USE OF THESES

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THE QUEST FOR THE OTHER

EXOTICISM AND THE FICTION
OF VICTOR SEGALÉN

by

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Canberra March 1980
I hereby certify that I have acknowledged all the sources of this thesis, and that the work is of my own composition.
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SPELLING

The romanization system I have used for Chinese is the Wade-Giles system, which will be more familiar to readers than the new Pinyin spelling. For similar reasons I have followed Fairbank, Reischauer and Craig in adopting the Chinese Post Office spelling for common geographical names, for example 'Peking' rather than the Wade-Giles spelling 'Pei-ching'.¹ In quotations I have followed the punctuation and spelling of the original text unless otherwise noted.

ABSTRACT

Segalen is associated with Mallarmé in a desire to renew appreciation of the primitive force of language, and to break away from literary stereotypes. However he embarked upon a different course, seeking rapport between the world of physical sensation and the world of literature. He found this rapport in the 'exotic'.

This study follows the development of his theory of exoticism from his departure in 1902 for Tahiti to his mature work in China. The intoxication of the voyage, a newly-found personal freedom and a passion for change intensify the Nietzschean exaltation of joy and art to be found in his first novel, Les Intrépides. This work is initially considered in relation to conventional exotic literature. Although any French writer in this field owes a certain debt to Chateaubriand, Loti, and the Romantic tradition, Segalen reacted against the subjectivity of this literary movement. The erudition, satirical tone and objective standards of craftsmanship of Les Intrépides are closer to the writings of the eighteenth-century philosophes, Mérimée and Flaubert. The strange, savage world of Les Intrépides is more directly inspired by the defiant freshness of Rimbaud's visionary poetry, Huysmans' clarion call for experimentation in the novel, and the myth which surrounded Gauguin's depiction of a primitive Tahitian culture.

In Part II we trace the expansion of Segalen's idea of exoticism from a celebration of geographical and cultural diversity to a study of the 'other' in its various manifestations. The interlude in Paris between voyages to Tahiti and China was a period of intense literary activity. While working on a number of projects inspired by Tahiti, including Les Intrépides, Segalen found a different type of exoticism in the world of music. A period of collaboration with Debussy in writing Orphée-Roi helped him to clarify his attitude towards writing, and had a lasting influence on his style. When he set out for China in 1909, he had formulated a personal 'aesthetic' based on his theory of exoticism, which was to shape his life and his work.

The 'Notes on Exoticism' which were written sporadically between 1904 and 1918 for a critical 'Essay on Exoticism' are considered here in conjunction with his creative writing. Together they reveal the gradual evolution of his ideas and attitudes, which were shaped as much by the spontaneous flow of his writing as by critical reflection. The novels,
short stories, poetry and drama inspired by his contact with Chinese civilization bear witness to his originality, his imaginative vision and his devotion to art. Although each work is unique in form, we trace an underlying pattern in his fiction which is intimately related to his concept of exoticism as a quest for the other, that which is different from the self.
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INTRODUCTION

Victor Segalen is one of the great literary exponents of the concept of otherness. Fired by a desire to renew a literature which seemed effete and divorced from life, he embarked on a course which was to be both destructive and creative — battering at the ramparts of convention while laying the foundation for a deeper consciousness of reality. He realized, with a lucidity in advance of his time, that language is a primary agent in stimulating perception. Therefore he eschewed facile writing in favour of a dense, subtle literary expression which demands of the reader effort and creativity. Like Mallarmé, he was little appreciated by his contemporaries, outside a small artistic circle.

When he died suddenly in 1919 at the height of his literary creativity, very few of his projects had been completed to his satisfaction. Those which had been published were increasingly difficult to find, having appeared in limited, often luxurious editions. Gradually these works have been republished, and all his major manuscripts have now appeared. Henri Bouillier’s pioneering critical study of his life and work was published in 1961, providing a point of departure for further study. By 1978, the centenary of Segalen’s birth, he was recognized as a major French poet. The year was celebrated by a world-wide exhibition of his work: photography taken during his archeological expeditions of 1909, 1914 and 1917; copies of manuscripts; sumptuous first editions of his poetry. A colloquium in Paris celebrated his posthumous fame as poet, archeologist and writer, and he was even given the accolade of a French postage stamp. However, his work is still almost unrecognized outside France.

Hitherto there has been no major study of his fiction. Bouillier’s work considering him primarily as a poet. Yet much of Segalen’s time and effort went into the writing of new forms of the novel. Since the republication of René Leyg in 1971, this remarkable work has been the subject of several

1 His friend and fellow-explorer, Jean Lartigue, edited and presented certain manuscripts; the poet Pierre Jean Jouve and Jean Loize the publisher, among others, also collaborated in presenting unpublished work; but the major credit for revealing Segalen’s work to the world must go to his daughter, Annie Joly-Segalen.
critical articles. However it has been seen in isolation from the main body of Segalen's work. In this study I aim to show his fiction as an organic body of writing which grew out of a critical reflection on language. Because of his antipathy towards traditional forms of the novel, his contribution to this field has been neglected. Like many recent novelists, he was vitally concerned with breaking away from conventional restrictions of genre and inventing new forms of fiction. His literary quest is intimately related with the concept of exoticism, which became for him a personal 'aesthetic', shaping his life and his work. This concept must therefore be central to our study.

Through a critical study of exotic literature — an 'Essay on Exoticism' which never progressed beyond note form — he analysed the essential qualities of the subject. He then set out to create a fiction which would be 'exotic' in the fullest possible sense of the word. His definition of the term was based on its etymological origin in the Greek prefix 'exo', meaning 'outside'. In this very broad sense it applied to anything which is outside everyday experience — a definition not dissimilar from that of Webster's Dictionary: of foreign origin or character... mysterious, different, strange.

The term 'exoticism' has disparaging overtones, particularly in English, because it often implies overt prejudice and facile writing. Exotic literature had its heyday in the nineteenth century, the age of colonialist expansion, global cruises and the roman feuilleton. The fascination with other lands and customs was captured in English literature by the stories of Rudyard Kipling, H. Rider Haggard and W. Somerset Maugham; in French by the poignant, fleeting impressions of Pierre Loti, the tales of Pierre Millière or Claude Farrère. Developing from the novels of Chateaubriand, who has been described as the 'father of exoticism',² it expressed the very essence of Romanticism — a desire to escape from the monotony and ugliness of everyday life; a dream:

De vos rêves voluptés, changeantes, inconnues,
Et dont l'esprit humain n'a jamais su le nom.³

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¹ e.g. Jean Verrier, 'Segalen lecteur de Segalen', Poétique, No. 27, 1976, pp. 338-350; Daniel Bougnoux, 'Dix-neuf et un gongs pour boîmer René Leys', Silex (Grenoble), No. 1, 15 October 1976.


Exoticism in French literature commonly refers to the depiction of geographical difference, particularly of a tropical nature, and frequently tinged with a melancholy pessimism. Pierre Jourda suggests as a preliminary definition of the subject: 'L'exotisme, en matière littéraire, c'est, d'abord, une conception toute faite que nous avons d'un pays et de ses habitants.'

It is this type of preconception, assimilated uncritically from reading and hearsay, that Segalen sets out to destroy. Besides this conventional literary style, Jourda suggests, there is another form of exoticism, 'une peinture fidèle de la réalité, d'une réalité simplement différente de celle dans laquelle on vit d'habitude.' This type of literature indicates a lively sense of curiosity about the other. Here Jourda is moving towards a definition very close to Segalen's, of exoticism as an exploration of diversity. However, he turns away from the implications of this definition to the more limited study of geographical diversity. He sees three major categories of exotic writing: 'une vision factiçé de pays étrangers, — une vision exacte... de ces pays... — ou l'expression d'une sensibilité tourmentée qui cherche à s'évader vers de nouveaux climats.' The misconception that realistic description could be 'exact' is characteristic of naturalistic attitudes.

Segalen sought to distill the essential quality which underlies the universal quest for the exotic: 'the desire for the other; that which is different from the self.' He took a critical interest in the way this sensation is created through literature, exploiting the methods of various literary styles in order to present the subject in its richness. Therefore his fiction has characteristics of all three categories listed above: realism, fantasy, the desire for novelty. While he adapted realistic techniques of documentation and close personal observation, he saw the activity of writing, like the act of perception, as an altering process. As one's impressions of reality are a highly subjective experience, literature is not 'une peinture fidèle de la réalité, but a personal vision of the world.


3 ibid., p. 11.

4 ibid., pp. 16-17.
Segalen found pleasure in diversity. The setting of his fiction has the fantastic qualities of an area cut-off from the reader's habitual experience by barriers of time or space. The 'otherness' of the exotic provides an analogy for the fantastic world of literature. We are asked to put aside conventional values in entering this strange new world. By his ironical play on perspective, Segalen indicates the relativity of ideas and customs. The apparent reliability and innocence of a language that is presenting 'facts' is suddenly called into question. Conventional exotic literature takes the material world for granted, conveying an air of solid reality through simple, linear depiction. Segalen prefers to question our preconceptions by presenting conflicting alternatives. By his anticonvulritical style he indicates the power of language to create and destroy realities. This power is exploited by a language which is itself open to diverse interpretations.

Like Alain-Fournier and, more recently, Michel Butor, Segalen based his fiction in the external world. As Françoise Van Rossum-Guyon has observed:

Si d'ailleurs le romancier sait maintenant qu'il travaille sur les mots et non sur les choses, il sait aussi que son inspiration c'est le monde lui-même en train de changer... .

The ironical interplay between fact and fiction in Segalen's work depends on the contrast between the 'actual' and the imaginary, the event and perceptions of the event. We shall not, therefore, adopt the procedures suggested by those who, following the path of the Russian formalists, have suggested that

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2 Alain-Fournier expressed a very similar attitude to Segalen's about the presentation of the fantastic: 'Je n'aime la merveille que lorsqu'elle est étroitement insérée dans la réalité, non pas quand elle la bouleverse ou la dépasse' (quoted by Yves Rey-Herme in his critical edition of Le Grand Meaulnes, Paris, Émile-Paul Frères, Livre de Poche, 1913, p. 270).

3 Françoise van Rossum-Guyon (Critique du roman: Essai sur 'La Modification' de Michel Butor, Paris, NRF-Gallimard, 1970, p. 38) who quotes from Butor's article 'Le roman et la poésie', Répertoire II. The author considers that in contrast with linguistic studies of poetics, critical literary studies must necessarily consider meaning as well as form.
critics limit their study to literary codes and rules. Such a study would neglect Segalen's exploitation of the rich field of human experience. His great contribution to literature lies in his power to suggest multiple levels of interpretation through erudite reference to history, mythology, art, literature and cultural diversity.

As his ideas on exoticism evolved gradually through writing, and through a critical consideration of other exotic literature, I shall not attempt a final definition of his concept of exoticism in his fiction until we have considered its various manifestations.

1 e.g. Roland Barthes; v. F. van Rossum-Guyon, op. cit., pp. 31-39.
PART IA

A new concept of exoticism

L'exotisme n'est donc pas cet état kaléidoscopique du touristte et du
médiacre spectateur, mais la réaction vive et surieuse au choc d'une
individualité forte contre une
objectivité dont elle perçoit et
déguste la distance.

(Note, 11 December 1908, Essai sur
l'Exotisme: Une Esthétique du
Divin (Notes), Montpellier, Fata
Morgana, 1978, p. 25)
In Tahiti Victor Segalen awoke to a new vision of life. This remote island revealed to him a world of spontaneous self-expression, freedom and joy, which became for him identified with the autonomous world of literature. In the creative play between these two worlds — the 'real' world of Tahiti as he discovered it through reading and experience, and the fictional world he created from this vision — his unique idea of exoticism was born.

To what extent is this theory which shaped his life and work inspired by his initial experience as naval doctor in Tahiti? Tahiti was in fact a fortuitous appointment, whereas later in life Segalen deliberately chose China as the object of his quest for exoticism. He observes in his 'Notes sur l'Exotisme' that he had intended to adopt a 'Symbolist form' for his first novel, but

"J'ai fait spontanément tout autre chose. Et c'est de là qu'il me faut partir pour, allons-nous voir, y revenir, par une nécessité personnelle."

The vision of the world which germinated in this novel expresses a deeply personal attitude to life. The choice of the term 'exoticism' for this vision is initially misleading. Generally taken to indicate the superficial description of picturesque details, it became for him a much broader concept, around which he built his literary method. In studying his notes on the subject we shall observe occasional misgivings about the choice of this term, as he strove to renew its meaning. However despite its derogatory overtones it suggests the part played by personal experience in Segalen's literary vision: the interplay between the real and the imaginary in the process of creativity. Tahiti was the catalyst in the generation of this literary vision. It was primarily a liberating influence, awakening the writer to the infinite possibilities of life. The discovery of another culture

stamped with the label 'exoticism' a theory that developed partly as a reaction to external pressures, but was more particularly the expression of the writer's personality. In order to appreciate the full meaning of the term in Segalen's work we shall first consider the setting which encouraged the development of this theory. His theory of exoticism demanded the suppression of intimate feelings in order to present an objective portrait of the Other. This literary method stems partly from a desire for secrecy, partly from an unconscious rejection of the self and all associated with it. The scorn for mediocrity vehemently expressed in Segalen's work is coupled with an exaltation of the artist, and a continuous striving for the heights of literary craftsmanship. His highly personal, aesthetic interpretation of exoticism indicates a personal malaise probably associated with his background and upbringing.

Victor Segalen was born in Brest, Brittany, on 14 January 1878. His parents, who had waited eight years for this somewhat frail first child, were, it seems, anxious and over-protective. Their frequent admonition, 'Tu n'es pas comme les autres',1 was no doubt influential in shaping Segalen's individualistic attitude to life. In équipée he described his youth as 'casanière et éberluée'.2 The term éberluée refers probably to the restricted outlook of the Segalen household. His mother, Ambroisine Segalen, exercised close control over her family, imposing narrow religious and moral views and rigid financial restraints. In contrast with the authoritarian outlook of this dominating mother, his father was quiet and self-effacing. Also called Victor Segalen, he was the illegitimate son of a peasant woman and an officer of the royal navy. Although the marriage was socially audacious in such a conservative milieu as Brittany, Victor Segalen senior was a man of means, owing no doubt to his father's financial support, and held a position as teacher in the school directed by Ambroisine's mother. He later became a civil servant.

Throughout his work, Segalen throws scorn on the teacher and the civil servant, who represent to him the mediocre law-abiding citizen. There is an almost total effacement of the father figure, a hatred and resentment of the

and a desire to establish his own name outside social conventions. The shame of his father's birth, aggravated by the bourgeois attitudes of his mother, seems to play a large part in Segalen's rejection of social and religious norms, and his desire to escape. It may have been one of the reasons for his sheltered upbringing and must certainly have left scars on his sensitive child.

When he left Brittany to study medicine in Bordeaux, his religious and Al Veligre was again closely supervised by the chaplain of the naval school, who kept in regular contact with Segalen's mother. The anxieties caused by a secret affair under the eye of this close surveillance led to two attacks of nervous depression of increasing severity. When his affair was discovered, Segalen submitted to authority and broke up his liaison, but not without cost. These attacks of nervous depression continued at irregular intervals throughout his life, including another breakdown before his marriage in 1905 to Yvonne Hébert. This love-match took place in spite of the opposition of his mother, who felt it was not economically advantageous to the family. These early nervous breakdowns seem to have resulted from guilt and conflict with authority. The interlude in Tahiti provided a unique period of adjustment, during which he discovered a joy in living that was never to find so intensely elsewhere. There is in Les Indomptés a celebration of sensuality which does not recur in his later fiction.

A letter written to his fiancée a month before his marriage indicates that he saw the cause of his depression partly in the conflict between the ideal world of art and mundane reality: "... garde-toi forte et toi-même, ou bien ces Idées, ces Formes et tout cet Art que j'ai trop vécu, peut-être, te disperserait, te disloquerait aussi..." The artist is necessarily narcissistic. We shall see in Segalen an increasing tendency to live his art, and to shape his life according to his idea of this art. However, although in theory he rejected bourgeois ideals in favour of the outlaw artist, in practice he remained a married man loyal to wife and family, who divided his time between his writing and his work as naval doctor, archeologist and explorer.

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1 This point, in which I differ from Boullier (op. cit., p. 111), will be further developed later.

2 Quoted by Boullier, p. 78.
This duality in his life provided a tension between experience and creativity which was particularly fruitful. Not only did financial independence assure the autonomy of his writing — an important point for Segalen¹ — but it also assured a certain order in daily living which corresponded with a critical self-awareness in writing. His life, like his work, was intense and disciplined, inspired by a Nietzschean desire for self-realization. Hence although he experimented with opium-smoking in Bordeaux and later in China, he never indulged like Henri Michaux to the extent of reducing his volition or verbal competence.² His priorities lay firmly in the field of aesthetic creativity. Where Rimbaud had seen the poet simply as 'voyant' Segalen, writing after Mallarmé, is more aware of the writer as artisan, conscious of the particular qualities and limitations of his medium. His work offers a unique blend of the exotic, the aesthetic and the erudite: a merging of various streams in French literature which flourished at this period. In the following chapters we shall consider these various streams, with reference to Segalen's particular idea of exoticism. They have in common the idea of transcending the everyday world, which was represented by the literary mainstream.

Many French artists and writers of the period felt stifled by the materialism of capitalist society, which drove Flaubert, Mallarmé and Proust into literary seclusion, Rimbaud into self-imposed exile, Jarry and Artaud into anarchism and Gauguin to Tahiti in search of new inspiration. Others, including Claudel and Huysmans, turned from the aesthetic cult of decadence, to from anarchism, to religion. Segalen was to take the opposite path. The remarkable ferment of discontent among writers in post-revolutionary France found expression towards the end of the century in the verbal anarchism of Mallarmé. 'La vraie bombe, c'est le livre,' he proclaimed.³ The poem was for him 'un travail de destruction', the only means of action left to man, an act of 'violence désespérée' in which he sought to express the impossibility

¹ In a letter to his parents, 22 November 1901, he observes with gratitude that the career they had chosen for him ('M'ayant fait adopter... une carrière') gives him great 'liberté d'esprit' as a writer ('Lettres inédites de Victor Segalen', Annales de Bretagne, t. LXXI, No. 3, Septembre 1964, pp. 432-3).
² V. 'below, p. 133.
of achieving his dream. The high priest of the doctrine of 'art for art's sake', he expresses many of the values underlying Segalen's fiction: a reaction against popular, representational art in favour of personal interpretation of the idea behind the subject — 'peindre non la chose mais l'effet qu'elle produit', as he wrote to Cazalis — and the lucid, self-critical expression of this idea. Mallarmé saw poetry as an exploration of that other self whom we can know only through the affective qualities. In order to give expression to the inner being, the writer must, however, suppress the sentimental Romantic effusions of the conscious mind. His quest, like the science of alchemy, is expressed in abstruse, difficult language and secret formulae available only to a few élite readers. Mallarmé sought to renew the power of language: 'donner un sens plus pur aux mots de la tribu'. Literature is seen as a work of art, autonomous, 'impersonnifié', independent of both author and reader: 'l'oeuvre pure implique la disparition élocutoire du poète, qui cède l'initiative aux mots...'

Popular values were inimical to the creation of this difficult art. The introduction of universal compulsory education in France in 1882 was instrumental in creating a vast reading public eager for sentimental or sensational literature. The reign of the bourgeois, described by Huysmans in A Rebours as 'l'immense, la profonde, l'incommensurable gougnerie du financier et du parvenu...', was seen as 'l'écrasement de toute intelligence, la négation de toute probité, la mort de tout art...'

Segalen's theory of exoticism develops from this intellectual climate of rebellion against materialism and social convention. The foundations of his literary method may be seen in his medical thesis and the accompanying article on synaesthesia. As a young student he had looked for his career to the sea, the traditional means of escape for a Breton. Unable to become a naval officer because of his myopia, he was directed by his parents towards

4 ibid., loc. cit.
the career of naval doctor. However he was never interested in general medical practice, although he welcomed the financial independence it brought. He was primarily concerned with the study of abnormal states of mind, which offered material for literary exploitation. In choosing a subject for his thesis he hesitated between studies of the split personality, sensorial analogy, medicine in ancient Egypt and hysteria and hypnotism in Wagner's work. His research at this stage was clearly influenced by the psychological studies of Charcot and his contemporaries in Paris. His passion for both writing and composing music, indicated by his choice of Wagner, was gradually superseded by an interest in literature, and his final choice of subject was the medico-literary theme: Les Cliniciens en-lettres... l'Ecole du Document humain. This study of naturalist methods was influential in forming Segalen's attitudes towards literature. Despite Bouillier's claim that Segalen was never tempted by naturalism, his first novel shows strong naturalist influence, as Segalen admitted to Debussy: 'Il répond naturellement à une formule naturaliste et à un moment où j'étais encore indécis.'

Even in his thesis; Remy de Gourmont found that he was not critical enough of naturalism: 'Cela m'a beaucoup intéressé — encore que vous soyez peut-être un peu indulgent pour les Naturalistes...'. In his notes for an Essai sur le Mystérieux, Segalen noted in 1911:

Les naturalistes ont, pour deux raisons, servi le Mystérieux:

a) par la réaction contra-naturaliste qui a suivi;

b) mais surtout, en nous maçonnant un monde solide, bon tremplin vers le monde idéal dont les poètes, un peu à l'aventure, nous avaient exclusivement entretenus.

This note suggests that Segalen looked to the novel, rather than poetry, for the contrast between the realistic and the purely imaginary. In his fiction he exploits the sensations of wonder and hesitation inspired in the reader by moving from the portrayal of everyday events to the strange or the extraordinary. The contrast between two worlds is a literary device characteristic of his literary work. He admits a certain debt to the naturalists, who have provided a 'trampoline' for his exploratory work. His

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1 cf. Gérard de Nerval, *Aurélia* and the work of Edgar Allan Poe, Guy de Maupassant, etc.

2 *Segalen et Debussy*, Monaco, Ed. du Rocher, 1929, p. 72.

3 Letter to Victor Segalen, 8 March 1902, quoted in Bouillier, op. cit., p. 52.

method evolves from that defined by Zola: thorough documentation, personal observation and interrogation of witnesses.

In his thesis Segalen criticizes Zola's priorities, since to personal observation he prefers documentation which is often excessive and poorly assimilated. However he finds Zola's work 'superb' in its sincerity, and remarkable for its 'merveilleux scientifique'. Its value lies in the quality of the writer's imagination rather than in pseudo-scientific theory. Segalen's admiration for artistic perfection is manifest in his preference of Flaubert's few brief masterpieces to Zola's more careless exuberance. He himself scrupulously observes the highest standards of craftsmanship for the written word.

The young medical student already sees language as having an autonomous power and personality. In the concluding chapter of his thesis, 'Le Vocabulaire médico-esthétique', he observes: 'Le mot — est-il admis — reste distinct de l'idée qu'il enferme. Il lui est souvent supérieur.' This interest in quality of style indicates a divergence from the preference expressed by Zola of a style 'fort, solide, simple, humain', a language which is purely instrumental. In this chapter Segalen shows particular interest in the style of Huysmans, which he praises for its originality, studied use of rare and specialized vocabulary, and its artistic quality. We shall see the influence of this 'écriture artiste' in Les Fummémoriaux.

If Segalen adapted certain naturalist methods in his study of exoticism, he was always conscious of the limitations of naturalism. His quest for new forms of the novel, new ideas and subjects was characteristic of the generation which followed Huysmans' break with naturalism, expressed some years later in a preface to A Rebours:

"ce besoin que j'éprouvais d'ouvrir les fenêtres, de fuir un milieu où j'étouffais; puis le désir qui m'apprêchendait de secouer les préjugés, de briser les limites du roman, d'y faire entrer l'art, la science, l'histoire, de ne plus se servir, en un mot, de cette forme que comne d'un cadre pour y insérer de plus sérieux travaux... [de] supprimer l'intrigue traditionnelle,

2 Ibid., p. 75.
This description of Huysmans' aims holds equally well for Segalen's attitude to the novel, particularly as illustrated in Les Immémoriaux and Le Fils du Ciel: the quest for exoticism; the desire to attack preconceptions and prejudices; the introduction of new forms and themes to replace the superficial love-story or adventure tale. Language is, however, still seen as subordinate to the theme, a means of communicating serious ideas, whereas Segalen is conscious of its creative role in generating meanings.

An article published at the same time as his thesis, 'Les Synesthésies et l'Ecole Symboliste', indicates Segalen's desire to go beyond naturalistic observation of phenomena in seeking hidden analogies and meanings:

... quelques modalités seulement sont matière, encore, à joie des sens. Nous pouvons les étendre... Allons au delà. Nous baignons en une mer d'ondulations inconnues dont chaque rythme, chaque période est peut-être élément artistique... source latente de jouissances. Surprenons-les, violons la nature, s'il le faut, c'est notre droit."

The text suggests an exploitation of science for the purposes of art. The development of sensory perception is seen as a source of artistic inspiration, and hence of pleasure. There is a Nietzschean tone in this confident appeal to explore man's potentialities for his aesthetic enjoyment. At this period, Segalen was greatly influenced by the solipsist philosophy of Rémy de Gourmont, one of the founders of the Mercure de France, and a leading spokesman for the Symbolist movement. Gourmont held that the only means of real knowledge are the sensations. In a letter to his friend, Charles Guibier, in 1901, Segalen observed: 'De plus en plus, mon critérium en art se spécialise, se cristallise autour de ce pivot: la Sensation. Pas d'écoles, pas de principes, pas de norme, mais l'éveil par tous les moyens possibles en l'âme de l'auditeur, de la Sensation-Idée conçue par le créateur.' There is a youthful tone in this defiance of established rules

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1 A Rebours, op. cit., p. xviii. The influence of this 'decadent' novel is indicated by Oscar Wilde in The Picture of Dorian Gray.
3 Quoted by Bouillier, p. 30.
and precedents; but it indicates the path which Segalen will take in seeking ideas, sensations and literary forms from unknown sources.

Saint-Pol-Roux, with whom Segalen discussed his article before publication, suggested that synesthesia was not a purely literary device, but a means of penetrating to the very essence of reality. He saw the poet's task as a spiritual quest of a mystical nature. Segalen rejected the metaphysical implications of this attitude towards synesthesia, which were associated with a bent towards contemplation as man's supreme goal. Although he later confessed that 'Il y a toujours le Mystique orgueilleux qui sommeille en moi', he remained throughout his life opposed to any form of religious conformity. He associated more closely with bitterly anti-religious critics such as Remy de Gourmont and Jules de Galtier. While Saint-Pol-Roux was a lifelong friend, Segalen had little in common with his literary views. In his 'Notes on Exoticism', attacking the exotic literature of travellers' impressions, he observed, 'Saint-Pol y est excelle, s'il était allé par les chemins universels.' Segalen was more passionately concerned with the diversity and potential within the world of physical phenomena.

Through Saint-Pol-Roux he became acquainted with the ideas of the well-known Symbolist critic and mystic, Josephin 'Le Sur' Péladan, who had in 1891 founded a Rosicrucian society based on aesthetics. Although Péladan's views were also deeply Christian, there is evidence in Segalen's letters and notes that he admired certain aspects of his thought and writings. His views of art as a religion, and of the artist as king or magus, are central in Segalen's work. Péladan saw the essence of art in the pleasurable sensations (la volupté) which it produces, rather than in its meaning or craftsmanship. Echoing his claim that art is 'le seul empire véritable', Segalen devoted his life to the creation of this empire. His voyages, his discoveries of other cultures were directed towards the pursuit of this ideal. However, rejecting

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1 Quoted by Bouillier, pp. 48-49.
3 v. below, p. 166.
4 Essai sur l'Exotisme... op. cit., p. 17.
5 e.g. Notes 'Sur une forme nouvelle du roman...', Annexe 1, Bouillier, p. 394; and Letter to P. Ythurbide, Annexe 2, Le Combat pour le Sol, ed. by Eugène Roberto, Ottawa, Editions de l'Université d'Ottawa, 1974, p. 161.
metaphysical implications, he was concerned with the human faculties of
sensory and extra-sensory perception, craftsmanship, and the indomitable
human will manifested in artistic creativity. Exoticism was for him
primarily a means by which the writer might see the world through new eyes,
and encourage his reader to do likewise. Tahiti opened the way to a
literary method which was concerned with far more than geographical diversity.
Writing from the more austere climate in Tientsin, Segalen looks back to Tahiti as a moment of awakening. After the rigid discipline of his boyhood and student days, Tahiti offered freedom and spontaneity. He was the more intensely aware of the joys of living because he had narrowly escaped death from typhoid during the voyage and had spent two months in hospital at San Francisco.

This discovery of freedom and joy in an exotic climate suggests parallels with the life of Nietzsche, as well as that of Segalen's contemporary, André Gide. Tahiti was for Segalen to some extent what Algérie was for Gide, and Italy for Nietzsche: liberation from an oppressive milieu, which suddenly allowed the individual an opportunity to discover new aspects of the self. In each case the subject had been close to death, an experience which awakened an intense, sensuous awareness of the world, and a determination to live each moment to the full. Reacting against the repression of an austere religious and moral upbringing, he committed himself to an unremitting search for knowledge, an uncompromising rejection of established social codes. The pursuit of beauty, which according to Nietzschean philosophy found its highest satisfaction in the art demanded will-power, discipline and self-mastery in

1 Letter to Henry Manceron, 26 September 1911, Essai sur l'Exotisme..., op. cit., p. 53.
order to develop the full potential of the self. The Christian virtues of compassion and humility were scorned as signs of weakness.

The work of Nietzsche became known in France through translation in the late 1890s. Like many French readers, Segalen discovered his ideas largely through Jules de Gaultier, who translated and interpreted his philosophy for the *Mercure de France*. While deeply influenced by Nietzsche, Segalen did not completely accept his philosophy. He wrote to Jules de Gaultier in 1908:

>C'est que l'examen le plus sérieux et le plus sévère de ma propre pensée m'a conduit à n'accepter comme vrais maîtres que les Hindous et vous-même, mais alors à le proclamer hautement. Nietzsche m'a été d'un roborant précieux, mais je ne sais pas penser comme lui. Kant est superbe de tenue, le premier Kant — mais je ne peux pas penser comme lui —. Cependant que les Hindous, par un jeu, des roulages et un mode 'expansif' qui s'est imposé à moi, m'ont appris à laisser vivre et s'étendre la pensée et vous-même, à la conduire. — Or, il s'agit ici, du Divers. —

Nietzsche is seen here as a source of strength rather than of new ideas. Although he showed interest also in certain ideas of Kant and Schopenhauer, Segalen was determined to escape from the intransigence of European philosophical systems. Schopenhauer and Hegel had been inspired by Asian philosophy. 2 With a characteristic desire to trace ideas to their source, Segalen turned to Hinduism, and later, more particularly to Buddhism and Taoism, for new ways of looking at the world. In these philosophies he saw not only an advocacy of individualism, but a lack of dogmatism and a cultivation of the fantastic more congenial to his temperament than the ideas of Nietzsche. His study of other philosophies contrasts with the eclecticism of the Symbolists, who tended to take philosophical ideas out of their context in order to support their theories. 3 He too was selective, in that he was primarily interested in aesthetics and freedom of thought. However in his work philosophical ideas are presented within the environment from which they germinated.

1 Letter of 28 December 1908, quoted in *Essai sur l'Exotisme*, op. cit., p. 32.
The delight in illusionism which many Europeans found in Hindu philosophy was applied by Jules de Gaultier to aesthetics. Where Nietzsche proclaimed a 'will to power', and Schopenhauer a 'will to suffering', de Gaultier proclaimed a 'will to illusion'. His philosophy was based on the idea, popularized by Schopenhauer, of reality as a representation of the human mind. However, while Schopenhauer saw pain as a driving force in life, de Gaultier like Nietzsche adopted a more positive stance, seeking joy and self-fulfilment in creativity. In the drama of life, man is at once actor and spectator. By not playing his part to the full, by simply being a spectator, he reduces the interest of the spectacle. The dynamic qualities of Dionysian art are exploited in order to enliven the diversity and colour of the spectacle. The artist cultivates the passions for their intensity and power.

Although de Gaultier was not a great and original thinker, his philosophy seemed to formulate Segalen's burgeoning theories on diversity, and on the primacy of art. This dramatic idea of life is apparent in Segalen's writings, which often take the form of a theatrical scene. Segalen found joy and fulfilment in the philosophy of life as an art. However in a later text, 'Le Philosophe dans la Vie', he observed that neither de Gaultier nor Nietzsche put their ideas into practice. He, himself, set out to live his philosophy. His explorations of other cultures in Tahiti and China, his arduous expeditions into the interior of China, his archaeological discoveries, his voluntary service in Manchuria during the plague and at the front during the war, indicate his strength of will, energy and delight in diversity. *Équipée: Voyage au Pays du Réel*, a philosophical contrast between the reality of his journeys in China and his earlier expectations is, significantly, dedicated to Jules de Gaultier. The conflict between the real and the imaginary in this work sums up Segalen's attitude to his life and his art, with its 'double jeu plein de promesse sans quoi l'homme vivant n'est plus corps, ou n'est plus esprit'. Life in its richest moments is

1 Gerald M. Spring, introduction to his translation of Jules de Gaultier, *From Kant to Nietzsche*, New York, Philosophical Library, 1961, p. VII.
3 Bouillier, pp. 174 & 275.
reality transformed by the creative play of the imagination: 'Car j'habite une chambre aux porcelaines.' 
Segalen created around himself a palace of illusion as a means of escape when life became unbearable, as in the commercial city of Tianjin: 'A force d'entêtement, je me construis, briques par briques, un kiosque intérieur où l'existence soit moins abjecte.'

For Segalen, as for many aesthetes of the 'belle Epoque', art was a cult demanding of its adherents uncompromising faith and dedication. In a letter to Claudel, he made what he later described to de Gaultier as a 'profession de foi' - 'toute entière basée sur le "dogme" spectaculaire et l'esthétique essentielle':

J'ai passé à plusieurs reprises, à longs intervalles d'années, par des mois de défaillance vide... C'est alors que j'ai passé en moi la valeur ou non de l'existence divine, catholique ou autre, et de sacrefice, et de devoir, et de la famille, je les ai trouvés nuls et sans effet. C'est dans ce vide, à peine soutenu par les fonctions animales, que m'est venu sauver le seul amour de beauté.

We have observed that Segalen suffered occasionally from bouts of nervous depression, which were associated with conflict with authority and the desire to escape from mundane reality into the world of the Other. In his theory of exoticism he was concerned less in fact with 'beauty' than with a very specific type of beauty which would be a means of reviving his interest in life. Baudelaire declared that 'Le beau est toujours bizarre', a theory echoed by Walter Pater and other aesthetes of the period. However in his 'Notes on Exoticism' Segalen observed that 'Le beau a des éléments de généralisation qui semblent effacer en apparence la beauté du Divers.' However it is the quality of strangeness which interests him and inspires his work.

C'est dans la Différence que gît tout l'intérêt. Plus la Différence est fine, indiscernable, plus elle éveille et s'aiguise le sens du Divers. Rouge et vert? Que non pas! Rouge et

1 Equipée, op. cit., p. 15.
2 Letter to Henry Manceron, op. cit., p. 54.
5 Essai sur l'Exotisme, op. cit., p. 48.
His work is a subtle exploration of the particular qualities of difference which he finds in his subject. It is an exaltation of the power of sensation: ‘... cherchant d’instinct l’Exotisme, j’avais donc cherché l’Intensité, donc la Puissance, donc la Vie’. Rather than a celebration of beauty, which is elusive and indefinable, Segalen’s theory of exoticism expresses his delight in diversity. He observes to Claudel that his moments of aesthetic pleasure depend on the ‘plein jeu de facultés purement humaines’. As in his letter to Manceron, he analyses his joy: ‘I know why I was happy.’ This is not the vague sense of well-being which one finds in Romantic exoticism, but an exploration of the powers of human perception, which transcend merely sensory limitations. Segalen ascribes this visionary power to men of great insight, particularly scientists, poets and those condemned by society as mad: ‘pour eux, tout est obscurité pénétrable, et qu’ils s’efforcent de violer.’ Paradoxically, obscurity is valued above clarity of perception. In exploring the deeper levels of reality the ‘seer’ develops faculties which have been suppressed in the European rationalist system.

For Segalen the voyage was both a ‘dépaysement’ and a discovery: an exploration of areas closed to the European through interdiction or rigid preconceptions. The image of Rimbaud haunted his mind during his travels. As he wrote to his wife in 1909, en route to China, ‘Rimbaud est une perpétuelle image qui revient de temps à autre dans ma route.’ Rimbaud’s poetic vision had the quality of freshness which Segalen sought in exoticism: the intensity of adolescence, Segalen called it, or, as Rimbaud suggested somewhat unrealistically, the view of an abandoned child, ‘neuf, net’, sans principes, sans notions... In order to recapture the irrational,

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1 Essai sur l’Exotisme, op. cit., p. 60.
2 Ibid., p. 76.
6 Ibid., p. 178.
strangely intense vision of childhood, Rimbaud sought to demolish ingrained preconceptions and habitual ways of thinking: "Tout à démolir, tout à effacer dans ma tête..." Hence he adopted literary procedures designed to break away from the rational flow of logical argument into the chaotic world of the unconscious: a tumultuous juxtaposition of unconnected ideas, feelings and impressions, presented as if in 'un rêve intense et rapide'. These moments of 'illumination' owe their intensity to his powers of literary expression. His genius lies not only in his extraordinary powers as 'voyant' but in his presentation of this vision in unconventional poetic prose which was dense, elliptical and suggestive.

In Aden the wretchedness of Rimbaud's last years tormented Segalen with thoughts of the 'meaninglessness' of life. His close identification with the poet is indicated in his letters:

Aden a dressé devant ma route un spectre douloureux et d'au libre équivoque: Arthur Rimbaud... Il s'est levé dans Aden desséché, me barrant la route et disant: vois mes peines, vois mes espoirs, infiniment déçus... Il faut que je passe outre. Je passe. Je lui réponds: tu as lutté pour le Réel. Tu l'as pris corps à corps, mais en dépourvant la plus diamantine des armures: Poète, tu t'es renié toi-même.

In order to dispel this bad 'omen', he seeks the cause of Rimbaud's despair; for, as he writes to his wife, 'La vie et la mort de Rimbaud serait une belle leçon de désespoir, si on ne la fait tomer à rebours en leçon d'énergie.'

The lesson takes the form of an article, 'Les Hors-la-Loi: le Double Rimbaud', in which he tries to understand Rimbaud's renunciation of his art. The importance of this article lies in his reflections on the role of the poet who is not just Rimbaud—but, as Segalen later reveals in plans for a drama on the subject, 'le nouveau-né, je Rimbaud, le moi-même, aux prises avec le concret et tant de diverses attirances'. Rimbaud, the newly-born, sees a world obscure in its very novelty.

Quoting the proud words of the 'voyant', 'Et j'ai vu quelquefois ce que l'homme a cru voir', Segalen remarks:

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1 Arthur Rimbaud, Œuvres, op. cit., loc. cit.
2 ibid., p. lxxi.
4 Letter to Y. Segalen, 5 May 1909, ibid.
5 'Les Hors-la-Loi: le Double Rimbaud', Mercure de France, 15 April 1906, p. 27.
Dans ces dix derniers mots, tous d'un usage ultra-quotidien, banal, s'enclot vraiment un frisson d'inconnu. C'est le face à face glorieux avec cet imaginaire absolu dont toute réalité ne semble que le reflet terne; c'est l'emprise immédiate par autre chose que des frissons de nerfs, de l'immuable, du surhumain. On congoit la fierté du poète, et l'hainaine allure de son affirmation, et ce mépris d'archange mauvais inclus dans l'assurance: '... ce que l'homme a cru voir...', lorsque lui, le voyant, s'en pénétrait, s'en rassasiait en dépit de l'inferme nature.' De tels instants divinatoires désignent les poètes essentiels.

The poet has, Segalen suggests, powers of imagination beyond those of ordinary men. He sees beyond the world of fleeting appearances to their ultimate meaning. Baudelaire and, more particularly, Nietzsche can be heard in the presentation of Rimbaud as the evil archangel and in the scorn of humanity. The poet is superhuman, capable of glimpsing the Absolute, whereas the average man remains on the level of human infirmity.

Rimbaud's _Bateau Jure_ symbolizes for Segalen the quest for exoticism: the flight from Europe, the cleansing power of the voyage, the 'dépaysement', leading to a 'profond dérèglement de tous les sens', an intoxication with new sensations. Yet in the sober tone at the end of the poem lies the paradoxical quality of exoticism:

_Filleur éternel des immobilités bleues, Je regrette l'Europe aux anciens parapets!_

The sensation of exoticism depends on distance. It is the inaccessibility of an object which feeds the flames of desire. The voyage symbolizes that eternal quest.

Rimbaud's vision of savage, primitive worlds found an answering chord in Segalen. It is possible that both poets found their initial inspiration in Tahiti. Pierre Caddau has claimed that Rimbaud's poetry is inspired almost entirely by Cook's journals. Whether or not Cook is the source of Rimbaud's inspiration, as he was in part for Segalen, there is a parallel between Rimbaud's 'parade sauvage' and Segalen's view of early Tahitian culture.

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1. 'Le Double Rimbaud', op. cit., p. 483.
In Rimbaud, Segalen saw clearly defined the dichotomy between the poet and the explorer which he himself sought to reconcile. However, whereas Rimbaud's poetry of exile was to become in real life a renunciation of his art, Gauguin's voyage represented for Segalen, as for his epoch, total commitment to art. Segalen's writings and his projected novel on Gauguin, *Le Maître du Jour*, exalt the myth of Gauguin, martyr to art, which developed partly through his own projections of himself through his writings and actions, partly also through Symbolist interpretations of his departure from Europe. Gauguin's intransigence and fierce individualism made him a figurehead in the battle against materialism and conformity. His letters to Monfreid, edited by Segalen, are a stirring appeal to the artist to struggle against all odds. In the 'Hommage à Gauguin' which prefaces these letters, Segalen describes them as: 'lettres terribles pour le siècle, décevantes et coupables, insulte perpétuelle au contemporain qui n'osa point écouter le voyant'.

Gauguin was concerned with building the myth of the 'génie sauvage' which he saw as conflicting with the other side of his temperament, the 'sensitive' husband and father. His art was fertilized by this conflict. 'La souffrance vous aiguise le génie...' he wrote in the *Cahier pour Aline*. The will to create survived against all odds, and seemed to feed on adversity: 'même terrasse, dire encore. Toujours et toujours. Au fond la peinture est comme l'homme, mortel mais vivant toujours en lutte avec la matière.' Segalen's imagination was fired by this conflict, which expressed the dichotomy in his own life between the real and the imaginary. Gauguin's life represented for him man's power to create meaning from the sordid reality of his final years. Arriving at the Marquesas Islands just after Gauguin's death, in August 1903, he was present at the sale of his last few possessions. His article, 'Gauguin dans son dernier décor', glorifies and idealizes the setting:

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1 v. below, pp. 135 ff.
3 v. *Lettres de Gauguin, recueillies par Maurice Malingue*, Paris, Bernard Grasset, 1946, pp. 188, 228, etc.
Lettres terribles pour le siècle... insulte perpétuelle au contemporain qui n'osa point écouter le voyant.

Gauguin saw the painting sketched here as his final artistic testament.
Segalen expresses here de Gaultier's idea of life as theatre. The island is seen as a magnificent backdrop for Gauguin's dramatic struggle against society. The terms 'somptueux' and 'splendide' may seem paradoxical in the face of the wretchedness of Gauguin's last days. They indicate an interpretation of his life as a crusade for the 'new religion' of art. In his article Segalen sees his death in the Marquesas Islands as an act which illustrates his life, 'qui s'en éclaire et s'en commente'. Hence he approved the advice of their mutual friend, Daniel de Monfreid, who wrote to Gauguin:

"Voulez-vous pas revenir... Vous jouissez de l'immunité des grands morts... Vous êtes passé dans l'histoire de l'art..."

Segalen's attitude towards Gauguin reveals a sense that symbolic meaning is more important than realistic description. In his journal he quoted from Léon Bloy's L'Arc de Napoléon: 'En réalité tout homme est symbolique, et c'est dans la mesure de son symbole qu'il est un vivant.' His own death was to have a symbolic value, which summed up the mystery and the drama of his life. In his writings on Gauguin, which we shall discuss in more detail later, Segalen is concerned with myth rather than reality. His lack of critical sense is particularly surprising with regard to Gauguin's plagiarism of texts about Tahiti; much of Noa Noa, for example, is simply copied out of Monmout's Voyage aux iles du Grand Océan. Segalen's readings of Gauguin are a creative interpretation of his experience in Polynesia more characteristic of the author than the subject. Whereas Gauguin made little effort to study Tahitian civilization, Segalen reads into his work a desire to recreate Tahitian mythology.

The real influence of Gauguin is on the emotional and sensory level rather than the intellectual. His paintings, wood carvings and writings

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1 'Gauguin dans son dernier décor'. Mercure de France, VI, 1904, p. 679.
2 Lettres de Gauguin, op. cit., p. 240; Cahier pour Aline, etc.
3 Segalen's attitude was particularly surprising with regard to Gauguin's plagiarism of texts about Tahiti; much of Noa Noa, for example, is simply copied out of Monmout's Voyage aux iles du Grand Océan. Segalen's readings of Gauguin are a creative interpretation of his experience in Polynesia more characteristic of the author than the subject. Whereas Gauguin made little effort to study Tahitian civilization, Segalen reads into his work a desire to recreate Tahitian mythology.

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4 Letter quoted by Segalen in his 'Hommage à Gauguin', op. cit., pp. 35-36.
5 Quoted in Briques et Tuiles, in Bouillier, p. 107. Bengt Danielsson points out that the closing lines of Segalen's article were based on a mistranslation (Gauguin in the South Seas, New York, Doubleday & Co, Inc., 1966, pp. 314-315). Also v. below, p. 117.
inspired in Segalen a particular vision of Tahitian civilization which he later ascribed to Gauguin. 'Je puis dire n'avoir rien vu du pays et de ses Maoris avant d'avoir parcouru et presque vécu les croquis de Gauguin.' ¹

This statement by a writer remarkable for his research and personal observation of his subject indicates the power of art over the imagination. It is Gauguin's appreciation of the unique qualities of primitive art which inspires Segalen. In China as in Tahiti art such as ancient funerary steles or archeological remains is frequently a source of inspiration for Segalen, suggesting different ways of interpreting the world.

Segalen saw, moreover, a similarity of form between Gauguin's art and his own work in Les Immémoriaux:

"Or je pensais justement... que ma conception de l'exotisme avait quelque rapport avec une peinture 'synthétiste', cependant que l'art de Lotti évoquait justement les analyses brèves des impressionnistes."

The 'synthetist' paintings of Gauguin and his contemporaries promoted the abstract qualities of form which were to transform twentieth-century art. ³

The value of form in literature, the inseparability of form and idea, had been a rallying cry for writers since Baudelaire; however Gauguin's revolutionary step was to proclaim that the form of a work was more important than the subject. The Synthetists sought to convey the essential idea of a subject by means of simple, pure colours and a unifying design without illusion of depth and space. Their intention was not merely to represent an object but to create something new. Maurice Denis defined the key formula of this school in 1890: "Se rappeler qu'un tableau avant d'être un cheval de bataille, une femme nue, ou une quelconque anecdote, est essentiellement une surface plane recouverte de couleurs en un certain ordre assemblées." ⁴

In applying painting techniques to literature, Segalen was following the Symbolist practice of borrowing from the other arts in order to enrich...

² Essai sur l'Exotisme, op. cit., p. 38.
the quality of language. His awareness of the particular qualities and limitations of his medium led him away from his early interest in synesthesia towards an interest in semantics. *Les Immémoriaux* is particularly concerned with the role of language in the creation of culture. Avoiding the popular designation of 'novel' for this work, Segalen conceived it as an aesthetic study of Tahitian civilization, constructed with consummate craftsmanship. His intention was to convey his particular idea of Tahiti through the depiction of certain events, although as we shall observe, he tended to become caught up in naturalistic detail. In his *Hommage à Gauguin* he admired the artist's ability to capture 'les traits du mystère de cette race, et laisser, sous l'enveloppe vivante et changeante, sourdre le visage essentiel.' It is this essential quality, unique to Tahiti, that he was particularly concerned with in his work: far more so, in fact, than Gauguin.

Segalen contrasts this 'Synthetist' attitude towards art with the 'impressionistic' style of writers such as Loti. We shall return to this point in the next chapter. Exotic writing up to this period falls into two main types, which we shall discuss under the headings of subjectivity and objectivity, terms used by Segalen in his notes on exoticism. The subjective tradition includes the plethora of travellers' impressions, anecdotes and tales which followed in the wake of Chateaubriand. The 'objective' tradition is based on erudition, detachment, and frequently fantasy. Few writers have successfully merged these two streams in imaginative literature. By the end of the nineteenth century great writers tended to despise the exotic literature inspired by personal observation. Huysmans' *Des Esseintes*, having echoed Baudelaire's cry 'N'importe où, hors du monde', remained at home by the fireside, claiming that the savour of the voyage lies as much in anticipation and imagination as in reality — a point which Segalen debates in *Equipée*.

Likewise Mallarmé remained in Paris; the voyage was for him synonymous with

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1 *Hommage à Gauguin*, op. cit., p. 29. This idea contrasts with his earlier comment on Gauguin's paintings: 'Il ne cherche point, derrière la belle enveloppe, d'improbables états d'ame canaque: pêlant les indigènes, il suit être animalier' (*Gauguin dans son dernier décor*, op. cit., p. 684).

the act of writing: 'cette écume, vierge vers'.'\(^1\) Writers such as Raymond Roussel and Henri Michaux, who travelled extensively, divorced their experience from their fictional work. Michaux shares with Roussel an interest in the process of writing, but his work is more firmly rooted in reality. Roussel insisted that 'from all his travels he drew nothing whatever for his books, that imagination was all'.\(^2\)

Michaux considered the poetry of travel boring and diffuse. Although he wrote travel-books such as *Un Barbare en Asie*, his imaginative work is generally based on fantasy.\(^3\) Yet like Segalen he felt a deep-seated need to see the world. Turning away from disgust from European civilization, he discovered in Asia a new freedom of thought, a diversity which reflected for him the diversity and the fragmentation of the inner self. He saw the ideal travel book as a 'parcours' which would take the form of an 'ideal personal trajectory'. There are similarities with Segalen in the association of the mysterious diversity of Asia with the multiple manifestations of the self, and in the idea of Buddhism as a means of developing the self to its fullest potential.\(^4\) Fundamentally both writers despised the literature of exoticism in its accepted sense. Where Michaux made a distinction between imaginative writing and his personal experience, seeking to discover the hidden nature of the people, 'pour tout comprendre...',\(^5\) Segalen limited himself to a concentrated and erudite vision which was explicitly fictional.

One of the few great traveller-poets with a comparable attitude towards the experience of other cultures is Alexis Saint-Léger Léger, 'Saint-John Perse'. In background and outlook he has much in common with Segalen, particularly in his celebration of sensory experience, his positive joy in living, his deep scientific interest in all fields of human knowledge: history, anthropology, ethnology, biology, medicine, music. Like Segalen, he regarded poetry as an art to be divorced from the mundane transactions of everyday life. This aristocratic attitude towards literature, associated with a sense of hierarchical values and a highly disciplined effort to develop personal potential, is characteristic of the 'Belle Epoque'. However both poets developed a unique attitude and literary style, influenced in part by the

\(^1\) *Salut*, Mallarmé: The Poems, op. cit., p. 54.
\(^5\) ibid., Author's Preface, p. 12.
revolutionary prose of Rimbaud. Breaking away from logical, discursive
narrative, Saint-John Perse seeks to penetrate to the very essence of his
subject. A letter to Mrs F. Biddle indicates his idea of poetics:

"... dans la création poétique telle que je puis la concevoir,
la fonction même du poète est d'intégrer la chose qu'il évoque
ou de s'y intégrer, s'identifiant à cette chose, jusqu'à la
devenir lui-même et de s'y confondre..."

The movement of the poem is dictated by this identification with the subject. Rational development is sacrificed to 'un vaste enchaînement d'ellipses, de
raccourcis, de contractions, parfois même de simples fulgurations, privées
de toute transition'. The desire to write from within the subject is
characteristic of Segalen's exotic method. It demands qualities of sensi-
tivity, erudition and personal observation common to both writers. The voyage
of discovery with which the poet identifies becomes a means of self-discovery. Unlike Michaux, Saint-John Perse and Segalen on the whole rejected the use of
artificial stimulants to achieve this state of mental awareness. In their
work the links with the world of natural phenomena are therefore more specific
and concrete.

In our study of exotic fiction it may suffice to point out these
similarities in the attitude of Saint-John Perse. In practice he expressed
his desire for 'exotic' writing. While his vocabulary and imagery retain
precise links with the real world, his poetry is not related to any particular
region. Readers, who are often agree in their interpretations of Anabase,
commonly relate this poem to his expeditions into the deserts of Central Asia;
yet there are no definite cultural, historical or geographical references.
It transcends the particular. Segalen on the other hand plunges into the
particular, tainting its special savour. Whereas Saint-John Perse eschewed
conscious erudition and auto-critical reflection on his work, by these
intellectual qualities Segalen espoused a type of literature despised by many
of his contemporaries. He is more critical, more fiercely ironic, more

1 Saint-John Perse, letter of 12 December 1955, Œuvres complètes, Paris, NRF-
Gallimard, 1972, p. 921.
2 ibid. loc. cit.
3 Letter to Archibald MacLeish, quoted by Christian Michaux, Saint-John Perse,
4 This poem was written during Saint-John Perse's five years in China, 1916-21,
which dovetailed with Segalen's last visit to China in 1917; v. Arthur Knodel,
resentful of society than Saint-John Perse. In a similar spirit of antagonism he undertook the challenge of writing a new form of the novel, a literary form which was scorned by most serious writers of the epoch. Our interest lies particularly in his efforts to renew this genre, which include a critical study of exotic fiction in general and a steadily evolving sense of his unique contribution to this field.

During the voyage from Tahiti to Paris, in October 1904, Segalen wrote the first of a series of 'Notes sur l'Exotisme', which he compiled with the intention of writing a book on the subject. In this note he presented the central idea of his book as:

Parallélisme entre le recul dans le passé (Historicisme) et le Lointain dans l'espace (Exotisme).


L'Exotisme sexuel.

La vue. Les peintres d'exotisme. Le peintre romantique (Fromentin). Gauguin.

La sensation d'exotisme: surprise. Son émoisement rapide.

Many of these ideas were never developed. At this stage Segalen had already written one chapter of Les Éclectiques, a work which he defined later as the simplest and purest form of exoticism, 'L'Exotisme des Races et des Mœurs'. Later his concept of exoticism became broader and more comprehensive. However, at this point he was considering the traditional idea of exoticism, the description of other peoples. His intention was to study the qualities of observation revealed in literary work of this type. The faculties of observation employed by the writer include various means of sensory perception which would convey the primary shock of exoticism more directly than rational means of description and analysis. This emphasis on sensation, influenced by contemporary solipsist theories, was supported by the broader Hindu philosophy of life as illusionism.

The critical notes on exoticism, which were written at various periods throughout his life, are a continual reflection on his own work and its place in the exotic tradition. As there is considerable evolution and change in these ideas, we shall study them in concurrence with his fiction. Taken together, the critical and the creative reveal a self-conscious attitude towards writing which is profoundly modern, and unique in exotic writing.

1. Essai sur l'Exotisme, op. at., p. 11.
2. ibid., p. 37.
3. THE BLINDNESS OF ROMANTIC SUBJECTIVITY

In the early notes on exoticism, written just after *Les Immémoriaux*, Segalen seeks a certain 'objectivity' of approach, which he defines particularly by contrast with the 'subjectivity' of traditional attitudes towards exoticism. The literary quest for objectivity is particularly characteristic of the Naturalist movement. In his essay *Le Roman* Guy de Maupassant contrasts the 'roman objectif' with the traditional French 'roman d'analyse', in which the novelist observes and analyses the secret motives and feelings of his characters. According to Maupassant:

> Les partisans de l'objectivité (quel vilain mot!) prétendant, au contraire, nous donner la représentation exacte de ce qui a lieu dans la vie, évitent avec soin toute explication compliquée, toute dissertation sur les motifs, et se bornent à faire passer sous nos yeux les personnages et les événements.

> Pour eux, la psychologie doit être cachée dans le livre comme elle est cachée en réalité sous les faits dans l'existence.

> Le roman conçu de cette manière y gagne de l'intérêt, du mouvement dans le récit, de la couleur, de la vie remuante.  

Elsewhere, however, Maupassant admits that the novelist cannot give an 'exact representation' of reality. He does not comment on the semantic differences between language and the object, which were defined later by Ferdinand de Saussure, but he observes that the novelist makes a selection of detail from the disordered mass of experience, and organizes this detail in artistic form. He is, moreover, limited by his own subjectivity of perception:

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1 *Essai sur l'Exotisme*, op. cit., pp. 36-37.

Maupassant's theory of the novel is a plea for individuality and freedom of form. 'Objectivity' in his fiction is a matter of technique: a consideration of the characters' feelings and actions from a distant standpoint. Through devices such as the 'discours indirect libre', also characteristic of Flaubert, the narration is presented in an impersonal manner, dissociated from both character and author.

Segalen defined the question of objectivity in literature as one of form, since ultimately all vision is subjective:

... Cependant, il reste métaphysiquement indiscutable qu'une seule attitude est possible, le subjectivisme absolu. L'apparente transformation ne porte donc que sur le mode dont on fait choix... sur la forme, donc sur cet élément factice et miraculeux qui fait la raison d'être de l'art... Donc, justification esthétique complète.  

This note was written one year after publication of Les Immémoriaux, which Segalen saw as 'objectifs, ou se dissimulés...  In writing, the novelist became aware that the 'objectivity' of his approach lay essentially in the question of perspective. As defined by Norman Friedman, objectivity of presentation is a question of point of view:

Subjectivity, refers to the interfacing and summarizing authorial narrator and objectivity means the disappearance of the author.

The 'disappearance' of the author implies here the adoption of a specific point of view, rather than the impersonal stance suggested above: This technique gives to the novel the drama, life and colour indicated by Maupassant, since 'the interest lies in the actions of the characters. Particularly advocated by Henry James in his critical writings and his own fiction, it has become a feature of the twentieth-century novel. The novelty of Segalen's approach in Les Immémoriaux lies in the simple stratagem of reversing the habitual point of view:

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1 Maupassant, 'Le Roman', op. cit., p. 41.
2 Essai sur l'Exotisme, op. cit., p. 19.
3 ibid., p. 64.
4 Norman Friedman, Form and Meaning in Fiction, Athens, Georgia University Press, 1977, p. 135.
... pourquoi tout simplement, en vérité, ne pas prendre le contrepied de ceux-là dont je me défends? Pourquoi ne pas tenter la contre-épreuve? Ils ont dit ce qu'ils ont vu, ce qu'ils ont senti en présence des choses et des gens inattendus dont ils allaient chercher le choc. Ont-ils révélé ce que ces choses et ces gens pensaient en eux-mêmes et d'eux?

His narrative gives a detached account of a situation, but from a point of view not familiar to either author or reader. This technique opens up new terrain to the novelist, allowing him to present without comment new ideas, and attitudes, and a new dramatic 'illusion'.

A subjective approach, on the other hand, indicates the projection of personal attitudes and moral values in the novel. The novelist intervenes in the narrative to comment or explain, or imposes his own views through his characters. In a study of exoticism, he is more concerned with his impressions and feelings within a strange environment than with the particular qualities of his subject. We shall briefly consider the work of the chief proponents of this literary method in order to understand Segalen's criticism of its limitations, and to evaluate his particular contribution to the field of 'exotic' literature.

The sense of diversity is a very recent development in literature. Before the nineteenth century, the writer typically interpreted other times and other peoples according to preconceived attitudes, without allowing for the transforming effect of milieu and moment. He judged according to his own values, which he saw as an absolute and fixed standard. We can see this attitude in European exotic painting before the nineteenth century, where people from other lands tend to look like Europeans. In literature they tend to behave like Europeans, except for anecdotes relating certain bizarre customs. There is little interest shown in the other; exotic literature is either titillating and sensational, in the manner of the Arabian Nights, moralistic, or fantastic. The sense of history as a dynamic force which brings about change within men is comparatively recent. Segalen claims to be the first exotic writer to attempt to put aside these

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1 Essai sur L'Exotisme, op. cit., p. 17.
preconceived attitudes: 'Je suis seul de mon espèce...'\(^1\) In the following pages we shall examine this claim.

If a sense of diversity among men is comparatively new to literature, we find an interest in exotic landscape much earlier. There is in French literature since the Renaissance a precise description of nature based on close observation. The depiction of the beauties of nature is extended in the seventeenth century by travellers, missionaries and adventurers to accounts of strange, wonderful or picturesque sights they experienced on their journeys. In comparison with the stereotypes of classical literary style, as seen in Astree or Télémaque, these prosaic accounts are remarkable for their precise detail and evidence of close observation, curiosity and wonder. They were reinforced by the scientific sketches of botanists and draughtsmen on voyages of discovery. No doubt in the observation of nature men were more precise, less open to prejudice than in the observation of peoples, whom they saw either as ignoble and cruel, or as noble and innocent.\(^2\) The study of nature in the Pacific was so much more advanced than the study of man that in 1795 Louis XVI ordered La Pérouse to make a more detailed study of native peoples.\(^3\) It was only in the nineteenth century that a more objective interest in other peoples became apparent.

In his Génie du Christianisme Chateaubriand observed the qualities of 'poésie descriptive' in nature description by travellers and explorers; he saw for example in the work of le Père Dutertre an accurate and striking use of vocabulary, a vivid palette akin to that of Buffon. While Dutertre's descriptions of the Caribbean people are also remarkably precise and detailed, they are designed to support the idea of the noble savage. His descriptions of both native Caribbean and negro slaves have a bias not found in his nature description.

More detailed studies of the history of nature description in exotic writing can be found in such texts as Chinard's studies of American exoticism in French literature. For our purpose it may suffice to note this distinction in the description of exotic lands and peoples. However it is not until the late eighteenth century that we find in exotic writing literary qualities of aesthetic style and poetic interpretation.

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2 Bernard Smith, op. cit., p. 102.

3 Gilbert Chinard, op. cit., p. 50.
During the eighteenth century a new attitude towards nature appeared in French literature, which was to become more fully developed during the Romantic period. This was no longer a mere description of landscapes, fauna and flora, but a consideration of their effect on the writer. A further development in this subjective attitude towards nature was the tendency to interpret a scene according to one's own sentiments. Among this group of writers the description of the external world is conditioned by a particular state of mind. These new descriptive techniques, particularly characteristic of Rousseau and Bernardin de Saint-Pierre, were to influence the development of nineteenth-century exoticism.

Diversity of geographical features, fauna and flora provides our first experience of exoticism in literature. In his essay on exoticism Segalen originally planned that after an opening chapter on individualism, he would begin his study by a consideration of the exoticism of nature, "notre premier expérience de l'exotisme". In a note written the following month Segalen defines his subject more closely, distinguishing between the exterior world, different from the self, and "le sentiment de la nature lequel "n'exista qu'au moment où l'homme sut la concevoir différente de lui". This sense of difference is the touchstone of exoticism as Segalen conceived it.

Segalen saw his theory of exoticism as providing a new reading of, or insight into, literature. Having defined the exotic as that which is other, different from the self, he intended in his essay to reconsider the work of Rousseau, Bernardin de Saint-Pierre and their successors in an effort to distinguish the exotic from the purely subjective.

Introduction à ce chapitre.

En somme, c'est l'éternel essai sur 'le sentiment de la Nature' que je reprends ainsi. Sa banalité même va être la pierre de touche où se rayera, ou non, où se marquera, ou non, la pureté, la nouveauté de ma vision. Si elle éclaire ces fouillis fades où se répandirent les Rousseau, les G. Sand, et d'autres, c'est qu'elle a vraiment quelque vertu singulière. Il ne me déplait pas de l'exercer sur d'ailleurs pétres sujets.

The sharpness of tone in such expressions as 'piètres sujets', 'banalité', 'fouillis fades', 'répandit', is characteristic of Segalen's notes on the

1 Essai sur l'Exotisme, p. 25.
2 ibid., p. 35. Segalen quotes Henri Clouard. See below, pp. 50-51.
3 ibid., p. 35.
Romantic at this period. Nearly ten years later, when reaffirming his intention to open his essay on exoticism with this subject, his tone is less antagonistic:

C'est cet exotisme-là, précisément, qui, le plus apparent, imposa son nom à la chose... Mais la sorte d'insistance avec laquelle cette sorte d'exotisme s'impose à ceux qui voyagent, la visibilité trop grosse, en fait à la fois un bon point de départ et la nécessité d'en finir avec l'idé traitant une bonne fois. Il fera l'objet du premier chapitre, — nécessaire.¹

In his maturer attitude towards exotic literature, then, Segalen accepts the geographical elements which he had earlier wished to reject: 'dépouiller l'exotisme de ce qu'il a de "géographique"'.² The exoticism of nature is an obvious example of diversity. Perhaps in his essay he would also have acknowledged a certain exoticism in the work of those he dismissed in his early attempts to define his own approach to the subject.

Although Segalen condemned Rousseau's style as lame and colourless, objective techniques of nature description are to be found in such works as the Confessions, Emile and Réveries du promeneur solitaire. There are moments of precise observation, for example, when Rousseau is concerned with identifying botanical species (as in the Réveries), or with conveying a message about the beneficial influence of nature.³ However Rousseau is usually more interested in the self, and the emotions which nature inspires in him. As he writes in the Fifth Réverie: 'De quoi jouit-on dans une pareille situation? De rien d'extérieur à soi, de rien sinon de soi-même et de sa propre existence; tant que cet état dure, on se suffit à soi-même, comme Dieu'.⁴ His method is essentially narcissistic, a quality which turns the viewer inward rather than out towards the other. Rousseau showed little interest in absorbing and objective study,⁵ being more concerned with the ideal than with reality. Segalen's concept of exoticism has more affinity with

¹ Essai sur l'Exotisme, op. cit., p. 83.
² ibid., p. 19.
³ V. Margaret Louise Buchner, A Contribution to the Study of the Descriptive Technique of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Baltimore, Johns Hopkins Press, 1937, Chapters II and III.
⁵ ibid., p. 80.
the detached, intellectual tradition of Diderot and Voltaire than with this
type of subjective emotionalism.

In the case of Bernardin de Saint-Pierre, a close friend and disciple of
Rousseau, the 'sentiment de la nature' was allied with a curiosity and a keen
eye for sensuous detail which influence Chateaubriand and the development of
nineteenth-century exotic literature. Hence Pierre Jourda claims that
Bernardin introduced the modern form of exoticism into French literature. Exoticism in this sense is defined by the work of Chateaubriand and Loti, whom Jourda considers the chief representatives of this form of literature.

In the work of Bernardin de Saint-Pierre, the exoticism is one of geographical difference. Bernardin took a scientific interest in natural phenomena, studying botanical and biological specimens on the island of Mauritius.

While his scientific observations in Paul et Virginie are highly questionable, his descriptions of nature bring new qualities of pictorial description to French literature: a rich vocabulary, a painter's eye for colour and detail. Nature is no longer a background as in Rousseau, but a dominant force which influences mankind. The writer adopts the passive role of interpreter, learning harmony and goodness from the natural rhythms of the universe.

Segalen does not credit in his work the innovatory qualities of descriptive realism, scientific study and personal observation. However, there are also many inconsistencies in his presentation of an idealized existence on a tropical island: an idea in the literary tradition of Robinson Crusoe which is unrealistic and sentimental. Bernardin's view of nature is centred on man. Nature is seen in his work as ordained by God to supply man's needs.

This subjective view lessens the mystery of nature, and reduces the cosmos to the limitations of man's understanding.

The 'Notes sur l'Exotisme' indicate that Segalen knew little of Bernardin's work. The opening reference gives the latter first place in Segalen's projected essay on exoticism: 'Ecrire un livre sur l'Exotisme. Bernardin de Saint-Pierre — Chateaubriand — Marco-Polo l'initiateur — Loti.' However, later he comments, 'Bernardin de Saint-Pierre! Lu seulement ici à Tien-tsin sept ans plus tard. Sans doute cité [un mot illisible: à cause d'un?] mépris de sa fadeur.' The term 'fadeur'
continually recurs to describe literature of the subjective tradition. This
geneneralization suggests that Segalen paid little attention to Bernardin's
literary qualities, seeking mainly to establish his own individuality by
contrast and negation.

In the same way Segalen showed little interest in Chateaubriand's work,
although he quotes with approval in his notes on exoticism a critical study
of Maurice de Guérin by Henri Clouard, including the following comment on
Chateaubriand:

Enfin Chateaubriand, ayant noué l'alliance de la description
lyrique de Rousseau avec la description picturale de
Bernardin de Saint-Pierre, anime et humanise de très beaux
paysages, et même s'efface afin qu'ils se détachent, se déploient
librement, existent pour eux-mêmes...

Like Segalen, Clouard is concerned with aesthetic powers of description which
include both lyrical and pictorial qualities. Whereas Rousseau and
Romantics tended to become carried away by personal emotion, Clouard notes an
objective quality in certain passages of Chateaubriand's work. At these
moments the author suppresses personal comment, becoming absorbed in the
contemplation of the spectacle.

Chateaubriand played a decisive role in exotic literature. In his work
Chateaubriand is a precursor of the exotic method of Segalen.

However, like Clouard, Segalen contrasts objective, autonomous art with
the 'narcissistic' qualities in Chateaubriand's work: 'Chateaubriand,
Senancour, ou Amiel, ces Marquisas des lettres, ont minutieusement noté les
nuances de leur moi.' Chateaubriand is less concerned with other races and
customs than with his particular vision of the world. This vision is a
highly subjective presentation of people and places as seen largely through
the imagination and the memory, coloured by reading and literary perceptions.

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de Guérin et le sentiment de la nature', Mercure de France, 1 January 1909,
quoted in Segalen's Essai sur l'Exotisme, p. 35-40.

2 Pierre Jourda, op. cit., p. 23.

3 Segalen quotes Clouard, Essai sur l'Exotisme, p. 38.
There is a certain falsification of detail in his work which may jar on the modern reader. For example, there are various geographical inaccuracies such as placing bears and maple syrup in Florida. Atala, a creole Amerindian, is improbably endowed with golden hair and an almost transparently white skin. While certain critics have defended Chateaubriand's distortions of reality on aesthetic grounds,¹ the value he places on whiteness rests on a value judgment in favour of his own civilization, which he idealizes as Christian. This assumption colours his perception of Indian culture, and blinds him to some of its unique qualities. When he first wrote Atala and René he had planned to describe the American Indians; however, later he adjusted certain details in order to fit these works into Le Génie du Christianisme: Moreover, he added other details to serve personal ambitions.² The hybrid nature of his work lessens its impact as exotic literature. In certain passages it reduces aesthetic quality by imposing an afterthought on to the original artistic vision a particular purpose or ideology.

The image of the 'métis' symbolizes the difference in attitude between Chateaubriand and Segalen. Chateaubriand's heroes and heroines — for example Atala, Chactas — are caught between two worlds; they represent the savagery of the old world, in the process of becoming civilized by the superior forces of European culture and religion. Segalen criticized Chateaubriand's work as a 'blending' of ideas:

Chateaubriand (nature et race), V. Hugo (nature) et Sand (Nature!) ne faisaient qu'affadir l'objet en un mélange où s'évanouissait la Diversité Merveilleuse!³

Chateaubriand's interest lies not in the other, but in the self, and its effect on the other. The subjective quality of his work contrasts with Segalen's quest for the purest, most unique traditions. Hence in Le Maître du Jour, Segalen represents Gauguin as rejecting the attractive Eurasian Saraw, because she belongs to no culture in particular: "Cette demi-blanche,

¹ e.g. Richard Switzer, Chateaubriand, New York, Twayne Publications, 1971; p. IV.
³ Essai sur l'Exotisme, op. cit., p. 37.
vernissée au contact de tous ces Européens...;¹ 'tu es pire que la bâtarde d'un serpent et d'un oiseau...²

Segalen's concept of individualism imposes on his work a more virile tone. The melancholy pessimism of Chateaubriand's René had a crippling effect on many nineteenth-century writers, encouraging negativity, ennui and inaction. Whereas there is a certain literary charm in this 'mal du siècle', it frequently encourages self-indulgence at the expense of art.

Following the tradition set by Chateaubriand, many exotic writers sought to impose their own mood on a scene or a description; their chief interest was in giving their impressions of other lands and peoples. Frequently they sacrificed the essential qualities of exoticism to the familiar, making little effort to understand customs outside their range of experience. Unless the viewer is open to new ideas and attitudes, his preconceptions and prejudices are likely to transmute the exotic vision. These are the dangers which Segalen saw in the Romantic vision of Chateaubriand, Hugo and Sand.

The work of Victor Hugo in its exuberant eloquence ranges from fine poetry to loose verbiage, from revolutionary poetic theory to empty rhetoric. His ideas influenced such diverse groups as the Romantics, the Realists, the Parnassians.³ The declamatory prefaces to his Odes, Cromwell, and Hernani broke the ground for the literary innovations of the following century. In the first preface to Les Orientales he presents a case for pure poetry, detached from the social and political considerations which were to weigh down his later work. In the preface to this 'livre inutile de pure poésie'⁴ Hugo announces the theory of 'art for art's sake'. The ideas expressed here are closer to Segalen's idea of exoticism than the later work of Hugo, the spokesman of mankind. In Les Orientales he indicated the fecundity of the Orient

² Le Maître du Jouir, II, 49.
³ A summary of critical comments on his work is given by Joanna Richardson, Victor Hugo, New York, St Martin's Press, 1976, p. ix.
as a potential subject of poetic inspiration. His appeal was influential in awakening a general interest in exoticism.

Many of the impassioned theories of Hugo are central to Segalen's work, yet there is a total contrast in method and style. Hugo's vision of the artist as revolutionary leader and magus dominates the century. However Hugo expressed with eloquence feelings and attitudes shared by the reading public. Segalen's artist-hero, misunderstood and reviled by the masses, is more akin to the tormented artist described by Alfred de Vigny: a figure which expresses the growing rift between artist and bourgeoisie, towards the end of the century.

This contrast in intention is a major point of difference between Hugo and Segalen. For Segalen writing is an art which is profaned by generalizations and verbosity. Hugo in his enthusiasm for the exotic had little time for research, picking up much of his material from historical and geographical dictionaries. Scholars have discovered glaring anomalies in the detail of his historical works, which contrast with Segalen's thorough erudition.

Whereas in earlier works such as Les Orientales Hugo is a precursor of Segalen, his later, more subjective works are the antithesis of Segalen's idea of exoticism.

The exotic tradition which flourished in the wake of Chateaubriand and Hugo found its most popular exponent in Pierre Loti. Loti, whose works enjoyed resounding success in his lifetime, is often seen as the chief exponent of exoticism. However his popularity has not lasted, although there are signs of renewed interest in his work. The dramatic decline in his readership is partly due to his lethargic tone of romantic sentimentality and pessimism, which has little appeal to modern readers. It is also partly due to an outmoded concern with personal anecdotes and superficial impressions of 'exotic' lands which are now available in tourist brochures. However the neglect into which his novels have fallen is particularly due to a certain attitude which may be described as colonialist. In his thinly-disguised

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1 Joanna Richardson, V. Hugo, op. cit., pp. 289-293.
autobiographical works, the patronizing tone of the European officer and
gentleman underlies the narcissistic descriptions of Loti's various love-
affairs in different parts of the world.

Segalen and Loti (or Julien Viaud) were both born in Brittany. As
French naval officers they were forced to adopt a pseudonym in publishing
their novels. There is a striking contrast between the two writers which
Segalen, the younger and less established writer, was at pains to make clear.
Both writers could be said to have made of exoticism a 'method'; to have
developed in their novels certain masks of the self which are transformations
of reality. However Loti's masks are repetitive, and very thinly disguised.
His method is that of a painter. His landscapes are justly praised as
lyrical depictions of colours, sights, perfumes and sounds. His intoxication
with these sensuous details is tinged with a melancholy reflection on
their transience, a fear of death and decay. Segalen's description of Loti's
art as impressionist aptly describes the brief, disconnected sketches
characteristic of his style. Loti himself observes, in a typically autobiographical manner: 'I know well that it is only expected of me that I
should speak of the trifling events of my journey, and catch the glint of
passing things...'

Loti plays on this light quality of style, juxtaposing letters and
anecdotes, labelling certain chapters as 'hors-d’oeuvre: qu’on peut se
dispenser de lire...' He made no effort to study the background of the
countries he described; like Rousseau he disliked reading books. He
preferred to convey a sense of the incomprehensible strangeness of a scene.
However he shared the contemporary preference for realism in that he based
his novels on places he had visited, people he knew. Generally he
described rather than invented detail. His descriptions, limited by sketchy
knowledge, play on suggestion, making use of a vague, emotive vocabulary.
Such terms as 'des impressions vagues', 'indéfinissable', 'le Mystère',
'distances vertigineuses' recur frequently in his novels.

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1 V. above, p. 20.
2 Pierre Loti, L'Inde (sans les Anglais), translated by George A.E. Inman,
4 Clive Wake, op. cit., p. 53: 'et al.'
5 Loti, Le Mariage de Loti, op. cit., pp. 6, 314, 157, 74.
The beauty of Loti's style lies in an evocative quality which is uneven, sometimes deteriorating into journalese. The contrast with Segalen's erudition and craftsmanship is particularly obvious in their writings on China. 'Les derniers jours de Pékin' is a journalistic description of the Allied occupation of the Forbidden City. We shall discuss in more detail in Part III the differences in attitude and style between Segalen's novel Le Fils du Ciel and the romantic drama La Fille du Ciel, which Loti wrote in collaboration with Judith Gautier. Loti at his worst writes on subjects to which he is indifferent, weaving into the text an ennui which inevitably destroys interest in his subject. The impressions of Japan given in Madame Chrysantheme are limited to a scathing description of an 'arranged marriage', a form of legalized prostitution in Nagasaki. The cultural prejudice of his work on China and Japan makes these writings unworthy of comparison with Segalen's exotic texts. However, it may prove more fruitful to contrast their novels on Tahiti. In both cases, these early works are coloured by the enthusiasm of youth breaking away from European convention into the 'paradise' described by early navigators as 'la nouvelle Cythère'. The nostalgia for this first glimpse of paradise was to haunt their later lives, although in Loti's case Turkey was even more unforgettable.

Le Mariage de Loti, like most of Loti's work, takes the autobiographical form of letters and reminiscences. The central theme is his quest for a childhood dream of the paradise described by his beloved elder brother, whose death had deeply affected him. He hopes to rediscover this lost past through finding his brother's Tahitian wife and possibly a child. His interest in Tahiti is essentially self-centred. His novel is concerned with the problems of destruction and death, which are symbolized by contemporary Tahitian society.

The theme of the fatal impact of European civilization upon Polynesia, which dominates literary descriptions of the Pacific since Diderot, finds poignant expression in Loti's novel. The shadow of death looms over the island, threatening the six-year-old heir to the throne, and dooming Loti's young Tahitian love, the innocent Rarahu. The destructive effects of civilization, disease and drink are contrasted with the idyllic purity of the landscape. The tranquil beauty of life in the traditional villages represents fleeting sensuous joys, doomed to extinction. Having left the

Le Mariage de Loti, op. cit., p. 176.
village for Loti, Rarahu is inevitably corrupted by the materialistic charms of city life.

Loti's novel gives an egotistical account of the destructive effect of his love affair with Rarahu. 'Je comprenais pourtant qu'elle était perdue… C'était peut-être pour moi un charme de plus.' A sense of guilt permeates the hero's reflections about the future. However he torments and goads Rarahu, whom he describes as his 'toy'. Although he begs her to return to the countryside after his departure, his efforts are influenced by his vanity, and a desire that she be faithful to his image. This double standard also applies to the wife Taïmaha his brother has deserted, and whom Loti accuses of infidelity. Rarahu and Taïmaha may have Tahitian lovers; what Tahitians do is mysterious, different and unknowable. However if they take another European lover this is seen as a betrayal of Loti and his alter ego, his brother. His attitude reveals both sexual discrimination and a complete misunderstanding of Tahitian society. Loti demands of Taïmaha not only fidelity to a lover who deserted her, but an attitude towards parenthood which is essentially European. Moreover he makes Taïmaha's mother express European sentiments about scrupulous exactitude and honesty. His novel is written from a European point of view, and despite its superficial nostalgia for the natural beauty of Tahiti it is suffused with ethnocentric prejudice. Thus Loti catered for the tastes of the average European reader, who was neither able nor prepared to identify with other attitudes.

A central scene in the novel represents the essential characteristics of Loti's novel: lyrical beauty of tone and landscape, marred by a paternalistic tone and rank prejudice. Loti and Rarahu have climbed through magnificent virgin bush to a volcanic peak which dominates the island. Looking out to the immense ocean, Loti reflects on the isolation of Tahiti, its eternal silence in the midst of a terrifying emptiness. Rather than seeking to learn about Tahiti from Rarahu, he tells her about early legends of the Maoris, treating her as an ignorant child of a primitive race doomed to extinction.

Segalen deplores this subjective quality of his work, which is the antithesis of his own attitude towards exoticism: 'les Loti sont mystiquement ivres et inconscients de leur objet, qu'ils mélangent à eux, et auquel ils ne.'

1 Le Mariage de Loti, op. cit., p. 166.
2 ibid., p. 184. 3 ibid., p. 155.
The term 'mélange' recalls his criticism of Chateaubriand, Hugo and Sand: the writer becomes intoxicated with his personal feelings, losing sight of his subject. The freedom of expression cultivated by the Romantics encouraged an effusion of personal sentiment detrimental to art. Segalen comments disparagingly on 'Loti et tous les touristes impressionnistes'; and elsewhere: 'les Loti, les touristes ne furent pas moins désastreux. Je les nomme les Proxénètes de la Sensation du Divers.' By idly reminiscing over their travels without research or understanding, writers cheapened and falsified their subject. Segalen sought for a deeper sense of diversity, less suited to popular tastes:

Je ne le cacherai point: ce livre découvrira le plus grand nombre. Malgré son titre exotique, il ne peut y être question de tropiques et de cocotiers, ni de colonies ou d'âmes noires, ni de chameaux, ni de vaisseaux, ni de grandes houles, ni d'odeurs, ni d'épices, ni d'îles enchantées, ni d'incompréhensions, ni de soulevements indigènes, ni de néant et de mort, ni de larmes de couleur, ni de pensée jaune, ni d'étrangetés, ni d'aucune des saugrenuités que le mot 'Exotisme' enferme dans son acception quotidienne.  

The vocabulary chosen by Segalen seems to apply particularly to Loti: néant, mort, incompréhensions, étrange, saugrenu, are leitmotif in Loti's work, which is often based in the tropics — Africa — or on an enchanted island — Tahiti. However such references to colonial literature apply to the accepted exotic tradition extending from Chateaubriand to colonialist writers such as Farrère, Nolly, Leblond, even Lafcadio Hearn, whom Segalen dismisses as a 'touriste lettré'.  

This estimate of Hearn's work is unfair. His writings show great sensitivity and a wide knowledge of Japanese culture. Like Segalen he rejected many features of his own civilization which he found repressive and excessively materialistic. In Japan he sought to consider things in a totally new way, not simply as an observer but through the eyes of the Japanese. His first book on Japan, Glimpses of Unfamiliar Japan, does indeed tend to give his early impressions of the people and their way of life;

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1. Étude sur l'Exotisme, op. cit., p. 39. Where Segalen uses the philosophical term 'objet' for the object of perception, I employ the literary term 'subject' in order to be consistent with my general approach.
2. ibid., p. 37.
3. ibid., p. 34.
4. ibid., p. 35.
5. ibid., p. 63.
However in later works he identifies closely with Asian attitudes. His study of Japan was a philosophical quest similar in many aspects to Segalén's quest for the 'other'. Through his empathy with different ways of thought he became aware of new aspects of the self, and new possibilities for humanity. He admired Buddhism not only for its aesthetic outlook on the world but for its analogy with modern theories of Evolutional psychology: ideas which were very much in the forefront of Segalén's mind. Nevertheless the latter would certainly have disputed Hearn's Idealistic desire to integrate the European scientific spirit with the philosophical wisdom and tolerance of Buddhism. His evolutionist theories of the universe included a belief in the future integration of East and West into a harmonious, 'perfect sphere': an idea totally opposed to Segalén's celebration of diversity. Moreover Segalén was more concerned to establish the unique qualities of his own literary attitude than to appreciate analogies in Hearn's writings. The latter is primarily remembered for his translations of legends, his philosophical and critical studies of the rapport between East and West. His great ambition of creating a new form of fiction out of his Japanese experience was never realized.

Among English colonial writers, Segalén mentions Robert Louis Stevenson's work later in his notes on exoticism as an example of the 'Exotisme des Aventures', with a reference to his friend Gilbert de Voisins, a collaborator in the projected essay. Segalén was clearly less interested in Stevenson's work than was his friend Gilbert, whose novels, like Stevenson's, are lighter and more popular in tone. Stevenson had intended to write an ambitious novel on the South Seas, but never succeeded in organizing his material. Although he did not have Segalén's profound vision, some of his poetry conveys a sense of the savage power of the Maoris. For example The Feast of Famine and The Song of Rahero present an attitude towards revenge which in its objective presentation with intention to shock is close to Segalén's idea of exoticism.

1 v. below, pp. 137.
2 Beongcheon Yu, op. cit., Ch. XIII, 'A Perfect Sphere'.
3 Essai sur l'Exotisme, op. cit., p. 46. For Gilbert de Voisins see below, p. 34.
There is no mention of other English novels on the South Seas, such as those of Hermán Melville, who preceded Loti and Segalen as the first great novelist to defend Polynesian civilization against the harmful effects of European civilization. According to Robert Louis Stevenson, Melville was known in France as the 'Rabelais américain' and had great influence on French writers, including Loti.

The sole colonial writer whom Segalen singles out for discussion in his analysis of exotic technique is Rudyard Kipling. Like Loti, Kipling was very successful as a writer, partly because he articulated the popular enthusiasm for the Empire. For similar reasons his work has dated, although recent critical studies indicate the artistic quality to be found particularly in his short stories. One of the most gifted story-tellers of his period, Kipling reveals, in tales such as Kim and the 'Story of Purun Bhagat' an extensive knowledge of northern India, and a deep sensitivity to his subject. Unfortunately, however, the artistic detachment and polished style of these stories is lacking in much of his work. Again like Loti, he wrote too much and too quickly. His work tends to be subjective, journalistic and prejudiced against the Other. In his notes on exoticism, Segalen refers not to Kipling's descriptions of Indian life but to the Jungle Books, as an example of narration from another point of view:

Oui, sans doute, Kipling a fait cela pour les Bêtes de la Jungle, considérant le Petit d'homme, et, à moitié (car la note d'exotisme n'y était plus), pour le Navire et la Locomotive. Mais ici, c'est le parti pris entiére par qu'obscur et inconscient d'abord; d'exotisme au 2e degré, poussé jusqu'aux c hêvnes', en somme, au 'monde extérieur', a l'objet tout entier, qui fait le fond personnel de cette attitude que je crois mienne, depuis que systématisée ainsi...

In attacking the subjectivity of travel-literature, Segalen was primarily concerned with suggesting the potentialities of the theory of exoticism as he understood it. Hence he made little effort to give an impartial appraisal of the literary merits of such writers. In some cases

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2 Three major works on Kipling have appeared since 1950: critical biographies by Charles Carrington, Lord Birkenhead and Kingsley Amis.
3 For an analysis of the dichotomy between these two attitudes, v. Syed Sajjad Hussain, Kipling and India, E. Pakistan, University of Dacca, 1964.
4 Essai sur l'Exotisme, op. cit., p. 18.
he ignored aspects of a writer's work where an aesthetic skill in craftsmanship is combined with a sensitivity to environment and a delight in the sensory stimulus of strange climates and situations. These cases are on the whole isolated instances within a body of work which is predominantly subjective in tone. His attitude, as we have seen, gradually softened towards the end of his life. He admitted certain literary qualities in the exoticism of purely geographical difference. However, since he was seeking to renew a term which had become cheapened by popular usage, he was necessarily fierce in his rejection of the facile, the superficial, the verbose. Moreover, he was not concerned with the appreciation of literary style in general. In his Essay on Exoticism he sought to define the qualities which he considered conducive to the fullest appreciation of the exotic. By giving rein to personal impressions and feelings, he claimed, a writer is blinded by his own preconceptions and remains unaware of the essential qualities of his subject. Man should develop his faculties to their full capability, becoming attuned to the environment in order to render its impact and savour. Instead of a Romantic indulgence in narcissism, he advocated a certain objectivity in presentation, which will be the subject of our following chapter.
4. THE QUEST FOR OBJECTIVITY IN EXOTIC LITERATURE

Segalen's first novel, *Les Immémoriaux*, is presented from the standpoint of a Tahitian narrator. The author seeks objectivity by presenting with scrupulous accuracy and detachment the 'other' point of view. In Part I, he imagines Tahitian reactions to the arrival of the first European missionaries. He conveys the shock of conflict between two different civilizations, their beliefs and customs. By maintaining a Tahitian perspective, he is able to call into question conventional attitudes and preconceptions. In the quotation above, Paofai, one of the leaders of a religious group of artists known as the 'Aroi', ridicules Christian attacks on Tahitian beliefs. By reversing the point of view, Segalen removes the solid ground of accepted rules and criteria from beneath the reader's feet, and makes him consider the relativity of customs and traditions.

Paofai enumerates Tahitian customs to which the European missionaries take exception: the practice of human sacrifice, especially of infanticide; the worship of idols; polygamy; a celebration of physical strength and prowess which sets youth above old age, cunning above honesty. The expression 'même un prêtre' highlights the contrasting attitude to religion

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1 V. Segalen, *Les Immémoriaux*, Librairie Plon, Coll. 'Terre Humaine' 1956, p. 12 (all further references are to this edition).
and to priesthood. The rhetorical style of the priest's incantation suggests mounting fury by the rhythmical enumeration of reproaches. The rhythm is strengthened by the repetition of the grammatical construction: 'Ils disent que...', followed by progressively longer sentences. This repetition is developed in the following paragraph, which describes the power of European 'magic':

Ils ont des sortilèges enfermés dans des signes. Ils ont peint ces petits signes sur des feuilles. Ils les consultent des yeux et les répandent avec leurs paroles...

In opposition to this power of the written sign, the priest then announces the anger of the Tahitian god Oro, with the dramatic contrast: 'Mais...' The justification of Tahitian customs lies in the authority of the sun-god. His curse will destroy the power of the strangers. The confidence expressed by the Tahitian — 'Je sais...' — leads through the analysis of the problem to his fierce resolution, 'Je vais jeter des maléfices!'

Paofai is as subjective, as secure in his beliefs as the Europeans. We are asked to exchange one set of preconceptions, values and prejudices for another. The reader, thrown into a strange world which questions his attitudes, needs suddenly to reorient himself, and to reconsider his own ideas. From this self-questioning come the insights, the sense of novelty and wonder characteristic of Segalen's exotic method.

In order to present this viewpoint the writer must have an extensive knowledge of Tahitian culture. He must also maintain a certain detachment in order to portray events and characters without personal comment. This presentation of an exotic subject requires thorough research, an open mind, sensitivity, an interest in other ideas, a knowledge of language which reveals different concepts and attitudes.

Objectivity in art was advocated by Hegel and Schopenhauer, who were influenced in this idea by Hindu mysticism. In his essay on 'The Metaphysics of Fine Art', Schopenhauer claims that the artistic faculty 'consists in forgetfulness of one's own aims and complete absorption in the object of contemplation'. In this contemplative state the intellect remains active

\[1 \text{ Les Immémoriaux, op. cit., p. 13.} \quad 2 \text{ Ibid., loc. cit.} \]
and energetic, yet detached from the will, and so 'completely objective'.

This objectivity is necessary in art, according to Schopenhauer, because the artist seeks to depict an individual person or thing 'with the most accurate precision', in order to give 'a clear and profound insight into the idea of humanity itself; as seen from this particular point of view'. By transmuting his vision of reality into pure form, he culs from destructible matter an 'idea', a vision of 'inner reality'.

We have observed Segalen's interest in the philosophy of Schopenhauer particularly at this period, in Hinduism. His notes on Jules de Gaultier's essays and his letters to Gaultier centre around the Hindu idea of detachment from personal desire:

Le sage... discerne qu'il a failli prendre pour un principe de certitude un goût particulier et qu'il a considéré, l'espace d'un instant, sa volonté, comme le centre du monde; il perçoit avec lucidité l'origine passionnelle de la théorie qui le bouleversa. Par là, il connaît sa relativité...

Segalen's idea of objectivity is a question of suspending his own values, tastes and judgments in order to consider the particular qualities of the other. It involves a sense of the relativity of all knowledge, and a sceptical detachment from European values, which are characteristic of eighteenth-century ironical literature of the philosophes.

The technique of the exotic narrator is reminiscent in some respects of Montesquieu's Lettres Persanes, in which the Persians Usbek and Rica write witty and eloquent letters to their friends about the frivolity and hypocrisy of contemporary French society. The convention of a foreign narrator allows liberty of comment, particularly on religious beliefs and practices; it opens horizons to the reader, suggesting other possibilities and viewpoints; it has the advantage of shock effect. Montesquieu's ironical, detached style, his wide documentation, intelligence and freethinking attitude are characteristic of the author of Les Immortuax.

However, the exoticism of the Lettres Persanes is very slight. The stratagem of the Persian narrator is superficial, and exploited for its salacious effect. This text lies in the voluptuous tradition of the Arabian Nights, which had known enormous popularity in the eighteenth

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century. There is little real interest in the other. Anecdotes about Persia are limited to scenes of the harems, projecting preconceived ideas of the libidinous lifestyle of the Muslims, although Montesquieu occasionally blends these piquant details with more serious sociological comments which foreshadow his greater work, L'Esprit des Lois.

The popularity of the Lettres persanes tempted many writers to imitate its sensational qualities. The technique of the 'exotic narrator' was not, however, invented by Montesquieu; P. Martino has traced this device to the seventeenth-century Genoese historian Marana, and thence to Dufresny, and to Addison in the Spectator. In all these works the prime purpose was to satirize the writer's own society.

The contribution of the eighteenth-century philosophical movement towards an interest in the Orient has been thoroughly analysed by Pierre Martino; we are only concerned here with Segalen's place in this tradition. In eighteenth-century satirical literature, exotic details were generally introduced to amaze or shock the reader, and to make him question his own legal or ecclesiastical system. Works such as Voltaire's Orphelin de la Chine or Candide did not pretend to give an objective account of other lands or peoples. The latter were often idealized, as in Rousseau's portrait of the 'noble savage'. Too little was known at the time to demand a more accurate depiction.

However, eighteenth-century philosophes encouraged the idea that one should learn from the Orient. The Jesuits had, paradoxically enough, praised the tolerance and wisdom of the Chinese; the philosophes used the accounts to attack the power of church and state. Asia became a source for historical and philosophical research. Montesquieu's Esprit des Lois was criticized by Voltaire as too derogatory of China and Turkey. On the other hand, Voltaire's enthusiasm for Asia led him to exaggerated and simplistic conclusions, especially about the social order in China, 'la nation qui passe pour être la plus sage et la plus policiée de l'univers'. Yet his Essai sur les Moeurs shows thorough documentation, and his interest in the East helped to open people's minds to other civilizations.

Segalen's exoticism develops from this free-thinking tradition. His studied consideration of the 'other' point of view is more open-minded, or at

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1 Voltaire, Lettres anglaises, quoted in Pierre Martino, op. cit., p. 316.
least less committed to European attitudes. Hence he does not set out to distort his vision of Tahiti or to judge, but through imaginative transposition provides a new outlook on the world.

The central idea of Les Immémoriaux — the deleterious effects of Western civilization on Tahiti — was forcefully presented by Diderot in his Supplément au voyage de Bougainville. Like Segalen, Diderot adopts the convention of a Tahitian narrator, a far-sighted old chief, in order to warn his people of the effect of repressive laws, greed and aggression on their simple lifestyle. The noble words of Diderot’s chief become more fierce and realistic in Segalen’s Paofai. Diderot’s description of Tahiti, based simply on Bougainville’s notes, has little in common with reality. By representing the island as a lost paradise, he can more effectively point out the contrast with European rapacity, hypocrisy and proselytism. In Les Immémoriaux, the question of morality is irrelevant. Segalen is concerned with the aesthetic qualities of diversity. Vices and virtues are presented objectively in order to indicate the relativity of values, the variety and the possibilities of the universe.

Objectivity in narration, as defined in the previous chapter, demands the presentation of characters and events from a specific point of view, without intervention by the author. The title of the book, playing on two concepts, announces this point of view: the Tahitians, forgetful of their traditions, have sacrificed a culture dating back to time immemorial. Beneath the factual presentation lies an ironical undercurrent. Segalen’s vision of Tahiti before and after its conversion to Christianity shows a decided bias against the change. Hence ‘objectivity’ is a stratagem of style, by which the author uses historical documents and observations to support a ‘Tahitian’ point of view. In a later chapter we shall discuss the interplay of conflicting perspectives within this ‘detached’ narration. However, occasionally the author sacrifices the presentation of Tahitian culture in order to present his own point of view. In describing religious ceremonies, he tends to adopt the satirical tone of the eighteenth century philosopher. For example, on several occasions he describes similarities of religious belief, thus questioning the uniqueness of both the Tahitian and the Christian traditions:

Douze disciples: l’atua Kēriʻo (Christ) s’était peut-être souvenu, dans le chêne de ce nombre, des douze maîtres Arioi, élus par le grand dieu Oro. Tērii s’intrigua de cette ressemblance.
The author is less concerned here with describing the particular features of Tahitian religion than with generalizations about comparative religion. Elsewhere in the text references to a great flood (p. 19) and to religious laws (p. 23) seem to associate Christian and Tahitian beliefs with primeval mythology. His antagonism towards organized religion occasionally gives a Voltairean tone to the narrative, where objectivity is sacrificed to satire. The confusion of the Tahitians; their misunderstanding and misinterpretation of Christian theology are also a source of comedy. Further examples of a 'European' attitude may be found in Segalen's frequent satire of the credulity of the mob. As in all his work, the disciple or follower is associated with servility and treachery. The outstanding example of this 'mauvaise foi' is Térim, the central character, who forsakes his ancient beliefs and prostitutes his daughter to European sailors in order to build a church. With heavy irony, these vices are represented as Christian virtues:

Or, le chrétien ne répondit pas à ces injures, bien qu'odieuses, impies, et propres à le déconsidérer. Le livre dit 'Tu pardonneras les offenses.'

Térim's cowardice and hypocrisy become a general attack on Christian humility and charity, which contrast with the fierce integrity of Paofa'il. In this satire on dogmatism rings the individualistic tone of Nietzsche, demanding freedom from repression. Segalen generally scorns those who follow a creed or dogma, although he has respect for great religious leaders, as for any great thinker and innovator.

While disliking organized religion, he accepts the role of mythology as central to Tahitian society. The novel is concerned with the role of oral traditions in preserving culture. Hence although certain passages reveal the author's anti-religious stance, this satirical tone is subordinate to the direct presentation of these traditions.

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1 Les Immémoriaux, p. 121.  
2 ibid., p. 211.  
3 "v. his dramas about the Buddha and Christ: Siddhartha, Le Combat pour le Sol.  
4 "His presentation of myth, superstition and belief from the Tahitian point of view foreshadows the more recent work of sociologists and anthropologists."
The question of objectivity has been raised in particular about the chapter entitled 'Le Prodigé'. The first chapter written by Segalen, it is an attack on religious credulity which Bouillier sees as expressing Segalen's anti-religious feeling at this time. However, I consider that it has a definite place in the structure of the novel, as a comment on the different levels of interpreting mythological belief. Situated between the two religious festivities of 'Oro' and 'Le Maître du Jour', the story of Térii's abortive attempt to perform a miracle seems to interrupt the flow of the narrative. Yet it indicates a turning-point in the novel when, by taking the myth literally, Térii is led into deception and hypocrisy. According to the myth of Téac, during a famine the old priest was changed by the sun-god Oro into a tree bearing fruit for his starving people. Térii's claim that he too will change himself into a tree is a desperate piece of bravado, a defiant effort to win back popular approval:

Cette pensée lui semblait parfois désir d'insensé ou de petit enfant qui se croit, dans ses jeux, transformé en chien ou en chèvre. Térii is not deluded like the inspired one, Tino, who is under the illusion that he is changing himself to stone. Full of doubts about his claim, Térii finds it impossible to back down. A weak and naive man, he is driven by ambition and fear. When he finally runs away, his trickery is covered up by his 'disciples' for their own motives: The last paragraphs of the chapter are clearly a parody of Biblical accounts of the Resurrection:

Bien avant le jour, les disciples de Térii guettaient le tertre isolé... ils contemplèrent avec un dépit, la place déserte, et ils riaient, dans leur embarras. — Cependant, on ne pouvait désappuyer le peuple, ni compromettre, par avance, sa ferveur pour de nouveaux inspirés! Il convenait de façonner vite un prodige: les uns voulaient planter là quelque feuillage et le donner en vénération. D'autres n'osaient; mais choisissant un bloc de pierre grise crevassé d'empreintes imprévues, ils le roulèrent au bord du trou; puis, éveillant la foule avec de grands cris, ils proclamèrent l'excellence et les pouvoirs de leur maître, qu'un atua des nues, Oro, véritablement, avait emporté sur ses épaules.  

1 Bouillier, op. cit., p. 89.  
2 Les Immémoriaux, p. 61.  
3 Ibid., p. 68.
The passage has a satirical tone more characteristic of a European than of a Tahitian. Details such as the block of stone rolled up to (not away from) the hole in the ground, the marks on the stone suggesting the footprint of the god (or angel), the early morning watch of the disciples are a parody of Christian belief. As in a similar passage in the manuscript for *Le Maître du Jour*, 1 Segalen attacks the credulity of the mob, the hypocrisy of religious leaders. Man's fallacy is to wish to become a god; his greatness is within himself. In this chapter the Tahitian people reduce the mystery of the universe to a commonplace. Their bad faith is the first betrayal of their traditional beliefs. Resulting from an initial confusion between history and myth, this falsification of reality leads to an undermining of their faith in all religious stories.

Segalen's anti-religious stance, as exemplified in the passage above, reveals the intense personal feeling of the young writer establishing his own freedom. Hence he defended the chapter when Saint-Pol-Roux suggested it should be more heroic, claiming that the sense of abrupt anti-climax was "voulu en raison de la tonalité générale du Livre..." 2

In writing from the Tahitian point of view he was influenced by the eighteenth-century philosophical tradition of satire which allowed him the freedom to criticize church and state. The eighteenth century had opened windows on the world and revealed other ways of doing things. The *philosophes* used accounts of exploration to attack intolerance at home. Segalen's work is not totally detached; through the Tahitian narrator he also expresses deeply felt personal resentment of all forms of repression. Although his interest lies above all in the Other, his works develop out of a humanistic tradition of free-thinking, research and ironical detachment characteristic of the eighteenth-century *philosophes*. He indicated in his 'Notes on Exoticism' his interest in certain nineteenth-century writers such as Maurice de Guérin, Mérimée, Flaubert and Anatole France, who maintained a similar attitude towards the literary presentation of other cultures.

In studying Segalen's notes on Chateaubriand, we have quoted various references to Clouard's study on Maurice de Guérin. Segalen saw a close parallel between his 'exotic' method in *Les Immémoriaux* and Guérin's

1 *Le Maître du Jour*, op. cit., II, 65 (planned as a sequel to *Les Immémoriaux*; see below, p. 135 ff.).

'objectivity' as described by Clouard. This interest in literary criticism is a vital part of Segalen's work, which involves a conscious appraisal of techniques and forms. Segalen seems more interested in Clouard's analysis of literary attitudes than in Guérin himself. In fact it is possible that he had not read the latter's work, as he quotes only Clouard and accepts his analysis as authoritative: 'M. de Guérin a donc...'; 'Ainsi M. de Guérin...'

Clouard's description of the 'objective' style of Le Centaure seems to him very close to his own literary ideal:

"Le Centaure... nous présente une création autonome, objective. Ce petit poème si évocateur a la résistance de l'airain... (presque textuellement ce que je disais de ma prose, telle que je la voulais: de bronze, dure et polie.)" 2

In Guérin, Segalen purports to find first and foremost a master of poetic prose. He seeks in his own prose the resistant quality of 'bronze', claimed centuries before by Horace. The image suggests attention to form and a polished, highly wrought style. Guérin's prose style prepares the ground for the innovations of Baudelaire, Rimbaud and Claudel, whom Segalen saw as 'masters' of style.

Clouard associates 'objectivity' with the artistic qualities of bronze: 'Or cette objectivité accroît toute émotion de ce qu'elle y met de ferme, de solide, d'éternel..." 3 In contrast with an amorphous expansion of sentiment, the object has a distinct outline and identity which suggests to Segalen its 'exoticism', the 'sentiment des différences des choses'. The sense of difference which represents for Clouard classical precision and control suggests to Segalen an awareness of the Other, with a concomitant sensation of strangeness. He was surprised to find in Clouard a description of the gulf between lovers, 'la distinction irréductible des êtres', which echoes his idea, expressed in 'Le Double Rimbaud', of 'l'infrangible barrière qui sépare les deux êtres sentants..." 4 Through his theory of exoticism Segalen is analysing the sensation which accompanies awareness of difference, and which arouses the interest of the reader. The method is similar: "Ainsi M. de Guérin n'est d'abord pénétré de la Nature, puis il s'en est totalement

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1 Essai sur l'Exotisme, op. cit., pp. 35-40; and see above, p. 32.
2 Essai sur l'Exotisme, op. cit., p. 38.
3 ibid., p. 39.
4 ibid., loc. cit.
5 ibid., p. 38; 'Le Double Rimbaud', op. cit., p. 486.
Like Segalen he is at first absorbed in a thorough study of an object, but after the initial inspiration and the deep contemplation which follows, he draws back to examine his work critically: 'Il faut sentir ce qu'une telle originalité a de réellité et de voulu jusque dans le plus fort de l'excitation.'

Segalen finds in Guérin's *Centaure* similarities with *Les Immémoriaux* in both attitude and form:

Il y a des corrélations dans l'exécution même: Le Récit est fait par un centaure et à la *centaure* (à la Maori). Tel Teri parlement avec pitié de "ces hommes blèmes aux mains ridicules", tel le centaure méprise l'homme... "centaure renversé par les dieux qu'ils ont réduit à se trainer ainsi."

Guérin's centaur has an 'inhuman' quality often sought by Segalen: 'l'inhumain: "Ce qui est autre qu'un homme."' A hybrid born from man's imagination, the centaur sees man from the outside, in his strangeness: Que ses pas sont courts et sa démarche halalée!

This stratagem introduces according to Segalen: 'la secousse exotique, qui renverse les valeurs humaines'.

Segalen associates an 'Exotisme de la Nature' in Guérin's work with his 'Exotisme des Races et des Moeurs' in *Les Immémoriaux*. There is no interest in nature for its own sake in this novel. Seen through Tahitian eyes, it is inevitably coloured by animistic superstitions and beliefs. In studying the text more closely, we shall see nature not as picturesque or romantic, but imbued with dangerous spiritual forces. It is seen by the Tahitians as either a threat or a means of livelihood, never as a source of sentimental wonder. Clouard makes the point that an awareness of nature evolves very late in civilization, and 'n'existe qu'au moment où l'homme sur la concevoir différemment de lui...' The sensation of the difference or exoticism of races also evolves very recently, as we have observed.

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2 *ibid.*, p. 39.
3 *ibid.*, p. 37.
4 *ibid.*, p. 74.
7 *ibid.*, p. 35.
In these observations and comparisons Segalen reveals a growing awareness of the relationship between writing, reading and criticism which is characteristic of much twentieth-century literature. In his formulation of "Esthétique du Divers", he is seeking the essential qualities of exoticism through both self-criticism and a general study of literature. He found the work of Mérimée of particular interest because of his detached, autocrirical style, his interest in other ideas and civilizations. He showed interest in Mérimée's literary technique particularly at the time of writing Le Père du Ciel. Unlike many exotic writers of his period Mérimée travelled widely, and although his earlier work is based on fantasy, after 1830 his descriptions of other countries combine personal observation with thorough documentation. In writing historical novels he showed an unusual awareness of the diversity of culture, the effect of milieu and moment:

Il me paraît donc évident que les actions des hommes du XVIe siècle ne doivent pas être jugées avec nos idées du XIXe siècle.

Segalen, Mérimée made an effort to see through the eyes of the Other, and to convey the illusion of a "peinture vraie des mœurs et des caractères à une époque donnée..." This concern for objectivity conflicts with the stance taken by Alfred de Vigny, which became associated with Romantic attitudes towards the historical novel. In his preface to Cinq-Mars, "Réflexions sur la Vérité dans l'Art", Vigny defended subjectivity, and advocated depiction of the noble and picturesque rather than the accurate presentation of everyday life of Sir Walter Scott's novels. Victor Hugo was to develop this preference for the monumental, sometimes to the detriment of art. In his preface to the Chronique du règne de Charles IX Mérimée attacks this "barbar" style, advocating a more analytical and sober approach, an ironical interplay between author and reader which we shall discuss further in Part III. A cultured man, interested in archeology, language and the ideas of other countries, Mérimée has much in common with Segalen. Deeply sceptical, he was part of the freethinking tradition leading from Diderot and Voltaire towards the individualism of Nietzsche.

The growing demand for accuracy of "local colour" which began with Walter Scott's historical novels culminated in the realist movement in

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France. With Flaubert the exotic novel became a work of art, blending realistic demands for precise, accurate description with a romantic craving for the spectacular. Like all great writers, Flaubert defies categories. He is at once the lion of the realists and deeply romantic. Exotic works such as Salammbô, Hérodiades, or La Tentation de Saint Antoine, inspired in part by childhood reading of Hugo and other Romantics, reveal a constant dialectic between asceticism and debauchery, exuberance and control. Salammbô is both the epitome of painstaking research and a personal fantasy. This exotic jewel among novels made a deep impression on the sensibility of aesthetic writers of the late nineteenth century; its influence can be seen in Huysmans, Mallarmé, Oscar Wilde, and so-called 'decadent' writers. In his "Notes on Exoticism" Segalen has little to say about Flaubert, who is nevertheless highly influential in indicating the possibilities within this literary genre:

... Pour l'influence de Salammbô, elle est indéniable ! J'ai subi Flaubert avec trop de fatalité pour essayer de m'en défendre ou de me disculper. Je n'ai rien fait d'autre part pour essayer de m'en affranchir — sauf peut-être, de m'interdire, pour un temps, ses livres. Mais son influence ne relève point, je crois, du mécanisme réminiscence: j'ai lu deux fois Salammbô, voici dix et six ans peut-être... 1

By briefly comparing Salammbô with Les Immorales we shall endeavour to clarify the different attitudes expressed towards exoticism.

The similarities are at first sight striking. Both authors undertook thorough research of their subject. Although Flaubert's extensive documentation is well known, controversy over the accuracy of his presentation which arose immediately after the publication of the novel revealed the hybrid nature of the work, and the subordination of accuracy to artistic vision. Segalen, on the other hand, showed a more rigorous concern for accuracy and a greater respect for ethnology. This passionate interest in the particular manifestations of Tahitian culture is shaped by the concept of exoticism which underlies his work. Before writing his novel, he consulted every available book on Polynesia, from the accounts of the first explorers such as Cook, Wallis and Bougainville to more specialized studies such as Polynesian Recherches by the English missionary William Ellis. He was particularly

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1 Letter to C. Farrère, 21 June 1906, quoted by Bouillier, op. cit., p. 91.
interested in the earliest accounts of the Tahitian people given by sensitive and sympathetic observers such as Cook and J.A. Hoerenhout. Notes in the margins of his manuscript reveal multiple sources for various details and anecdotes. The novel tends occasionally to become bogged down with documentation in the writer's enthusiasm for his subject. However he sacrificed accuracy of detail to poetic vision in the shaping of his novel, as we shall see in studying the referential detail of the text.

Like Flaubert, Segalen provokes the reader by delineation of the grotesque. Yet details of human sacrifice have a definite purpose in the text, conveying particular characteristics of Maori warfare:

"De ces bas-fonds, où rôde et règne Tané le mangeur de chants mortes, levaient d'immodes exhalaissions, et une telle épouvante, qu'on eût reculé à jeter son ennemi. Paofai, d'un grand élan, sauta. Ses larges pieds disparurent dans une boue, broyant des os qui craquaient, croyant des têtes aux orbites vides...."

The technique of detached narration increases the horror of the subject. Yet this passage has a more important purpose. It describes a superstitious belief by which the Tahitian hopes to combat his new enemies. If he has possession of some part of a body — hair, teeth, saliva — he can use this part to have an effect on the whole body. Paofai's curse springs from a magical cult which has been proscribed by rational European civilization.

In Salambo, however, the sensational seems frequently to be exploited for its own sake, for example in the war scenes, descriptions of human sacrifice and sadism. Through the depiction of horror Flaubert sought to express his deep disgust with humanity. Yet the horror of the cult of Moloch has a deeper purpose than the desire to shock the reader. It represents the fury of desire, which leads to excess, and thence to destruction. In contrast with the fierce tone of Segalen's Tahitian narrator, Flaubert's work is pessimistic. It expresses distaste for the real world, and a desire to escape into fantasy. This fantasy, which destroyed Emma Bovary,

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1 A Belgian who was Consul-General of the United States in Tahiti, 1830-1834. His Voyage aux Iles du Grand Océan (Paris, Maisonneuve, 1837) was also an important source for Gauguin.


4 ibid., p. 429, n. 879; p. 423, n. 758.
is ultimately a desire for the absolute. It is symbolized by Salammbô,
beautiful, inaccessible source of desire, who drives Mathô to desperate action.

The desire for the absolute takes a very different form from Segalen's work. Flaubert's heroes express his distaste for the boredom and ugliness of nineteenth-century materialistic life. His choice of Carthage as an exotic setting is not so much a quest for the Other as a negative detachment from his own civilization, history and times. Carthage, a city geographically and historically different from Europe, is, as Thibaudet has pointed out, 'un bloc isolé dans l'antiquité classique'. It is chosen not for its own sake but for its isolation. Critics have remarked on the Parmesan quality of the description, the immobility and hard, glittering qualities of the prose style. Flaubert is less interested in theme than in form. The result is an autonomous literary masterpiece which bears no relation to external reality.

Both Flaubert and Segalen are primarily concerned with the art of writing. If we adopt the distinction of Alberès between 'l'art du roman et le roman comme art', like the novels of Flaubert, is closer to the former type: that is, the more 'closed' idea of the novel. It is a carefully composed representation of a certain décor and situation, leading by means of an intrigue, albeit a minor one, to a definite conclusion which conveys a meaning to the narrative; whereas René Leye, as we shall see, would fit the description of the novel as art, an adventure in writing which is open to many interpretations. Salammbô is a pure work of art, where meaning is form; it draws close to Flaubert's idea of 'un livre sur rien'. Les Immortels, on the other hand, is the first step in Segalen's exploration of the creative power of language.

There is some similarity in the basic symbolism of the two novels. Flaubert's novel is structured around the central symbols of the male and female principles: Moloch the sun-god, representing greed, power and destruction, and Tanit the moon-goddess, sacred and inaccessible, representing

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On the human level, Salammbo is associated with the worship of Tanit, and with lascivious sexual rites. Mathô, who represents the power of Moloch, is driven by desire to seize the veil of Tanit and then Salammbo; he is therefore destroyed. In Les Immémoriaux, the sun-god Oro is associated with ancient fertility rites, which are carried out by the Arior. These rites celebrate the joy of living, in contrast with Flaubert's exploitation of terror. However we shall see that the female principle is omitted by Segalen, for conscious or unconscious reasons. The corresponding lack of balance in structure is a weakness of the novel.

The deliberate underplaying of the love-theme in Les Immémoriaux is indicative of Segalen's uncompromising attitude towards the novel, which we shall discuss in the following chapter. Flaubert too had written his book "pour un nombre très restreint de lecteurs", as he wrote to Mme de Maupassant, but "il se trouve que le public y mord". While he set out to construct an aesthetic vision of Carthage, the characters of Salammbo and Mathô became more and more closely woven into the structure.

Because of the lack of characterization and plot in Segalen's novels, Boullier has seen him primarily as a poet. Nevertheless, a study of his fiction and of his critical notes reveals a rebellion against these limitations in traditional narrative. Like Huysmans, Segalen was searching for literary forms which would combine the 'objectivity' and detachment of great art with new inspiration and insight. The virtuosity of Flaubert had a stultifying effect on the novel. Segalen's Les Immémoriaux sounds a new, more virile note, fired by the discovery of other possibilities. Symbolism seemed at first to offer his new freedom by emphasizing the suggestive qualities of language. Retailing a desire for objectivity and craftsmanship, Mallarmé saw literature as an autonomous work of art with its own laws and limitations: "l'œuvre pure implique la disparition élocutoire du poète, qui cède l'initiative aux mots..." The text is 'impersonnifié', independent of both author and reader. It is not a means to an end, but has its own existence as an 'art consacré aux fictions'. The sense of an objective quality in language underlies all Segalen's work. It presupposes an attitude towards the novel which we must now consider briefly before embarking upon a study of Les Immémoriaux.

1 'Correspondance', v. V, p. 73, quoted in the introduction to Salammbo, op. cit., p. vi.
2 Quoted by Keith Bosley, introduction to Mallarmé: the poems, op. cit., p. 15.
3 ibid., loc. cit.
A dynamic criticism of outmoded forms of the novel finds expression in Segalen's autocritical fiction. There are, moreover, among his manuscripts and notes a number of observations on the subject, which were written after Les Irrémoriables. However they are an attempt to formulate an attitude which already manifests itself spontaneously if obscurely in his early work. For this reason we shall consider notes such as those 'Sur une forme nouvelle du roman' before studying the novel itself. Rather than a rationalization of his own limitations, as Bouillier has suggested, these notes are part of the gradual evolution of a unique literary style. They must be considered within the context of an era which saw great change in social and literary attitudes.

Artists and writers of the 'Belle Epoque' were passionately involved in a rebellion against the narrow aesthetic of Taine, which had led to a confusion between the functions of science and art. According to Taine literature was to be judged by its clarity and its ability to represent some exterior 'reality'. Sculpture, painting and poetry were seen as imitative arts made up of an 'ensemble de parties liées... [qui] correspondent à des objets réels'.

1 'Sur une forme nouvelle du roman ou un nouveau contenu de l'essai' (notes), Annexe I. Bouillier, op. cit., p. 392.
Art was thus perceived primarily as an intellectual activity, which involved the perception of certain absolute, given qualities of reality, and the artistic representation of these qualities. The form of the work was subordinate to its subject. This limited view of the function of art inspired a reaction: writers upheld 'Art for Art's sake', which led to the so-called 'decadent' movement. Novelists such as Edouard Dujardin, the early Barrès, and André Gide in France, like Oscar Wilde, Virginia Woolf, Walter Pater and Ford Madox Ford in England and America sought to justify literature by purely aesthetic criteria. The basis was laid for twentieth-century critical theory which regards the novel as an autonomous art form whose meaning is inseparable from its form.

The Nietzschean cult of individualism encouraged artists to break away from traditional forms. An exaltation of the new and the extraordinary won Edgar Allen Poe inordinate popularity in France, particularly through Baudelaire’s translation of his work. His definition of poetry supported the demand for novelty: 'La nouveauté, l'originalité, l'invention, l'imagination ou enfin la création de la beauté constituent l'essence de toute Poesie.' His work, with its defence of craftsmanship, its exploitation of the strange and macabre, influenced Segal as it influenced the generation of artists following Baudelaire. The dreariness of life in industrial Europe created a need to escape into other, more stimulating worlds, which was expressed in part by the literary theme of the voyage. For Segalen the voyage was not only a theme, but a quest for other literary forms, which would in themselves convey new attitudes and styles.

The early twentieth century was a time of experimentation in the novel. Proust and Gide, Joyce and Woolf broke away from conventional narrative style, and opened up new possibilities of artistic expression. Literary innovation paralleled the revolutionary discoveries in physics (Einstein), psychology (Freud), anthropology (Durkheim and Lévi-Bruhl), linguistics (F, de Saussure) — discoveries which pointed to the limitations and the relativity of human knowledge. The twentieth century was to be characterized by a much greater specialization. The increasing complexity of human existence is reflected in modern fiction by a tone of hesitancy or irony, a limitation of the point of view, and a self-conscious reflection on language. In contrast to the confident omniscience of the nineteenth-century author, the writer today often accentuates the absurd and the irrational.

1 Quoted by Lehmann, op. cit., p. 184, from the Mercure de France, t. x, p. 296.
At the time when Segalen wrote his notes on the novel, the great works of Joyce and Proust which were to break through restrictive narrative tradition had not yet been published. Gide, like Segalen, was turning towards other literary forms in his effort to renew the novel. He found in medieval theatre the form of the 'sotie', a burlesque farce which had been used to satirize contemporary officials. Le Prométhée mal enchaîné escapes from linear form into a musical structure where irony and humour mingle with fantasy. Paludes, like Le Prométhée mal enchaîné and Les Faux-Monnayeurs, is an autocritical work which satirizes traditional narrative forms by its attacks on authorial manipulation of plot and characterization. The limited point of view characteristic of the 'blind' narrator in his récits takes a more complex form in Les Faux-Monnayeurs, which is a juxtaposition of various limited points of view, including that of the author-narrator. His experimentation with new forms of the novel runs parallel to that of Segalen. Although the latter showed interest in Gide's work, and sent him a copy of his magnificent first edition of Sireses, there is little evidence of reciprocity. Very few contemporary writers appreciated the originality of Segalen's work, perhaps because of a basic misunderstanding of his concept of exoticism.

Because of his intense intellectual curiosity, his scientific training and critical awareness, Segalen was more aware of revolutionary discoveries in physics and psychology than his literary peers. His vision of the world was far in advance of his age. For this reason his work was misunderstood and neglected during the first half of the century. References in his notes indicate an acquaintance with the work of great physicists such as Einstein, Thomson (J.J.), Arrhenius and Perrin. A sense of the instability of matter, its 'structure infinitimement granuleuse', underlies his presentation of the world, as his knowledge of contemporary psychological theory makes him particularly sensitive to the multiple facets of the personality. The huge gaps in human knowledge indicated by contemporary scientific discoveries were for Segalen a matter for celebration, revealing limitless potential for research and for speculation.

1 W. Holdheim, Theory and Practice of the Novel, Geneva, Librairie Droz, 1968, Pt II.
2 Essai sur l'Exotisme, op. cit., p. 68.
3 Ibid., loc. cit.
Hence his opposition to superficiality and dogmatic assumptions. His notes "Sur une forme nouvelle du roman, ou un nouveau contenu de l'essai" focus on two topics, on which he planned to write an article: 'La haine de l'auteur' and 'Le mépris du sujet'. The author whom he despises is the 'Auteur de Romans contemporains', whose pomposity is indicated by the capital letters. In a sweeping dismissal of all contemporary novels, Segalen condemns the condescending tone adopted towards his reader by the omniscient author-narrator:

Notons que le roman, seul de tous les genre, possède l'édit personnage haïssable: l'Auteur à tout faire, obstiné, importun, polymorphe, pitoyable, qui flâne son lector, lui donne de petites tapes, parfois l'injurer. Pour moi, c'est là-dedans que réside la définition du ROMAN que j'exècre. (Cet auteur est le même que celui qui déifie puis encense son sujet. Autre étude.)

The hypocrisy of this narrator lies in his secrecy. While he claims to be conveying an important message to the reader, his assertions are made dogmatically from behind the scenes, without admitting his own bias. He thus claims the validity of his particular view of life, claiming to know everything in advance, and to be an expert on all things. He unveils this knowledge gradually to the reader, with a patronizing or scornful air:

Le Personnage haïssable de tout roman: l'Auteur. Celui-là qui sait invraisemblablement tant de choses, et les écrivit avec impudeur. Celui-là qu'on sent partout sans qu'il ait souvent le courage de paraître. Celui-là qui apostrophe ses lector, et de quel droit? qui prédit que 'le' chapitre va finir; celui-là qui, ayant cru changer de sujet, aura donné son effort pour être neuf, et reste obstinément lui-même... L'auteur impersonnel est un être à tuer.

Je n'appelle pas auteurs impersonnels celui des romans d'une grande objectivité. "Evelamiéd, par exemple: l'auteur pourrait être Carthaginois.'

The image by which Segalen describes this author is often the 'larva': cet être informe, larvaire, inconscient, inopportun, que je voudrais enfin définir et par conséquent démasquer. This shapeless being represents the facile story-telling of the popular writer, in place of which Segalen would

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2 ibid., p. 394.
3 cf. N. Sarraute, L'Ere du Souçon, Paris, NRF-Callimard, 1956, p. 85, for a similar reaction to the omniscient author.
4 "Sur une forme nouvelle...", op. cit., p. 394.
5 ibid., loc. cit.
posit a clearly defined point of view. Let the author, he suggests, put aside his preconceptions and judgments in order to consider other aspects of the subject; or let him openly reveal his own standpoint through narration in the first person, as in letters and memoirs. In Part II we shall consider the application of these ideas to his fiction generally. With the experimentation in literary perspective by André Gide, Henry James, James Joyce and Virginia Woolf, there is a trend towards a limited perspective which has been more recently developed by Lawrence Durrell, William Faulkner and the 'new novelists' in France. The twentieth-century novelist may restrict his perspective to that of a certain character, or juxtapose contrasting points of view. He often admits his problems and doubts, and the mechanism of his craft; or he abandons all pretense to realism, preferring to revel in the absurd.

Segalen's attitude towards the 'omniscient' narrator, like his attitude towards the accepted exotic tradition, is associated with a rejection of authorial 'subjectivity'; the presentation of personal observations, reminiscences and impressions in the narrative. According to the definition given earlier, 'subjectivity' refers to the author's intervention in the narrative. Many modern novelists prefer the 'objective' style, which was advocated by Henry James in the influential prefaces of his novels as a device which gives coherence, intensity and vividness to narrative: 'I understand no breaking-up of the register, no sacrifice of the recording consistency, that doesn't rather scatter and weaken.' His somewhat narrow idea of the technical advantages of this theory is widely accepted among the 'New Critics' in America. His attitude might be more generally applied the technique of writing short stories or Gide's style of 'récits'. In limiting the narrative to a consistent point of view he dismisses complex presentations such as Gide's Faux-Monnaieur. Advocates of James's critical theory are totally opposed to the self-conscious presence of the author in the text, which Segalen sees as a reasonable alternative to the above method. By fulfilling a specific role within the narrative, the author—

2 The Art of the Novel: critical prefaces, quoted by Friedman, op. cit., p. 136.
3 Ibid., loc. cit.
narrator tends to break the illusion and to call attention to the artificiality of art. This ironical device has been adopted by critics of the sentimental romance from Cervantes to the present day, as a comic or satirical device which also stimulates critical awareness.

Segalen accepts either method as legitimate, as long as the point of view is clearly defined, but rejects the technique of the hidden narrator. Nevertheless it is the author's intention which must decide his choice of method. The omniscient technique has certain advantages in giving a broad overall view of the action, as in the novels of Tolstoy, and greater access into the minds of the characters. It is particularly suitable for the nineteenth century 'roman total', by which novelists such as Balzac and Zola sought to give a view of all aspects of society. The method frequently assumes the writer's endorsement of contemporary social and political attitudes, which explains Segalen's particular antipathy. He was too concerned with his rebellion against these cultural conditions to be tolerant of such a method. His rejection of the omniscient narrator is part of a general rejection of dogmatism. Yet denial of the legitimacy of this literary technique is in itself a denial of diversity. 'Omniscient' narration has both advantages and disadvantages. The author must choose the most effective method for his particular intention. Having adopted a narrative method, he must be consistent in its application, rigorously selecting relevant material without stringent aesthetic standards the novel becomes shapeless, superficial and diffuse. The question of technical skill is Segalen's primary concern in this matter, as it was for Henry James.

Segalen's second objection to the novel, 'Le Mépris du Sujet', is another plea for diversity of literary form. The form of the nineteenth-century novel seemed rigidly circumscribed by its need to tell a story:

"Ce roman possède une justification de tirage, une dédicace, un récit... Un récit surtout! Soit la troisième, soit à la première personne; ou bien encore, adresses à la seconde. Et je n'en sors pas! Il faut que j'acconte! Il faut que j'étale propremern une anecdote, comme un peintre en bâtiment une couche de ripolin."  

The story is one of the earliest functions of narrative — the romance, the epic and the myth. As the narrative form develops in European literature, the story becomes less important, giving place to elements of description.

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1 'Sur une forme nouvelle du roman', op. cit., p. 392.
analysis, moral comment or pure rhetoric. However it remains in the novel up to the twentieth century, as a unifying thread which ties together these diverse elements. In its more complex form, story is usually defined as plot. Segalen finds the need to tell a story restrictive, since it demands a certain progression, change and conclusion. It imposes on the author a logical development which excludes the free play of ideas:

Je ne puis croire au nécessaire triomphe du Roman. Sa formule est grossière par excellence et sa transsubstantiation médiocre. Il réclame de se développer. Il n’est que de donner toute une série de causes et d’effets, et il n’est même pas réversible. Comme un long fil d’éther, il doit surtout faire preuve d’une ductilité grande (300 pages) et, pour ne pas se rompre, d’une considérable ténacité. — Mais cette filière n’en est qu’une, entre d’autres. J’en ressens tout l’arbitraire.²

Segalen is rebelling against Aristotle’s definition of poetic method which still permeates much critical theory of literature.³ In place of rigid Aristotelian rules of logical development, he seeks greater complexity and powers of suggestion through a renewal of language:

Certes, j’en vois l’arabesque et je suis libre d’en dessiner tous les contours. Je puis aussi les donner de cet ‘arrière-monde’ sans quoi toute œuvre d’art existe peu. Des volets s’entrouvrent qui ont nom: Ironie, Allusion, Symbolisme même; ou bien Analogie trouble...⁴

However for Segalen the idea does not mean a devaluation of the phenomenological world. It refers to the magic powers of language to enrich reality by a complex play on association and suggestion. Techniques such as irony, allusion, symbolism and analogy are means of opening the text to a plurality of possible interpretations. The ‘arrière-monde’ is therefore a private world of meanings, ideas and fantasies created by the individual faced with a text which is stimulating and enigmatic.

² Sur une forme nouvelle du roman’, op. cit., p. 393.
³ v. Friedman, op. cit., Introduction.
⁴ Sur une forme nouvelle du roman’, p. 392.
Very similar terms recur in the *Stèle 'De la Composition'* written the following year which was, however, for various reasons omitted from the published volume of *Stèles*.1

This poem presents Segalen's attitude to the writing not only of poetry but also of the novel, as becomes clear in the analogy with his notes 'Sur une forme nouvelle du roman'. The *Stèle* opens with a statement of poetic method by an imaginary Chinese critic, 'Le Maître', which, Bouillier tells us, is based on Fr Couvreur's critical edition of the *Che King*. Three literary methods are distinguished here: 'Description', which seeks an exact resemblance to its object — 'enclôt un geste comme un contour' — and which is praised by the Master; 'Comparison', also seen as explicative, and therefore 'd'un emploi précieux'; and 'Allegory': 'lumière empruntée, image oblique, regard ortobé, commentaire incertain. Un pinceau prudent se risque peu jusqu'à l'allégorie.'2

Allegory was described by Couvreur as 'une similitude dont l'application n'est pas exprimée, et comme une stèle dont la moralité doit être devinée par le lecteur'.3 Obscurity was seen by the classical Confucianist poet as a vice, as it was in classical European literature, whereas for the Symbolists and their successors it is regarded as a stimulous to creativity. The writer's ironical attitude is apparent in his presentation of the Master's ideal of prudence, wisdom and 'nervile' language.

In the second half of the *Stèle* the writer announces his own attitude: 'Non, je dis'. Taking up the three methods given, he presents the opposite point of view. 'La Description tue le geste comme un air placé tue le souffle... mere représentation, art lacks imagination, and has no meaning. 'La Réssemblance est faite pour les sots: deux égaux deux, et le ciel est un por d'azur...'. Segalen also rejects this traditional poetic device of simile as too limiting and reductive. Yet, as Bouillier has observed, he uses this method himself, even in this very poem. However it is used only with reference to the despised descriptive method. He sees greater freedom of suggestion in Allegory:

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2 ibid., p. 275.
3 ibid., p. 276.
Maiis pour l'Allégorie, — oh! tous les possibles sont permis: voici la peau qu'on assouplit, le parfum qui réveille, le son magique roulant ses fanfares jusqu'aux échos des nues.

Voici, d'un seul coup — sans grossières machines — deux profonds volets (créneaux) qui s'ébrasent, et, le temps, d'un mot, ouvrent les Marches d'arrière-monde.

Segalen is using the term 'allégorie' here in a broad sense, according to its Greek derivation, to say: 'other' than what one seems to say. Hence he sees it as a device allowing 'all possibilities'. This desire to renew the original meaning of a term is common in Segalen's work, but tends to be misleading to the reader. To many modern writers and critics it is seen as a rigidly sustained metaphor with a specific concealed meaning which dictates the flow of the writing, and devalues the explicit meaning of the text. In the case of the Stèle 'De la Composition', the term is dictated by the comparison with classical Chinese literary techniques. However in general, in order to avoid confusion, we shall employ the rhetorical term 'analogon' instead of 'allégorie' in referring to this literary device.

There is a close analogy with his 'Notes sur une forme nouvelle du roman' in the ideas expressed, and in the imagery: for example the image of the shutters, which are 'deep', 'oblique' and subtle; 'sans grossières machines' in the Stèle, the idea is more fully developed. At a magic word they open into an 'arrière-monde'. Bouillier interprets this concept as the 'espace imaginaire que la vision distingue au-delà des choses vues; cette zone intermédiaire entre le désert inaccessible de l'Absolu et le chaos pouvant des objets d'idées'. More specifically it could be seen as the writer's 'idea' or vision of the world, his perception of the meaning underlying objects, just as a trompe would imagine, when confronted with an object, what does this mean?

The 'arrière-monde' is the elusive, equivocal world of visionary art, described by Segalen in his notes for L'Essai sur le Mystère.

1 Stèles, op. cit., p. 276.
3 Stèles, op. cit., p. 276.
symbolism, analogy, ellipsis are various means of exploring this world by following the vertical rather than the horizontal dimensions of the phrase. The frontiers between prose and poetry, eroded by Baudelaire, are ignored by Segalen in his desire for totally new literary forms. Mallarmé had observed that there is 'style; versification s'il y a cadence et c'est pourquoi toute prose d'écrivain fastueux, soumette à ce laisser-aller en usage, ornemmentale, va en tant qu'un aspect rompu.' Modern French writers, including Butor and Sollers, have carried further the argument against a distinction between genres. The novel demands technical skills and reflections on form and style akin to those of prosody. The modern novel is, according to Butor, evolving towards 'une espèce nouvelle de poésie à la fois épique et didactique'.

Ironic is seen by Segalen as an effective literary device which deepens the suggestive power of the novel, undermines certainties and thus conveys a sense of the fatalistic quality of life. Through these literary devices we are required to hesitate in our reading of a text, to consider its implications and resonances.

The movement of the story, which draws the reader gently on towards a conclusion, is a less sophisticated and reflective technique. Its most extreme form is the detective story, which is exploited and satirized in René Ley's, as in modern French fiction. More complicated plots may be taken to include a broad range of literary devices such as characterization, presentation and contemplation of ideas. However plot involves the need for a conclusion, whereas Segalen, like many modern novelists, seeks to avoid there being a prejudice for an open ending, which suggests various possibilities. A device which refers the reader back to the novel to reread and consider more deeply.

Segalen, a literary tradition in his quest for new forms of the novel. Les Invaincus represents a return to the epic, the earliest form of ancient narration, and in the Chanson de geste and the epic, as he observed in a later note, there is a more clearly defined relationship between author and listener. The novel offers a closer rapport between the people and...
their literature, which retains some features of sacred myth and legend.
Beneath this association of literature with the identity of a people is an
awareness of the role of language in shaping our ideas.

This quest for the identity of a people within the diversity of their
literary tradition is an essential feature of Segalen's theory of exoticism.
Les Immémoriaux sounds the opening note of this quest; the final note was to
be a return to the hearth, a study of Breton tradition. In the last years
of his life, tragically curtailed, Segalen formed a plan to write Le
chapitre des Immémoriaux, a novel which would 'reprendre toute l'abecdote, et
presque chapitre après chapitre des Immémoriaux'. This wish to explore the
origins of his own people is the other side of his interest in the exotic.
Exoticism for Segalen demands the consideration of both sides of a subject.
The sensation of diversity arises from the confrontation of two worlds: in
both cases, the primitive and the colonizing forces. There is moreover an
interesting parallel between Tahitian and Celtic animism and its conflict with
Christian belief. The most surprising feature of this plan is the idea of
repeating the form of Les Immémoriaux; as he wrote to Henry Manneron, 'Tu
sais, dès autrefois mes efforts à ne pas me répéter...'. However this plan
never came to fruition. Its interest for us here lies in the integration of
Segalen's literary vision. Les Immémoriaux is part of a lifelong quest for
the purest forms of exoticism.

In Les Immémoriaux, mythic and epic qualities predominate over psycholo-
gical analysis. Segalen's characters generally represent an ideality of
conflict. A comment in a letter to his wife about his projected novel
Initiation du Bouddha suggests that he attaches some importance to
characterization:

Le traiter en nouvelle? Impossible s'il en fût; une nouvelle,
mieux, un conte n'est que le résumé brutal d'une histoire où
tout est préparé pour un déclenchement. Mais si, les
personnages doivent vivre, et changer, et c'est le Roman même.3

Unpublished notes on the novel.

1 Essai sur l'Exotisme, op. cit., p. 64. The cause may well be the
debilitating disease which sapped his energy in his last years, about which
we have a record in his correspondence and in Bouliier, p. 374.

2 Lettres de Yvonne Segalen, 16 January 1910, Lettres de Chine, op. cit.,
p. 277.
There is little sense of this development and change in the characters of his first novel. Growth is usually seen by Segalen as a question of creating one's own identity, through vision and self-mastery. *Les Immémoires* presents the problem more generally as a question of racial identity.

The whole question of the human personality is, however, central to Segalen's quest for the other. Through his studies of psychological and philosophical theory in France, he was aware of what the 'new novelists' later defined as the 'subversion du personnage'. In the words of Nathalie Sarraute, 'le bond immense accompli par la psychanalyse... avait démontré l'inefficacité de l'introspection classique et fait douter de la valeur absolue de tout procédé de recherche'. Our studies of Segalen's later fiction will consider the concept of the multiple personality; and its function in the novel. His novels and short stories are generally centered around a single heroic figure, and his struggle for self-realization.

His concept of the novel is very similar to Huysmans' ideal: 'supprimer l'intrigue traditionnelle, voire même la passion, la femme, concentrer le pinceau de lumière sur un seul personnage...' *Les Immémoires* focuses around the adventures of Teril. There are, as we shall see, kept very much in the background; the plot is reduced to the minimum. In Part II we shall study other examples of characterization which follow the same pattern.

These reflections on Segalen's attitude towards the novel may help to avoid the pitfalls of looking for traditional ideas of plot and characterization in Segalen's novels. In *writing Les Immémoires* Segalen firmly rejected suggestions on these points from Farrère and Saint-Pol-Roux. In answering Farrère's objection to the bitter tone of the closing chapters he wrote:

*L'issue est amère, le dénouement terne, mesquin. Je l'ai désiré
tel parce que le mesquin est ce qui me poigné moi-même le plus.
Soyez dépité, agace, irrité par mes derniers chapitres, tant mieux ainsia. Je suis satisfait. Avez-vous la bouche, un arrière-gout d'appréci et la sensation aux mâchoires d'avoir mordu...*

A letter from Loti praising the originality of the work also points out that it will have limited appeal to the general public: However the intrasensigence of Segalen's replies to all these comments reveals the

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2 Preface to *A Rebours*, v. p. 7-8 above.
3 Letter to Farrère, 2 September 1906, quoted by Bouillier, p. 90.
4 Below, p. 97.
intensity of his rebellion against the popular novel. In the "prière d'insérer" sent to the publishers he proudly declared that his book 'n'avoue aucune concession au lecteur', a comment understandably omitted from the publisher's note on the dust-jacket. This independence of spirit characterizes all of Segalen's work. He preferred to earn his living as a naval doctor and interpreter rather than to depend for his living on his craft. The problem became apparent with the publication of Les Immémoriaux, which was paid for 'à contre-coeur' by his parents. In a letter to Jules Renard he announced that he was entering Les Immémoriaux for the Prix Goncourt 'non pour l'argent, mais pour écrire un autre livre'. He was seeking partly to win support from the publishers, and partly to gain greater financial independence. The prostitution of the novel to the general public is the subject of trenchant satire in Renée de Leyse.

Like Flaubert, Segalen published only a few slender volumes of his work. Because of his high standards of craftsmanship, and his desire for diversity of literary forms and ideas, the only literary works presented for publication before his untimely death in 1919 were Les Immémoriaux, Stèles, Feinture, and the short story 'Daus un Monde sonore'. However the last half-century has seen the publication of other novels and short stories which we shall discuss in the following pages. An analysis of his contribution to the novel is long overdue.

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1 Unpublished note.
2 A. Joly-Segalen & Gabriel Germain, Introduction, 'Lettres inédites de Victor Segalen', op. cit., p. 435. No doubt his parents disapproved of his attacks on the missions, although he assured them in his letters that his satire was directed against the English Protestants: letter to his mother, 2 April 1904, quoted by Bouillier, p. 80.
3 Undated letter of 1907, quoted in the 'Lettres inédites de Victor Segalen', op. cit., p. 435.
PART IB

Les Immémoriaux:
The role of language in creating exoticism

... L'Heure était propice à répéter sans trêve, afin de n'en pas omettre un mot, les beaux parlers originels où s'expriment, assurent les maîtres, l'élosion des mondes, la naissance des étoiles, le façonnage des vivants, les ruts et les monstrueux labours des dieux Maori.

(Les Immémoriaux, op. cit., p. 3)
The presentation of a vision of Tahiti in *Les Immémoriaux* is inspired by and based on intensive research, direct and indirect observation, and imaginative interpretation. Loti's nostalgic novel, Gauguin's cult of primitive art in their very different ways played a part in shaping Segalen's perceptions of a unique cultural tradition threatened by European civilization. References to these external elements are transformed within the work according to the laws of literary creation. Already within the text of *Les Immémoriaux* the artificiality of these laws is suggested, although the conscious undermining of literary illusion is more apparent in *Le Fils du Ciel* and René Leys. The technique adopted in this first novel indicates the relativity of human concepts of 'truth,' and the role of language in shaping our idea of the world.

The author refers constantly to exterior reality in order to establish some congruence between the known and the unknown in his reconstruction of ancient Tahitian culture. Literary communication depends, as F. van Rossum-Guyon has observed, on two aspects: 'l'aspect de reconnaissance, l'aspect de nouveauté.' Segalen is primarily concerned with the latter.

Hence there is little concession to the reader, who is expected to comprehend Tahitian expressions or turns of phrase, and references to historical background. On the other hand, the author is closely concerned with Tahitian attitudes, and is inclined to excessive detail in the description of customs.

In this chapter we shall consider the author's purpose in introducing referential detail, and the manner in which it is incorporated into the narrative.

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The title of the novel announces the author's plan to describe a people forgetful of their ancient traditions. Segalen creates a vision of early Tahiti which will, by contrast with the change under the missionaries, reveal the values that have been sacrificed. His description opens at the point when the first missionaries are arriving in Tahiti, towards the end of the eighteenth century. The choice of this moment in history provides a dramatic contrast between two civilizations; moreover it provides the author with the rich historical documentation of the earliest explorers, which gives colour and verisimilitude to his description.

Cook and Wallis had commented on the seeming instability of Tahitian politics at this time. The English gave political support indirectly at first, but later more directly, to the chiefs Va'iraatoa or Tu (in Les Immémoriaux Va'iraatoa) and his son Otu (Tunui), who were to become the first kings of Tahiti under the dynastic title 'Pomare'. In Les Immémoriaux for various reasons Segalen favours their rivals, the Teva tribe, from the neighbouring region of Papara. Their chief Tati had opposed the British annexation of Tahiti and its evangelization by the London Missionary Society, preferring French claims to the colony. The Teva were often seen to be 'la famille la plus noble du clan le plus ancien et le plus prestigieux...'. However this idea of the superiority of the Teva over Pomare reveals the bias of certain historical sources, in particular the Mémoires of Ariti Taimai by the American historian Henry Adams. As Bengt Danielsson points out in his introduction to the French translation of this work, since Adams was opposed to the British colonization and evangelization of Tahiti, his feelings 'coïncident du reste parfaitement avec ceux du clan des Teva, dont le grand Tati fut le premier et le plus influent des chefs tahitiens à prendre parti pour la France en 1842'.

Adams and Segalen have a similar attitude towards Tahitian culture. Like Segalen, Adams sought to convey the glory of ancient Tahiti by writing so-called 'memoirs' from a Tahitian point of view. His major source, Ariti Taimai, was the mother of Tati, and a chief of the Teva tribe, whom he idealizes as a being of superior strength and intelligence, 'l'incarnation de la femme archaïque...'. Although the two writers adopt a similar political

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2 Ibid., p. x.
3 Ibid., p. ix. Moerenhout, one of Segalen's major sources, also gathered much of his information from the Teva clan.
stance, we shall note the contrast in Segalen's presentation of woman's role in Tahitian society.

The novel is based in the Papara region, where the Teva had built an enormous maraé (Polynesian altar and its enclosure), though at a political cost as Cook noted. Their ambitious undertaking aroused the jealousy of other chiefs, and was a cause of their loss of power. In the novel this maraé is not named until the second chapter, but simply indicated: 'Ceux-là sacrifiaient au maraé le plus noble de l'île.'

The narrator takes for granted the superior quality of the Teva region. The 'noble vallée Papara' is opposed to the 'turbulents territoires Atahuru,' ruled at this period by Valrastoa, whose influence is rapidly extending over the island. The people of Papara are associated with the peaceful cultivation of religious tradition, while Pomare is represented as warlike and aggressive. The Teva chiefs are never named, although Tati is a historical source for Segalen. In the text there is a binary opposition between the forces of tradition, represented by Paofai, head priest of Papara, and the forces of change, led by Pomare and Haamanhi, head priest of Atahuru. The omission of all mention of the Teva chief Tati has no doubt the literary purpose of highlighting Paofai's role as sole leader and representative of the idea of cultural integrity. Paofai remains in the background, representing a diminishing force in Tahitian society. Both Paofai and his region are associated with nobility.

Paofai's rival, Haamanhi, has a certain nobility as befits his position; but he is too old and weak to retain power, 'un vieil homme, éraillé d'ulcères et desséché par le jus enivrant du āva.' Like Pomare he suffers from over-indulgence in alcohol, a major cause of degradation to his people. Like Pomare also, he is presented as an outsider, without the support of local tradition, although he comes from the 'terre dix fois sacrée,' the home of sacred traditions, Raalteia:

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2 Les Immémoriaux, p. 4.
3 ibid., p. 18.
4 His name appears in notes on the manuscript.
5 Les Immémoriaux, p. 22.
6 ibid., p. 91.
Pomare is also seen as an outsider: 'on les savait plus proches des manants Paumotu que des Aris de la noble terre Papara'.

This accusation of lower birth is modified slightly by the admission that Pomare had claims to nobility 'peut-être par les femmes', but the narrator instantly discounts the idea of matrilineal succession. Admittedly this is a complex question in Polynesia, little understood by Europeans in Segalen's time. However it is generally accepted that Pomare owed his power to his mother's high rank. Segalen's dismissal of his right to succession is part of a general refusal in his work to countenance women in political affairs. Through the perspective of his Paparan narrator Segalen denigrates Pomare as 'rien autre en vérité que le voleur de la terre Paré, l'homme au teint noir, aux lèvres grosses, le manant privé d'ancêtres, l'échappé des îles basses, des îles-soumises!' The insults of the Paparan suggest European rather than Tahitian racial prejudice.

In the novel, Pomare and Haamaini use the British to bolster their power. The missionary Note (the historical figure Npt mentioned by Ellis) reminds Pomare of this fact before warning the Tahitian people: 'S'en prendre à nous et à nos disciples, c'est donc vouloir s'en prendre au Roi.' Hence in return for British military support, the Tahitian chiefs are required to support missionary activity.

Against these political machinations Segalen sets the dynamic power of the Arioi, who symbolize ancient Tahitian culture. The activities of this society of travelling artists are very little known, as both Tahitian and European observers found them too scandalous to describe. However historians generally accept the interpretation of the Belgian consul J.A. Moerenhout that they were a religious society, traditionally believed to originate from the incarnation of the sun-god Oro, and dedicated to the cult of fertility. Their spectacular performances have much in common with the Dionysian cult of art celebrated in French literature since the time of Baudelaire. Segalen admired their complete 'disponibilité', a quality sought by Gide and the followers of Nietzsche:

1 Les Immémoriaux, p. 22. 2 ibid., p. 20.
3 v. below, p. 118. 4 Les Immémoriaux, p. 84.
5 ibid., p. 183.
promenant au travers des îles leurs troupes fêtauses, [ils] célèbrent les dieux de vie en parant leurs vies mêmes de tous les jeux du corps, de toutes les splendeurs, de toutes les voluptés.1

Handy suggests that the original purpose of their activities was to stimulate the creative instinct in the spectators, the gods and nature. Symbols of regenerative power in the novel, they represent the only hope of a dying race.2

In selecting the Arioi as a symbol of ancient Tahitian culture, to what extent has Segalen transformed his material by his personal vision? There are several notable changes in his portrayal of the society. In general, he has simplified the presentation, by combining in the Arioi the functions of both religious artist and priest. In fact the Arioi or priest fulfilled quite a different social role from the Arioi.3 By simplifying, Segalen obtained a more dramatic contrast between the Tahitian and the European priest, emphasizing the Tahitian idea of the sacredness of life, joy and fertility in contrast with Christian repression and gloom. However the Arioi leaders retain a dignity and self-control which contrasts with the orgiastic frenzy of their followers. They are characterized by 'leurs immobiles et paisibles regards'; 'ils passaient lentement, certains de leur sérénité.'4 They seem to possess a Hindu ideal of peace and detachment: 'C'étaient vraiment des Maitres-de-jouissance: nuls liens, nuls soucis, nulles angoisses.'5 These qualities are more properly associated with the Tahitian priest than with the Arioi.

Segalen has omitted one of the eight ranks of the Arioi in his narrative: 'Et peut-être, avant sa vieillesse, parviendrait-il au degré septième et suprême: celui des Douze à la jambe-tatouée... Alors il serait Arioi.'6 In fact Térî must already be an Arioi of the seventh (i.e. second to lowest) rank, since he has a blue circle tattooed on his ankle. Clearly Segalen prefers to retain the term only for the most worthy. Moreover, in Part I

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1 Les Immémoriaux, p. 5.
2 In Gauguin's painting 'Te Ao no Areois: Le Germe des Areois' the lotus held by a statuesque figure possibly also symbolizes procreative power.
3 J.A. Moerenhout, op. cit., pp. 474-503; E.S. Craigill Handy, 'Polynesian Religion', Bishop Museum Bulletin Hawai'i, No. 34, 1927; et al.
4 Les Immémoriaux, p. 81.
5 ibid., p. 85.
6 ibid., p. 5; cf. Craigill Handy, op. cit., pp.
PaoaI takes HaamanThi's place as one of the twelve Grand Masters, whereas in fact this rank was hereditary. The man and woman holding this position had certain privileges common to royalty, and were exempt from the usual role of infanticide, so that their children could inherit their title. It is in this first rank of the Aroï that Segalen has made the greatest changes, making PaoaI move to the top, and presenting it as a society of men only. The rule of infanticide also plays a role in the fiction.

Perhaps the most striking innovation is the omission of women from the society. In fact the sexes enjoyed the same rank and privileges within the society. According to Teuira Henry, 'C'étaient des lettrés et des acteurs de grand talent choisis dans toutes les classes et tenus en haute estime par tous... les deux sexes jouissaient du même rang et des mêmes privilèges.' In Les Immémoriaux, the women become mere objects of pleasure possessed by the Aroï:

Entourés de leurs femmes peintes, — les divines-Ornées-pour-plaisir aux belles cuisses, aux dents luisantes comme les dents vives des atua-requins, — les maîtres figuraient douze fils voluptueux de Oro.

This deliberate distortion of reality is part of a general presentation in the novel of woman as the possession of her husband. It is partly derived from Marenhout, who claimed to see in Tahitian society, as Segalen noted in his manuscript, 'un mépris de la femme'. The question of women's place in Polynesian society, which is complex, is simplified in Segalen's novel by reducing her to a sexual object. This attitude towards women goes beyond the stereotypes of that era to a point where it suggests personal rancour:

Se peut-il que des hommes dignes, des chefs, surtout des gens qui parlent aux dieux, tolèrent qu'une femme, être impur et profanateur, vient souiller un festin de sa présence obscène!

1 'Tahiti aux temps anciens', Société des Oceaniens, No. 1, Musée de l'Homme, 1951, p. 237.

2 Les Immémoriaux, p. 81.

3 J.A. Marenhout, op. cit., pp. 474-503; notes, Les Immémoriaux, p. 234; cf., for example, Edouard R.L. Doty (foreword to Polynesian Researches, by W. Ellis, Rutland, Verpont & Tokyo, Charles E. Tuttle, 1968, p. xii) who sees Polynesian women as 'substantially on a social par with their men.' Les Immémoriaux, p. 75.
As in many early civilizations, Tahitian women were excluded from sacrificial ceremonies, although they were accepted as prophets. However, Segalen's language is more reminiscent of Christian than Tahitian attitudes. Elsewhere the same association of women and also sex with uncleanness recurs: 'Taumii, souillée par ces ébats non permis...'; 'Mêléés aux hommes qui, cette nuit-là, les avaient enlacées, et puis sous les fleurs souillées...'.

Woman, subject to masculine authority according to Polynesian custom, is treated as a slave, slapped, dismissed, disregarded. She 'souches' in the boat, takes a lowly position generally and has no distinctive personality: 'Quant aux femmes, on sait bien que le inoa [personality] leur est superflu pour s'entendre avec les autres femmes.' This contemptuous treatment of women represents Segalen's desire to shock, by contrasting Tahitian attitudes with European deference towards women. However there also sounds a deeply personal note, partly a rejection of Romantic sentimentality, partly also a trace of the repressive mentality Segalen is striving so hard to counteract.

In Part III the narrative follows the historical progression from conversion of the inhabitants to the appearance of the heretical group, the Mamaia. There is reference to the prophet Tino, who had great influence in early nineteenth-century Tahiti. His trances and ecstasies become the occasion for pleasure in the novel, supporting the idea that Tahitian religion was a celebration of joy and vitality.

The Mamaia movement was led by Teao, another prophet in traditional Tahitian style who claimed to be possessed by the spirit of Christ. Teao proclaimed that there was no need for the new law. Tahitians should return to their traditional songs, dances and orgies. In *Le Mémorial*, the movement is associated with Paofai's rebellion against the evangelization of Tahiti. The novel concludes with the condemnation of these 'heretics' to the traditional punishment of 'la course-au-récif'. According to the historical record Teao was banished to Raiatea, and 'died of smallpox in a miserable way in the bush, because his sect refused vaccination.' By according the rebels an cruel but glorious martyr's death, Segalen shapes a meaning for their lives which has a deeper reality than that of historical fact.

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2 ibid., p. 199. 
4 ibid., p. 215. 
5 cf. his account of Camarin's death, above, p. 19.
In his choice of aspect Segalen reveals his attitude towards the novel and its reader. *Les Immémoriaux* is directed towards an artistic elite which is looking not for light entertainment but for vision, new qualities of language and evocative power. The tone and style of *Les Immémoriaux* have a unique quality due to the incorporation into the narrative of Tahitian words, myths and legends, as well as a blending of style and subject through the studied technique of the 'Tahitian' narrator. Segalen uses place-names, proper names and Tahitian words not merely for local colour but for their musical quality. Polynesian languages with their many vowels have a soft, liquid quality particularly obvious in the spoken language. In the written text they give a flowing rhythm and density:

On le croyait fils de Tévatane, le porté-idole de la rive Hitia, ou bien de Véhatua no Tahupō, celui qui bataille dans la presqu'île.\(^1\)

Segalen refers to Tahitian words and names for their rhetorical power, their challenge to the reader, and their local colour. Oral traditions are an essential part of Tahitian culture. One of the great creative skills of the Polynesian people is the rhetorical use of language in song, story and ritual. The Polynesians lived in a world created by gods and heroes who were part of everyday folklore. As there was a close relation between the sacred and the profane, the daily work was consecrated by invocations and rituals. Major activities such as arrival and departure, birth and death, celebration and lament were accompanied by rhythmical orations, song and dance. In his article 'Voix mortes: musiques maori', Segalen indicates the distinctive qualities of Maori music: 'l'amour de la sonorité; une perfection de la mesure; un certain art de la mélodie; de l'ampleur et du nombre dans le rythme'.\(^2\) In particular he observed the total participation of those present at a festivity. European dramatists at this period — Claudel, Artaud, Jarry — were experimenting with a 'total theatre' which would involve the spectator in a similar way. However, since music in Tahiti had been closely associated with 'pagan' ritual, it had been quickly suppressed by the missionaries. Ancient genealogies and myths, ridiculed by many Europeans,\(^3\) were also vanishing. *Les Immémoriaux* is an attempt to recreate this lost culture.

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1. *Les Immémoriaux*, p. 3.
3. e.g. Banks, Ellis, etc.
Fragments of Tahitian genealogies, myths, songs and incantations are included in the novel. They derive from a variety of sources, sometimes oral, sometimes written, sometimes invented. Skillfully welded into the narration, they convey the atmosphere of ancient Tahiti. In his 'Journal des Îles' Segalen describes the manner in which an old woman, 'la seule dont la mémoire ait encore conservé de telles vieilles choses, nous récite... les Origines et comment furent peuplées les îles, et les soixante et onze générations...' According to Segalen, she recited a genealogy going back 1,775 years, with the aid of 'a tresse de fibres de vigne... compliquée de noeuds qui rappellent et évoquent les noms'. In the novel it is the male priests who have this special power. The mythological story of the origins of the race has a central position at the very middle of the novel. The words passed on by the dying priest Tupua represent the oral traditions carried on from one generation to the other for many centuries:

— Il était. Son nom Taaroa.
   Il se tenait dans l'immensité
   Point de terre. Point de ciel.
   Point de mer. Point d'hommes.
   Il appelle.rien ne répond.
   Seul existant, Taaroa se change en monde.2

This text had been copied almost word for word from Moerenhout by Gauguin, in his Ancien culte mahonie, a collection of writings on Tahiti which later became Nœa Nœa. Whereas in the novel history and legend are openly incorporated in the fiction, Gauguin claimed that his book consisted of original research on Tahiti gathered from the Tahitians about him.3 Segalen must have been aware of this plagiarism. However he admired Gauguin's attempt to revive ancient Tahitian culture, which he described in his journal as 'un peu le dernier soutien des anciens cultes'.4 His own work is a much more systematic attempt to recreate this culture.

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1 'Journal des Îles' (Océanie, 1903-04), op. cit.
2 Les Immémoriaux, p. 95.
4 'Journal des Îles', op. cit.; p. 274.
Another mythological story, the legend of Teae, is recounted in 'Le Prodigé'. It consists of eight rhythmical stanzas, each followed by a chorus slightly varied each time: ' — E aha Teae... ' — E rahit Teae... ' Ahel Teae... 1 Using the thinly disguised pretext that Teitiri is remembering this myth, the narrator indicates the manner in which it should be chanted:

Des paroles rythmées contant l'histoire prodigieuse, et que l'on disait sur un mode enthousiaste, venaient chanter sur les lèvres du haeré-po... 

The desire of the author to explain and describe tends to break the illusion of the narrative, and gives a didactic tone to the novel.

As well as myths and legends, Les Immémoriaux includes chants, as at the approach of the Arioté (p. 80); intangements to conciliate the spirits, as upon arrival at a new land (p. 108); instructions for navigation, poetic in their close observation of natural phenomena:

Qu'il souffle le marasumu; que la mer soit bleu-verdâtre et le ciel teinturier de mer.

Qu'elle tombe dans la nuit, l'étoile Fétia Hae. C'est ton guide. C'est le mot. C'est ton avèra: tu marcheras sur elle. 2

The chant which traced the genealogy of a Polynesian chief back to the gods bolstered his authority, indicating his sacred origin and power. In the first part of the novel the recitation of genealogies provides a concrete example of the responsibility and power of the orator. References are made within the narrative to the intensive training of the orator, and the dangers he ran by forgetting his lines.

Other Tahitian customs are described with a similar attention to detail, for example the preparations before setting out in a canoe:

D'abord, il passa prudemment toutes ses piroguiers de poche sous des abris de palms tressées, et, titrant son le sable sa pirogue de haute mer, l'examina. Il est bon de ne jamais partir sans avoir recouvert bordes, qui feraient eau dès le premier clapotis. On calfeutre ensuite les petites fissures en y bourrant, à coupes de mallettes, des fibres gluantes. Il est très bon, encore, d'entreposer ce travail de courtes prières à Taneti-te Haa, propre aux façonniers-de-pahi... 

1 Les Immémoriaux, p. 59.
2 ibid., loc. cit.
3 ibid., p. 100.
4 ibid., p. 17.
Once again the narrator has slipped from the relation of events to a rather pedantic description of Tahitian methods of boatbuilding, more interesting for its close association with religious rites (invocations and offerings to the gods). He then slips back to the narrative in the following paragraph, by returning to his central character: "Tériti ne négligeait aucun de ces rites..."

Through the mechanism of the plot, the author broadens the perspective of the novel, relating Tahitian culture to that of other Polynesian islands. Comparisons of language, customs and behaviour reveal the diversity within the Polynesian race:

le rude prononcer des gens d'Anaï et de Nuku-Hiva — qu'ils appelaient Nuku-Hiva — heurtait les molles oreilles des Tahitiens beaux parleurs...1

The Marquesans from Nuku-Hiva are a more violent and warlike people than the Tahitians: "Or, les Nuku-Hiviens scrupuleux redoutaient à mêler leurs chants aux ébats du peuple en liesse. La joie pérénelle de la terre Tahiti leur pesait..."2 Like the Polynesians of Easter Island they were cannibals. In spite of the different customs and attitudes which become apparent to Tériti and Paofai during their voyage, there is expressed in the novel a sense of brotherhood within diversity, and a tolerance of this diversity:

... voici le festin d'adieu: un bras de malfaiteur, rôti avec des herbes.
Paofai refuse: ce n'est point l'usage, dans la terre Tahiti, où il est grand-prêtre. On respecte sa coutume. Il est bon que chaque peuple, même au hasard de ses voyages, garde ses tapu.3

This tolerance contrasts with the intolerance of the European colonizers. It indicates an acceptance of the other, and a recognition of personal liberty.

The voyage to the farthest corners of Polynesia is a fictional device which is related to historical events through the old priest Tupua. His father is claimed to be the priest Tupai'a who, having sailed from Tahiti with Cook, displayed great skill as a navigator, and an amazing knowledge of the islands in the area.

We have observed the manner in which Segalen wove the referential into the narrative, frequently adapting details in the interests of unity, power and clarity of vision. We shall now consider the particular form taken by this narrative, which contrasts the past glory of the Tahitians with present degradation.

1 Les Tahitiens, p. 39. 2 ibid., p. 49. 3 ibid., p. 111.
2. THE ANTI-EPIC

Segalen's scorn for the traditional novel led him to the form of the anti-novel. *Les Irénoridiens*, which is written in a satirical spirit, might be described as ironic epic, or even 'anti-epic'. The epic has been defined as a 'long narrative poem on a serious subject', related in an elevated style, and centered about an heroic figure on whose actions depends to some degree the fate of a nation or a race. It is a synthesis of myth, legend and folk-tale in narrative form, which tends to support the traditions of a race. According to Scholes and Kellogg, 'In the epic, the preservation of an ordered society is the highest good, and the goal towards which the hero's physical and intellectual discipline is bent.'

The preservation of the ancient Tahitian culture is considered by Segalen highly desirable. In order to preserve this society, he would claim, one must preserve the myths, legends and traditions which gave it order and identity. His book attacks those who destroy this cultural tradition. Like other twentieth-century novels modelled on the epic, it has an ironical style which suggests disillusionment, even cynicism. Yet in attacking the present, it also recreates the lost past. Segalen's sensitive reconstruction of this past is an act of faith in art which counters the loss of diversity in the 'real' world. He sets out to recreate Tahitian identity by integrating myths, legends and religious beliefs into a

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representation of traditional culture. As the anti-novel is not purely destructive, but seeks to create new forms of the novel, Segalen seeks to create in language something of the diversity which has been lost to the 'real' world. The definition 'anti-epic' is, then, not a negative one, but implies an ironical stance towards reality, and a reflection on the creative powers of language.

Saint-Pol-Roux commented on the epic nature of the narrative in his letter to Segalen. Expressing enthusiasm for Segalen's sensuous evocation of the joys of ancient Tahiti, he makes less comment about the satirical aspect of the novel. However in an earlier letter he expressed his reservations, as we have observed, about the chapter 'Le Proïgé'. In place of the bitter sensation of anticlimax, he would have preferred a more heroic tone, 'un crescendo formidable...'. Cette scène de Tériï seul dans la nuit avec ses efforts doit être GIGANTESQUE disons DANTESQUE et naïve à la fois. Distinct differences of attitude between the two poets are apparent in this interchange. Segalen pointed out his ironical intention in the book: 'Mon héros Tériï n'est pas un héros.' Et ce sera la meilleure réponse à ta judicieuse observation. Lui-même est un presque faux-père, un demi-sourbe, un peureux, un médiocre.' Less inclined than Roux to metaphysical speculation; Segalen's work is firmly rooted in the real world. The choice of an inadequate hero is characteristic of the Naturalists and of trends in the twentieth-century novel. However Tériï is not merely inadequate but finally despicable. There is no possibility of identification with his actions and emotions. The illusion of sharing his adventure is sacrificed to an awareness of difference, and to the subtle interplay of irony between various points of view. The epic in which the hero helps to preserve his race is seen here in reverse: the anti-hero by his misadventures symbolizes the destruction of his race.

The structure of the novel follows certain epic traditions. The development of the plot takes a common epic form: the voyage of the hero, his return home. However the hero's adventures serve the satirical purpose of portraying the collapse of tradition. Tériï has certain fixed attributes similar to the formula which describes the epic hero. His name, we are told,

1 See above, p. 50.
2 Letter of 29 April 1906, Saint-Pol-Roux to Victor Segalen, Correspondance, op. cit., p. 54.
3 Letter to Saint-Pol-Roux, 29 April 1906, ibid., p. 54.
means 'chef au grand-Parler. Mais les noms décoivent autant que les dieux de bas ordre.' Thus we are warned in the first part of the novel that Tériori may not live up to his name. Paofach is also introduced according to set formulae in the narrative. His name, Paofat Tériorifatau, includes the title Tériori; Paofat, which is not translated in the novel, means 'stone fortification'. Together the names symbolize his role as the orator who will not be swayed from his task. It is possible that Segalen originally intended to give the translation of his name, but rejected the idea as too openly 'Symbolist'.

Following traditional epic style, the narrator begins in the middle of the action, and breaks off to recount what has happened up to this moment before taking up the central theme once again. In the opening paragraph Tériori is presented at prayer on the mure. The central theme is introduced: the rhetorical recitation of the 'beaux parlers originels', 'les histoires premières et les gestes qui ne doivent pas mourir'. The narrator then looks back at Tériori's past. The question of parentage introduces a minor theme, that of the father-son relationship. Various possible fathers are suggested, before the narrator moves on to mention the key points in Tériori's life: Cook's landing at Matavai, which is introduced as 'le plus incertain parmi ses souvenirs'; his apprenticeship as an Artoi; under the chief priest Paofat. At this point the narrator hints at the possibility of a relationship between Paofat and Tériori: 'Paofat Tériorifatau ne reprisait point le nouveau disciple: Paofat avait dormi parfois avec la mère de Tériori.' There is the suggestion of a relationship in the name Tériorifatau. This idea is gradually developed in the novel. When Paofat rescues his disciple from the angry crowd at the feast of Oro, his rival Haamanhi jeers:

— Paofat! Paofat Tériorifatau! Père! Je suis Père et Artoi! malgré tes promesses! Eh! l'homme qui a perdu la parole est ton fils! Pourquoi l'as-tu laissé vivre, quand ta mère a mis bas?

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3 Les Immémoriaux, p. 3.
Paofa\ ignored these insults, which could cause his banishment from the Arici
society, but at the end of the novel, when Térii refuses to save Paofa\'s
life in his turn, the latter returns to this theme:

— Homme sans mémoire! Térii qui as perdu les Mots! Térii qui
m\'as nommé son père... J\'aurais dû te serrer le cou dans ton
premier souffle!1

Underpinning the primary theme of Térii\'s betrayal of his racial identity are
the mythical and psychological implications of the betrayal and indirectly the
killing of the father by the son. There is, moreover, an ironic contrast
between the charity of Paofa\, an Arici, in saving his 'son', and Térii\'s
refusal to save his 'father', although he has by then become a Christian and
should theoretically have shown compassion. However this conversion is
superficial, and does not fundamentally change his way of thinking. Hence
Paofa\ in this case seems more 'Christian' than Térii. Here Segalen has
sacrificed exoticism to dramatic contrast.

The two men represent a binary opposition in the novel between the
forces of old and new Tahiti. The opposition is expressed in imagery
indicating superiority and inferiority: the master and the disciple, high
and low or uncertain rank. Paofa\, like the Arici leaders, is noble,
ferocious and strong (p. 112). He remains in the background, a shadowy yet
formidable figure: 'une ombre, soudain, se dressa devant lui qui tressaillit'
(p. 12). Again in Part II, 'Une grande ombre sur le ciel: voici Paofa\'
(p. 98). In Part III at the mention of his name 'une grande vision brève
des courses d'autrefois... sauta devant les yeux du converti... ' (p. 158).
A Tahitian Christ-figure, he calms the storm at sea by his 'violence
majestueuse' (p. 106). At the end of the novel, bleeding, tormented by the
mob, he falls on the reef, like Christ carrying his cross. Betrayed by his
own disciple, he returns, presumably to die on the reef.

Térii is the Judas who betrays his master for nails to build his church.
The disciple, a figure of scorn in Segalen\'s individualistic creed, is too
weak to create his own identity. He trembles uneasily before Paofa\'. His
fears, like those of all the followers, contrast with Arici serenity:

1 Les Immémoriaux, p. 211.
C’étaient vraiment des Maîtres-de-Jouissance: nuls liens, nuls soucis, nulles angoisses. Les annants maigres, inquiets parfois sur leur propre pâture, sentaient, à les considérer, leurs propres désirs satisfaits.  

There is no basic change in either character. The term 'inquiétude' characterizes Téiri's behaviour up to the final scene of his 'triumph': 'Le chrétien s’écarterait avec mépris, et une inquiétude.' The scene closes on a consistent pattern of Téiri cowering before Faial's ferocious curses.

Through the story of Téiri the narrative traces the downfall of a race who have forgotten their past. Part I describes the manner in which Téiri forgets his words, and eventually runs away from Tahiti. Possible reasons for this forgetfulness are suggested. The European mind might consider psychological causes: Téiri is not sufficiently detached to concentrate on his prayer. He is considering its effect on Pomare, whom it is designed to flatter: 'Téiri songeait combien ce Dire devait plaire à Pomaré, jusque-là traité comme un usurpateur, et dont nul ne s'était mis en peine, jamais, de publier les âleux.' It was the orator's task generally to establish the divine origins of the chief. However, having once forgotten the words, he no longer has complete confidence in his powers: 'des crânes indécis, le harcelaient, comme des moustiques importuns.'

In the traditional epic, disasters are not attributed to psychological causes, but to magic or divine intervention. In the same way Faial attributes the disasters which are befalling Tahiti to European 'sortilèges', and calls down the curses of the gods on the foreigners. 'Téiri savait, maintenant, d'où tombaient les coups, et contre qui l'on pouvait batailler, avec des charmes.' The cause lies outside himself, in European magic.

Following epic tradition the story falls into clearly demarcated episodes illustrative of the central theme. Having discovered the cause of his trouble, in Chapter II Téiri goes to see the European missionaries disembarking from their ship, and wonders at their strange customs. Chapter III describes the fertility rites celebrated by the Arii for the feast of Oro. Once again there are threatening signs: 'mauvais présages,'

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1 Les Immemoriaux, pp. 85-86.  
3 ibid., p. 45.  
4 ibid., pp. 35-36.  
et nouveaux sortilèges! The festivities are to be held at Atahuru rather than Papara: Pomare's power is increasing. The celebrations are briefly interrupted when Tériti forgets the words during his recitation, but once he has escaped the crowd settles down to song, dance and orgy.

'Le Prodige' describes Tériti's unsuccessful effort to redeem his prestige; and the final chapter in Part I contrasts the simple Christian idea of sacrifice with the spectacular Tahitian feast of joy. However growing signs of dissidence threaten the atmosphere of peace and pleasure.

Foreseeing trouble, Paofai sets out at the end of Part I on an epic voyage 'vers les pays originels'. Charitably, he allows Tériti to hide in his canoe.

Part II describes the heroic quest of Paofai. The voyage to Raiatea, 'le poteau arrière du monde' according to Polynesian belief, and thence to the farthest corners of Polynesia relates Tahitian culture to a broader context. Besides illustrating the diversity within the Maori race, it also illustrates the remarkable skills of Polynesian navigators who relied entirely on the memory of ancestral stories and traditions. The theme of forgetfulness reappears. By some sign or fatal intervention of the gods — 'N'est-ce pas un signe qu'il l'ai dit? — Tériti is led first to Tupua, son of Tupaia, and custodian of the sacred words. Tupua senses that Tériti has not the necessary powers of concentration to absorb his words: 'Jeune homme, tu ne m'écouteras pas jusqu'au bout.' He warns of the disasters that have befallen those who forget: 'Mais, voici qu'ils perdirent les mots, et qu'ils oublièrent les naissances des étoiles. Le honte même! Vers où se tourner? On dérive. On désespère.'

In spite of Tériti's repeated assurance, 'Je suis hâlé-pot, Je suis écouté!' he falls asleep. Meanwhile the old priest divulges the sacred stories, which culminate in a mystical vision:

A mesure que faiblit le corps du vieil homme, son esprit trans-illumine monte plus haut dans les Savoirs Mémoriaux; plus haut que n'importe quelles âges; et ceci qu'il enti'aperçoit, n'est pas dicible à ceux qui ne vont pas meurtir;


1 Les Immémoriaux, p. 36. 2 ibid., p. 90.
3 ibid., p. 91. 4 ibid., p. 94. 5 ibid.; 6 ibid., p. 93.
6 ibid., pp. 94-96. 7 ibid., p. 97.
This vision of the absolute is an attempt to relate Polynesian joy in living to a broader metaphysical system based on individualism. In his dying moments the spirit of the old priest sees far back into the most distant past of his race, to the earliest forms of religious belief. There he has a vision of the void, which reveals to him that there is no reality outside the self. Man's essential quest is, therefore, the discovery of his own identity. Only by being true to the self can he realize his full potential.

The idea is an invention of the novelist, with overtones of Buddhism suggested by the idea of Illumination — 'son esprit transilluminé...'. This glimpse of the Absolute raises the tone to a point of epic grandeur. It is a turning-point in the novel, which repeats the central incident in Part I, Térill's forgetting of the words, and announces the doom of Tahiti. By forgetting their past, the Tahitians are betraying their own identity. Paofai is aware of the danger threatening his people. By the time he arrives, Tupua is dying, completely disillusioned with his people: 'Tous! Tous, ainsi, maintenant!' Bitterly regretting the loss of the words, Paofai realizes the advantage of the magic European 'signs': 'Mais leurs signes, peut-être, ne sont pas bons à figurer le langage maori? S'il en existait d'autres pour sa race?' He then sets out to find some Polynesian equivalent. After many dangers and adventures he and Térill meet a traveller from Easter Island who tells them of the signs used by his people: 'en les tatoue, avec une pierre coupante, sur des bois polis et plats qu'on nomme ensuite jets-intelligents.'

The journey to Easter Island is too arduous for Térill, who abandons Paofai, and after wandering aimlessly for some years returns to Tahiti.

Twenty years have elapsed; Tahiti has become Christian, and is totally transformed. Part III sets out the progressive stages towards suppression of the ancient customs. The first chapter, 'L'Ignorant', conveys Térill's shock at the contrast between past and present. However he is quickly converted to Christianity through fear and ambition. In the following chapter he is baptized with almost all the other inhabitants. Refusal to conform is severely punished by the missionaries. When Paofai eventually returns, in the third chapter, 'Les Hérétiques', he is dismayed at this total betrayal of the past: a betrayal which he links with Térill's earlier forgetfulness.

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1 Les Immémoriaux, p. 97.  
2 ibid., p. 100.  
3 ibid., p. 110.
crois-tu si débile que je perde le souvenir de mes mots, comme tu le fis, Téril au grand-Parler, sur la pierre-du-récitant? 1

In his quest for written signs, he has learnt that each society should cling to its own traditions. The signs of Easter Island could teach nothing more than their own mnemonic aids:

— Non! les signes Piritane où n’importe quels autres ne sont pas bons pour nous! Ni aucun de tous vos nouveaux parlers! Prends garde, Téril. La chèvre ne renifle pas comme le cochon, et le bouc n’abole pas comme le chien. Quand les bêtes à quatre pieds échangent leurs voix, prends garde, c’est qu’elles vont mourir. 2

Pana‘u uses the concrete imagery of a man close to nature. His vision is simple but clear and far-sighted. “Like the Egyptian god in Socrates’ Pancrace, 3 he warns of the threat to oral traditions presented by writing: the loss of rhetorical skills, powers of memorization and concentration; a tendency to look to books for knowledge rather than to cultivate personal wisdom. The oral traditions of Tahiti are doomed to extinction with the advent of European civilization.

In ‘Les hérétiques’ Sepa‘en conveys a sense of the instability of the new regime. This instability is one that personalized in Téril, sent as a spy among the Hawaiin by the missionaries. During the meeting by night in the mountains his mind wavers; he suddenly finds himself joining in the invocations and ‘abominations’ with enthusiasm: ‘devenu manaia lui-même, il répond à tous les appels’. Recognizing Pana‘u among the speakers, he is won over swiftly to become again ‘le ha‘i‘pe sousmis et le fils de ce vieillard qu’il avait, au grand jour, réprimé comme pâion’. 4 As easily, he betrays them all the next day to the Christians, in return for the position of deacon, and the chance to wear a black ‘pare’.

The last two chapters of the book describe the condemnation of the heretics, with other law-breakers, their punishment, and the final degradation of Téril, who not only betrays his comrades, his former master and ‘father’, but prostitutes his daughter to further his own ambitions. These betrayals are made in the name of Christianity.

1 Les Immémoriaux, p. 163. 2 ibid., p. 161.
3 Quoted by Schœles & Kellogg, op. cit., p. 19.
4 Les Immémoriaux, p. 176. 5 ibid., p. 175.
The adventures of Térry are thus mock-heroic, and represent the
disintegration rather than the preservation of an ordered society. The
poetic intensity of the description adds to the regret for what is lost.
However the ultimate message is not nostalgic. It defends the right of the
individual to establish his own identity, untrammelled by religious and
political oppression. Related in an elevated, rhetorical style, *Le
Terri* is a poetic narrative designed, like the epic, for an "aristocratic"
audience who will read in its indictment of contemporary regression
an exaltation of freedom, diversity and joy in living.
The best translation, transcription, and publication by Victor Sperling, under the guidance of Dr. Anka.
3. THE TECHNIQUE OF THE EXOTIC NARRATOR

The intensity of the sensation of exoticism felt on reading Le Peuple noir derives largely from Segalen's use of an 'exotic' narrator: that is, a narrator who does not share the cultural presuppositions of the author and the presumed reader. Tahitian writing a similar narrative would incorporate into the text neither the detachment from his own ways of thought nor the irony of seeming to take for granted that which both author and reader realize to be at variance with their preconceived ideas. Perhaps no other writer in exotic fiction has developed this technique to the same extent. Segalen considered the idea unique: 'Cette attitude que je crois la mienne, depuis que systematisée ainsi...'. Although many writers and critics have commented on its originality, there has been no detailed analysis of the method.

The novelty of the work lies particularly in its choice of perspective. The shock effect of this method would be diminished by explanation or by a more classical style. Based on a thorough study of the subject, it demands effort and creativity of the reader. Loti's criticism reveals a very different attitude towards the novel. Before returning to his objections about the obscurity of the style, we shall consider the consistency of the narrative perspective, and its operation in the novel.

The narrative is related in the third person, as if by an 'omniscient' author. However within the first few lines a particular point of view becomes apparent, owing to certain stylistic qualities:

1 P. Loti, unpublished letter to Victor Segalen, 16 November 1907.
2 Essai sur l'Exotisme, op. cit., p. 18.
Cette nuit-là — comme tant d'autres nuits si nombreuses qu'on n'y puvait songer sans une confusion — Térii le Récitant marchait, à pas mesurés, tout au long des parvis inviolables. L'heure était propice à répéter sans trêve, afin de n'eh pas omettre un mot, les beaux parlers originaux.

We are thrown into a certain situation, within a strange society, with different customs and ideas. Moreover, these ideas are taken as the norm; we are expected to make an effort to understand and to appreciate this difference.

The narrator's knowledge is limited to his own country and to accounts of the voyage in Polynesia. Even this knowledge is limited, as he later warns us, since we can only know what Térii tells us of his adventures. However, the narrator is as assured of his vision of the world as a European might be of another; and his descriptions of strange European customs have an amusing naivety which gives a comic tone to the narrative.

The disparity between the various points of view within the novel has an ironical effect of dissolving certainties. The 'objective' narrator simply tells the story of Térii. He and Paofai present two major, Tahitian points of view. The European-missionaries, on the other hand, present a Christian viewpoint which gives rise to comical misunderstandings. The attitudes of author and reader may be presumed: the author delighting in the discrepancy between the Tahitian and the European points of view; the reader perhaps shocked, dismayed, or 'dépayssé'. This complex interplay of various perspectives gives depth and subtlety to the narration.

Third-person narrative suggests the detachment of an objective, historical style. The narrator gives the illusion he is relating what he has seen or heard, without personal comment, in contrast to the implicit bias of first-person narrative. In Les Immémoriaux the narrator gives no justification or explanation for his story, but plunges 'in medias res' as would a traditional story-teller. Occasionally during the narrative he explains how details have come to be known, for example through stories related about particular events. In general he limits himself to Térii's perspective, bringing in other points of view dramatically through direct speech or observation of people's behaviour. If Térii has left the scene, as during the feast of Oro, the narrator may give us a more general view in order to describe the festivities and to comment on the other characters. When Térii

1. Les Immémoriaux, p. 3.
runs away from the lakeside, in 'Le Prodigé'; we observe the thoughts and actions of his 'disciples'. Occasionally the narrator adopts Paofai's viewpoint. We shall see specific examples of this, particularly in Part II.

However on the whole we know what Tériti knows of the action, either through his presence, or later through other characters, telling him what has happened. The action is often presented through his thoughts and feelings: 'Tériti songeait... 'Tériti connaissait...'. Usually Segalen respects the limitations of his convention, moving outside its boundaries when necessary to complete the picture. On a few occasions, however, his personal feelings and ideas can be detected, as in 'Le Prodigé', and in certain attitudes towards religion or women. He appears in the shaping of the narrative, as for example in the opening scene, where the shores of Tahiti are seen as 'le cercle du rivage': a view from above, or from the intellect. Despite his professed aim, he sometimes intervenes in the narrative: 'En vérité, c'était cela: vingt années hors de Tahiti.' This concept of verité is irrelevant to the Tahitians, who are represented in the novel as attuned to natural rhythms: a concept we shall discuss in the next chapter. In this case the author chose to intervene, perhaps unnecessarily, in order to explain how much time had passed. It is however inconsistent with the style of the novel; elsewhere the narrator simply comments: 'Des lendemains passent.'

The device of the 'Tahitian' narrator conveys to the reader in its full freshness the shock felt by the Tahitians on first confronting Europeans. The narrator reveals his sense of the 'exoticism' of these strangers. Simultaneously the reader is aware of the obverse reaction — that of the Europeans. Through the medium of the text he is confronted, like Cook and the early explorers, with scenes of human sacrifice, exposure of the dead, eating the eyes of a victim, infanticide... Customs which horrify the European are taken for granted by the narrator. The reader is introduced to a way of thought totally alien to the European rationalist system.

According to the animistic beliefs of the early Tahitians, spirits dwell in nature as well as in people. Presentation of natural phenomena from this perspective has the naïveté of primitive painting. Scenes are presented to the reader with the mystery of a mythological world. For example the eclipse of the sun observed by Cook is seen as the embrace of the moon-goddess: 'Hina-du-ciel, la femme lunaire, l'imperissable femelle dans les cieux, qui

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1 Les Immémoriaux, p. 113.  
2 ibid., p. 111.
parfois, s'approchant du Fécondateur, l'étreint, le mord, et l'obscurcit'.

Gods and goddesses are represented as having human attributes and functions. The sun-god is the source of fertility: 'Oro, par sa présence au firmament de l'Ile, avait fécondé la grande Hina-terrestre, et s'en allait, imperturbable, avec son cortège de nubes, vers d'autres terres, ses autres femelles, pour les féconder aussi.' A close relationship is established between the Sun's desire over the earth and the powers of the Arioi leaders, his representatives on earth.

Complex rituals are designed to appease the spirits, and especially the sun-god; 'car le Resplendissant, jaloux d'homages, aurait pu s'attacher à des pays plus dévots, et tarder en son retour'. In the same way during navigation Tériti and Paofai seek to appease the spirits of the sea, such as Ruahatu l'irritable, dont les cheveux sont touffus et la colère prompte'.

During a storm at sea, Paofai's efforts to conciliate the gods have an unexpected ferocity: 'tendant le bras vers le coin du ciel d'où se ruise la tempête, il hurla, plus fort que le vent, des imprécations supplantes'. The reader conditioned by the humility of Christian prayer is taken aback by the juxtaposition of imprecation and supplication. This apposition of antithetical qualities is intended to challenge conventional European value systems. Paofai is admired for his 'violence majestueuse' and his 'inventive haineuse'; the Arioi for the 'majesté de leur appétit, l'ampleur de leur soif'. A cult of joy and power reminiscent of Nietzschean philosophy contrasts with Christian meekness and consideration for the weak. The old, now useless and despised, must pay respect to the young:

C'était l'âge du Pomaré. Il s'arrêta sur les plus bas-degrés et rendit hommage à son jeune descendant. — L'autre considérait sans répondre, avec indifférence, le vieillard-débile...

Values are inverted, with comic effect. The clever are admired for their skill in stealing goods unnoticed — an ability which had amazed and dismayed Cook and his men. This attribute is vividly illustrated by the comedy played during the feast of Oro: A vice in Europe, stealing is celebrated by the Tahitian god 'Hiro subtil, favorable aux hommes rusés'. In a world which makes no clear distinction between the natural and the supernatural, men

2 ibid., p. 35. 
3 ibid., loc. cit. 
4 ibid., p. 19. 
5 ibid., p. 106. 
6 ibid., p. 12. 
7 ibid., p. 85. 
8 ibid., p. 40. 
9 ibid., p. 12.
display their power over the gods. Such is the popular mythological figure Maui, who, "plus fort que tous les hommes, poursuivant l'atua vagabond jusque par les confins du monde, avait saisi les cheveux de lumière, et fort heureusement remisé le soleil dans le ciel Haorî, — où il le fixa par des nœuds."

Maui represents the exaltation of human powers which is a major theme in Ségâlen's work. In Tahitian society, the boundaries between the human and the divine are blurred: nobility is associated with divinity. The chiefs are honoured and respected for their divine rights: "Car le chef était divin par sa race et par son pouvoir." The Ariœ are granted similar privileges due to their standing as artists. Since they represent Tahitian religion in Les Immémoriaux the latter is closely associated with artistic activity: an idea with particular appeal to the Symbolists, as we have noted. Life as seen through the eyes of the Tahitian narrator is a celebration of physical powers attuned to the mysteries of the universe:

"Car tout est matière, sous le ciel Tahiti, à jouissances, à délices: les Ariœ s'en vont? — En fête pour les adieux. Ils reviennent pour la saison des pluies? — En fête pour leur revenu."

This attitude, presented simply and naturally, carries a conviction which is strengthened by the poor showing of the Europeans. The contrast of the antithetical attitudes of Ariœ and puritan Christians creates an air of comic misunderstanding which gradually deepens into irony and satire.

The Tahitians can hardly believe their ears when they first hear Christian doctrine: "L'étranger ne répondit pas quelque chose de croyable; — ou peut-être, il ne pouvait pas répondre: ce langage puritan est misérable: il ne parle jamais que d'un seul dieu." Limitations in European ways of thought are here presented as a limitation of language — an idea in line with the thinking of modern criticism. The foreigner could not reply, the narrator suggests, because there were no English words for the ideas presented by the Tahitian.

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1 *Les Immémoriaux*, p. 35.  
2 *ibid.*, p. 182.  
4 *Les Immémoriaux*, p. 83.  
5 *ibid.*, p. 24.  
The English seem to the Tahitians remarkably deprived, having only one god and one wife. Their amazement indicates the relativity of the custom: "Teri n'eût rien imaginé de pareil." Diversity of culture is particularly apparent in the demeanour of the women. The fragrant, joyful, naked Tahitian women eclipse their weaker European counterparts:

"Lassées les premières, les femmes blemes se mirent à soupirer. Elles apitoyalient: leurs vêtements incommodes, effrangés par les broussailles, salis de terre rouge, étaient indignes d'épouses de prêtres. Elles ne les dépouillaient jamais, de nuit, ou de jour, non plus qu'elles ne lavaient leurs membres, ni peignaient leurs chevelures poussières. Même l'usage du monoï onctueux leur semblait indifférent. Vraiment, elles et leurs tané figuraient d'assez pauvres hôtés pour la terre Tahiti."

This vivid picture indicates some of the problems of nineteenth-century colonial women in adapting to a tropical environment. The Tahitian narrator is in no position to understand their behaviour; therefore we have an objective portrait of the impression created partly by their "modesty", partly by the conditioning of an urban upbringing and a cooler climate. However like the men, the English women seem to the Tahitians to neglect and even to despise their bodies: "Mais il s'indignait à voir ces serviteurs charger des fardeaux sur leurs têtes — et la tête est sacrée! Quel mépris de soi-même nourrissaient-ils, ces hommes bas, pour s'infliger une aussi grave insulte!"

The endless toil of the Europeans seems ridiculous to the Tahitians. According to Teri's informant, material goods held no great attraction for those asked to work for the missionaries: "Puis les étrangers proposèrent deux pièces d'étoffes à chaque fétii. Personne n'en voulut." Certain characters are shown as corruptible and venal, including Teri and his family. However, in contrast with conventional representations of Polynesians as lazy, the novel creates the sense of a well-ordered society. The conservation of oral traditions demanded a highly disciplined system of memorization. The inability to concentrate is presented as an effect of the degradation of the race.

In general Tahitian customs are depicted as neither superior nor inferior, but different — adapted to their particular circumstances: Europeans are represented as inferior in some respects, in order to

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1 Jean Immémoriaux, p. 24.  
2 ibid., p. 80.  
3 ibid., p. 27.  
4 ibid., p. 28.
counteract religious conceptions and prejudices. However their scientific knowledge and technical skill are shown as a cause for wonder, as for example their ships, 'la pirogue sans balancier ni pagayeurs'; their astronomical instruments and their signs and their calculations: 'les savants Piritane, au moyen de nombres figurés par des signes et combinés entre eux, en concluraient combien de fois distaient du soleil la terre Tahiti: Tupai a ne l'avait pas cru.' The simple note of disbelief renews the sense of wonder at the technical feat.

European religion like their science is a matter for amazement, although in this case there is a strongly satirical tone. Christian religious ceremonies viewed through Tahitian eyes lack the spectacular colour and gaiety of their own prayers, which encourage creativity in its fullest sense. The symbolic simplicity of the Eucharist is incomprehensible to them. Tahitian amazement at the poverty of the offerings is highly comical: 'Est-ce tout le repas du dieu?... On ne pouvait croire à une telle misère, ou bien à une telle avarice!' More deeply satirical is the objective description of the consecration of the host. The Tahitians take the words literally: 'Manger le dieu! manger le dieu!' The crowd consider the idea of communion as magic, which will cure disease or procure various powers. Their misunderstanding of the words of consecration is a satirical attack on Catholic dogma. The Protestant missionary who fiercely repulses the stampeding crowd presents a conflicting Christian belief. His anger turns the communion service into a farce. The service, instead of impressing the Tahitians, has the contrary effect of making them despise the Christians. The scene culminates in Haamanihi porta his own offering to the god an eye which he plucks from a human corpse. This time we appreciate the effect of the scene on the European spectators:

Haamanihi porta la main pour accomplir les gestes sacrés... 'Malheureux! malheureux!' pleurait le Piritane, balbutiant comme un enfant épouvanté. Ses compagnons, et même les femmes, s'enhardissaient, entouraient le sacrificateur, criaient, le suppliaient de ne point troubler leur prière...

The European point of view is revealed through their exclamations of dismay:

'ils ont profané ton nom, Kérino, et la mémoire de ton sacrifice.'

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1 Les Immémoriaux, p. 4.  
3 ibid., p. 76.  
4 ibid., p. 78.  
5 ibid., p. 79.  
6 ibid., loc. cit.
This dramatic contrast between the two attitudes towards religious celebration leads up to the last appearance of the Arioi, at the end of Part I:

Ils paraissent, les Douze à la Jambe-tatouée. Ceinturés du maro blanc sacréotal, poudrés de safran, ils marchaient, peints de jaune, dans le soleil jaune qui ruisselait sur leurs peaux onctueuses. Leurs immobiles et paisibles regards contemplaient la mer-extérieure.\(^1\)

The sacred colour of their saffron yellow is associated with the colour of the sun. Their contemplative glance is associated with the vastness of the ocean, and hence with infinity. Before their triumphal procession the strangers disappear, their church is broken down and trampled underfoot. In this moment of Arioi glory the gods of life seem to triumph:

En fuite! En fuite! L'autre dieu, le subtil et lumineux Oro resplendirait désormais sans contrainte, car, avec les étrangers aux gestes ridicules, l'atua Kéréno, sans doute, s'était à jamais évanoui.\(^2\)

The irony of this hope is underlined by the narrator's confident tone: the Christians and their god had gone 'for ever', 'without a doubt'. The moment of joy does not last. After a brief répit, Pomare returns to steal the sacred feathers, and Part I closes on a note of uncertainty.

The voyage of Faofai and Térif in Part II towards 'les pays originales' provides, as we have observed, a broader perspective of Polynesia. Their adventures are presented through the illusion of travellers' tales:

... Ainsi, dès la première nuit de mer, Faofai Térif- Tatau et Térif, son disciple, s'efforçaient, l'un et l'autre, d'accommoder de petites histoires. Ils les composaient de mots mesurés, à la façon des Parlers transmis. On ne peut assurer qu'ils rencontrèrent jamais Havai-1 qui est la Terre-Originelle; car on ne sait que ce qu'ils en voulaient. Encore une fois, il n'empêche: un beau Parler bien récité, même sans aventures dessoy, vaut certes un repas de fête solennelle.\(^3\)

Through this realistic device the narrator calls into question the veracity of the account. Indirectly he is establishing, albeit ironically, the priority of artistic invention over the purely mimetic. The use of a colon at the end of this passage suggests that the story of the voyage is related,

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1 *Les Immémoriaux*, p. 81:

2 *ibid.*, p. 82. The epithet 'subtil' to describe Oro is surprising; it indicates more about Segalen's preference for the obscure and the suggestive than about the Tahitian god.

3 *ibid.*, pp. 89-90; Havai-1: Savaii, in Samoa (v. note, p. 87, *Les Immémoriaux*).
directly or indirectly, by the two Arioi. However there is a view of the meeting with Tupua which extends their limited viewpoints. As we have noticed, neither Paofai nor Terii hear the dying words of Tupua. While he is speaking, Terii goes to sleep. However a little boy is listening: 'Le petit garçon s'ébat, et veut raconter: comme il le raconta par la suite. Paofai n'ignore le petit garçon.' 1 Through this medium the author justifies his presentation: the narrator is repeating a story which is well-known among the people. It is, moreover, the one optimistic note in the narrative, suggesting other possibilities outside the scope of the novel.

Tupua introduces a new perspective into the novel. The narration is lifted for a moment on to another plane, which gives a mystical dimension to the quest for racial identity. After this moment, the narrator is more concerned for a time with the reactions of Paofai than with Terii. He describes the grief of the Arioi leader at the loss of the words, and his efforts to trace the origins of the race. In this central part of the novel, events are introduced through his thoughts, feelings and perceptions: 'Paofai reconnaît que...'; 2 un nouveau souffle se levait que Paofai crut pouvoir nommer...'; 3 'alors seulement Paofai commença de s'étonner... The shift in point of view here indicates the greater nobility of the adventures described. Part II is an interlude in the story of Terii. At the end of the section we return to Terii’s pointless wanderings, and his return to Tahiti.

The exoticism of Part III is that of a new Tahiti, seen through Terii’s eyes upon his return. The shock comes from the contrast between past and present, a device we shall discuss further in the following chapter. Everything has changed during Terii’s absence, even the people’s names: 'les mots entendus apparaissaient inhabituels: à coup sûr, étrangers'. 5 Their behaviour, their attitudes seem severe and extraordinary. By a technique similar to that in Part I descriptions are presented through Terii’s eyes as comical or surprising:

Surtout il rit très fort quand une fille entra, vêtue de même que la femme entrevue déjà sur la plage: la poitrine cachée d’êtoffes blanches, les pieds entourés de peau de chèvre. 6

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2. ibid., p. 103.
3. ibid., p. 104.
4. ibid., p. 105.
5. ibid., p. 117.
6. ibid., p. 118.
Terīi is suddenly a foreigner in his own country. He must relearn socially acceptable rules of behaviour. Through his bafflement and dismay we realize the enormity of the change:

Tout se bousculait dans l'esprit du voyageur; et son étonnement égalait celui de ce pilote qui, pour regagner la terre Huahiné, s'en fut tomber sur une autre île, dans un autre firmament.¹

The shock of exoticism is thus redoubled, as if by the discovery of another island so different as to seem from another planet — although the narrator is not aware of the existence of planets. Terīi's swift adaptation to this new environment is ironically contrasted with Paofai's uncompromising attitude when he returns. His anger is expressed in virile language coloured by natural imagery:

Ha! tu n'as pas vu des oiseaux habillés d'écaillés? Tu n'as pas pêché des poissons couverts de plumes? J'en ai vu! J'en ai pêché! Ce sont les hommes parmi vous qui s'appellent 'convertis', ou bien 'disciples de Jésus'. Ils n'ont pas gardé leurs peaux: ils ne sont plus bêtes d'aucune sorte: ni hommes, ni-poules, ni poissons. Reprends ta peau, Terīi que je déclare plus stupide qu'un bouc! Reprends ta peau!²

Paofai's rhetorical style, with its rhythmical symmetry and poetic use of metaphor, contrasts with the more mundane style of the Christians. By the urgency and weight of his appeal we understand that he expresses the author's point of view: by adopting European customs, traditions and attitudes the Tahitians have lost their own identity. In order to maintain individuality, man must be free from subservience to authority. The role of missionaries and colonizers has suppressed this individuality.

Ironically, one of the few people who share this resentment is the young European lover of Terīi's daughter, Auté. This character was criticized by Farrère in a letter to Segalen as too weak and colourless. Segalen pointed out in reply that he represented Auté as the Tahitians would see him, foolish and unrealistic, a mere 'chasseur-de-sauterelles',³ the sentimental dupe of the pleasure-loving Erena.⁴ He is in many ways Loti's arrogant hero seen from the other point of view. There is, however, an autocritical element in his portrait. Like Segalen himself, Auté is anxious to learn the ancient myths and legends before they are lost in oblivion. There is no trace of

caricature at the moment when he accuses Téfii of betraying his sacred trust:

Les Paroles sont donc mortes avec lui, prononçant, comme un Maître, le jeune étranger aux yeux clairs. Iakoba tressaillit. The youth's clear eyes suggest the visionary power of the 'Master', a word used by Segalen not only for the 'Maîtres-du-Jouir', but in letters to Debussy, Claudel and in reference to great artists. However Aüté depends, like Segalen, on unreliable witnesses to learn the stories of the past. Téfii deliberately mixes these up:

Pour mieux saisir l'attention de l'écouteur, il entremêlait tous ces parlers, au hasard des lèvres. Il riait en lui-même à voir l'étranger recueillir ses racontars pailens, de confiance, — les yeux brillants, les doigts agiles, sans même flaire la tromperie ou le désordre du récit...

The author's irony is here turned against himself, and against those who would seek an accurate reconstruction of past legends. His ironical description of Téfii's deception is a comment on the problems of his exotic method, a 'mise en abyme' which questions the possibility of reconstructing accurately the fast-disappearing oral traditions. This technique, in the words of Sylvère Lotringer, 'n'est donc la représentation qu'en la refusant...'. Accepting the limitations of his craft, the author consciously creates an artistic vision which will, however, reflect as closely as possible the exoticism of early Tahiti.

The exoticism of Segalen's representation evolves from a blending of style and subject within the language used by the Tahitian narrator. This language is skilfully adapted to suggest Tahitian patterns of thought. It is beyond the scope of this thesis to do more than indicate the variety of means by which Segalen has coined a unique style in Les Immémoriaux. In a study of the vocabulary of this novel, J.-M. Gautier has enumerated the many neologisms, rare words, particular usages of words, compound words and other examples of 'poetic licence'. As he points out, many of the compound words have a Homeric tone, summing up a character by his physical or moral attributes; 'Tané le mangeur de chairs mortes'; 'les Douze à la

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1 Les Immémoriaux, p. 208. 2 ibid., p. 207.
4 'Notes sur le vocabulaire des Immémoriaux', Le Français moderne, October 1948, pp. 303-308.
Jambe-tatouée. Many neologisms follow the pattern of Maori language, which allows the free composition of compounds such as 'nuit-pour-ne-pas-être-vue'; 'cochons-porteurs-d’hommes'; 'les Maîtres-du-Jour'. The use of the infinitive is particularly remarkable in these compounds: 'les hommes au nouveau-parler'; 'l’ornée-porte-plaire'; 'esprits-du-dormir-le-jour'.

This comparatively simple method of word-formation with its freedom from grammatical constraints correlates with a major theme of the novel, freedom from laws and regulations. The naive juxtaposition of ideas in the compound word corresponds with a quality of primitive spontaneity in the text.

Sometimes the compound word is an explanation of a European word, as 'faré-des-prières' (church), 'batons-luisants' (guns), and 'petits signes tatoués' (writing). Sometimes it has an elliptical effect, compressing meaning into a phrase, as 'l’œil offert' referring to a Tahitian custom, or 'les promeneurs-de-nuit'.

Tahitian words and names are used in the narrative for their musical quality, rhetorical effect and for local colour, supporting the illusion of the Tahitian narrator. Many Tahitian words unexplained in the novel — haére-po, marae, fare, pehö, atua — give a certain density to the language, slowing down the reader, demanding reflection and effort. The meaning of the words can be deduced from the context, but not without difficulty. The lack of explanation is a rejection of banality and a device to stimulate the creative participation of the reader. More particularly, it is essential to the illusion of the exotic narrator.

The innovatory quality of the language arises from the choice of vocabulary, its grammatical usage and its order in the sentence. As well as inventing new words and incorporating Tahitian words into the text, Segalen's stylistic innovations include the irregular use of parts of speech: adjectives and participles for nouns ('l’obscur', 'sombre', 'les baptisants', 'les arrivants', 'les épargnés'). Words are used in an unusual and striking manner.

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1 Les Immémoriaux, p. p. 81. 2 ibid., p. 169. 3 ibid., p. 30.
4 ibid., p. 5. 5 ibid., p. 16. 6 ibid., p. 15.
7 ibid., p. 66. 8 ibid., p. 82. 9 ibid., p. 16.
10 ibid., p. 16. 11 ibid., p. 62. 12 ibid., p. 3.
13 ibid., p. 67. 14 ibid., p. 170. 15 ibid., p. 155.
16 ibid., p. 81. 17 ibid., p. 189.
manner: 'le récif grondait avec une longue menace'; 'il avait dépouillé toute fatigue'; 'dans une nuit'; ['il répandait de terrifiants discours'. Adjectives frequently precede the noun in order to gain emphasis: 'cette insupportable posture'; 'une imprescriptible noblesse'; 'la persistance de favor'. Conversely those which would generally precede the noun are sometimes used after it: 'le rang premier'; 'ton souffle dernier'.

Sentences are broken up by interposing phrases which modify, contrast or pile up further detail. These phrases are often interposed between subject and verb, verb and object, verb and infinitive: 'Voici que l'esprit, dès la mort, plongé dans les ténèbres, et aveugle; s'en fuit vers les deux pierres ambiguës, à Papeari de Mooréa.' The apposition of phrases and nouns gives a poetic balance to the sentence. By continual breaking up of the phrase the writer draws out the rhythm in an oscillating movement, and slows down the pace of the novel: 'la voûte entière parut peser sur ses épaulres, etclore, ainsi qu'une paupière insupportable, le regard du ciel'.

The mood of the early part of the novel is contemplative and poetic.

The heavy rhythms, the unusual use of language, the compression and novelty of the ideas are more characteristic of poetry than of the conventional novel. The imagery has a concreteness and intensity which suggest primitive animistic concepts: 'le ventre de la terre'; 'l'eau lui mordit'; 'les vents jouaient et mordait comme des anguilles capricieuses'. Nature is personified; its threats are conceived in human terms.

In Part III the sentences are shorter and simpler, expressing disillusionment and bitterness. The language, like its theme, is more rational; the satirical tone becomes more marked:

— Hii! Samuela eut un petit rire: les Missionnaires ne pensaient point ainsi, et les Missionnaires, on devait les écouter et les croire. Des gens, comme Téfii, avaient pendant quelques lunaisons fait la sourde oreille: 'En bien!...
— Eh bien?'

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1 Leo Immémoiaux, p. 57.  2 ibid., p. 65.  3 ibid., p. 67.
4 ibid., p. 56.  5 ibid., p. 121.  6 ibid., p. 159.
7 ibid., p. 20.  8 ibid., p. 3.  9 ibid., p. 146.
10 ibid., p. 55.  11 ibid., p. 56.  12 ibid., p. 55.
13 ibid., p. 67.  14 ibid., p. 105.  15 ibid., p. 138.
The movement between direct and indirect speech conveys the dramatic points of Samuela's message in an abrupt, suggestive manner; the colloquial tone indicates the change in point of view. Samuela's language is less rhetorical and subtle than that of the narrator: "Lui non plus ne voulait rien entendre", dit simplement Samuela.1 The missionary Noté adopts a rhetorical style which is patronizing and moraletic;

— 'Terii, mesure l'abîme qui sépare ce méchant païen de toi-même, bien qu'ignorant encore; et redouble ton zèle, afin d'ètre demis bientôt, comme les autres, à professer ta foi, à dépouiller toutes les erreurs en même temps qu'à changer ton cœur.2

Contrasting points of view are marked by a change in rhythm, imagery and tone. Within this variety of dramatic styles, Paosaf alone provides a consistent link with the past.

There is then a close marriage of subject and style in Les Immémoires. Segalen's intensive study of Tahitian language patterns, corresponds with his research into Tahitian culture in general. The attitude which lies behind the novel is reflected in the language, which is an effort to escape from rational European thought into a sensuous world of rhythm, joy and sensation. The complex movement of the phrasing reflects the novelty of the theme. The hesitations, the modifications and the contrasts express the wonder of the narrator confronted with the exoticism of his subject. A certain obscurity is inevitable in conveying to the general reader a vision based on profound erudition and personal knowledge of the subject. However the reward to the reader is commensurate with his effort not simply to comprehend, but to appreciate the full flavour, the sensation of exoticism. As Segalen wrote of Rimbaud:

Ne cherchons pas à comprendre... Comprendre est le plus souvent un art, un jeu puéril... L'aveu d'une sensibilité ralentie, la teârne intellectuelle du spectateur affligé d'anesthésie artistique... Néanmoins, à défaut de légendes, d'explications, de clés, à défaut de symboles concrets et parlants, on est en droit de réclamer du peintre exposant son œuvre du de l'écrivain donnant de bon à tirer, une certaine part de joie, un surprenant, une petite angélisse douce, un œil d'énergie, une suggestion ou, plus simplement, une sensation.3

1 Les Immémoires, p. 138.
2 Ibid., p. 163.
Les Immortels awakens in the reader the sensation of the diversity of peoples and customs, and a sense of anguish or regret at the suppression of a culture which had given spontaneous expression to sensations lost or suppressed in European civilization. Through his Tahitian narrator Segalen expresses these sensations with immediacy and dramatic power.
4. NARRATIVE MOVEMENT IN TIME AND SPACE.

The opening scene of the novel introduces the major theme: the role of language in creating and preserving the oral traditions of Tahiti. The myths and legends recited by the haeré-po have played their part in creating a culture which permeates the activities and attitudes of the people. A sense of this continuity and timelessness is conveyed in the repetitive nature of the recitation — a repetition which takes place in both time and space. The words of the orators are passed on not only from altar to altar, terrace to terrace, marae to marae, but also from the sacrificer to his disciple, from generation to generation. The haeré-po are responsible for preserving the 'first' stories and gestures: the ritual is not purely intellectual, but a dramatic performance.

The idea of repetitive prayer is conveyed by stylistic devices such as the repetition of words: 'd'autel en autel'; synonyms: 'aux promeneurs-de-nuit, aux haeré-po'; and by the balanced construction of phrases and clauses in apposition. Each clause is broken up, modified and qualified. This dissection of the linear sentence is a technique designed to slow down the
thematic progression, in favour of a more contemplative consideration of associative meanings.1

The symbol of the circle introduced to describe the shore of the island is repeated in the image 'une ceinture de prières'. The image has both visual and metaphysical connotations. In his 'Journal des Iles' Segalen describes more precisely his perception of the islands as 'un immense anneau', a ring formed by the reef and the land within:

L'éternel décor: ligne blanche de corail, ligne verte de cocotiers, par-dessus; ligne bleue du lagon, puis tout à l'horizon un dernier pointillé, qui complète l'immense anneau.2

Segalen observes with an artist's eye, and with a continual sense of the world as a 'décor' for the drama of life. In Les Immémoriaux the pictorial element is refined to an abstract idea. The circle, as Georges Poulet has suggested, is a universal symbol of the infinite.3 Eternity resembles the centre of the circle; simple and indivisible, it comprehends the whole course of time, and every part of it is equally present. This symbol recurs in Segalen's work particularly with reference to Taoist and Buddhist ideas of the creative void, where it symbolizes a mystical experience during which the spirit moves outside the illusions of time and space, to become absorbed in the infinite.4 The shores of Tahiti are represented here as a magic circle, self-contained, unique, and protected from outside intervention by a ring of prayer. Within this isolated cultural entity, time is conceived in terms of the cyclical movement of days and seasons. Society is closely attuned to natural rhythms. Its identity is protected by a magic wall of the 'triple sonorité sainte — voix du récif, voix du vent, voix des prêtres'.5 The integration of man's rhetorical chanting with the sounds of nature symbolizes the harmony of man and his environment. The triple rhythm of sea, wind and sacred chant, first introduced in paragraph one, recurs only in Part I. The image of the reef suggests a barrier between Tahiti and the rest of the world.

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4 See below, p. 274.
5 Les Immémoriaux, p. 39.
Within this barrier, the sacred rites are regularly performed to conciliate the spirits of nature. Life is simple, spontaneous and joyous; its occasional ferocity is, for the poet, preferable to monotonity.

In the wild interior of the island, the lake is "immuable, silencieux et froid". To Teiti, as he meditates alone during the night, it seems "sans limites et sans fond". In the darkness the deep, cold, motionless water terrifies him, as had that of the Mara cave. The qualities of stillness, silence and darkness represent the terrors of the void. They are associated with a mystical cult of the absolute: "les longues vallées où rôdent les esprits sont dépoupillées de vivants, et muettes." The cultivation of pure metaphysics is antithetical to Tahitian joy in living. The Tahitians of Les Immémoriaux show the foreboding lake and mountains for the carefree life of the coastal plains.

Les Immémoriaux describes the manner in which the Europeans break into this magic circle of ritual and harmony. Once the charm is broken, the magic is lost; the mechanism of development and assimilation is set in motion. Two conflicting attitudes set up a dichotomy in the form of the novel. The circular form introduced at the beginning of the book, which symbolizes early Tahiti, contrasts with the linear form of intervention, progress and change. The interlude of the central voyage traces a wider circle around Tahiti, that of Polynesia. Paofai's exploration of this area symbolizes his total identification with his culture. Symbolically also, the novel closes with Paofai circling the island, hunted by those who would destroy this culture.

Circular form conveys a sense of the eternal cycle of nature: birth, death, renewal. Roger Shattuck sees this form as characteristic of modern art, providing a means to escape the limitations of logical reasoning:

Discursive logic is linear and moves from point to point. Art of the modern era, like religious meditation, is circular, and revolves around a point whose location is limitless.

In "Sur une forme nouvelle du roman", Segalen refers to the restrictive nature of the traditional intrigue, like "un long fil d'acier", which demands the tracing of cause and effect in a linear development in time. He would prefer a freer, more contemplative form of art, dissociated from the need for

1 Les Immémoriaux, p. 65. 2 ibid., p. 67. 3 ibid., p. 69.
progress in chronological order. Les Immortels seems at first glance to follow the classical structure of division into three parts, with a sense of progression from beginning to end. However in counterpoint against this progression we shall see an alternative form. This alternative represents the artistic values which the author is seeking to restore by his positive reconstruction of Tahitian cultural attitudes in Parts I and II, and a negative satirical attack on European repression in Part III.

A distinct pattern emerges from the movement of the narrative. As time progresses, there is a gradual inversion of the roles and attributes of the characters. Like certain novels by Anatole France and Henry James, described by E.M. Forster, the novel has the form of an hour-glass, its sands gradually falling from one sphere to the other. The material of the novel is controlled and shaped to fit this aesthetic pattern which gives pleasure through its sense of symmetry. The repetition and contrast of actions and events are part of this general symmetry.

The hour-glass pattern involves a sense of progress in time. At the beginning of the novel Paofa is in a position of authority; Teri is his disciple. The English missionaries, newly arrived in Tahiti, are a source of wonder and ridicule. Nature and man are integrated in an antifistic view of the world. Man lives simply and freely untrammelled by clothes and possessions. The movement from one way of life to the other is precisely contrasted and balanced. Parts I and III are the two spheres of the hour-glass. They are separated by the voyage of Paofa and Teri in Part II. This device, like the 'long sleep of Rip van Winkle', gives the hero the full impact of the transformation of time. He returns to a totally new world.

The reader derives aesthetic satisfaction from the systematic technique of reversing ideas and attitudes. 'Le Récitant' of Part I becomes 'L'Ignorant'. Those who were strangers ridiculed for their beliefs are now the masters; they ridicule Tahitian beliefs in their turn. Teri's former

1 Einstein's theory of relativity altered twentieth-century perceptions of time, which can now be seen as an aspect of space. This concept has affected the structure of the modern novel. vi. Thornton Spencer, Space, time and structure in the modern novel, New York, New York University Press, 1971; Ortega y Gasset, The dehumanization of art, New York, Doubleday, 1962 (translator not named); etc.

companion has changed his rhythmical Tahitian name Roometua te Matautu for the conventional Biblical name Samuela; now he, who was formerly a mere boat-builder, presumes to instruct Terii, a haere-po: 'Le voyageur, bien que surpris, songeait que l'homme Samuela était peu digne à se poser en maître.' The revolutionary change in Tahiti has led to a promotion of the less worthy to positions of authority. Samuela's promotion is a minor note leading up to the dénouement, the successful conclusion of Terii's ambitious scheming, when he, disgraced in former days for forgetting the sacred words, is promoted within the new order.

The chapter 'Les Baptises' counterbalances the earlier chapter 'Les Hommes au Nouveau-Parler'. Both chapters are concerned with Christian teaching; yet although in Part I the Tahitians find these ideas ridiculous, by Part III they are eagerly seeking the benefits that seem to be promised by baptism. For Pomare the greatest benefit is power: 'Et la justice de ce dieu-là, on la nommait pillage, massacre et dispersion des peuples qui le dédaignaient!'

His conversion is foreshadowed in Part I by Haamanhi's recognition of European power: 'Il les jugea néanmoins d'une puissance neuve, et capables de l'aider en la reconquête de ses biens: il résolut de les servir.' With conscious hypocrisy Terii, like Samuela, pretends to follow the new doctrine, suppressing memories of the past: 'Mais il les sentait savoureux et nobles... et resplendir en lui-même au-dessus des spectacles présents... Moments of former glory — 'visions immémoriales peut-être des temps oubliés' — contrast with the monotonous gloom of the present.

Chapter III, 'Les Hérétiques', corresponds with the festivities of Oro in Part I. Preceding references to Christianity contrast with the attitudes of Paofai and the Hamala, which represent a resurgence of traditional beliefs. Paofai's return to Tahiti in this chapter allows the repetition of the device of shock at the transformation of society. Dramatic effect is obtained by variation on this theme: like Terii Paofai is amazed, but he is not so easily swayed. Parallels with the past are again established. Paofai refers to Terii's forgetting the words at the feast of Oro. The arduous journey to the interior recalls Terii's scramble up the river-bed in 'Le Prodigie':

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1 Les Immémoriaux, p. 138.  
2 *ibid.*, p. 142.  
3 *ibid.*, p. 34.  
4 *ibid.*, p. 156.  
5 *ibid.*, p. 155.
Ainsi, durant une autre nuit, déjà, voici tant d'années, lui-même avait, même, le long d'une autre rivière, vers laquelle dont les eaux sommeillaient, une foule enthousiaste pendue aux pas.

However in the earlier scene he made the journey eagerly, by daylight, accompanied by a throng of followers. The image of water predominates in the description, promoting life and fertility: the lushness of the vegetation, the turbulent river, gushing springs, the rains which

emplissaient les troncs juteux des arbustes, pénétraient les larges feuilles grasses et les tiges gluantes, brisées au passage, laissaient couler une salive claire.

In comparison with this precise and lyrical description of nature in 'Le Prodige', the narrator in 'Les Héritiques' stresses the terror of the lonely climb in the darkness:

L'halène s'angoisse très vite, et s'écoule; les jambes vacillent; les oreilles s'inquiètent à n'entendre que le bruit des pas dans l'eau ou sur les feuilles humides; et les yeux s'effacent qui ne servent plus à rien.

Attributing feelings to particular parts of the body rather than to the intellect gives a naive directness and spontaneity to the description. The sense of fear permeates the body of Tériti-Lakoba, making him recall his panic years before, alone at night at the lakeside.

While there are references to 'Le Prodige' in 'Les Héritiques', the former chapter is structurally counterbalanced with 'La Loi Nouvelle'. Descriptions of Tino in the Mara cave contrast with the trial in Part III of the heretics in a Christian court. Papeaï compares the former stability and power of Tahiti with the instability of the present régime:

... ils avaient d'inviolables coutumes; les Tapu, qu'on n'enfreignait jamais... 'C'était la Loi, c'était la Loi! Nul n'osait, nul ne pouvait les mépriser! Maintenant, la loi est faible, les coutumes neuves sont malades qui ne peuvent arrêter ce qu'elles nomment crime, et se contentent de se mettre en colère.'

The imposition of foreign laws on to a society cannot change the longstanding customs and beliefs of the inhabitants. The destruction of the old order, together with a resentment of the new, has brought only a superficial law and order based on hypocrisy and greed. By recalling the glory of the past

Les Immémoriaux, p. 168.
2 ibid., p. 64.
3 ibid., p. 168.
4 ibid., p. 168.
Paofai establishes contrasting links once again between Parts I and III of the novel. The traditional penalty, 'La Course-au-récif', which is ironically decreed for the heretics by the Christian Tribunal, refers the reader back to the beginning of 'Le Prodigie', where Tériti escaped along the reef. At that moment he recollected the harsh punishment: 'Des haërê-po, même des sacrificateurs, avaient dû, pour des fautes moindres, courir tout le cercle de l'île...'. Paofai saved Tériti from this fate. At the end of the novel he has changed places with Tériti. Now he is being driven with Téao along the reef by the crowd, 'harcelés de gens en pirogues qui brandissaient des lances'. Appealing to Tériti for help, Paofai reminds him of the moments when he saved Tériti's life at the feast of Oro, and again at the end of Part I, when he smuggled him away from Tahiti. Remembering suggestions that Tériti is his son, he then curses the man who has betrayed father, tradition and race in his personal ambition and weakness. The spheres are now totally reversed. Tériti, now in a position of authority, is again shown at prayer as he was in paragraph one; but he indicates, by his final action, the adjustment of his black robes, that he cares more for appearances and for the symbols of authority than for Paofai and all he stands for.

The subtle pattern of cross-references, contrasts and modifications give the novel a unified structure. The rhythmical repetition and variation of words, images and themes form a counterpoint to the development of the narrative, and recall the reader continually to the earlier part of the novel. The technique suggests that progression towards a dénouement has less merit than a return to the beginning, and a deeper consideration of the values which have been sacrificed.

The sense of disillusionment at the end of the novel does not convey the author's final message. *Les Immémoriaux* is a plea for individual freedom, a celebration of diversity of culture, attitudes and ideas. The theme of the novel suggests that only by remaining true to the self can a person develop his fullest potential. The imposition of laws, which represent his individuality, leads to instability and weakness. Tériti's forgetting of the words is the first step towards renouncing his traditions. His actions symbolize the historical renunciation of their past by the Tahitian people.

1 *Les Immémoriaux*, p. 54.  
2 Ibid., loc. cit.
The writer's answer to this loss of diversity in the 'real' world is to construct in words his own private image of the world, whose fantasy is an allegorical representation of the illusionism of reality. *Les Irénories* illustrates the role of oral traditions in creating and maintaining cultural identity. It indicates, moreover, the possibility of renewing through literature the sensation of exoticism that is stifled in everyday life.
Exoticism as an aesthetic of the diverse

... Pour désigner le livre entier, et enfermer dans un titre ces deux éléments, esthétique du Divers, qui n'en forment que le sous-titre, j'ai fait choix d'un mot très courant, Exotisme, dans le dessein que son emploi, ne préjudicier de rien, accepte toutes les notions neuves dont ce livre doit le confier.

(Écho de l'Exotisme, 2 October 1918, pp. 82-83)
I. THE DEFINITION OF EXOTICISM AS "THE DIVERSE"

L'Exotisme
Comme une esthétique
du Divers

Je conviens de nommer 'Divers' tout ce qui jusqu'aujourd'hui fut appelé étranger, insolite, inattendu, surprenant, mystérieux, amoureux, surhumain, héroïque et divin même, tout ce qui est Autre; — c'est-à-dire, dans chacun de ces mots de mettre en valeur dominatrice la part du Divers essentiel que chacun de ces termes recèle.

Je garde au mot 'esthétique' le sens précis, qui est celui d'une science précise que les professionnels de la pensée lui ont imposé, et qu'il garde. C'est la science à la fois du spectacle, et de la mise en beauté du spectacle; c'est le plus merveilleux outil de connaissance. C'est la connaissance qui ne peut être et ne doit être qu'un moyen non pas de toute beauté du monde, mais de cette part de beauté que chaque esprit, qu'il le veuille ou non, détient, développe ou néglige. C'est la vision propre du monde. (Une Imago Mundi, en cet exemple: la mienne).1

This note, written shortly before Segalen's death on 21 May 1919, indicates the breadth of his concept of exoticism in the latter part of his life. In Parts II and III we shall consider the application of this concept in his fiction. The notes for his projected study of exoticism illuminate the progression of his ideas, and give a fuller understanding of the theory of exoticism which underlies his work.

The formation of a personal 'aesthetic' is characteristic of Symbolist artists at the close of the nineteenth century. A symptom of the Nietzschean tendencies of this epoch, it implies a rebellion against general principles of aesthetics and an exaltation of personal expression. Art was seen as the expression of a particular vision of life which varied according to the individual. This rebellion against recognized conventions in art and literature was inspired by contemporary social, physiological and philosophical theories.2

1 Essai sur l'Exotisme, 2 October 1918, pp. 82-83.
2 v. above, p. 60.
influenced by the ideas of a biologist, Quinton, whose observation is quoted in his notes on exoticism: 'que toutes les vérités se trouvent dans la nature, que nous y trouvons celle-là que nous possédons en nous'. Several years later Segalen returned to this theme in his notes: ... Quinton m'avait dit: "Je crois que chacun de nous n'est apte à ne dire qu'une seule chose... Et j'avais conscience de plonger dans l'innombrable pour saisir Un, — et l'exprimer.'

Segalen conceived his Essai sur l'Exotisme as the expression of his personal vision of the world. The concept of exoticism was for him a means of developing a sense of infinite diversity. This was manifested in his thirst for new sensations, new experiences, it shaped his attitude towards literature, and the cultivation of a highly idiosyncratic literary style. The awareness of difference which underlies his concept of exoticism enriches not only literature but life itself: 'en n'est point comme unique ressort d'esthétique, mais comme la Loi fondamentale de l'intensité de la Sensation, de l'exaltation du Sentir; donc de vivre.' A world which has lost faith in a life beyond death must find its sole meaning in sensation. The awakening to feeling creates existence out of the psychological 'nothingness' of torpor which lies at the root of human existence. This passion for life is necessary in order to escape from insensibility.

The choice of the term 'exoticism' involved him however, in a literary tradition which he found superficial and limited. In preferring to use this well-worn word rather than to coin a neologism, he followed in the path of Mallarmé: 'donner un sens plus pur aux mots de la tribu...'. In his essay he hoped to renew appreciation of the sensation of difference by the isolation of this quality in literature and art generally, and by a critical evaluation of its dramatic effect:

... Il eût été habile d'éviter un verbe un si dangereux, si chargé, si équivoque. En forger un autre; en détournier, en violer de mineurs. J'ai préféré tenter l'aventure, garder celui-ci qui m'a paru bon, solide encore malgré le mauvais usage, et tenter, en l'épouillant une bonne fois, de lui rendre, avec sa valeur première, toute la primauté de cette

2 ibid., 21 April 1917, pp. 75-76.
3 ibid., p. 75.
4 For a similar theory v. G. Poulet, op. cit., pp. 18 ff.
The use of the traditional term offered him the opportunity to define his work by contrast with other exotic writers. The very complexity and breadth of his idea makes it easier to define by negation, as we have observed in studying his attacks on Romantic writers:

A défaut de le définir d'emblée, et de dire ce qu'il est comme je l'entends et ai déssein de l'entendre, — je m'empresserai de dire tout ce qu'il n'est pas. Avant d'en venir au sanctuaire, il faut balayer le vestibule. Si la mesure est fastidieuse, je la tiens pour indispensable.  

The image of sweeping the terrain clean is recurrent in the Notes on Exoticism, dating from 1908: "Avant tout, déblayer le terrain. Jeter par-dessus bord tout ce que contient de misérable et de rance ce mot d'exotisme. Le dépouiller de tous ses oripeaux..." The term was widely associated with a certain type of literature which was predominantly concerned with superficial geographical differences:

L'une des manifestations les plus simples, les plus pressenties du Divers, à l'homme, est sa réalisation géographique dans les climats, les faunes et les floras. C'est en réalité la seule qui soit connue sous ce nom... Le seul connu, il introduisit des valeurs fausses...

In traditional exotic or colonial literature there is a change in background without a corresponding change in attitude: "on crut avoir assez fait en changeant de couleur, ou simplement de température..." The scenery is generally tropical: the palm or coconut tree, the camel, a hot yellow sun, the colonial in his pith helmet confronting a black-skinned 'native'. By its superficiality and its limitation to details of colonial living it tends to cheapen the concept of exoticism, according to Segalen. A logical development of the exploration of geographical space would include a consideration not only of movement across latitude and longitude, but the dimensions of height and depth ('y ajouter peut-être l'exotisme de la montagne à la mer').

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2. *ibid.*, 8 October 1917, p. 80.
4. *ibid.*, 8 October 1917, p. 81.
5. *ibid.*, loc. cit.
6. This is the type of exoticism analysed by P. Martíno and P. Jourda, *op. cit.*
notes Segalen,¹ and ultimately all possible dimensions: 'Enfin le simple
enuméré des trois dimensions en évoque au moins la quatrième, si ce n'est le
nombre "n" des dimensions possibles...² The chapter dealing with the
exoticism of geographical difference would study the sensation of diversity in
its deepest sense, including literary accounts of the cultural, religious and
aesthetic attitudes of other countries.

Les Immémoriaux is primarily a study of geographical difference. At the
time of writing this novel Segalen considered exoticism an attribute of space:
'Parallèleisme entre le recul dans le passé (Historicisme) et le Lointain dans
l'espace (Exotisme)'.³ He was concerned with presenting the relativity of
the concept of exoticism, which depends on one's situation at the time of
writing:

La relativité de la sensation d'exotisme est plus qu'avérée. Ce
n'est qu'un recul dans l'espace, un lointain aboli, une surprise
des premiers instants. Maintenant voici que... je couds
incurieusement des moeurs qui se répètent... et que maintenant
cest le retour vers la vieille Europe, qui me semble mirage...

Distance in space conveys a sense of nostalgia, curiosity and desire for that
which is inaccessible. Once the traveller arrives at the desired point,
these sensations are dulled. Losing his sense of wonder, either he sinks
into apathy or he must turn back, like Rimbaud's Bateau ivre, seeking
exoticism at the opposite pole: 'Je regrette l'Europe aux anciens'
parapets...⁴ Segalen read this inverted sense of exoticism into the work of
Gaugin and of the writer Jules Boissière, 'qui, provençal, félibre, écrit
ses plus beaux vers félibrism à Hanói.' Gauguin mourant peignait ce rose et
pale clôcher breton sous la neige⁵. The theory that attraction is
increased by distance is a commonplace. However Segalen's great contribution to
literature is his systematic analysis of the sensation of exoticism, and his

¹ Ensay sur l'Exotisme, 8 October 1917, p. 82. ² ibid., p. 81.
³ ibid., October 1904, p. 13.
⁶ Ensay sur l'Exotisme, 1911, p. 49. The latter supposition is, it seems,
incorrect: Gauguin brought the Breton painting with him to Tahiti (F. Cachin,
op. cit., p. 268).
application of this theory to literary technique: 'C'est le propre des bons artisans du Divers, que de le retourner ainsi bout pour bout.'

The technique of turning a word or an idea around, and looking at it from all possible angles, is particularly characteristic of Segalen's later fiction. Satirizing the dogmatic representation of fixed realities, he opens the text to a variety of interpretations. "Les Immortaux" represents the dynamic role of oral language in creating the traditions and the identity of a race. In China the written text is seen as a means of imposing order on the chaos of phenomenological flux and illusion. Hence it frequently takes the form of a dialectic between opposing forces: those who, holding a conventional world-view, prefer the seemingly innocent language of representation; and those who, supporting free expression, prefer a rich, suggestive language which is conscious of its own "duplicity". This "duplicity" is indicated through Segalen's idea of "allegory": his fundamental awareness that to use language is to "say other" than what one means. The interpretation of language, like all perception and interpretation, is essentially private and relative: each reader faced with the "exoticism" of the text, must discover his own meanings. This quality of "otherness" in language is accentuated in many of Segalen's works by a movement between the world of seemingly fixed realities and that of "illusion". We shall consider this double movement more closely in the following chapter. It consists of a constant interplay between the "real" and the "imaginary" world.

The "real" is already for Segalen an equivocal concept. The ideal setting to illustrate this concept is one which is "stranger than fiction", a reality which has the spectacular colour, mystery and distance of fantasy. However, the sense of mystery and distance is fast disappearing in the world of the early twentieth century. Segalen saw Magellan's voyage around the world as the first step to dispel the mystery of the unknown: "Le premier voyage autour du monde dût en être le plus désenchante... Il n'y avait plus d'Extrême Lointain!" After the discovery that the world was round, the monotony of the organized tour replaced the thrill of uncertainty. In 6 voyages through uncharted seas. Having seen the discovery of the North and

1 Essai sur l'Exotisme, 1911, p. 50.
2 v. above, pp. 65-66.
3 Essai sur l'Exotisme, 1917, p. 78.
South Poles, and the cutting of the Panama Canal, Segalen expresses regret in his notes at the steady 'dégradation de l'exotisme'.

The loss of 'geographical exotism' coincided with a loss of social and cultural diversity, as kingdoms and empires — France, Germany, Italy; Russia, China, Turkey — crumbled before the revolutionary forces of populism. Monarchies, which had been the great exemplars and defenders of tradition, a cradle of social and cultural diversity, must be sacrificed on the altars of equality:

... Où est le mystère? — Où sont les distances?

Il y en avait de considérables entre le Tsar et le moujik — le Fils du Ciel et le peuple, malgré la théorie paternelle, les Cours anciennes, et les petites Cours — d'Allemagne, — ou les villes Princières d'Italie furent de beaux outils du Divers. Le peuple souverain apporte partout avec lui les mêmes habitudes, les mêmes fonctions.

Segalen's conception of literature was expressed in social terms through an analogy with the aristocracy, who symbolized the few élite readers capable of creating their own ideas and meanings from a rich and obscure language. The middle classes in his fiction represent the superficial materialism of popular fiction; the workers are totally irrelevant — brushed aside with the mass of humanity, even despised. As exotism was for Segalen a means of getting outside the self, he rejected sentimentality and the revelling forces of humanitarianism in favour of a broader view of creation: 'Exotism represented for him a source of Nietzschean energy and vitality: Its loss meant enervation: 'La Tension exotique du Monde décroît...'. At the end of World War I, just before his death, moved by the vast scale of meaningless destruction, he briefly abandoned his scornful isolation, seeing his theory of exotism as a message of hope for all mankind:

C'est en voyant comment les valeurs diverses tendent à se confondre, à s'unifier, à se dégrader, que je connus comment tous les hommes étaient soumis à la Loi d'Exotisme. C'est par la Dégradation de l'Exotisme sur la surface de la terre, que je résolu d'y convoquer les hommes mes frères, — pour qu'ils la sentissent un peu, cette loi, que j'avais cru d'abord de seule esthétique personnelle.

1 Essai sur l'Exotisme, 21 April 1917, p. 78.
2 ibid., same date, p. 77.
3 e.g. Equipée, op. cit., Ch. XVII: 'L'Homme de Bât'.
4 Essai sur l'Exotisme, 21 April 1917, p. 76.
5 ibid., loc. cit.
This was to be a third stage in his work, he declared, which would give to his theory 'une plus grande généralité'. Unfortunately this stage was never achieved. By the end of the war he was suffering from the exhausting disease which led to his death in 1919. His literature remains highly individualistic, yet of universal significance. In the face of what he saw as the increasing entropy of the universe, it posits a renewal of sensation, and a critical awareness of the plurality of language: 'le goût à déguster le plus faible divers croît, ce qui, peut-être, compense?'

From being an exploration of geographical difference, Segalen's theory had broadened after his return from Tahiti to become a general system exploring the sensation of diversity:


The phrasing stresses the oscillation between two poles in Segalen's life and his work — the return, setting out again: the movement of the pendulum. On his return to France he discovered a new type of exoticism in the world of 'sound'. What he had seen as a theory limited to space was defined by 1908 as a general theory: "Tout ce qui est 'en dehors' de l'ensemble de nos faits de conscience actuels, quotidiens..." Exoticism was taken in a strictly etymological sense as that which is 'outside' our usual field of experience. Therefore it would apply to the worlds of music and the plastic arts, as well as to nature, space and time.

While the exoticism of space remained Segalen's chief interest at this period — 'le seul que l'on développera' — there is in his notes a growing awareness of the exoticism of the past, which proved a particularly fertile subject in China: 'Exalter le prodigieux profond passé inconnu. (Recherches dans le Temps des Âges). Whereas the future is speculative and imaginary, the past offers links with historical reality which allow the subtle play between 'truth' and fiction characteristic of Segalen's work. The monotonous present — 'mesquin et méprisable' — provides a contrast, a

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1 Essai sur l'Exotisme, 1912, p. 63.
2 ibid., 21 April 1917, p. 75.
3 ibid., 17 August 1908, p. 20.
4 ibid., 21 April 1917, p. 78.
springboard for a leap into the past, which exists only in the memory of the imagination. The movement between different periods of time is to become a feature of the novel *Le Fils du Ciel*.

By the end of 1908 Segalen had isolated various fields of study for his essay on exoticism. The introductory chapter would define the sensation of exoticism, first by purifying the term of its habitual connotations; then, 'la possédant enfin, cette notion, à l'état d'idée claire et toute vive, laissons-lui reprendre chair, et comme un germe, cette fois pur, se développer librement...' The following chapters would consist of a series of essays considering this sensation of difference and its power. Their titles as roughly drafted in December 1908 are as follows:

I. L'Individualisme
II. L'Exotisme de la Nature
III. L'Exotisme des plantes et des animaux
IV. L'Exotisme des Espèces humaines
V. A un autre degré: la Présentation directe de la matière exotique par un transfert opéré par la forme
VI. L'Impénétrabilité des Races
VII. L'Exotisme des Morales
VIII. Du perfectionnement des Voyages...
IX. L'Exotisme dans la race ('l'Exotisme extra-terrestre...')
X. L'Exotisme para-sensoriel
XI. L'Exotisme dans le Temps
XII. L'À-venir
XIII. (Conclusion:) ... l'Exotisme Essentiel.

Most of these categories of exoticism were never developed by Segalen. His notes remained rudimentary and loosely organized. The fields which are particularly relevant to his fiction are the 'Exotisme para-sensoriel', in particular the world of sound; and the world of the past. The 'Essai sur le Mystérieux', drafted in China in 1910-11, was to be presented as an aspect of exoticism 'dont il n'est qu'un cas très particulier et d'une intensité poussée à la limite'. The 'Exotisme du Divin' was another category defined later as the attribution of certain human qualities to some ideal figure. This category seemed to Segalen to lack the essential qualities of difference from man, which found expression in the term 'Inhumain: Ce qui est autre qu'un homme.' The term expresses the attitude underlying Segalen's concept of exoticism:

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2 *ibid.*, loc. cit.
3 *Imaginaires*, *op. cit.*, p. 118.
4 *Essai sur l'Exotisme*, 3 June 1916, p. 73.
5 *ibid.*, same date, p. 74.
L'inhumain: son véritable Nom est l'Autre. Ainsi il devient, non pas un dieu, mais un acte inhérent à la pensée... Ne pouvoir imaginer qu'en fonction de l'adverse.\(^1\)

By the 'inhuman', therefore, Segalen does not mean the 'cruel', which is a human attribute, but that which is not human. It represents his effort to move away from anthropomorphism towards a consideration of all phenomena. The diversity of the universe can only, he suggests, be imagined by a style of thought which plays on contradiction, negation and suggestion, awakening the mind to the limitations of conventional attitudes. Segalen saw this 'free play' of thoughts and ideas as a characteristic of the Hindu way of thought, particularly as manifested in Buddhism: "Ce mode de jeu de la pensée n'est autre que le monde libre jusqu'à l'infini, de la pensée hindou.\(^2\)

Asian philosophy was for him not so much a system of beliefs as a means of escaping from dogma and Western rationalism. In a letter to Claudel in 1915 he observed that Buddhist philosophy had confirmed his individualistic ideas: "J'en ai gardé surtout un jeu de pensée entièrement étranger au concept d'un dieu personnel... et le refus d'une rédemption possible par un autre que par soi.\(^3\)

In his notes for a projected novel, L'imitation du Bouddha, he quotes a line from a Burmese writer, Maung Nee: "le Bouddhisme est une méthode, rien qu'une méthode.\(^4\)" This method consists of a contemplative attitude which is intuitive and integrative rather than analytical. The Zen Buddhist identification with the world is described by Dr D.T. Suzuki in the following terms:

The Zen approach is to enter right into the object itself and see it, as it were, from the inside. When this is done, the flower speaks to me and I know all its secrets, all its joys, all its sufferings; that is, all its life vibrating within itself. Not only that: along with my knowledge of the flower I know all the secrets of the universe, which includes all the secrets of my own Self, which has been eluding my pursuit all my life so far, because I divided myself into a duality, the pursuer and the pursued, the object and the shadow.\(^5\)

This technique encourages detachment from the self in order to contemplate an object in its fullness. The state of meditation heightens the powers of

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\(^1\) "Essai sur l'Exotisme", 3 June 1916, p. 74.
\(^2\) "Ibid.", 11 December 1908, p. 22.
\(^4\) Unpublished notes.
creative energy by release of tension and by concentration on a given object. Through this method of detached contemplation the Buddhist is aware of distinctive qualities of the object; he simultaneously becomes aware of his own identity, apart from this object. In adapting this method to his study of exoticism, Segalen first undertook a thorough study of the object in order to become familiar with its history or particular qualities. Having thoroughly assimilated this material he was more able to empathize with the other, while retaining the sense of his own identity:

Ne peuvent sentir la DIFFÉRENCE que ceux qui possèdent une individualité forte... Que ceux-là goûteront pleinement l'admirable sensation, qui sentiront ce qu'ils sont et ce qu'ils ne sont pas.1

Setting out from a distinct point of view, 'un point de départ individuel', the writer explores the unique qualities of the other, thus paradoxically discovering the essential self through empathy with the other:

Enfin, la Notion choisie, le mode de voir le monde autour de soi, l'attitude du sujet pour l'objet ayant doucement englobé toute pensée, l'être conscient (par le mécanisme hindou) se trouve face à face avec lui-même. (Après l'Exotisme universel nous en voici à l'Exotisme Essentiel. Je procède donc nettement de la pensée de J. de Gaultier.)2

The essay on exoticism would culminate in a chapter on this 'Exotisme Essentiel'. This idea was developed three years later, in a passage comparing the philosophical concept to a mountain peak. The writer warns his reader of the preparations necessary to reach these rarefied heights: 'Il y a l'essoufflement inopiné, la crampe irresponsable, d'autres appels, le manque de préparation musculaire... '

The imagery of physical exertion, which bears some resemblance to Yogic discipline, refers to the ascent into the abstract world of metaphysics. The moment of self-awareness which Segalen describes is a mystical experience similar to that experienced by the dying priest, Tupua in Les Immortels: 'Dans le principe-Rien-Excepté: l'image du Soi-même.'3 There is no objective reality outside one's own perception.

The priest has proceeded beyond the contemplation of the world to a vision of the self, which is yet perceived as other than the self. Segalen points out the analogy of Buddhist ideas with Gaultier's law of Bovarysme: 'le pouvoir dévarli à l'homme de se percevoir autre qu'il n'est', which Jules de Gaultier

2 ibid., same date, p. 29.
3 See above, pp. 87-88.
saw as a law of human existence, 'un élément nécessaire ou fatal de l'activité humaine en son fond essentiel'. However Segalen prefers to linger in the fields of human illusion rather than to remain on the peaks of metaphysical detachment:

Terminer ce chapitre en opposant un peu ironiquement à ces considérations philosophiques dépourvues d'exotisme la loi du Bovarysme essentiel qui sera peut-être la seule citation du livre... Et il se réjouit dans la diversité... 2

The state of 'Connaissance' is seen by Segalen as 'nihiliste', 'destructeur'; it is generally associated in his work with icy coldness. This state of perfect equilibrium is presented as a reconciliation of opposites, the 'Blanc et noir, Noir et blanc' suggesting the interplay of complementary forces, the Yin and the Yang of Taoist philosophy. There is no possibility of exoticism, Segalen observes, unless one takes up a specific standpoint, which involves a contrast with some opposite pole: 'alors, le sujet épouse et se confond pour un temps avec l'une des parties de l'objet, et le Divers éclate entre lui et l'autre partie.' 3 Thus he rejects the final stage of mystical 'Illumination' described by Dr Suzuki, in favour of the dynamic duality of the 'pursuer and the pursued, the object and the shadow...', the eternal human quest for meaning and integration. As he wrote in the Œuvre 'Nom Caché',

Mais fondent les eaux dures, déborde la vie, vienne le torrent dévastateur plutôt que la Connaissance!

The flood of life and vitality is associated here with destruction in a paradoxical play on opposites characteristic of Segalen. Language must be destructive in order to create new meanings. In many of his stories and novels, therefore, the quest for the 'exotic' is associated with a fierce satire on conventional prose. In his 'Notes on Exoticism' he describes the stylistic device of antinomy as an arresting means of demonstrating the conflict which is essential to his concept of exoticism:

1 Le Bouvy-Sama, Paris, Mercure de France, 1902, pp. 27-38.
2 Essai sur l'Exotisme, 21 October 1911, p. 60.
3 ibid., same date, p. 59.
Verbalement, à en croire les mots, quelle exacerbation d'exotisme dans les antinomies. Des notions qui non seulement diffèrent, mais s'opposent directement entre elles! Si la saveur croît en fonction de la différence, quoi de plus savoureux que l'opposition des irréductibles, le choc des contrastes éternels?

This play on contradiction is a means of setting up a creative dialectic in the text. An idea provokes its opposite, a character arouses his antagonist as a word stimulates the reader. Continual movement between opposite poles is a source of vitality and awareness. In Mefutique Segalen reveals that this dualism is an intrinsic part of his poetic method:

**MAEFUTIQUE**

Croire en soi. Se nourrir de sa substance, après, d'abord, avoir dépéché le monde, différent de soi.
Dans le silence, enfin perçu comme un Chant, s'offrir, se dédier à cela, différent de soi, qui veut naître.
Avant l'œuvre, sentir le Germe. Suspender la respiration jusqu'à l'étouffement, et l'angoisse et l'extase — aux premiers mouvements qu'il a.
Faire son plan: construire le Palais factice, prêt à crever cadres et, murs si le Germe s'y trouve mal à son aise.
Ne pas trop 'penser': la pensée: anecdote de l'esprit. Mais, le dos rond, ramassé, hérissé, farouche,
Bondir sur le Germe, dès qu'il est né, le secouer et l'éterrer, le serrer et l'écrouir pour connaître s'il est, ou non, digne de la densité des Mots.

Alors écrire à l'aventure, mais avec un jeu mécanique, un papier habituel: plume d'aigle longue et dure. Bâmer avec force les t.
Dessiner ses majuscules — Ecrire bien lisiblement,
Faire son devoir.

Mefutique is a proud statement of independence. The poem which develops within the unconscious self germinates in confrontation with the outside world. The sense of difference is felt intuitively rather than perceived intellectually. In order to be fully aware of this sensation, mental activity is quietened, the mind emptied of thought. Mefutique has a mystical tone reminiscent of Zen Buddhism. This is particularly notable in the reference to silence perceived as a song, and in the emphasis on breathing

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1 **E**ssai sur **L'**Exotisme, 21 October 1911, p. 59.
2 Ms, written 1 June 1916: Bouillier, Annexe II, p. 396.
techniques, which are the first steps towards 'l'extase', Illumination. The poet uses these steps as a means of concentration. The initial period of meditation is followed by disciplined craftsmanship. Art is seen as a 'duty' of the highest order, which demands enthusiastic dedication suggested by a vocabulary indicating physical energy: farouche, bondir, secouer, étirer, serrer, écrouir: imagery suggestive of the virility of Claudelian language. (Segalen notes elsewhere: 'La puissance et la nouveauté des images musculaires dans Claudel. La nouvelle élosion du sens musculaire'.)

In creating works which are diverse, different from the self, the writer's spirit is felt in the work although his personal sentiment may be suppressed. The distinctive quality pervading Segalen's work, a 'feeding on one's own substance', is encouraged by following a clear formula and a regular routine in writing. While creativity depends on spontaneous inspiration, Segalen writes with self-critical awareness and energy, taking pride in the tools of his trade. The choice of an eagle's feather as quill indicates the pride of the artist, and a sense of the traditions of writing. The same imperative pride is to be seen in the forceful crossing of the 't', the desire to write legibly, the stressing of the capital letter.

Méticuleux is written in reply to Pierre Louys' Poétique, which begins 'Croire en la Muse'. In opposition to this subservience to an abstract mythological figure, Segalen posits the human powers of the writer: 'Croire en soi'. The initial inspiration comes not from the Muse, but from the inner self, in its reaction to stimuli. Its artistic expression is not the passive reception of a gift of 'grâce', as Pierre Louys suggests, but depends on the creative energy and discipline of the artisan. Whereas Louys suggests that a prearranged plan destroys the spontaneity of expression, Segalen sees the plan or the form, of the work as an essential part of the subject. This sense of craftsmanship distinguishes Segalen's view of the creative process, as it distinguishes his novels. In our study of his later fiction we shall observe the interplay of form and idea: the construction of a 'Palais factice' by an intensely self-critical artist.

1 Essai sur l'Exotisme, 21 October 1911 (sub-note), p. 60.
2. THE DIVERSE MANIFESTATIONS OF THE CREATIVE SELF

Dans le silence, enfin perçu comme un Chant, s'offrir, se dédier à cela, différent de soi, qui veut naître...

The quest for exoticism took a variety of forms in Segalen's fiction. From the exploration of that which is other than the self, it evolved towards an awareness of multiplicity and mystery within the self. Segalen deplored any tendency to reduce the sense of otherness in exotic literature by remaining locked within the self. The exotic writer who holds rigidly to a certain world-view is incapable of appreciating the potentiality of his subject. However, after writing Les Inconnus, he acknowledged that any literary attitude is essentially subjective. Objectivity is a question of form, and more particularly, we have noted, of perspective. By immersing himself in the consideration of another point of view, the writer becomes aware of the difference between the self and the other: "... le Divers éclate entre lui et l'autre partie." Segalen became progressively more concerned with what he called the 'essential exoticism', the exploration of unknown facets of the inner self. In 1913 he admitted in a letter to Henry Manceron the broadening of his theory of exoticism:

... je ne peux que te donner raison, quand tu vois, dans Étrico, un démenti spontané à l'attitude d'exotisme littéraire que je t'exposais autrefois; — non pas démenti: éclatement de la formule. C'est seulement de m'exprimer que j'ai tenté là-dedans. Je dois dire que l'exotisme m'a beaucoup facilité la tâche: en me permettant — non pas des 'sujets', je les tiens en défiance, — mais une forme, des cadres, des décors nouveaux...

Here Segalen abandons the illusion that he is revealing 'ce que ces choses et ces gens pensaient en eux-mêmes et d'eux'. There is a growing self-consciousness in his fiction, leading him to express 'exotic' ideas and

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1 Maloutique, op. cit., p. 396.
3 v. above, p. 121.
4 Letter to Henry Manceron, 3 February 1913, Essai sur l'Exotisme, p. 64.
5 ibid., 9 June 1908, p. 18.
attitudes as a facet of his own creative vision: "se limiter à la Chine, se suspendre à la Chine même puissante et infatigable serait une déchéance et une lâche limitation."\(^1\) China, Tahiti, racial and geographical diversities are incidental to his theory of exoticism, which has now a more universal application.

The difference from Romantic subjectivity remains in attitude and presentation. The emotion expressed in Stélas is depersonalized by the form. The author's feelings in his fiction are filtered through specific viewpoints, clearly differentiated, and subordinated to artistic considerations. Where Guy de Maupassant presents the writer's task as a faithful reproduction of his own illusion of reality, Segalen like many modern writers sees literature as the creation of illusion through the autonomous medium of language.

The writer discovers meanings in the process of writing his novel. Many novelists have observed that their characters once created take on a life of their own. They have their own inwrought logic, as Miguel de Unamuno's character warns his creator in the novel Niebla, and their own reality. Although in creating them the author is unconsciously expressing something of himself, his literary creation is governed by the rules of his craft. Inspired by various factors outside the conscious mind, this creation may, however, reveal to the author new aspects of his own personality. "Je suis un autre," declared Rimbaud, while in his attack Centre Sainte-Feuillée Proust observed the distinction between the conscious self and the 'moi intérieur'. The idea has been developed by Charles Mauron: "... pour le moi conscient, qui donne à l'œuvre littéraire sa forme verbale; l'inconscient franchement nocturne est "un autre".\(^2\)

In an essay on 'Le Philosophe dans la Vie' Segalen suggests that other aspects of the self, discovered 'sous la poussée d'une émotion intérieure', may serve as a guide or 'Directrice', provoking 'de nouvelles éclissions', and reorienting his life.\(^3\) The idea lies at the basis of his individualistic philosophy:

--- Il est fou; ou bien, d'une sagesse plus dangereuse que la folie, de vouloir s'appuyer, chercher un réconfort, sur quelque chose d'autre que soi. Mais ceci, qui pourtant est lié de soi...

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\(^1\) Letter to Henry Manceron, 3 February 1913, Essai sur l'Exotisme, p. 65.
Aspects of the unconscious self, revealed to the writer through his work, may transform his life. Writing was thus for Segalen a means of creating the self. It was closely related to his personal life. In an autobiographical note written in 1909, 'Moi et Moi', he reveals an almost obsessive desire to establish his own identity: 'combien de fois n'ai-je pas retourné cet: et qui suis-je... quoi suis-je? Qui est-ce qui est moi, et pas un autre...'. Segalen reveals here his fundamental concern with language, which he saw as a means of creating and shaping identity. His quest for the other had as its ultimate purpose the discovery of the essential exoticism of the self, which is always perceived as 'other' through the deforming processes of language, thought and perception. The constant duality between the self and the other, which is for Segalen a source of dynamic dramatic contrast, is pinpointed in the symbol of the double. Through this literary device he suggests the identification of the self with a mirror image which has disquieting similarities, and yet a mysterious quality of difference from the self. It is, therefore, an image representing the exoticism of the essential self.

In studying this symbolism in Segalen's fiction it is illuminating to consider the pioneering studies on the double in literature and myth carried out in the early twentieth century by Otto Rank. We are particularly concerned at this point with one aspect of the phenomenon, that of 'duality', where a single object is seen as double, although the opposite aspect — two objects seen as one — is also found in Segalen's work. According to Rank and Freud, the theme of the double has far-reaching implications, revealing a duality within the conscious self: the ego is not a fixed identity, but is constantly changing. As various elements of the personality emerge from the unconscious self to take the centre of the stage, a critical element stands...
aside to watch and to judge the actions of the other, the primitive narcissistic element of the self. The ego is thus constantly divided into subject and object. Applying this theory of 'Narcissism' to the literary phenomenon of the double, Rank saw the latter as a means of representing the human desire for immortality through a symbolic division of the self into body and soul. The writer, according to Rank, dramatizes the conflicting aspects of the self by presenting them as separate entities: either as a physical and a spiritual self — a man and his double — or two different characters. In his study of *The Don Juan Legend*, he suggests that Don Juan and Leporello together constitute a complete, understandable, and unified character — as for example Tasso and Antonio in Goethe, or Shakespeare's Othello, who can be so naive and credulous because his jealousy is split off in the figure of Iago. By splitting off the self-critical aspects of the personality, the author achieves a more dramatic character-portrayal which concentrates on a dominant emotion or behaviour pattern. The hero's 'ego-ideal' is represented by a secondary character, in Don Juan's case Leporello, who often acts as double for his master, criticizes and identifies with him. Without scruples and guilts Don Juan represents, according to Rank, deep-lying primordial instincts. The double may thus be a means of expressing forbidden urges and repressed desires. Through his character the author gives expression to narcissistic impulses more openly manifested in childhood (a stage vitally concerned with the survival of the individual).

For Segalen the double becomes a technical means of exploring different levels of reality and illusion. Like Freud and Rank, Segalen was interested not merely in the psychological implications of the phenomenon — its roots deep in the human psyche — but in its effect: the uncanny sensation aroused in the spectator or reader through the experience of seeing 'double'. Primarily, however, Segalen's interest lay in the analogy with writing as a means of 'doubling'. Through language the writer creates an idea of an object or a person which develops its own reality.


Segalen's critical interest in the double in literature centred around the sensation of 'exoticism' aroused by the confrontation between the self and its strange-mirror image. In his notes for the 'Essai sur le Mysterieux' there are references to the double in stories by Hoffmann, Edgar Allan Poe, Robert Louis Stevenson, Rudyard Kipling, Oscar Wilde, H.G. Wells and Farrère, all of whom were fascinated at some stage with the idea. In particular he noted the technical skill of Dostoëvsky's La Double, an intensely evocative portrayal of psychological neurosis:

Un chef d'oeuvre de roman exotique comme je l'entends — admirablement, et d'un bout à l'autre, pensée en fou.

Maupassant's short story 'Le Horla', which is based on medical data, was of special interest to him in his thesis. He also planned at one stage to take up the theme of Alfred de Musset's La Nuit de Décembre.

In his own fiction, the double is frequently used to establish an analogy with the dichotomy between the everyday world of human experience and the more mysterious world of the imagination which takes form in writing. Following Rank's analysis of the literary phenomenon, we might define Segalen's technique as a means of splitting off the physical from the 'ideal' self. There is in his fiction a constant duality between the real and the imaginary. The 'real', physical elements are associated with the earth, lowliness, the 'common people', animal behaviour. The representation of this physical reality is an analogon for traditional popular literature. The imaginary is associated with spirituality, subtle reflections of moving water and light, loftiness, nobility; the presentation of these qualities is an analogon for writing as an art. The phenomenon of the 'Doppelgänger' which appears in Segalen's writings is a means of conveying this abstract aspect of the self, which corresponds with the literary reality.

In Équipée he describes a personal experience which lies behind the concept in his later work. At the farthest point of his second expedition across China in 1914, an apparition of himself as a youth floated before him.

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1 Unpublished letter to Henry Manceron, 29 March 1912.
2 Segalen 'observes' of this story: 'tout cela est vrai, effrayamment vrai'. Les Cliniciens de-Lettres, op. cit., p. 52.
3 Lettres de Chine, op. cit., p. 212.
'Un pan sinueux et fantôme de ma jeunesse..." It seemed to Segalen paradoxical that he should come to this spot, 'le plus reculé du monde', in order to have a vision of his own youth. His account illuminates various references to similar experiences in his fiction, which although associated with a particular mental phenomenon are left open to a multiplicity of interpretations on the levels of psychology, spiritualism or literary allusion. As well as suggesting different layers of meaning, they provide a technical means of playing with various levels of time and reality.

The double which appears in Equipe, with his fresh enthusiasm and hope, represents the dynamic power of the imagination: "prêt à tout, prêt à d'autres lieues, [sic] prêt à habiter d'autres possibles..." The self present in flesh and blood, represents the reality, the writer seeking escape from the bonds of time and space into, in this case, memories of the past: 'l'inséparable charmé de tous les espoirs devinés à cette heure où que la dure réalisation étouffe un à un...'

In the fragment 'Moi et Moi', Segalen meditates on a similar moment of his youth, as he looks through old diaries and photographs. From these fragments emerges the impression of an Other, different from the present self, with an attraction 'qui est faite évidemment d'impossible retour...'. This past self, 'L'ami d'un soir,... qui me ressemblait comme un frère...', is closely related in age and in attitude with the double in Equipe. He has the exoticism of that which is distant, stirring troubled memories, yet without the stultifying quality of a photograph, which reduces the self to a fixed image: '... débroques... carton pâte.... Mais le passé que j'imagine... quelle singulière autre allure...'. Segalen is tempted by the idea of shaping his past in a new image.

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1 Equipe, op. cit., p. 213. Although the Freudian implications of the phenomenon need not concern us here, this text taken together with the autobiographical account in 'Moi et Moi', which describes 'une grande cassure dans ma vie...', suggests an emotional trauma underlying this regression to childhood. The affair mentioned above (p. 3) may well be the moment which changed the author's life and which underlies indications of mental conflict apparent in his literary work.

2 Equipe, op. cit., p. 216.

3 ibid., p. 214.

4 Imaginaires, op. cit., p. 90.

5 ibid., p. 85.

6 ibid., p. 88.
Out of this dream of the past comes the inspiration for a short story contrasting the idealistic dreams of the younger self with the disillusionment of the older man. The two would remain separate identities, according to Segalen's plan, unable to communicate. The older man seeks in vain to warn the younger about the mistakes he has made — in particular about a woman who has ruined his life. The idea plays on the distance between the two selves in time, space and attitude: "Pourquoi de si loin, et surtout, pourquoi si loin?" Segalen is primarily interested in the literary presentation of the feelings aroused by the apparition. His notes indicate his preoccupation with aesthetics:

"Il me faut absolument essayer de ce Mystérieux verbal: je 'me' dis à moi-même... 'me' étant toute la personnification du passé.
Etrange, mais belle tentative. Pas d'hstoriq de paramnésies, et surtout, pas d'hystérie, de dédoublement ou d'hallucination! De l'intensité d'évocation, voilà tout."

The novelist is concerned with the verbal process of creativity, rather than with the evocation of magical powers or psychological phenomena. His interest lies in questions of technique: on the one hand a critical study of the manner in which the sensation of strangeness or 'exoticism' is created and maintained in literature; on the other, an attempt to develop the power of that sensation. In the following chapters we shall consider specific examples of exoticism arising from the movement between the self and the other, the 'real' and the 'imaginary', the physical and the spiritual. The clinical depiction of abnormal psychological states suggesting mental instability, psychic powers or hallucination becomes a means of conveying an illusion of probability to the literary device. In conveying the sensation of mental derangement, Segalen reveals his broad knowledge of abnormal mental conditions such as neurosis, hypnosis and experimentation with drugs. Frequently we find the annihilation of the physical form of the character —

4. Segalen was not only interested in parapsychology (v. below, p. 144) but in the effect of drugs such as opium, which he discussed briefly in his thesis. From his student days he planned an "Essai sur l'Opium", studying the effects of the drug; and he experimented with it himself in China. However, unlike Henri Michaux, he avoided the debilitating effects of addiction, using it only to 'create an atmosphere'. v. "Lettres de Chine", pp. 138, 168, 190, 226 and 263 (note).
often the heroine — in order to achieve the integration of the male and female principles, the self and the other (Siddhartha, Orphée-Roi, René Léves).

The sense of duality introduced within a character is reflected in the total structure of a work through patterns of repetition and reflection, and imagery such as the echo, the bell or gong, the mirror, the shadow. We shall consider these details more closely within certain works of fiction. Above all, Segalen creates a sense of duality by his play with language. As he wrote to Henry Manceron of Stèles, ... j’ai tenté que tout soit double et retentisse profondément. 1 The word in Segalen’s work does not represent an object, but suggests a multiplicity of meanings. In this plurality lies the sense of distance from the subject, the mystery which is the particular quality of exoticism.

The continual movement between the self and the other is reflected in Segalen’s choice of perspective for his literary work. His fiction tends to fall into two distinct patterns which reveal his mental habit of considering both sides of the question. Discussing the problem of authorial intervention in the narrative in a letter to Henry Manceron, he suggests:

Ou bien, qu’elle prenne son parti: qu’il rédige, sous son nom! Mémoires, Lettres (quoi que le roman par lettres soit souvent bien embêtant). Ou bien qu’il remplisse une fonction déterminée (mon annaliste du Fils du Ciel, personnage imaginaire sans doute, mais moins absurde que mon intrusion à moi, là-dedans!). 2

His work shows an oscillation between these opposing attitudes: the ‘objective’ stance of an ‘exotic’ narrator, or narration in the first person, which conveys the illusion of autobiography. In his letter to Henry Manceron he sees this duality as a desire for diversity in literary form:

... Tu sais, dès autrefois, mes efforts à ne pas me répéter: des immémoriaux objectifs ou se disant tels, j’ai sauté au Maître du cœur dont le premier mot est ‘Je’. Mais je crois ici les étapes plus marquées... 3

His experience in China inspired works outside the conventional literary genres, such as Peintures, Équipée, ‘Un Grand Fleuve’. Those which could broadly be categorized as novels (Le Fils du Ciel, René Léves), or prose poetry (Stèles, Ode, Thibé) are very different in form. Yet within his fiction, generally, there is a constant alternation between one pole and its contrary — a reversal of perspective in order to consider the other side of the picture.

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1 Unpublished letter to Henry Manceron, quoted by Bouillief, p. 178.
Thus, having written Les Immémoriaux from a 'Tahitian' point of view, Segalen planned to write a sequel, Le Maître du Jour, from 'his own' point of view. It was to take the form of a diary describing his efforts to document a study of Gauguin's work in Tahiti and the Marquises. The two novels set in China, Le Fils du Ciel and René Leys, are marked by a similar movement from the 'exotic' narrator to the autocritical narrator 'Segalen'. His fiction is moreover left increasingly open to the reader's interpretation through a play with diverse perspectives. There is also an alternation in his work between drama and novel. Siddhartha, a lyrical drama about the life of the Buddha drafted on his return from Tahiti, was eventually put aside in favour of L'Imitation du Bouddha, a projected novel planned in the first person, presenting the problems and limitations of Buddhism. Similarly the short story 'La Tête' indicates a movement between satire and fantasy, illusion and autocriticism. Orphée-Roi, a lyrical drama written at the instigation of Debussy, develops out of a segment of the short story 'Dans un Monde Sonore', which is set, like 'La Tête', in the equivocal milieu of superficial Parisian society. Thus the writer alternates constantly between one point of view and its opposite aspect, between the autocritical writer trying to write his novel and the Other, the exotic hero. However a growing preference for first-person narration in the novel is expressed in notes on the manuscript of L'Imitation du Bouddha:

... Sous la forme 'Je'. Celle qui se dessine de mieux en mieux dans 'Maître du Jour... 'Le je' m'est familier. C'est le verbe partant de Sol... — C'est le Sol se conjuguant au début du verbe.

Et c'est par l'intermédiaire du 'Je' que se présenteront les noms, les autres personnes... 1

The autocritical 'Je' who seems to be relating the author's problems in writing the novel must be distinguished from the other characters who also speak in the first person in their own right. The court annalist, the Emperor and the Empress-Dowager in Le Fils du Ciel present conflicting points of view which, however, convey the illusion of 'exotic' narration. Through presenting their viewpoints directly the author gains dramatic interest and immediacy as well as the irony arising from the presentation without comment of a limited perspective.

The autocritical 'Je', on the other hand, deliberately breaks the illusion of the story, calling attention to the artificiality of art. In René Levy he is at one point given the author's name, 'Segalen'. In general a rapport with the author is suggested not only by the use of the first person pronoun but by autobiographical details, or by the attitude taken towards certain ideas. The device establishes a link between the worlds of fiction and reality. Nathalie Sarraute remarks in L'Ére du Souçon:

Le récit à la première personne satisfait la curiosité légitime du lecteur et apaise le scrupule non moins légitime de l'auteur. En outre, il possède au moins une apparence d'expérience vécue, d'authenticité, qui tient le lecteur en respect et apaise sa méfiance.

Sarraute sees the technique as a more authentic play with illusion, by means of which the author openly admits his subjectivity: 'l'auteur en toute honnêteté parle de soi'.

This question of 'authenticity' lies behind a general antipathy in modern French literature towards an omniscient viewpoint. Segalen also sees the question as a matter of the relationship between author and reader. In his notes for L'Imitation du Bouddha he observes that first person narration gives 'le plus beau contact' with the reader, avoiding the condescending tone of the Olympian perspective, and admitting the arbitrary nature of the illusion. The particular value of the 'autobiographical je' for Segalen lies in the play between truth and fantasy. Since he seems to be telling us a real-life story, the boundaries between fact and fiction become blurred, giving a sense of the illusory quality of life. In a letter written to his wife during his first voyage to China, he comments on the technique of H.G. Wells:

... Je note ceci: que Wells est en progrès d'écrivain, ou plutôt que sa touche de conteur est plus souple, plus légère. Ce qui m'a intéressé, ça a été de surprendre dans chacun de ses contes le passage du plan de la vie commune au plan de la vie merveilleuse; le passage du fait divers au miracle. Note bien, que dans un monde où tout serait prodigieux, plus rien ne serait prodigieux. Il faut, pour avoir la sensation de prodige, un à-coup, un transfert du mode de vie quotidienne au fait inattendu...

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1 L'Ére du Souçon, op. cit., p. 85.
2 Ibid., p. 86.
"Je suppose que le livre existe. Je vais
le lire. Peut-être qu'il est fait.
Par qui il fut fait, pour qui enfin, il a été fait. Le livre, l'auteur, le lecteur.

I. Le Livre
II. Le Livre à l'Auteur
III. Le Livre à la Lecture
The sudden awareness of difference which arises from the juxtaposition of opposites conveys a sensation of the 'Mysterious', which Segalen distinguishes from the state of 'Mystery': 'Le moment Mystérieux bien loin d'être le Mystère, est donc tué par le plein Mystère' (Il n'y a pas de Mystère dans un monde homogène)\textsuperscript{1} The sensation of the mysterious, like exoticism, arises from a sense of wonder at the play of unknown forces. The consistent presentation of a certain phenomenon encourages the reader to accept the illusion without question. In order to awaken his interest and therefore his participation, the writer moves from one plane to another:

Mais le Moment Mystérieux existe partout où il y a conflit de deux mondes différents, donc partout où il y a sensation d'Exotisme dont il n'est qu'un cas très particulier et d'une intensité poussée à la limite.\textsuperscript{2}

There are affinities between Segalen's technique of opposing two conflicting worlds and Todorov's theory of the fantastic. The latter gives as the first condition of the fantastic that the world of the text must be 'un monde de personnes vivantes'. The reader must, moreover, be invited to 'hésiter entre une explication naturelle et une explication surnaturelle des événements évoqués'.\textsuperscript{3} The fleeting sense of the fantastic depends on this hesitation before various possibilities, which may be felt by a character within the story as well as by the reader. We shall observe this quality of hesitation within the text particularly in \textit{Rêve Leys}. The third condition of the fantastic given by Todorov refers to the reader's attitude: he must retain a sense of uncertainty, accepting the possibility of the fantasy. A similar play with ideas intrigues Segalen, and lends his later fiction an equivocal, almost schizophrenic quality of turning the world upside down.

Like Todorov he seeks a basis in the ordinary world as the departure-point for fantasy. He sees the sensation of the Mystérieux in the uncertainty felt by the reader: 'Parfois, entrevisions d'autres mondes. Leur existence? Nous l'ignorons: Mais ce qui est certain, vivant, puissant: la sensation du Mystérieux.'\textsuperscript{4} This sensation can be aroused by various means: 'Ignorance — crédulité — ironie — peur — imagination'.\textsuperscript{5} It thus refers to a specific

\textsuperscript{1} \textit{Essai sur le Mystérieux}, op. cit., p. 118.
\textsuperscript{2} ibid., loc. cit.
\textsuperscript{4} \textit{Essai sur le Mystérieux}, p. 125.
\textsuperscript{5} ibid., p. 130.
type of 'exoticism': the strange world of hallucinations, fears and fantasies.

Again like Todorov, Segalen defines 'deux sortes de Mystérieux: celui qui est Mystérieux pour les Personnages, et celui qui est Mystérieux pour le spectateur seul.' In stories such as René Laye and 'Dans un Monde Songre', the narrator shares with the reader uncertainty about the story which is unfolding. In 'La Tête' the reader is uncertain about the nature of the narrator's experience: he is perhaps suffering from a hallucination, and is like Gide's narrators blind to 'reality'. Yet this hallucination has the power to transform reality. Likewise in 'Le Siège de l'Ame', the reader may hesitate before various interpretations of the text, but is persuaded by the dramatic force of the narrative to accept the narrator's interpretation.

The abrupt movement from the everyday world to the strange and mysterious conveys a sense that reality is not as solid as it seems, and that life itself is an illusion. Todorov claims that the idea of the fantastic depends on the nineteenth-century positivist concept of reality; however Segalen's idea of the Mysterious does not posit the existence of exterior reality. Rather, it seeks to question that sense of reality by the metamorphosis of the real into the imaginary, the self into the Other. Both worlds play their role in a fiction which is not, theoretically at least, seeking to devalue the one in favour of the other, but is concerned with the point of their dramatic encounter. This point, the moment which arouses the sensation of surprise and wonder at an unknown world, is the space within which Segalen works, and which we shall now proceed to consider more closely. By technical skill and craftsmanship he seeks to evoke a sense of that which is 'étranger, inattendu, surprenant, mystérieux...', all that is Other, with the magic appeal of the 'exotic'.

1 Essai sur le Mystérieux, op. cit., p. 122.
2 v. above, p. 114.
3. GAUGUIN, CREATOR OF AN EXOTIC WORLD

Le Maître du Jouir

Having completed his 'objective' consideration of a Tahitian attitude towards life, Segalen turned to a more subjective aspect of the subject, presented through the life of Gauguin in Polynesia. The idea was deeply bound up with his own creative experience of Tahiti. He wrote to Jules de Gaufier:

Je reprends la société tahitienne au point où la laissent les dernières pages des Immémoriaux, dans un état de désagrégation religieuse et morale complète; mais je les reprends cent ans plus tard, de nos jours, et je tente d'y superposer la silhouette d'un de nos contemporains blancs, qui, en guise de codes, de dogmes et de moralités, s'efforcera de leur apporter ce qu'ils ont perdu: la vie joyeuse et nue. Cet homme, le peintre Gauguin, mort aux Marquises, en a enquisé, par certains côtés de sa vie, la silhouette. En tout cas, il a rêvé sans doute d'être cet homme. Il s'agit de réimaginer son rêve.²

There is a characteristic reversal of perspective: from Tahitian to European, from past to present, from an attitude of despair to one of hope. The need to oppose one aspect of a subject to another is an essential feature of Segalen's concept of the relativity of truth, and his delight in the opposition of ideas. He reveals in this letter that he is not concerned so much with a realistic portrait of Gauguin as with 'certain aspects' of his life, or with a certain dream which he may have had. The novel was to be concerned with recreating this dream, which Segalen has read into his notebooks, his paintings, carvings and other art as well as his life. It was an imaginative interpretation of the latter part of Gauguin's life, which remained one of his favourite projects: "mes livres choisis..."³ In the letter to Henry Manceron, which described the joys he had known in Tahiti he remarked:

¹ Le Maître du Jouir, unpublished manuscript, Part II, p. 24. The quotations are taken from the 3rd manuscript.
² Unpublished letter of 18 October 1907, quoted by Bouillier, p. 106.
³ v. above, p. 135.
Je sais aussi que dans cinq ans, dix ans, lorsque j'y retournerai pour vivre et écrire mon Maitre du Jour, j'y retrouverai sous des espèces nouvelles — (oh! pas de passions personnelles) — d'analogues moments. Ou bien je ne serai pas digne de sentir et de vivre.

Since Segalen was deeply inspired by his subject, as he was by his other heroic subjects Siddhartha, Orpheus and Rimbaud, the most remarkable feature of the manuscript which remains is the choice of the first-person narrator. We might have expected the dramatic tone of Orpheus or Siddhartha. Instead in the manuscript we find, the hesitant tone of the autocritical narrator opening his narrative on a negative note, 'Je n'ai pas connu cet homme...' but then declaring, 'Je ne m'en soucie pas non plus. Mais pour sa personnalité... Je la vois si forte et si indestructible qu'il est aisé de la suivre à la trace...'.

In seeking to recreate Gauguin's years in Polynesia, he follows all the procedures characteristic of Segalen's exotic method: personal observation of the situation, interrogation of witnesses, study of all the available documents and particularly of Gauguin's art; and above all, imaginative reconstruction.

The choice of an autocritical narrator reveals the attitude of the novelist. Segalen's interest lies less in dramatizing the life of Gauguin than in the creative process itself — the act of recreating the 'dream' of Gauguin, and ultimately the act of creating his novel. Thus the novelist becomes an historian, like Sartre's Roquentin in La Nausée, trying to reconstruct fragments of evidence. His problems anticipate the self-conscious art of later novelists who are primarily concerned with the process of writing. He moves from the superficial, garbled accounts of the Marquesans who were closest to Gauguin, Tioka and Sara, to the more 'reliable' evidence of his writings: 'Le maître était là, non pas dans son œuvre réalisée, hélas! mais je tenais le germe de son œuvre et l'arrière-fonds de sa formidable pensée...'. In fact Gauguin's notes gave little indication of either originality or powers of thought. The ideas which Segalen read into them are more similar to his own grandiose vision of Tahitian culture.

The particular interest of Segalen's plan lies in the way the novel was to be built up: by piecing together fragments from the artist's life, works and notebooks, which are shaped by the creative imagination.
from *Noa Noa* suggests the theme of the novel: Tiïka’s greeting to Gauguin; 'Bonjour, toi! l'Homme qui fait des hommes!' This naïve description of the artistic process suggests the literal interpretation taken by the hero: he will create a new society by recreating traditional culture. This romantic theory permits an integrated view of the artist’s life in Polynesia, interpreting in a new light his wrangles with officialdom, his racist attacks on Chinese settlers and his notorious affairs with young girls. His notes taken from theosophical studies are developed in the text into an erudite suggestion of Hindu influence on Polynesian religion. Gauguin, "une sorte de génie d’espèce" in the novel, turns to early Vedic gods as a means of reviving the Polynesian culture discredited by the missionaries. His influence over his new community is however weakened when he yields to pressure to 'become' a god. This idea is perhaps partly suggested to Segalen by Gauguin’s self-portrait as Christ, and particularly by his proud references in his writings to his creative role: "en faisant comme notre Divin Maître, crée..." Segalen depicts him as greater than gods, which are shown as mere creations of his boundless imagination: "l’homme est divin... ou plutôt, ce que l’homme renferme en lui de divin, c’est d’avoir inventé le dieu." The novel celebrates man’s 'divine' power to create his own image of the world. The overriding quality of the hero, his struggle for freedom of expression, coincides with recent assessments of Gauguin’s achievement. His fierce individualism and will-power, his rebellion against authority struck answering chords in the writer’s imagination; like Rimbaud, he is for Segalen ‘hors-la-loi’. Like Rimbaud also, he is a manifestation of the author’s creative self; but unlike the poet, he did not renounce his art. Thus he symbolized for Segalen the artist as Master and Martyr of art.

However to a large degree Segalen’s hero represents the author rather than the artist. The idea of recreating Tahitian culture through art describes Segalen’s imaginative interpretation of Gauguin’s work, and not Gauguin’s intention. A reference in the manuscript to Gauguin’s mastery of

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Maori language and style — as in the animistic image 'le museau de l'Ile accroupi comme une bête... — is likewise more applicable to Segalen. The depiction of a special relationship between Gauguin and an ideal female counterpart expresses an essential feature of Segalen's way of thought. Once again we can trace the origin of the idea in the text. It evolves through a certain logical development of the intrigue from Tioka's reference to an 'épouse choisie':

Je me répétais longtemps par la suite 'son épouse choisie'. Et il me parût que tout un espace équivoque, vacillant et vertigineux bâillait devant moi...

We have here an allegory of the creative process. The narrator ponders over the casual words of Tioka, becoming lost in deep meditation. The idea has for him great romantic appeal; yet there is little evidence that Gauguin ever in fact formed a serious relationship with a Tahitian woman. The term 'équivoque' represents the doubt of the narrator (and his reader). The Eurasian 'heroine' Sara, based probably on Gauguin's first mistress Titi, bears little relation to reality. She is, as we shall see, more characteristic of Segalen's heroines. Hence the narrator presents his theory tenuously, as a dream worthy of a great visionary. As she is not Polynesian, she cannot share Gauguin's task of rebuilding the race. Therefore she remains on the perimeter, adoring him from a distance. Gradually the narrator gathers from Segalen and from a letter Gauguin has written her that they shared in idealistic love, although they had to remain apart:

... Je te repousse de moi-même et tu me suis, tu me pénètres, tu me hantes! parfois! tu me hantes et me haïs peut-être... Mais je ne veux pas! Il ne faut pas!

Their love, fed by a desire which cannot be consummated, retains the exoticism of inaccessible distance. Freed from physical bonds, its magnetism unites their spirits in a mystical union:

par la double allure de nos regards sans fond, des choses passent de toi-même en moi... et ceci est paradoxal... tu aies senti et vécu d'avance tout ce que j'attends d'eux!

So it seemed to Gauguin; and yet eyes have for Segalen the deceptive qualities of water in a well, reflecting back his own image to the observer,

1 Le Maître du Jouir, III, p. 29. 2 ibid., II, p. 17. 3 ibid., II, p. 49. 4 ibid., II, p. 50.
and betraying nothing of the depths beneath. The narrator is elated by 'la profondeur de ses yeux qui comprenaient...[1] Sara, like Eurydice and Krisha, is described as a 'young girl', with the power of understanding the artist's inner self. However when the narrator asks what she understood of Gauguin's work, she replies, "Rien. Je l'aimais beaucoup, voilà tout. Mais je n'ai jamais pu savoir ce qu'il voulait faire..." Et elle s'endormit.2

The narrator's sense of disillusionment over Sara represents the disillusionment of reality unleavened by the yeast of illusion. The opposition between the dream and the actuality which is latent in Le Maître du Jour later becomes the primary concern of the novelist.

In the manuscript a technical problem arises with the presentation of evidence from Sara and Tioka. They are required to withhold certain details for some time from the narrator. For example Tioka refuses to explain Gauguin's plans for a new settlement until he has described the festivities for the new god: 'Tu le sauras... plus tard, comme les autres; comme nous autres. Nous avons bien attendu.'3 In the same way, Sara finally admits that she understood Gauguin without need of words, although earlier she denies this: 'Nos respirations, nos mémoires, nos désirs s'entrecroisaient comme des gestes d'amants enlacés. Mais déjà je savais tout...[4] No doubt Segalen would have found a way to avoid these problems of narration. The relationship between Gauguin and Sara presents a characteristic dichotomy in Segalen's work between the male and the female, the hero and his helpmate. The woman is not an individual in her own right. She is another aspect of the hero, representing his choice between the physical and the ideal world. Imagery describing women frequently leans towards the former. Associated with the body and the earth, it suggests defilement or animality. The ideal world, on the other hand, associated with the eyes, suggests the narcissistic vision of the creative artist. Through the eyes or the words of the unconscious object he achieves 'illumination'. The novel closes with Sara walking 'à rebours derrière lui qui revenait tout seul, tout grand vers sa demeure...[5] In this suggestive closing line she is like a shadow, the 'alter ego' of the artist who returns 'alone' towards his fate.

1 Le Maître du Jour, II, p. 50. 2 ibid., II, p. 51.
3 ibid., II, p. 36. 4 ibid., II, p. 82.
5 ibid., II, p. 81.
Closely associated, moreover, with the narrator, she presents a link between Gauguin and Segalen, the character and his author. In this sense she represents reality, which provides inspiration for the writer in his quest for the Other. While much of the manuscript seems nowadays outdated and lacks the lightness of touch of his greater works, it illustrates the development of Segalen's fiction towards an allegory of the process of creativity. Gauguin, creator of a new Tahitian culture, ultimately represents Segalen, creator of an exotic world of literature.

Les Fantômales

A similar duality in Segalen's presentation of the hero may be observed in two fragments which Segalen wrote in the years 1905-8 for a book to be called either Les Maîtresmaux or Les Fantômales. He had been interested in parapsychology since student days, when he had planned to write a story on spiritualism. The project for 'Les Deux Mariés de Mrs Walker' suggests the influence of Villiers de l'Isle-Adam, and particularly Edgar Allan Poe. The heroine's name suggests English influence, while the idea of the story is reminiscent of Poe's 'Ligeia'. Segalen's idea was to describe an encounter between Mrs Walker and her deceased husband. The overtones of spiritualism would no doubt have been subordinated to the more characteristic dichotomy between male and female, the real and the ideal, the self and the other.

The second project, Le Grand Œuvre, a title referring to alchemy, was also to be a story with spiritualist overtones:

Un homme à qui la vie donne des nausées, et la femme de chair des hoquets, se découvre soudainement des qualités médiurniques. Il somme alors à vivre dans un monde, fantômal créé par lui; il désire la forme féminine issue de lui — le ragout de l'inceste le plus complet qui fût jamais! Il s'épargne tout ce que l'œuvre déchire. Il contient d'ordurier... Puis, lentement, le fantôme par atomes se dissocie, se désoiffe vers ce néant qu'a la matière elle-même, ce dernier des Dieux, tend sans cesse.

This plan expresses very clearly and simply the binary opposition in Segalen's mind between female and male, life and death, flesh (associated with the earth, 'soil') and fantasy. The hero seeks to escape from the 'god' of matter — materialism — into his own world of illusion. However, since he does not create a lasting work of art, this illusion suffers the annihilation...
common to all phenomena. Segalen reveals an awareness of the narcissistic quality of his work, which is presented as an expression of the inner self with its primitive instincts. The image of an idealized woman, which recalls Villiers de l'Isle-Adam's Eve Future, takes form later in Peintures, where the "Jamme amante" becomes dearer to the emperor than his concubines. Each night she is reborn in a voluptuous form 'qui le léche, l'enveloppe, le pénètre, et fond la joie comme un bronze enroulée au four du coeur.' Her diaphanous form has the power to penetrate to his innermost self, and to make joy flow through his veins. The preference of the 'ideal' to the flesh-and-blood woman reveals a personal neurosis transformed into a celebration of art and joy.

There is, however, a continual dialectic between the real and the imaginary in Segalen's fiction. 'Le bon, gros Réel,' described in Équipée represents the world of physical sensation, whose savour and joy is increased by confrontation with the imaginary world, and in turn increases the savour of illusion. Segalen repudiates the material world in its drab monotony and sameness for the chameleon world of exoticism, which is neither real nor purely imaginary, but retains the illusion of reality.

1 Stèles, Peintures, Équipée. op. cit., p. 33.
4. DEBUSSY'S ROLE IN THE EXOTIC WORLD OF SOUND

D'un accord réfléchi, le poète... écrit en l'honneur secret du musicien:
Orphée... Orphée ne fut pas un homme, ni un être vivant ou mort. Orphée:
le désir d'entendre et d'être entendu.
Le pouvoir dans un monde sonore.1

Whereas Les Immortels represents the conflict of cultural attitudes, in France Segalen discovered a new form of exoticism in the world of sound. In early 1906 he presented himself to Claude Debussy in the hope that the composer would write the music for a lyrical drama, Siddhartha. As he wrote to Debussy after their first meeting:

... il m'a semblé impossible de ne point, d'emblée, me présenter à vous... dès vos 'Nocturnes' vous m'avez révélé mieux que de nouvelles formules en musique: une forme artistique certainement.2

According to Segalen, Debussy played a 'strange and unique rôle'3 in his life — the role of an 'Orphée', revealing to him not only a new world of music but a new artistic style: the subtle art of suggestion. The extraordinary transformation in Segalen's style between his first novel, Les Immortels, and his last, René-Lévy, owes a great deal to this period of collaboration with Debussy. He not only suggested and inspired the writing of Orphée-Roi, but played a creative part in its writing by his criticism of the text. Segalen listened to his suggestions where he ignored those of Saint-Pol-Roux and Farrère, and subordinated all other plans to that of collaborating with the composer.4 In turn, the latter found Segalen's work to be of great originality and interest, and his company stimulating — he was 'un des rares à qui je parle facilement, ou même à qui je parle, moi'.5 Of the article 'Veux mortes, musiques maori!' written at his suggestion, he wrote to

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1 Segalen quotes from 'Dans un Monde Sonore', in the Prologue for Orphée-Roi, Segalen et Debussy, op. cit., p. 220.
2 Letter to Debussy, 30 April 1906, ibid., pp. 53-54.
3 Segalen's record of a conversation with Debussy, 8 October 1907, ibid., p. 75.
4 Letter to Debussy, 30 April 1906, ibid., p. 53.
5 Segalen's record of a conversation with Debussy, 8 October 1907, ibid., p. 73.
Segalen, 'C'est extrêmement curieux, aucun essai de ce genre ne m'a autant intéressé....' While he eventually rejected the project of collaborating on a lyrical presentation of *Siddhartha*; he saw in Segalen's story 'Dans un Monde Sonore' an idea for another project: 'Ne pensez-vous pas qu'il y aurait quelque chose d'admirable à faire avec le mythe d'Orphée?'  

The power of Debussy over Segalen is indicated by his reaction to the proposal. Although disappointed by Debussy's decision, he soon immediately saw a means of recreating the myth: 'Certes, Orphée — mais un Orphée pour la réalisation duquel on ferait éclater le légendaire connu et crever les mythes râchés...'. Segalen saw in Orpheus the Nietzschean desire for self-expression which motivates all his heroes: 'un homme créateur, inventeur, progénéré, en lutte et en opposé avec d'autres hommes...'. Orpheus symbolizes in part the creative power of Debussy himself: 'Vous ne pouvez supposer combien il y entrera de vous-même...'; however the symbol has a deeper, more universal significance. 'Orphée ne fut pas un homme'; he is a mythological figure, a literary creation expressing an idea.

Characteristically this idea takes for Segalen a double form — the desire to hear and to be heard — representing the dual role of the artist as creator and listener, actor and spectator, author and reader of a text.

Segalen's initial desire to work with Debussy stemmed from a Wagnerian enthusiasm for a synthesis of the arts. A gifted pianist and amateur composer himself, he felt that music could express that which is inexpressible in language, as for example the final act of *Siddhartha*: 'Je ne conçois pas, avec des moyens littéraires seulement, la réalisation d'une apotheose — Mais je la vois très bien aidée et bâtie sur des moyens lyriques.' This attitude reveals a hesitancy only found in the early stages of his literary career. Through his conversations with Debussy he became increasingly aware of the

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1 Letter of Debussy to Segalen; April 1907, *Segalen et Debussy*, op. cit., p. 58.  
2 Describing the text as 'un prodigieux rêve', he observed: '... je ne connais pas de musique capable de pénétrer cet abîme!' (letter to Segalen, 26 August 1907, *ibid.*, p. 67).  
3 Letter to Debussy, 4 September 1907, *ibid.*, p. 69.  
5 Letter to Debussy, 4 September 1907, *ibid.*, p. 69.  
6 Segalen's record of a conversation with Debussy, 8 October 1907, *ibid.*, p. 73.
Henceforth his work celebrates the particular qualities of writing. His
Stèles 'ne réclament point la voix ou la musique... Ils n'expriment pas;
ils signifient; ils sont.'

Debussy had a lasting influence on Segalén's work, not only symbolically
but also stylistically. His influence is apparent on the manuscript of
Orphée-Roi, where he scribbled notes such as: 'Professeur! Abréger...
Trop explicatif... Pas mal mais trop long... Trop lourde... Pas
lyrique... Trop précieux...' He encouraged greater clarity and simplicity
of style, pruning out Symbolist obscurities and excessive verbosity—in
Segalén's words: 'cette hantise littéraire à rebours qui était de trop
contré'. André Schaeffner has observed that the style of René Leys suggests
Debussy's lightness of touch:

Le roman René Leys eût-il paru avant leur mort, Debussy aurait apprécié
cette façon presque sienne d'entremêler rêve et ironie, cet exotisme
qui se vide en moins de rien.'

Through Debussy we can also hear the voice of Malarmé, indicating to Segalén
the path away from the excessive representation of objects found in Les
Immortels towards a more subtly suggestive style, concerned with the ideas
and meanings created through the dynamic interplay of language. The tendency
we have noted in Les Immortels to explain and to describe exotic customs is
suppressed after this period in favour of literary form, a greater stylistic
detachment and a concern with the essential qualities of the literary medium.

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1 Note of 2 February 1909, quoted by Annie Joly-Segalén, Segalén et Debussy,
op. cit., p. 27.
3 Note quoted by Annie Joly-Segalén, Segalén et Debussy, p. 27.
4 Introduction 'Du côté de Debussy, ibid., p. 23.
Dans un Monde Sonore

Dans un monde sonore est une chose très bien, dans un domaine absolument inexploré... Il serait à souhaiter que les gens veuillent bien comprendre ce que vous avez voulu dire...? C'est assez douteux... car jamais ils n'admettent que la plupart d'entre eux n'entendent ni voient.

Dans un Monde Sonore was begun five months after Segalen first met Debussy, and published in the Mercure de France in August 1907 under the pseudonym Max-Anély. As Debussy observed, the short story opens up a new world to literature. André, a friend of the narrator, lives in a "world of sound" where all other sensory stimuli are suppressed in favor of the auditive sense. He despises what he considers the more 'primitive' senses of touch, smell, and sight. The idea was in part suggested, as Bouillier points out, by Alfred Binet's study L'Art et le Corps, a text which points out that the senses of sight and touch tend to be given an artificial importance in our lives. However it is also inspired by Segalen's recent meeting with Debussy, as he reveals in the Prologue to Orphée-Roi: "écrit en l'honneur secret du musicien..." The influence of Edgar Allan Poe is also apparent. Poe's hero, the young aristocrat Roderick Usher, is the sole heir of an ancient family long noted for a 'peculiar sensibility of temperament' which was manifested in a passionate devotion to the arts, and particularly to musical science. Roderick himself suffers from a "morbid acuteness of the senses". In his medical studies Segalen showed, as we have seen, particular interest in abnormal states of the mind, seeing in what society defined as madness qualities of genius beyond the comprehension of the average man.

1 Letter from Debussy to Segalen, 26 August 1907, Segalen et Debussy, op. cit., p. 67.
2 It was reprinted in 1961 in Segalen et Debussy, the text to which our notes refer.
3 Bouillier, p. 113.
Segalen's short story has none of the horror and melodrama of Poe's tale. Based on a situation from everyday life, it indicates man's power to transcend his environment. As in the manuscript of *Le Maître du Jour*, the story is narrated in the first person, a technique which presents the theme as a personal quest. The narrator, Leurais, begins on an uncertain note — 'Je ne sais comment l'idée me vint de renouer connaissance' — thus creating the illusion of real-life experience. The reader has a sense of sharing with him a growing awareness of man's capabilities. In a characteristic play with reality, the first-person narrator (Leurais) has certain features in common with the author, who was also short-sighted and travelled to the South Seas after finishing his medical studies in Bordeaux. Leurais's object was to measure the sensorial powers of the Papuans. On his return he declares that 'les sens des peuples non civilisés ne diffèrent pas, en acuité réelle, des sens des races affinées'.\(^2\) In this desire to consider all men as equal he differs from Segalen, who leads the narrator — and the reader — gradually to another conclusion. On visiting his friends André and Mathilde, he hears from the latter that André has gone mad — a word that conjures up a conventional image: 'le visage brisé d'un homme furieux accroché à des barreaux de fer qu'il mouchait en tordant le cou'.\(^3\) However madness he learns, is a term used for behaviour outside the social norm: it is in this case a question of outlook. From André's point of view, Mathilde is mad. Gradually Leurais begins to see the world anew through André's eyes. Mathilde seems like 'un être primitif et bas', 'une sauvagesse de quelque Australien'\(^4\) in her need to see, touch and smell objects, whereas he delights in subtle resonances:

... reposant ma tête étourdie sur le dossier mou je me laissais baigner par ces sortes d'effluves où tressaillaient des tonalités matinales et des timbres de jeune soldat à l'aurore des jours. Je n'écoutais même plus mon ami. Sa voix se dissolvait aux rumeurs de l'espace; et son parler devenu rythmique et ralenti

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1 'Dans un Monde Sonore', *Segalen et Debussy*, op. cit., p. 190.
2 *ibid.*, p. 198.
3 *ibid.*, p. 193. Segalen has in mind no doubt Gobineau's study *Sur l'Inégalité des Races*, to which there is a reference in his 'Notes sur l'Exotisme' (*Études sur l'Exotisme*, op. cit., p. 88).
4 'Dans un Monde Sonore', p. 191.
5 *ibid.*, pp. 201-202.
comme une houle s'imposait à ma rêverie, me berçait et me submergeait... — vraiment, qui avait parlé de 'voir'?  

The theme of the story gradually emerges as an allegory of artistic sensitivity. The sense of sight symbolizes the literary representation of a subject in its material aspects: the depiction of the 'grosier monde matériel', which is also rejected by Mallarmé and the Symbolists as lacking in aesthetic appeal. The writer sees beyond the surface of his subject to its essential quality, which Mallarmé defined as 'la notion pure', 'l'idée', but which for Segalen is its 'exoticism', its 'otherness', that which distinguishes it from all other objects. The Symbolists associated inner meaning somewhat loosely with music. In a well-known article on Symbolism Brunetière declared, 'Voyez profondément et vous verrez musicalement.'

As Lehmann has observed, the musical quality sought by Mallarmé and the Symbolists generally was not so much a question of the technical qualities of music (of which Mallarmé knew little) as the aesthetic value of the art: a sense of harmony, arising from the heightened quality of artistic expression. For Segalen the 'monde sonore' has a similar sense. It is not the world of musical scores and compositions, but a world of subtle 'sound'. It expresses arrangement to the rhythm of life. As in 'La Tête', the vision perceived by the narrator has a strange glow in the darkness: 'Il m'apparut que tout s'éclairait et que tout s'illuminait...'. Shutting out the rational doubts which make his mind whirl, he sinks into a contemplative state where the meaning of his friend's words is lost in a rhythmic sense of harmony with the universe, compared here with the hypnotic swell of the sea. Artistic inspiration is seen here as an emotional rather than an intellectual process, concerned not with ideas but sensation.

In the description of André's room, with its artificiality and flickering light, there are suggestions of the 'ameublements fastueusement étranges' of Des Esseintes; but Segalen's story is more directly concerned with the question of artistic creation.

1 'Dans un Monde Sonore', p. 204.  
2 ibid., p. 205.  
4 Quoted ibid., p. 167.  
5 ibid., pp. 149 ff.  
6 'Dans un Monde Sonore', p. 204.  
7 Huysmans, A Rebours; op. cit., p. 15.
To illustrate the gulf which lies between himself and his wife, André relates the myth of Orpheus in a new light. Symbol of pure harmony, Orpheus seeks out Eurydice from the underworld of materialism, which he has the power to transform by his divine breath. Together they represent the creator and the created, the ideal and the real, desire and its expression. The characters are presented as symbols of the artist's effort to distil ideas and sensations from reality. The expression of desire in material form is destructive of desire itself, which depends for its very being, like the sensation of exoticism, on distance and inaccessibility. Eurydice, the symbol of the 'real', tries to drag Orpheus down into the mud of carnality: 'sa main... pâtrissait la boue'; 'elle s'enfonçait'. She represents the 'rite immonde' of sexuality, which is associated with obscenity. From the ideal Eurydice he had known, 'pareille jadis à la cithare Apollinienne [sic]', she seemed 'métamorphosée par maléfice', becoming 'la femelle assoiffée, d'étreintes primitives...'. A neurotic fear of woman and of sexuality, associated no doubt with Segalen's puritanical upbringing, takes the form of an allegory expressing desire for the ideal forms of art.

The short story is written in an autocritical form linking the rejection of the material world with an attack on the popular novel. The narrator had visited his friends with the idea of seducing Mathilde: '... je me présentai chez eux libre de petits remords, au passé, mais résolu à m'en pourvoir abandonment par la suite.' Ironically it is André who dissuades him from this treachery without being conscious of his intention. After hearing André's account of the myth of Orpheus, he sees Mathilde with horror as Eurydice the temptress. Now he plans a new type of story:

... Je façonnerai moi-même, tant bien que mal... une histoire... trois personnages, et l'un tout sans adulte, s'joie, sans adulte! En avait-il été question? J'en étais maintenant si détaché comme d'un geste inutile et bas. Non, je n'y avais jamais pensé. Non plus que jamais je ne l'avais cru fou, lui — n'est-ce pas?

By this naive volte-face the narrator undermines his story, which has led us to expect a titillating 'ménage à trois'. Having created a certain impression of himself, he now seeks to efface that impression. Then why does he decide to publish his story as it stands? He presents his own reflections and hesitations, the problems of communicating to the reader an experience which is outside social norms:

1 'Dans un Monde Sonore', pp. 206-7. 2 Ibid., p. 190. 3 Ibid., p. 214.
... Mais une inquiétude me survint: comment faire admettre, aux amis lecteurs, même en une préface onctueuse et servile, que mon héros se renferme dans une chambre tendue de ficelles... D'embrée toutes les sympathies sont à la femme, à la pauvre petite femme. Et mon rôle, là-dedans! Je serai le traître qui ne trahit point: l'am qui ne trompe pas, l'indécis, le monsieur qui déçoit le public à défaut de décevoir le mari... Triste situation! Et quelle ignorance avouerai-je par là, de la saine littérature! Non, je n'écrirai rien, je ne dirai rien.

Thus the narrator includes an ironical critique of his own story, from the viewpoint of the imaginary reader of popular novels: an attack which reveals the limitations of the critic. As in Gide's novel *Les Faux-Monnayeurs*, this autocritical section seems to present indirectly the author's ideas on literature. The ironical tone he takes towards the general public is a savage attack on the author who panders to popular tastes, as well as on the undiscriminating reader.

Yet the narrator does not in fact re-fashion his story. Faced with the contradiction of the text, the reader is led to believe that Leurais finally decided to tell all 'just as it happened', inspired by the dismay he feels at the end of the story. For then, returning to join André in his 'isolement splendide', he finds that the latter is completely 'cured', and dismisses his former theories: 'balivernes... Ne m'en parlie plus, sinon comme d'une amusette de malade...?' Leurais and André, like Téri and Paofai in *Les Innombrables*, have changed places. Leurais's outlook has been transformed by André, who does not, however, have the strength to maintain his convictions. He has slipped back to a conventional outlook on life. Thus Leurais, left alone in his vision of reality, decides presumably to let the reader consider the 'full story'. Then he may decide whether his allegiance lies with the general public, which finds reassurance in 'la saine littérature' — conventional ideas of madness and adultery — or whether he identifies with Leurais. Thus there is an attempt to define the role and the value of literature.

The modern reader may well find certain aspects of the story outdated, for example the author's scornful one towards his 'amis lecteurs', and his virulent attack on realism in the person of Eurydice/Mathilde. However Segalen reveals here a mastery of structure and style, and a conscious

1 Dans un Monde Sonore*, p. 214.  
reflection on his craft, which announce future developments in his work. To Debussy, who suggested that Segalen should have developed the idea of the 'monde sonore', Segalen replied:

C'est ma seule issue possible actuellement. C'est une espèce de rythme que je porte en moi et auquel sont astreintes toutes mes inventions littéraires: la montée, l'effort, un semblant de réalisation éblouissante, et puis la chute.1

This rhythm which comes spontaneously to Segalen takes the form of a struggle to reach the point of reconciliation with the other, the mysterious object of desire. The quest by its very nature is doomed to failure. Once attained, the object loses its mystery and exoticism, leaving a sense of anticlimax. Like Le roman amoureux, 'Dans un Monde Sonore' closes on a note of disillusionment. In his later fiction Segalen succeeds in deflecting this downward movement, leaving the text open to mystery and doubt. The rhythm and the structure of his work are shaped by his concept of exoticism. The thrill of the quest conveys a lyrical tone of optimism and joy which is tempered in his novels and short stories by a current of ironical self-criticism. In his dramas, however, the lyrical tone tends to predominate.

Orphée-Roi

Orphée-Roi, like Siddhartha, presents a heroic figure struggling against the forces of materialism. We are concerned only with certain parallels this drama provides with Segalen's fiction, notably the presentation of Orpheus and Eurydice as two aspects of one being. The young Eurydice unwittingly inspires the hero by the sound of her 'voix inouïe et sauvage': the unique and untutored voice of natural harmony, which answers Orpheus's desire to hear as well as to be heard. In order to express this pure harmony she must transcend physical reality. Segalen deliberately blends the myth of Semele with that of Orpheus: Eurydice is consumed by the song of Orpheus, as was Semele by the fire of Zeus, becoming part of his harmony. She is the echo of his song in the world, the means by which he achieves integration of the self.2

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1 Segalen's record of a conversation with Debussy, 8 October 1907, Segalen et Debussy, op. cit., p. 73.
2 This sacrifice of the female to male narcissism is a characteristic of the 'Belle Epoque', which can be seen also in the works of Gide, Claudel and others.
Like Saramarre du Jour, Eurydice represents reality, which the writer seeks to transform into an ideal form of art. Thus there are two Eurydices, a 'real' and a false Eurydice: moreover the former has two aspects, her real and her ideal form. Orpheus flees in horror from the physical woman, as he recoils from the false Eurydice, a Maenad in disguise. Although his physical being is destroyed by the Maenads, his spirit is liberated to reign as eternal harmony.

The drama, which is heavily symbolical, has none of the rich interplay of the real and the imaginary which is characteristic of Segalen's work. The background is abstract and generalized; there is no attempt to present cultural attitudes and local colour. It is a lyrical presentation of the idea of harmony inspired by Debussy's work — an idea which led Debussy to declare: 'Ce sera mon testament lyrique.' Thus it lacks the particular stamp of a work chosen and developed purely by Segalen. Moreover, largely because of its form, it lacks many of the most remarkable qualities of his prose. Whereas in drama he gives lyrical expression to some of his deepest feelings, in fiction this lyrical flow is analysed and modified by an alternating movement of autocriticism. Through such devices as irony, doubt and suggestion the exotic qualities of language are rendered apparent to the reader.

In the next chapter we shall discover a similar movement in the texts inspired by Buddhism. However this time Segalen takes the opposite course, moving from the dramatic form towards the greater freedom of the novel. The fiction which evolves in China has a new tone which owes much to this interlude in Paris. The desire to depict social phenomena in their fullest detail and colour, which we have seen in Les Immortels, is more subdued. The 'subject' loses its solidity, becoming a pretext for a complex play of ideas. Encouraged by Debussy to prune the text of inessentials, Segalen grew more attuned to a sense of what Mallarmé called a 'silent music', a quality of depth and suggestion in language which was reinforced in China by the dense, elliptical qualities of calligraphy. 'Grand Magicien', Debussy

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1 Debussy quoted by Segalen, Prologue to Orphée-Rêve Segalen et Debussy, op. cit., p. 221.
2 Mallarmé, Correspondance, Œuvres Complètes, op. cit., v. V, p. 293.
3 Letter from Segalen to Debussy, 4 September 1907, Segalen et Debussy, p. 68.
was above all for Segalen an inspiration and a guide, encouraging those stylistic qualities by which he had transformed twentieth-century music — a lightness of touch, a subtlety and depth of tone, and above all a desire for innovation, a perpetual quest for new musical ideas. Debussy had admired the original tone of Segalen's prose. In the next few years it was to become more refined in tone, more apt to convey the sense of the fantastic inspired by his experience of ancient Chinese civilization.

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1 'Il faut que j'aille plus loin...' (a comment of Debussy's which is equally characteristic of Segalen), Segalen's record of a conversation with Debussy, 8 October 1907, *Segalen et Debussy*, p. 71.
Buddhism as a Way to Exoticism

Mes premiers voyages m'ont permis de voir du dedans le Bouddhisme et de lui donner cette sympathie sans laquelle aucun jugement sur le fait religieux n'est possible. Je reconnais en sa conception du monde une valeur universelle... Mais je déplore sa morale pratique et je constate la médiocre valeur vitale qu'elle détient. Je lui sais toujours gré de m'avoir méthodiquement formulé ce que j'avais confusément et timidement senti, le grand illusionnisme du monde, la prétendue dignité des apparences sur lesquelles on se base et qui s'en vont. J'en ai gardé surtout un jeu de pensée entièrement étranger au concept d'un dieu personnel à face et à passions humaines, et le refus d'une rédemption possible par un autre que par soi.1

During the return voyage from Tahiti to France in 1904-5, Segalen made his first direct contact with Asian ways of thought through Buddhism. Already fascinated by certain Hindu ideas which had become popularized in France through interpretations of Schopenhauer, he undertook a close study of Theravada Buddhism during the six weeks he spent in Ceylon while his ship was being repaired.2

Writing to Claudel about this experience eleven years later, he suggests that in order to fully understand this way of thought one must suppress one's own values, and consider the subject 'from within' - a method which demands not only empathy but an understanding that comes from thorough research. We shall discuss this difference between the two poets in a following chapter. However it is clear from his letter that he too only took from Buddhism theories which confirmed his own idea of the world, a delight in illusionism, a vision of the world as his own creation. He saw Buddhism not as a body of religious beliefs with another 'Law' and dogma, but as a 'method',3 a new way of looking at the world which enabled him to brush aside Christian doctrine.

2 Segalen's study of Buddhism included long conversations with Buddhist monks and Hindu scholars at Colombo, and reading such texts as: E. Vedel, Lumière d'Orient, Rhyda Davids, Buddhism, and The Buddhist Index, H. Oldenberg, Bouddha, V. Henry, Les Littératures de l'Inde (Bouiller, op. cit., p. 68; Gabriel Germain, Préface, Siddhártha: drame en cinq actes, Limoges, Rougerie, 1974, p. 9; and unpublished notes).
more confidently. It provided not only new settings, new fantasies and local colour but a different world view. Buddhist techniques of contemplation facilitated the poet's desire for identification with the object, promulgating sensory awareness rather than rational analysis. Like Henri Michaux, he stressed the legend of the Buddha's dying words that Buddhism should be not a religion but a means of self-refuge. However, he rejected the essential features of Buddhism: its detachment from the world, its passivity, its ultimate negation of the idea of individualism by its theory of 'universal being'. Rather than following this method to its ultimate conclusion, he showed interest in its technique of self-mastery. In his journal in 1904 he summed up the qualities which he admired in this philosophy, as well as those which he deplored:

Ma conclusion bouddhique de mon séjour à Ceylan sera: que si j'étais malheureux je serais volontiers bouddhiste. Que rien, même pas la transmigration n'est franchement inacceptable à nos cerveaux de scientifiques européens; que la psychologie B. [sic] parmi un fatras digné de nos vieilles 'facultés' a merveilleusement jeté à bas les notions d'amène et de personnalité: qu'il se 'tient' d'un bout à l'autre; et que sa formule du Self-Refuge est purement admirable, et d'une seconde morale sans bornes. Mais je récusé avant tout sa première 'noble vérité': La Vie n'est pas Souffrance. La Vie est Joie, le désir est Joie, la Sensation est bonne à sentir. Et cela sera l'éternel conflit.  

Segalen's exaltation of the powers of sensation, heightened by his experience of Polynesia, led him to deplore Buddhist asceticism. The study of metaphysics was for Segalen not a search for enlightenment but an intellectual stimulation, a justification of his individualistic ideas, and a source of artistic inspiration. The difficulty of translating key words of Buddhist belief led him to comment: 'De plus en plus, en matière de religion, les mots sont les Dieux! In principie erat verbum... Le mot engendre l'idée.' The words underlined by Segalen are repeated, as we have observed, in the central part of Les Immortuus. They recall an awareness of the role of language in society which is well in advance of his age. Rather than learning about religion through language, Segalen learnt about the properties of language through his study of religions. He saw creative power in the

1 v. above, p. 22.
2 Journal de voyage de Tahiti à Toulon', quoted in Boullier, p. 68.
3 ibid., p. 68.
artist and writer rather than in a metaphysical god, which was, he claimed, the creation of man: 'Se tourner vers le dieu, faire son dieu n'est pas beaucoup sortir de l'homme, mais choisir parmi les qualités humaines un faisceau d'entre elles, parfois disparates, telle que Bonté et Justice...1 Man's concepts are limited by his language; his idea of a god is a reflection of himself.

Buddhism indicated for Segalen a way shown by man to libérate thought patterns and, by mastering the self, to enter into a state of heightened awareness of the other. There are Nietzschean elements in his manner of interpreting this Asian philosophy, but ultimately it reinforced his particular way of thought. He had copied into his journal a line from Léon Bloy's L'Ame de Napoléon: 'En réalité, tout homme est symbolique, et c'est dans la mesure de son symbole qu'il est un vivant...', to which he added the note, 'Il est vrai... j'ai vu que ce qui me passionnait surtout, c'était l'incertitude sur l'identité des personnes'.2 The Buddha proclaimed that all forms of life were an illusion of the senses; Segalen declared that man must accept and even exploit this universal condition by becoming, as de Gaultier describes it, an actor in the spectacle of life.

Sidhârtha

At the same time as Segalen was writing Les Immémoriaux, in 1905-6, he was preparing the first draft of Sidhârtha, which he submitted to Debussy in April 1906. The two works present a remarkable contrast — on the one hand a drama representing man's triumphant self-mastery, on the other a novel describing the downfall of a race. In Sidhârtha Segalen presents a hero who abandons physical lows and desires for a life of asceticism, in Les Immémoriaux the heroic figure of Paolaf represents the Apoll', masters' of sensual joy. The novel is characterized by its heavy rhythm, dense naturalistic description, and a growing pessimism which culminates in a final note of disillusionment. The drama, however, is concerned with inner conflict rather than with exterior reality. Necessarily demanding a simpler, more direct style, it is characterized by short sentences broken by dramatic pauses suggesting hesitation and conflict. The mood gradually rises in intensity towards a final apotheosis:

1 Essai sur l'Exotisme, op. cit., 3 June 1916, p. 73.
2 Quoted by Bouillier, op. cit., p. 107.
Siddhartha finally becomes aware of the illusory nature of the universe. Through meditation and determination he is able to become detached from the desires and preconceptions which dominate man’s spirit.

Fundamentally the author is concerned in both works with the question of our perceptions of reality. In *Les Immémoriaux* he presents with vivid intensity a Tahitian vision of the world; in *Siddhartha* he is concerned with the rejection of illusion. In both cases he considers the origins of a particular world-view. The contrast between the Tahitian and the Buddhist attitude to life is a means of exploring the diversity of human attitudes and traditions. Ultimately in writing Segalen explores the diversity within himself, the perpetual conflict between a sensuous delight in action and the more sedentary call of literature.

If we compare his drama with Hermann Hesse’s novel of the same name, written in 1922, a certain difference in attitude is immediately obvious.

Both writers, influenced by the individualistic European philosophy of the early twentieth century, found in Buddhism a means of self-discovery. However, Hesse’s novel gives a lyrical description of the Buddhist thought which transforms the life of Siddhartha. Segalen’s novel is less concerned with the message — the Buddha’s teaching — than with the interior conflict of the hero. As he observes in the text of the novel, the very name ‘Siddhartha’ means ‘L’homme qui-attient-son-but’. The text grows out of the name: it is a creative reflection on language, and on the power of illusion, which terrifies Siddhartha in a manner reminiscent of Flaubert’s *La Tentation de Saint Antoine*. Through coming to terms with the nature of his temptation Siddhartha is finally able to free himself from their control.

Thus Segalen gives a different meaning to his study of an historical and legendary subject. He writes: ‘... le titre de son manuscrit: C’est n’est pas l’histoire du Bouddha, c’est un Homme. It was motivated partly, he tells us in his notes, by a desire to be among the pioneers of European interest in Buddhism, and partly by an interest in the experiences of the savants humanistes de l’histoire de Siddhartha. He says: “It was an effort to grasp the original meaning of a term”.

3. *ibid.*, notes, p. 117.
a name, a doctrine, and through study and imaginative reflection to offer a new interpretation of its meaning. He takes up the legend of the Buddha’s life very much as it is presented by the Theravada school, but rejects the religious system of Buddhism. In an appendix added in 1911, he argued:

“tout sa loi, son ordre, ... tout ce qu'on fera sous son ombré et que des milliards d'humains ont répété après lui, ne sera plus qu'imposture; car lui seul pouvait vivre ce que lui seul a vécu. Et tout est incommunicable.”

While opposed to Buddhism as a religion, Segalen admires the powerful vision of its creator, and his ability to express that vision. In declaring that 'tout est incommunicable' he is expressing the vision common among the Symbolistes, that language is essentially private. His vision is unique, and valid only for himself. Segalen quotes from the Buddha in his notes: '... Je vous le dis, dans ce corps aimé qui n'est grand que d'une toise, le monde habité.' The world is an illusion of the senses from which each man creates his own meaning. Thus although the Buddha was in fact striving to realize a state beyond all desire which is antithetical to Segalen's celebration of desire, it is characteristic of Segalen’s heroic figures. By dominating matter he creates within himself a new way of looking at the world.

Like Gauguin, then, Siddhartha expresses the author’s desire to create form and meaning from the chaos of the phenomenal world. Once again the focus is directed upon a single heroic figure. The heroine, Krishna, is an essential part of his being, 'la plus chère Essence de moi-même'. Like most of Segalen’s female characters she takes two forms. Segalen explains his invention in his notes:

Il y a deux Krishna: d’abord la petite enfant larmoyante et vive du 1er acte, devenue aux III et IV, l’épouse trop expressée, trop lourde, trop ‘femme’ — celle-là que Siddhârtha reprit et abattit. En second lieu, la Krisha du II acte est de l’Epilogue; l’inexistence, si ce n’est dans la plus forte réalité: dans l’esprit même de Siddhârtha; celle qu’il a fait naître, de l’autre; celle qui est l’essence même de sa pensée afranchie; qui est de pensée. Tendre à les différencier sans qu’il puisse y avoir réprise.

This ideal young virgin-figure who is the creation of Siddhartha’s imagination, the very essence of his thought, is a characteristic form of allegory in Segalen’s fiction. Their love is an innovation in the legend of the Buddha.

1 Siddhârtha, op. cit., p. 116. ibid., p. 121.
2 ibid., p. 113.
3 ibid., p. 119.
which is otherwise broadly respected in the drama. Through these two figures Segalen presents an allegory of artistic creativity. It is Krisha who unwittingly suggests to Siddhartha the idea of renouncing the world, when she announces the birth of his son: 'Voici la délivrée...': words which resound in Siddhartha's mind like 'un passage fair comme une aube', and which inspire his future actions. She is therefore the 'Divinaire', 'Révélatrice', source of inspiration to the writer: a position which she holds unwittingly, however, by virtue of her silence: 'Ignorante, tu as répandu des ondes de sagesse, mieux que les meilleurs maîtres!'

Thus she represents the narcissistic vision of the artist who creates ideal forms from brute reality.

When Debussy rejected his request to write the music for Siddhartha, Segalen set the manuscript aside until 1911, when he spoke of rewriting it in the form of the Sutras, inspired by the example of D'Annunzio. However by this period he was more drawn to the idea of a novel about Buddhism which would allow him greater freedom and self-expression:

Quant à mon Imitation du Bouddha, c'est, ou je me trompe fort, quelque chose qui peut être dans mon œuvre ce que le satanisme et La-Bas furent pour Huysmans, et entre Siddhartha (difficilement viable à l'heure actuelle, — et sous quelle forme?) et ce roman où tout est à créer sous une forme que je sais et que l'on ne saura que lorsque je l'aurai faite, je n'hésite pas.

The statement indicates the opportunities which Segalen saw in developing the form of the novel. La-Bas and A Rebours represented a breakaway movement in French littérature, reacting against naturalism towards greater freedom of subject-matter, artistic method and style. There is, moreover, an analogy in the mystical nature of the theme: where Huysmans sees spiritualism as a means of introducing a new dimension to the novel, Segalen turns to the illusionist theories of Buddhism as a means of opening the novel to new possibilities.

We have observed the influence of Huysmans in Segalen's focus on a single character, and in his desire to introduce new ideas, new structures and forms into the novel. However, in contrast with the static descriptions and serious attitude of the ex-naturalist author, Segalen has a lighter, more

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1 Siddhartha, op. cit., p. 51.  
2 ibid., p. 61.  
3 ibid., ms. notes, p. 16.  
5 v. above, pp. 7-8.
detached tone. He is less concerned with the presentation of an argument than with the dramatic interplay of ideas, desiring to 'faire danser à mon tour la ronde des arguments'. ¹ This critical attitude is prefigured by his play on the title in the manuscript: L'Imitation du Bouddha. There is a greater liberty and openness than was evident in Les Immémoires.

Imitation du Bouddha

In planning this novel, which was never more than an outline, Segalen considered the idea of a 'double' structure of two diaries juxtaposed on the same page: 'entrecroisés, en deux colonnes contemporaines', in a sort of 'Forte Étroite non chrétienne'. ² Ideally, it was to give a more important role to the heroine. Writing to his wife about the idea, he remarked: 'Ce livre, ne loin de toi, Imitation du Bouddha, te devra infiniment, mon amour cheri... tu ne saurais être que toute mêlée à un livre où je mettrai tant de moi-même.' ³ This observation made in 1909 indicates a shift in attitude from the 'objectivity' of Les Immémoires towards a more subjective approach.

Conscious of the lowly role played by women in his fiction hitherto, he continued, 'Imitation du Bouddha me permettra d'ailleurs de montrer ce que je veux faire depuis longtemps: un personnage de femme digne d'être aimé, et non point ironisé.' ⁴ Clearly Segalen had problems in creating such a character. If his later female characters were not satirical, they were idealized, and equally unreal. He was concerned with the question of artistic creativity; woman entered into this picture only as a means towards self-realization.

The later drafts for this novel present as the essential attraction of Buddhism its aesthetic emphasis. This sensitivity to beauty is particularly characteristic of Ch'an Buddhism as it evolved in China under the influence of Taoism, later spreading to Japan as Zen Buddhism. ⁵ Sensitivity to beauty is seen as a source of intuitive knowledge, joy and peace. Originally Segalen's heroes were to seek in Buddhism an escape from pain; however this idea evolved towards a quest for beauty: 'une fuite de la Douleur laide, plus

¹ Unpublished notes, 1918.
² Unpublished notes.
³ Letter to Yvonne Segalen, 10 January 1910, Lettres de Chine; op. cit., p. 241.
sincerely, de la Laidere'. By cultivating detachment and inner harmony, they developed an appreciation of form. For this 'new' theory of religion, Segalen coined the word 'esthétisme', which expresses a personal creed similar to that outlined in his letters to Claudel:

Le Beau Divinisé, le Beau donnant le Bonheur, le Beau senti comme tel, au moment où il passe. L'Esthétisme! Monstrueuse hérésie! En viennent-ils à bout pour retomber, par passion, au profond des Enfers?2

This cult of beauty was shared by the so-called 'Decadent' Symbolists in France, as well as the Oxford group in England led by John Ruskin, Walter Pater and Oscar Wilde. Segalen's idea of a novel on the subject develops out of the ideas of this period, particularly the novels of Huysmans. Its particular novelty was the combination of art and exoticism, through reflection on the aesthetic sensibility of the most ancient school of Buddhism.

The lovers in the novel planned by Segalen are prepared to sacrifice all material joys for this new cult of beauty. However when asked to make the final renunciation, that of themselves, they turn aside from the path to supreme enlightenment. To the Philism of pure detachment they prefer 'le chemin merveilleux qui y conduit, est les dé tours du chemin...3 even if this act of resistance involves the terror of a Buddhist hell.

The theme of the novel was therefore to be an analogy for the process of writing, which Segalen saw as an exploration of the 'chemin merveilleux' leading towards enlightenment, but turning aside from lucid explanation. A reference in a letter to his wife in 1910 suggests that he saw the form of the novel as a quest, which involved the growth and transformation of the characters:

La traiter en nouvelle? Impossible s'il en fut: une nouvelle, m'aux, un conte n'est que le ramassé brutal d'une histoire où tout est préparé pour un déclenchement. Mais ici, les personnages doivent vivre, et changer, et c'est le Roman même.

1 Unpublished notes.
2 Unpublished notes; and v. above, pp. 15 & 158-159.
3 Unpublished notes.
At this stage he felt the need for a sense of progression in the novel, whereas his later notes, subsequent to the writing of René Leye, are concerned less with 'character' than with the creative play of contrasting ideas. René Leye was to be his supreme accomplishment in this field. Usually he worked on several texts at once, in one developing the dramatic aspect of a subject, in another playing with the autocrical ideas suggested by his writing. Often one work developed out of another, as Le Maître du Jour developed from Léo Immémoire. Imitation du Bouddha was to provide a means of exploring the author's ideas about Buddhism, stimulated by writing Siddhártha. The short story 'La Tête', which germinated at the same period, is based on a similar theme.

'La Tête'

The event which inspired the story is described by Segalen in his Lettres de Chine. During his first expedition through China with Augusto Gilbert de Voisins in 1909-10, the two friends discovered a statue of the Buddha deteriorating rapidly in a neglected pagoda in the heart of the 'Terre d'ombre: la Chine la plus fantastique, étreignante, pouvroyante, ancienne'. As the head was 'extraordinarily beautiful, they decided to take it with them. The operation was more lengthy and dramatic than they had expected; but eventually:

On la met dans un sac de toile, on l'emporte au galop, et...

Et, en quelques secondes, j'ai la vision d'une nouvelle à écrire là-dessus... Et le soir tombe, délicieux, sur une belle tête pour... Augusto, et un conte que je crois beau pour moi...

At first Segalen planned to write a 'simple conte fantastiste, assez dans la note Farrière' — a type of literature he generally scorned as superficial; but the story developed into a strange fantasy which expresses incidentally his attitude towards religion, life and literature. Segalen was in fact incapable of tossing off a story lightly. He reflected on it and polished it continually, rarely admitting that it was ready for publication. When

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1 'La Tête', Imaginaires, op. cit., pp. 25-51.
4 Letter to Yvonne Segalen, 29 October 1909, ibid., p. 181:
Victor Segalen and Gilbert de Voisins during the excavation of the tomb of Pao San-niang.
'La Tête' was published in abbreviated form in *La Table Ronde* in October 1951, the satirical elements and the conclusion were omitted, leaving only an exotic account of a mystical experience. The complete version was not published until 1972. Yet it has some remarkable qualities, which give it an important place in Segalen's fiction.

It presents two conflicting points of view: that of the narrator and his 'alter ego', Annie; and that of the others, including his friend, Régis. These two attitudes might, broadly speaking, be traced back to Segalen and Gilbert de Voisins, who represent two distinct literary styles. In contrast with Segalen's lofty theories of exoticism, Gilbert de Voisins was content with a more facile narration of what Segalen defined as 'impressions de voyage'.

Always good friends, they were nevertheless very different characters; Segalen observed that Gilbert de Voisins's more easy-going, sociable nature was complementary to his own intense, introspective nature:

Il y a toujours le Mystique orgueilleux qui sommeille en moi. Et ce sera même une haute joie que d'approfondir — ô, si lentement! — le sillon qui me sépare d'Augusto: lui, catholique et non mystique (s'est-il défendu) — moi si anti-catholique pur, mais resté, d'essence, amoureux des châteaux dans les âmes et des secrets corridors obscurs menant vers la lumière.

This passage, written in Segalen's poetic style, illuminates his attitude not only in this story but as it is reflected in all his work. His stance as 'anti-catholique pur' is clearly an emotional reaction against his authoritarian upbringing, since he is ceaselessly concerned with ontological questions. However his individualistic tone, associated with the vocabulary of royalty, proclaims an uncompromising quest for beauty. The scorn for superficiality and complacency which becomes apparent in his story indicates the intensity of his inner anguish. Like the Symbolists and Nietzsche he seeks to create his own 'god' to replace the 'dead' god of Christianity.

Beneath the defiant tone of the narrator lies the author's desire to defend his action and to exercise a sense of guilt. Gilbert de Voisins explained Segalen's version of the story in this manner:

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Il est si honteux de ce sacrilège qu'il veut s'en expliquer à la postérité, si honteux surtout de notre impunité qu'il accable le héros de son histoire de mille malheurs, plus atroces les uns que les autres. Par ce moyen, il croit les éviter un peu lui-même. Il n'a dû se sentir soulagé qu'en disposant la conclusion de son histoire parfaitement horrible d'ailleurs.1

Gilbert de Volpins seems not to have understood the deeper meaning of the story, which he sees as 'atroce', 'horrible'; however it is structured around the opposition between a realistic interpretation — what happens on the surface — and a symbolic interpretation, which takes into account the implications of the narrator's actions. In fact Gilbert de Volpins, who kept the head, seems to have been less moved by these dramatic implications; whereas Segalen felt compelled to explore his feelings, to analyse, perhaps to justify them by this story, which is at once an exotic-fantasy and a defense of pure art.

The story takes as its departure-point the contrast between the believer and the 'non-believer'; but it develops far beyond a sense of difference between two friends. The narrator's strongly anti-religious stance, and his account of a mystical experience outside the bounds of normal experience, set up a tone of conflict in the narration from the outset. Régis is the first to leave the group, refusing even to listen to the story: the narrator suggests that his resentment is born from the realization of his own lack of vision: 'Il me tient rancune depuis que j'ai vu ce qu'il ne verra jamais, lui...'.2 His satirical tone, which antagonizes most of the listeners, may well explain the obscurity in which the story has lain until recently.

The story is provoked, it seems, by the narrator's anger when Régis refers obliquely to the incident before their 'friends', and then seems to reduce its meaning to some banal adventure: 'On en revient... Oui, Pas moi-même, on y laisse toujours quelque chose...'.3 This obscure reference is jokingly taken to mean a love-affair, Loti-style, with some little princess with little eyes and feet. At this point the narrator, Robert, decides to break the promise he had made Régis: 'Non. Pas ça. Je vais vous expliquer. Ecoute, Régis, tu l'auras voulu. Je t'avais promis, j'ai tenu. Tu me

2 'La Tête', op. cit., p. 27.
3 ibid., p. 25.
forces à dire..." 1 As Régis abruptly leaves the gathering he suggests that
the story to follow is purely a fantasy of the narrator: "— Mon cher, je
connais ton histoire. Tu le sais, elle ne m'intéresse plus."

The gulf between the two men, who are unable to share their particular vision of the
world, represents a gulf between superficial literature with its
conventional European attitudes, and Segalen's idea of exoticism: "... on y
laisse quelques défroques occidentales; quelques manies sans intérêt..." 2

Robert brushes aside Western preconceptions of religion and incidentally
literary realism in order to present other attitudes and ideas.

The majority of the guests represent conventional attitudes. The women
are generally timid, silly and submissive: "Isabelle Servins avait cru lire
En Route, à travers les pages non épinglées par son directeur de conscience." The men are equally superficial. To satirize their lifestyle the author
adopts the traditional literary device of the romantic triangle: the flighty
woman, the solicitous husband, the jealous lover. There is also the
'reasonable' attitude of Rava's, which cloaks a desire to assimilate all
beliefs to a simple common denominator:

"... Je ne vous comprends plus... Vous savez bien qu'il y a une
certaine mesure à garder. On peut ne pas être un croyant, mais
on doit respecter toutes les croyances. Lisez donc cet
excellent guide des Religions, Orphée de M. Salomon Reinach.
Il a paru durant votre absence. Il coûte six francs dans une
reliure souple. Vous y verrez qu'on y parle simplement et
d'une façon rationnelle de toutes les superstitions connues." 3

Segalen is satirizing the tendency, found in post-Renaissance European
scholarship, to reduce meaning to a rational analysis. In claiming to
respect all beliefs, Rava is in fact imposing his own views on the other.
The term 'superstitions' reveals his unspoken prejudice. There is no effort
to understand from within, but rather a quick reference to cheap guides
characteristic of the tourist who sees all from his own point of view.

Robert's attitude, on the other hand, is closer to that of the author,
expressed in the letter to Claudel quoted earlier. 4 Like Segalen himself,
Robert shows a profound knowledge and appreciation of Buddhism, and a scorn
for those who in their ignorance confuse Asian philosophies with their own

1 'La Tête', op. cit., p. 26. 2 ibid., loc. cit.
3 ibid., loc. cit. 4 ibid., p. 31. 5 ibid., p. 32.
6 v. above, p. 157.
religion, such as Râvais: 'Je comprends tout, j'ai assisté à la... voyons... à la "Messe Bouddhiste" chez Guimet. 1

Annie is the only guest who seems to take a serious interest in the story. A close relationship with the narrator is indicated by his use of this name: 'Il l'appelait ainsi, par ce nom qui n'était pas à la discrétion des autres.' 2 The shortened form of Segalen's wife's second name, 'Anély', it suggests an autobiographical link in the story which Segalen had indicated in a letter to his wife:

... un personnage féminin a pris tout d'abord une singulière importance, si grande que le conte n'est plus écrit qu'en raison de ce personnage, qui ne t'est pas tout à fait étranger.

Annie is not, however, a character in her own right. Like most of Segalen's heroines she is the means by which the narrator communicates and evaluates his ideas. The name 'Anély', which refers also to Segalen's nom de plume, Max-Anély, suggests more closely a narcissistic reflection of the author. Annie and Robert together form an entity against the mounting antagonism of the other guests. The fundamental question which divides the group is the manner of interpreting the story. The head symbolizes pure art. Left on the statue it would eventually have rotted away, the narrator claims:

Nous avons entamé l'œuvre nécessaire. D'abord, la Tête elle-même nous y invitait. Vous ne supposerez pas ce qu'elle gardait d'intangible et d'entier. Elle était très ronde et se suffisait à elle-même. Tenez, c'était un bon service à lui rendre que de la détacher du mauvais corps qui lui donnerait sa pourriture et sa fange.

Its roundness indicates its quality of self-sufficiency: it is a thing of beauty in itself with a meaning quite apart from any reference to external reality. Moreover the Buddha whom it represents was finally neither man nor god, but le Nirvanique, le Délivré, Lui, que nulle arme humaine ou divine ne peut plus toucher, et nulle douleur et nulle joie même effleurer... 3

Robert's violation of the statue is at once an objective move to save the head and a symbolic action. Whereas the Chinese peasants who arrive are completely indifferent to the proceedings, the guests see it in realistic, Western terms.

1 'La Tête', op. cit., p. 30.
2 ibid., p. 27.
4 'La Tête', p. 32.
5 ibid., p. 38.
as cutting off the head of a god. Thus they misunderstand the nature of the Buddha:

— Un dieu! cria Robert, un dieu! Pourquoi l'insultez-vous, Lui, qui s'est mis au-dessus des hommes et des dieux... " Un dieu... s'il avait consenti à l'être!... un dieu!... voilà bien ce que j'attendais. Rassurez-vous, mon cher ami. Il avait prévu toutes ces avances quand il refusa d'être dieu... et celle-là, surtout, de se réincarner dans la cervelle des dévots, ou de s'exprimer dans leurs livres... ou de subir leurs explications rationnelles..."

The movement between the description of an event and the question of its interpretation is here made explicit. Those who interpret the story rationally are deeply shocked. Conventionally religious, they see this action as sacrilegious. They are associated with the followers of the Buddha, who have betrayed his teaching by the worship of idols, to the extent of leaving inside his statue ridiculous objects of devotion which prostitute his beliefs. Cutting the head off this statue symbolically releases the Buddha from a body of false beliefs.

By taking the story literally, the guests distort its essential meaning. They misinterpret the nature of literature, as well as Buddhism, by confusing realistic and symbolic meaning. The ironic contrast between their ignorance and Robert's superior viewpoint is a technique for winning over the reader's allegiance to the narrator. Their numbers dwindle rapidly as the story proceeds, suggesting that only a select few will comprehend the author's meaning. The ritual of polite society — "Prêtétes! Reconduites! Echos d'antichambres..." — contrasts with the fiercely individualistic tone of the narrator. It provides a foil for the drama, the springboard frequently devised by Segalen for a leap into the world of fantasy.

The sudden arrival of two peasants in the pagoda cuts across the narrator's reflections on the silence and isolation, creating a sensation of shock and guilt:

Que nous étions seuls!
Tu sais qu'on nous regarde, dit Régis, la figure tournée vers la porte, et tout éclairée. Deux Chinois. Mauvais! Ne bouge pas..."

The writer vividly recreates the scene by details such as the play of light on Régis's face, the disjointed style of the narrator, the fear which emerges.

1 "La tête", op. cit., pp. 33-34.
from his imagination: 'Mais cette présence concrète... Ces yeux obstinés, ces yeux chinois innombrables il y en a trop: quatre cent millions de paires...'

Memories of the Boxer rebellion were still fresh among the Europeans of this period. Robert's story takes on an increasingly 'subjective' quality as he describes his mounting tension, which contrasts greatly with the casual behaviour of the peasants smoking their pipes.

His anxiety to escape is implied by the fact of the forgotten whip: "Ta cravache?" Je ne voulais pas me retourner... The flight of the two horsemen through the crumbling loess takes on the nightmarish quality of "ces fuites impossibles en rêve." This dreamlike quality suddenly becomes more specific, with the narrator's fall from his horse (a fall based on an anecdote humorously described elsewhere in Lettres de Chine):

— Pas de mal. Chute banale au possible... Comique même: la bête à plat ventre sur les débris du mur, les quatre pieds nageant en l'air... Pas de mal... Tiens, c'est aussi ce que me cria Régis, mais avec un ton! Il a prétendu, depuis, m'avoir vu tomber sur la tempe... Suis-je même tombé?... C'est lui qui le raconte et ça lui fait plaisir... Ce qu'il y a de certain, c'est qu'au même moment, — au même moment, entendez-vous, Annie, j'étais en selle, plus alerte que jamais...

At this moment an autobiographical element enters the narration which was omitted from the expanded version. There is an explicit suggestion that Robert may have hit his head in falling, and imagined the following events. This interpretation is supported by his strange insistence that at that very same moment he was up in the saddle and chasing the head, which kept eluding him. From this moment Régis disappears, and the element of fantasy takes over.

The narrative takes on the playful tone of a polo game. The head dances gaily, liberated from its body: 'Elle ricochait à droite, à gauche, pirouettant sur le nez, roulant sur les joues et le menton, rebondissant sur la nuque...'. The fragment of chest affixed to the otherwise round form, 'qui la faisait bolter comme sur une béquille', is a realistic detail which establishes links with the earlier part of the story and therefore reinforces the element of uncertainty in the reader. The style has the dramatic quality of a chase:

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1 'La Tête', op. cit., p. 135.
2 Ibid., p. 42.
3 Ibid., p. 43; cf. letter to Yvonne Segalen, 28 August 1909, Lettres de Chine, op. cit., p. 143.
4 'La Tête', p. 45.
The short, incomplete sentences, the amassing of verbs, the narrator's excitement yet detachment from his subject suggest an allegory of the literary game played by the author, allowing free rein to his imagination in its play with the source of inspiration.

Suddenly the head plunges into a deep crevice, beyond reach of the narrator. It glows dimly in the darkness, with a strange light: 'une lumière lente, — un halo sans éclat, sans feu...'. The darkness is also equivocal: it is 'Une nuit double'. Celle du ciel. Et l'autre nuit, souterraine, qui dort dans ces grands puits... The well symbolizes the descent into the depths of the unconscious by the means of meditation. By means of a hypnotic concentration on the object — 'je ne voulais pas détourner les yeux' — the narrator wills it to rise slowly towards him, purified, glowing except for its dark eyes: 'Parce que le regard, Annie, est quelque chose de trop humain pour celui qui a dépassé toute condition humaine'. The eyes suggest superficial perception of material objects, whereas this vision is outside the range of normal sensory perception. There is a similar idea in Segalen's painting 'Cinq génies aveugles', where the painter dares not paint the magic light in the pupils of their eyes, for 'Ils-vivraient tout à fait; — dites-vous, — si leurs yeux avaient, comme un puits; ce point dans la prunelle'. The artist is not concerned with the mere representation of objects, but with his idea of their inner meaning. Robert's action in throwing his axe at the head is, possibly, as Jean Roudaut has suggested, a reference to the Hindu mythological story of Ramakrishna splitting the divine image he saw in a trance, in order to penetrate to the source of all light. On a more universal level, the narrator pierces the shell of the object in order to discover its inner reality. Then the Face becomes identified with his own: 'doucement elle

1 'La Tête', op. cit., p. 46. 2 ibid., p. 47.
3 ibid., p. 44. 4 ibid., p. 47. 5 ibid., pp. 48-49.
6 Sibylles, Peintures, Équipées, op. cit., p. 190.
devient virtuelle; retournée sur ma face, front sur front et bouche contre bouche...1 In this mystical state all sense of time and space is lost: 'l'espace se désipe'; 'la durée... S'arrête'.2 A similar effect can be produced as an effect of drugs, psychosis or prolonged contemplation.3

While Segalen was intensely interested in all means of extending the field of human perception, he was less interested, as we have observed, in the supreme state of Buddhist Enlightenment. The Table Ronde version closes the story at this point, and thus falsifies its meaning, for Segalen's story takes on a more personal note. Robert's graphic description of his experience, and the strange hypnotic power of his narration, hold Annie finally in a sort of trance where she identifies with the narrator, speaking like an écho of his voice. As she sees and feels in unison with him, she shapes in a mystical vision, where the lovers seem to transcend the limitations of the body: 'Enfin, Annie! vous seule entre tant d'autres!... Alors, vous êtes mienne, Annie. Alors, Annie, tu es tout mon amour.4

Through this identification with another, the narrator rediscovers the 'Way' which he had believed lost. The moment is described as an experience of 'illumination'. — 'car la Connaissance, Annie, n'est plus en dehors de moi... je la possède toute, n'est-ce pas? Dans vos yeux.'5 Yet the writer indicates that this moment differs from the Buddhist experience of Supreme Enlightenment. As in the project Imitation du Bouddha the couple find in Buddhism a way towards transcendence of material reality, rather than a static mystical experience: 'Non pas ce Nirvana dont nos poètes ont si naïvement abusé...6 nor even a more authentic version of Nirvana, but a vision characteristic of Segalen's literary work.

1 'La Tête', op. cit., p. 50.
2 ibid., pp. 30 & 51. The experience is remarkably akin to that described by Théophile Gautier in his Contes fantastiques: 'Par un prodige bizarre, au bout de quelques minutes de contemplation, je me fondais avec l'objet fixe, et je devenais moi-même cet objet'. (T. Gautier, Contes fantastiques, quoted by Todorov, op. cit., p. 123.)
3 cf. Henri Michaux, Les grandes épreuves de l'esprit, Paris, Gallimard, 1966, p. 140; Pliget also observed that the 'child does not differentiate between the self and the exterior world (Todorov, op. cit., p. 129).
4 'La Tête', p. 51.
5 ibid., p. 50.
6 ibid., p. 51.
Elsewhere Segalen comments that lovers are inevitably separated by an unbridgeable gulf which divides all beings one from the other. This story would seem to present a different idea. However Annie has not sufficient individuality to remain a distinct person: she is never more than an echo of the narrator or a means of stimulating the narrative and encouraging the projection of ideas, as Eurydice was for Orpheus an echo of his song.

Although the closing lines suggest a moment of harmony between two individuals, this harmony depends on the assimilation of ideas. Once Annie enters fully into the spirit of the narrative, Robert finds in her eyes a reflection of the inner self. The idea is supported by the Kantian theory that man can only know the self through an object of his consciousness. Annie becomes part of the consciousness of the narrator, thus fulfilling his desire for integration of the self.

Underlying the story is a current of fierce individualism. Through the contemplation of the Other — the face of the Buddha, Annie, — the narrator discovers the 'essential exoticism' of the self: 'il se retrouve face à face avec lui-même'.

1. v. above, p. 123.
6. CHINA AS CATALYST OF CHANGE

... se limiter à la Chine, se suspendre à la Chine même puissante et inépuisable serait une déchéance et une lâche limitation. — Et ce n'est pas le moindre mérite de ce grand continent 'exotique' que de m'avoir fait éclater mon exotisme même.

In 1909, after an intensive study of written Chinese under Vigatère at the École des Langues orientales in Paris, Segalen obtained the two-year posting he had sought as naval student-interpreter in China. His sole task was to perfect his Chinese. There is considerable evolution in his attitude towards exotism at this period. Whereas in Les Immemoriaux he had claimed to adopt an 'objective' style presenting a so-called 'Tahitian' point of view, he now sought a much greater complexity of perspective. His method remained unchanged. He immersed himself in a creative reflection on the essential features of his environment through a study of calligraphy and history, and an acute sensitivity to atmosphere, attitude and cultural phenomena.

However, he remained almost completely cut off from contacts with contemporary Chinese scholars and artists, and antagonistic to all aspects of modern China. As his interest lay in aesthetic expression in its different aspects, he turned to the earliest art forms of Chinese civilization. His various expeditions into the interior, his remarkable archaeological discoveries dating particularly from the Han period\(^2\) were à fertile source of inspiration. In his Lettres de Chine he describes the 'éclosion tumultueuse d'idées' fertilized by his first expedition through China in 1909-10 with Gilbert de Voisins:

> Je n'ai pas perdu ces trois mois, je t'assure! Le Fils-du-Ciel, Imitation du Bouddha, Cahiers de service de mon valet chinois, Essai sur le Mystérieux, La Vie... et surtout une fièvre continue

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\(^1\) Letter to Henry Macdonald, 3 February 1913, Essai sur l'Exotisme, op. cit., p. 65.

Plaise à Gâneça, l'éléphant-dieu de la littérature hindoue, que j'admire dans les années qui vont suivre le temps, le pauvre temps matériel de réaliser ce que j'imagine, et je ferai de belles choses, tu verras.

Unfortunately, although these and many other projects fermented during the next ten years, time proved merciless to Segalen. None of these projects saw publication; only 'La Tête' was completed. Yet he accomplished other works, remarkably original in tone and style, which we shall study in the following pages. Several of these projects involved an attempt to present the text from 'Chinese' points of view. Thus his greatest literary ambition in China was not fundamentally dissimilar to his idea in Tahiti: to write a novel on the Chinese emperor, Le Fils du Ciel, from various perspectives within the Manchu Court. The plan of writing the Cahiers de service de mon valet chinois was never developed. Seemingly far removed from Segalen's aristocratic interests, it reveals his desire to study a subject — in this case, his own journey — from another viewpoint. This play with diverse attitudes and perspectives developed in the literature Segalen wrote in China. Beneath the surface of a creative play on conflict and paradox lies the autocratic tone of an author conscious of his subjectivity, but determined to exploit to the full the richness and savour of the other.

'China symbolized for Segalen the most 'extreme' form of exoticism. In Équipée he outlines its qualities as a symbol of Diversity: a country diverse in climate, terrain, peoples, and cultures, where he found a terrain rich in history, yet still relatively unexplored, — 'des pays gros de souvenirs antiques' — in close proximity to other more primitive regions. Extending, Segalen claims, from the Pole to the tropics, from the ocean to the great mountain ranges, China, 'L'Empire du Milieu', represented to him a closed world, a microcosm of the universe with the fantastic qualities of literature itself. He saw in the strangeness of this new reality an allegory for his idea of exoticism: the creation of a work of art by the play of imagination on reality. Almost inaccessible to Europeans until recently, its extraordinary civilization was known only by hearsay; it seemed then, literally,
Segalen's appeal crystallizes the mood of French artists tired of the monotony, pollution and materialism of an industrial age, longing for escape into a world of fantasy. China seemed to Segalen the seemingly eternal procession of emperors. The Son of Heaven, walled into the Forbidden City, with its secret dramas, beauty and cruelty, represented at once the essence of Chinese civilization and the eternal nature of art. Isolated within a concentric system of palaces and moats, the Emperor ruled over the universe in Chinese belief, sole mediator between Heaven and Earth. In this philosophy Segalen found an analogy for the role of the artist.

Kafka had also seen the symbolic implications of the subject. His short story, The Great Wall of China suggests the mysterious power of this invisible figure enclosed within his palaces, his moats, his cities in a series of concentric squares, their solidity presenting an impenetrable surface to the men who strive like ants to build the Great Wall. For Kafka the Emperor represents 'Absence': an unknown power which controls the lives of men. Segalen with his greater knowledge of the lives and art of the emperors is more concerned with the man behind this mythological façade.

For Segalen the essential spirit of China was expressed in Taoism, the most ancient and obscure of Chinese religions. The Taoist vision of the universe, described by Léon Wieger as 'une fantasmagorie universelle', was highly individualistic, encouraging creativity and delight in the contemplation of beauty. Therefore it held particular appeal for Segalen, having the Buddhist qualities of exoticism and illusionism without its asceticism. As

3 Léon Wieger, quoted by Bouillier, p. 286.
I wrote to Claudel, 'il m'a lavé de [la morale pratique] du Bouddhisme dans ses parties fades...'; more positively he saw Taoism as:

... cette vision 'ivre' de l'univers; 'd'une part,' la pénétration à travers les choses lourdes, et la faculté d'en voir à la fois l'avant et le revers; 'd'autre part,' la dégustation ineffable de la beauté dans ces apparences fuyantes.1

Taoism provided a philosophical basis for European poets such as Segalen and Claudel who were seeking an escape from rationalism. Segalen's sense of intoxication derives from the Taoist idea of the world as a juxtaposition of contradictory impulses and opposing forces. This point of view was described by the ancient Taoist sage Chuang Tzu as:

un point d'où ceci et cela, oui et non, paraissent encore non distingués. Ce point est le pivot de la norme. C'est le centre immobile d'une circonférence, sur le contour de laquelle roulent toutes les contingences, les distinctions et les individualités; d'où l'on ne voit qu'un infini, qui n'est ni ceci ni cela, ni oui ni non. Voilà la vraie intelligence.2

In contrast with the more nihilistic Buddhist conception of the 'néant,' the void was for the Taoist an active principle, source of primordial energy.3 Although Taoism is not the unique source of inspiration for this aspect of Segalen's thought, it provided a unique mythological system, as well as the philosophical formulation of ideas which were already part of his outlook on life: a delight in the dynamism of change and paradox, a movement away from the more rational, Christian idea of progress towards a fixed goal to a free play with perspective. He chose from Taoist philosophy ideas which were compatible with his own attitude and theory of writing.

Incorporated into his fiction, Segalen's perceptions of China operate on various levels of meaning. On one level, the more immediate and colourful, he presents specific aspects of Chinese civilization, often from differing points of view. On another level he is concerned with universal themes, seeking to

3 There is an analogy with Heraclitean philosophy, which inspired T.S. Eliot's lines in 'Burnt Norton': 'At the still point of the turning world, In there the dance is' (Collected Poems 1909-35, London, Faber & Faber, 1948, p. 187). Bouillier has pointed out references to Heraclitean philosophy in Segalen's notes (Bouillier, op. cit., pp. 159-160).
renew our perceptions of reality through the creative play of the imagination in a world which seemed itself a fantasy.

La Queste à la Licorne

The unicorn symbolized for Segalen the fabulous qualities he sought to exploit in China. Towards the end of his first expedition through China, he described in a letter to his wife an idea for a novel or 'book' based on a similar journey:

LA QUESTE DE LA LICORNE
de Messer Odoric de Pordenone
d'après le manuscrit
de Venice — 1455-1490.

Il ouvre toute la Chine, tout le bestiaire et légendaire chinois, et m'y plonge avec beaucoup d'entrain. Je donnerai cependant le pas sur lui à Fils du Ciel.¹

The project was superseded not only by Le Fils du Ciel, his major project in China, but by René Leys and his poetry. Only a few plans were drafted. They are valuable however as an illustration of his ideas on the exotic novel. The idea took two basic forms. Initially he planned to build the book around the discovery of the diary of a fourteenth-century explorer. This hero would be based on either the historical figure of the Christian missionary Odoric de Pordenone,² or an imaginary character, Béroalde de Loudun. Like Odoric or Marco Polo, he would give a written account, in the language of his period, of his discoveries. However this account would be written by a man of greater artistic and intellectual refinement than either of the two early adventurers, and would be coloured not by considerations of trade or evangelization, but by a sense of wonder before the extraordinary world opening up to the first explorer,

voyant ce que j'ai vu, mais y cherchant, sous forme apologétique de Licorne, l'illusionnisme, et l'arrière-monde que j'y ai voulu trouver moi-même.³

¹ Letter to Yvonne Segalen, 2 January 1910, Lettres de Chine, op. cit., p. 236.
² His account of his journey through Central and South-East Asia to China in the early fourteenth century, like that of Marco Polo, provides one of the earliest and most remarkable eyewitness accounts of Asia. It has recently been republished in Cathay and the Way Thither, translated and edited by Colonel Sir Henry Yule, revised by Henri Cordier, vol. II, Taïpei, Ch'eng-wen Publishing Co., 1986.
The hero would have the creative insight and critical awareness of the writer, who saw a deeper meaning underlying natural phenomena. The participle 'voulu' suggests a conscious effort to create his own interpretation of reality. A further dimension would be added by the commentary of a modern reader who discovers this document. Thus, Segalen claimed, 'l'exotisme à double détente (espace et temps) y joue un rôle unique.' The gulf of time, language and attitude would divide not only European from Chinese but European from European.

Alternatively, Segalen considered writing a series of poems and prose purporting to be the impressions of Mou-Wang, a Chinese emperor who had according to Taoist legend travelled to the West. As in Les Immémoriaux we see the conflict between two worlds, the European and the other. Each is exotic in certain circumstances, depending on one's attitude and perspective. However the concept of exoticism suggested here is broader and more subtle, while the form of the projected novel is correspondingly complex.

Bouillier has argued that the idea was artificial and doomed to failure. It would certainly have been extremely difficult to execute. It is, however, interesting on several accounts. It may well have been seen by Segalen as an adaptation of the ancient Chinese tradition of pastiche, or what Reischauer and Fairbank describe as the 'imaginative reconstruction of lost texts.' Such a reconstruction demands the intensive study and imaginative empathy characteristic of Segalen's exotic fiction. It would have involved a play on different perspectives, revealing the relativity of the point of view, which varies according to the historical and geographical situation. Language plays an important part in the concept. The device would allow the author to present a 'double' language, where the original or medieval sense of the word contrasts with its modern meaning. Given Segalen's interest in renewing the original force of the written word, it is apparent that the device meant more than merely a naturalist stratagem to maintain the illusion of realism in the text. Segalen's idea evolves not so much from naturalism as from the taste.

1 Letter to Yvonne Segalen, 2 January 1910, Lettres de Chine, op. cit., p. 236.
2 Bouillier, op. cit., p. 168.
4 Quoting as an example of such a naturalist pretence of authenticity Heinhold's Bermudineze, Georg Lukács points out that the stratagem is illogical and would lead ultimately to incomprehensibility (The Historical Novel, translated by Hannah & Stanley Mitchell, London, Merlin Press, 1962, p. 196).
for 'l'écriture artiste' in late nineteenth-century France which stemmed from the work of Baudelaire. Huysmans, for example, used medieval language in his Vie de Sainte Lydie. According to this idea of language, the writer is less concerned with meaning than with the sensuous quality of the words, and with a certain effect: the sensation of strangeness and 'otherness' conveyed by the language. Initial obscurity is thus an essential part of the total form of the word.

Jorge Luis Borges has more recently played with similar ideas in certain stories in Ficciones. *Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius* describes the discovery of certain documents written in archaic language, which had a dynamic effect on modern society. In fact, they were 'forged', or rather invented by a group of philosophers, who thus succeeded in transforming reality through the action of the ideal. Another story, 'Pierre Menard, Author of Don Quixote', gives a humorous account of Menard's rewriting of Cervantes' novel. Thus he observes the difference in interpretation of identical texts according to the author, period and circumstances in which they are written. Borges discusses the effect of pastiche rather than attempting such a work himself. However like Segalen he seeks to transform our manner of looking at the world by means ofigma and paradox; he too is concerned with the manner in which our interpretation of language is conditioned by our preconceptions, our environment and our epoch.

Some of the ideas which Segalen considered for his Quête à la Licorne were developed in Le Fil du Ciel. Turning aside from what promised to be a difficult project, on his return to Peking in 1910 he concentrated on various other projects, including a poetic monograph about his descent of the Yangtze River.

'Un Grand Fleuve'

Written between 1910 and 1912, 'Un Grand Fleuve' was first published in Lettres Nouvelles in January 1956, and again in Imaginaires in 1971. This 'sorte de monographie' as Segalen called it is inspired by his journey by junk from the borders of Tibet to Shanghai at the end of his first expedition through China. The experience is described in Lettres de Chine, and also in

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1 Marcel Cressot, op. cit., pp. 8-8.
2 Letter to Yvonne Segalen, 10 January 1910, Lettres de Chine, op. cit., p. 239.
Whereas in the latter text he describes his physical encounter with the river, 'Un Grand Fleuve' explores the idea of the river more deeply on various levels. There are several ways of interpreting the movement of this river 'trouant de ses aros volontaires l'immense Empire rond comme une orange et savoureux comme ce fruit près de la putréfaction'. I propose that this impetuous, wilful movement is an allegory of the writer's own exploitation of the 'ripe fruit' of China. The 'Génie du Fleuve', the mythological 'dragon' of the river, refers ultimately to the creative energy of the writer.

In Chinese mythology the dragon was the spirit of the river, an emblem of primordial energy. Sent from Heaven in the form of rain, it remained under the earth in winter, returning in the spring at the source of the river. Its waters brought fertility to the earth. The dragon was the emblem of the Emperor, indicating that the creative power of the universe was entrusted to him as mediator between Heaven and Earth. The fantastic image of the dragon suggested in the narrative evokes many of the major themes in Segalen's later work: creative energy, imagination associated with the movement, opacity and reflective qualities of water; the autonomous power of the Emperor.

Frequently, moreover, in Chinese literature and art, the 'Tao' or 'Way' was symbolized as a river, a 'seamless web of unbroken movement and change'. In a world of perpetual flux, Taoist sages followed the path of Wu-Wei, which taken literally means 'without action' or non-assertion, living in harmony with nature. Obstacles were to be overcome not by sudden aggression but by the constant, relentless pressure of the water. Segalen's river is the 'Tao', the Way he has chosen, Chinese in theme and imagery yet with deeply personal connotations:

'C'est le destin de tous les grands fleuves que d'être unique au monde, et chacun pour lui sans jamais pouvoir en toucher d'autres autrement que pour l'absorber... Tout fleuve est forcément

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1 Letter to Yvonne Segalen, 10 January 1910, op. cit.; and Equippe, op. cit., Ch. IX.
2 'Un Grand Fleuve', Imaginaires, op. cit., p. 70.
Il, lié! hé, Dragon couché! Empiré! Héros paresseux
qui sommeilla en un de nous, inconnu, envoûte, irrévélé...
Lève-toi, révèle-toi, c'est le temps.
The river for Segalen is highly individualistic, fierce and proud: qualities he seeks in his own work. However any tributary is absorbed into the mainstream, the dominating 'personality' of the great river: 'Les parcelles métalliques lentement rouillées se dissolvent peu à peu dans l'onde vivante, lui communiquant leur saveur et perdant leur spécificité.' The-Other, is, in this case assimilated, losing its identity. The adjective 'âpre' is surprising. It refers not only to the ruthless force of the current, but more precisely to the biting irony of Segalen's own prose.

The narration opens with the comment, 'J'ignore d'où il coule exactement.' One of the very few references in the text to the first person, it draws the essay into an unspecified, broader context, relating the author's reflections to a particular narrator, the 'self.' There is immediately a rapport established between. It, and some inner quality: 'Lui-même ne le sait pas et moins encore le Génie qui le pénètre, l'anime et marque tous ses ressauts.' This trio of the self, the other and the Gente or spirit underlyng this object foreshadows the theory outlined for a projected essay on 'Sites' in 1917: the 'triple alternance' which was to be a means of undertaking: 'Ia totale compréhension de la nature, et qu'alors, orgueilleusement, sans se confondre, on jouit des irre grands pouvoirs qui sont: d'être, de connaître, et d'aimer.' In this case 'Je', the observer, expresses the desire to know; Lui, the river, is the other, the exotic object which 'exists' and attracts by its strange power, its difference; Le Génie, the 'spirit of penetration', indicates the writer's power to discover the inner nature of the object, 'et le pouvoir d'en jouir pleinement.'

The opening comment is, moreover, characteristically negative, attacking naturalistic 'certainties'. The narrator's intention is not to give specific information or description, but to explore inner meanings, and to delight in

1 'Un Grand Fleuve', op. cit., p. 70.  
2 ibid., p. 73.  
3 ibid., p. 69.  
5 ibid., loc. cit.  
6 v. below, p. 302.
the affective qualities of an object rather than to represent surface realities. The narrator announces his intention:

... ayant dessen seulement d'honorer par ceci le Cénacle du Fleuve, j'e me m'attarderai pas à décider, ci là-bas, en plein cœur du Tibet, c'est cette veine d'eau ou bien celle-ci, toute semblable, qui est vraiment son origine.1

Thus he pushes aside naturalist theories of heredity and origin: at the source there is little difference between one spring and another. "The difference comes from the terrain, the river traverses: the 'communication longue des rives et de l'eau.'"

Il a rôdé tant de berges, il a léché tant d'argiles rouges, ocres, grises ou bleutées que, mélangeant toutes ces poussières, ses eaux en ont pris un miroitement particulier. Point de transparence imbécile; point de naïveté comme dans les yeux des sources; mais cette opalescence irisée, changeante.2

The particular qualities of the Yangtze for Segalen lie in the subtle blend of colours, and the chameleon quality — opal, iridescent, 'bleutées'. As with language, the beauty of the water lies in the suggestive power of its reflections, calling for a creative response from the observer. 'Transparence' is scorned, as is the transparent language of representational art. The colour of the waters comes from the earth—"the soil of China, the "bon gros feu" which is the material of the writer."

Yet the river has its origins in the mountains of Tibet, "haut pays de Bod dont les écrits gardent encore les textes purs de la Loi et de la Connaissance".3 Coming from another land, like Buddhism, it assumes the coloration of the land of China, as Buddhism was influenced by Taoism. To take the analogy a step further, Segalen himself came to Taoism through Buddhism; moving away from the Buddhist Law, he preferred the freer, more joyful Taoist theories of establishing inner harmony with the universe. The great river flowing through central China suggests the movement of the writer's imagination, absorbing colour and material from the land he traverses. "Little is known of the hidden depths of this river, with its opaque surface 'où des yeux indiscrets s'arrêtent et qui ne laisse rien voir de ces abîmes que les reflets changeants..."4 The opaque surface represents the

1 'Un Grand Fleuve', op. cit., p. 69.  
2 ibid., p. 72.  
3 ibid., p. 71.  
4 ibid., p. 72.
density of 'objective' artistic writing, which reveals 'nothing' of the
writer's inner self, but rather a reflection of the reader's own mind. 1
Believing in the essential privacy of language, Segalen had no wish to reveal
his intimate self to the 'indiscreet' reader, as his friend Jean Lartigue
observed in the preface to Equipee. 2 The 'Génie du Fleuve' which lurks fat
below the surface is an inhuman power beyond human comprehension, sensitive to
its environment, intuitive, with its own intense individuality. This
mysterious life of the river has the monstrous form of a dragon-like creature.
The author gives a 'sensuous account of its 'skin' — 'Les poètes ont peu
chanté l'immédiat et le charme et la jouissance de la peau,' he observes when
describing the river in Equipee: 3

Mais la peau du fleuve a bien d'autres sensations; elle se plisse
en mille signes, se ride ou se dilate; elle s'étire, se collie et devient
visqueuse, ou bien tout d'un coup, file fluidiquement droit devant
elle. Le vent montant la gêne, et l'énerve, qui idf passe à
reculons 'sur l'épiderme'...

These 'excitants grossiers' are mere details of the surface, 'étrangers'
the life of the hidden depths. 'The 'boatmen are 'insectes aquatiques',
'parasites', threatened by the 'bouche mobile suiveuse, pleine d'eau violente'.
The 'exoticism' of the description lies in the presentation of a power beyond
human control or comprehension. Men are seen from a different perspective,
as a helpless prey, 'qui est temporaire et d'un règne différent.' The
writer's scorn is similar in style to his description of the tourists as
'vermis' in 'Le Siège de l'Ame'. 5 This technique is designed to set himself
apart from humanity, and thus to identify more closely with his inhuman
subject. In Equipee he states his intention in writing of the river: 'ne
pas l'affoler de sentiments humains, et ne pas lui prêter de souffrances
inutiles... 6 Yet although he avoids sentimentality, he inevitably must use
a human vocabulary to convey the sensations of movement and power he
attributes to the river: 'Le Fleuve, ne 'tend' pas vers la mer, qu'il ignore,
mais à tout instant jouit dans sa descente.' However he succeeds in evoking

1 cit. Philippe Sollers: 'Lire, c'est lire ce que nous sommes' (L'écriture et
2 Equipee, op. cit., p. ix.
3 ibid., p. 101.
4 'Un Grand Fleuve', op. cit., p. 76.
5 v. ibid., p. 205.
7 ibid., p. 59.
the sensation of a natural force which dwarfs humanity. A vivid sense of the affective qualities of his subject is conveyed by minute details such as the long oar of the sampan, "un excellent appareil de tact et de toucher" which conveys to the oarsman the most sensitive movements of the water. The poet delights in this close contact with nature, the exhilaration of pure sensation. The rapids are the high point of this experience:

... un nœud dans le courant, un moment décisif, une tragédie complète où l'exposition, la crise et le dénouement obéissent à un décor unique, et dont le dénouement indéfiniment joué est fatalement heureux et victorieux.  

The movement of the river takes on a characteristically dramatic form. Energy, conflict, power are the essential qualities which Segalen sees in this natural force, "L'apogée des qualités violentes". In his study, despite an effort towards objectivity, he reveals his own passionate temperament, his preference for violent sensation. In a letter to Debussy he observed that the descent of the rapids was 'pleine d'ivresse', a term he often uses of Taoist art. Rather than follow the river to its inevitable end, he preferred to close his narrative with a description of chaotic movement as the river forces its way through a rocky mountain pass. The description is precise, powerful and dramatic: 'voici en plein milieu, dardée, une langue d'eau, triangulaire, polie comme une épée claire... 

Segalen's description has a remarkable evocative power, conveying not only sensory detail but an imaginative reflection on the nature of physical phenomena. Details taken from close personal observation of the river, coloured by the fantasy of Chinese mythology, provide an analogy with the flow of language, where 'dans un désarroi sans nom tous les mouvements sont possibles'. The narrative is an apt symbol of the qualities of his writing, where 'désarroi' represents a poetic exhilaration — Rimbaud's 'dérèglement de tous les sens' — which is nevertheless controlled within the banks of conscious craftsmanship.

Peintures

The intoxicating drama of continual movement and change symbolized by the river finds masterly expression in Segalen's Peintures. This remarkable
poetic prose, which deserves closer study in itself, is relevant to our
study on several respects. Not only does it express in unique literary form,
like Études, Odes and the fictional works, the author's profound contact with
Chinese civilization, but it includes as an essential part of its form
reflections on the relationship between author and reader, and on the creative
process, which are more closely related to Segalen's fictional techniques than
to his poetry. Like 'Un Grand Fleuve' it suggests a Taoist universe of
perpetual flux, but the fantastic qualities of this mythological world are
more apparent in the rapidly changing 'peintures' which flicker before us as
if on a cinema screen. Peintures littéraires, they celebrate the power of
language to transform and continually efface its subject. In a letter to
Henry Manceron, he describes the form and tone of Peintures:

Peintures n'auront pas de nom défini déjà dans les biens, Lanson,
Deschamps et Nordau. — Si j'avais à en indiquer un, je ne
pourrais trouver plus d'autre que 'Boniments' ou encore 'Parades aux
tréteaux'. C'est d'ailleurs le titre même de leur préface. Une
assemblée, des spectateurs qu'il faut aguicher et de grandes toiles
de couleurs vives... Evocations crues. Fantasmagories verbales;
et tout d'un coup l'escamotage et le mur gris. Les sujets? toute
l'histoire chinoise. La forme? celle, variée, des Peintures
chinoises... Mais tout doit se soumettre à l'attitude fondamentale:
un Boniment. 1

Peintures is written in a light, ironical tone. Segalen seeks to underline
the illusory nature of literature by presenting the text as the slick patter
of a mountebank addressing his audience: 'Vous êtes là: vous attendez.'
By beginning with points of suspension, the author seems to hesitate, like
the puppeteer waiting dramatically for the attention of the audience. As in
Chinese and Japanese theatre there is no effort to hide the conventions of
the art: the puppeteer is revealed, manipulating the strings of his puppets,
and appealing to the audience to play their part in this mutual entry into
fantasy: 'Je ne veux d'autre réponse ou d'autre aide que le silence et que
vos yeux.' 2 In a later note for L'Imitation du Bouddha Segalen applied this
technique to the art of the novel, as a means of establishing a more open
relationship between author and reader:

— Cette intervention de l'auteur résout la fausse alarme: ne
pouvant, du fond de la coulisse, agiter à mon gré mes marions,
sans qu'un fil ne casse, sans qu'un ressort ne crie ou râle,
sans intervention maladroite d'une grosse tête barbue crevant la

1 Letter to Henry Manceron, 3 February 1913. Essai sur l'Exotisme, pp. 64-5.
2 Stiles, Peintures, Équipés, op. cit., p. 176.
toile de fond du Guignol — expliquant avec un mauvais accent ce qu'il ne peut pas faire voir — alors, tout bonnement j'interviens, assis majestueusement sur la scène. Marions et marionnette, dansent tout d'abord pour moi.  

The author's attitude towards his art as a 'Boniment' is perhaps unconsciously echoed here in the phrase 'tout bonnement'. He delights in the illusions of his craft, creating primarily for himself. There is an implied comparison between the clumsy, popular 'Grand Guignol' and the studied, aristocratic Japanese puppet show with the puppeteer on stage. Art is seen as essentially private and incommunicable; in order to see for himself the author's fantasies, the reader must also create: 'Et je ne puis dissimuler... je vous réclame comme des aides indispensables à la substitution.' The spectators or readers are indispensable for the success of the show; if the author wishes to share his art with others, he must stimulate their interest.

Whimsically, with an imperious wave of his fan, he projects fantastic visions on to 'a blank 'wall', as if on to a screen: the 'Peintures magiques', a magic round of genies and Taoist deities; the 'Cortèges et trophées des tributs des royaumes'; and 'Peintures dynastiques' — dramatic glimpses of Chinese history.

Cependant, ce n'est là tout d'abord qu'un grand mur, de couleur indécise, fait de briques et de gravats; — avec des taches, des imprégnations, des efflorescences givrées, des moisissures noires ou neigeuses...

The art of writing has the freedom to sell incoherence and to dispel visions with a wave of the wand — or the Oriental fan. Taoist techniques of deep breathing play their part in the creative technique:

L'homme est de nouveau seul dans son noir, campé sur son pied, sabre au poing, prêt à trancher par la nuit...

Respirez. Bien. Regardez encore. La nuit se peuple.

The reader like the author assists in this creative process; by deep, rhythmical breathing he enters into the trance-like-contemplative state of the writer, who sees in the uneven surface of the wall strange objects; as if in a Rorschach test. The technique suggests the device used by Robbe-Grillet in his novels, where scenes of fantasy emerge from a crack in the ceiling or...
the surface of a door. The narrator continually urges his reader to further efforts, conveying a sense of excitement and continual movement:

Tout d'un coup un creneau s'ouvre: des ailes battent: des gros yeux roulent: un crâne creve: il sort une pagode qui d'un seul jet fuse en plein ciel...

Vous avez vu? Eventez encore, eventez.
Un personnage se compose: un moine nu, extatique. Il conserve, de tout son torpe, deux yeux seuls...
Eventez encore, eventez...
Voici qu'un visage écarquillé vous regarde; si magiquement et si profondément qu'il va se coller sur votre face et deviendrait votre visage, si, vous évantant toujours, vous ne le changiez en quelque autre chose qui n'interloque pas...

The depth and power of expression on this imaginary face suggests the intense mystical experience of 'La Tête', written two years earlier. It suggests also a passage in 'Vingt des Royaumes', where Segalen describes his own creative process: the moment when, sunk into a corner of a huge antique armchair in his study,

malgré moi, mon regard s'en va toujours vers le point brillant du front d'un fonctionnaire de jade, bloc luisant et pur...
Alors je sais très bien d'avance ce qui va arriver. 

C'est d'abord un rétrécissement brusque de toute ma vision condensée sur une boule de porcelaine, creuse comme un vase, ronde comme une tête, et qui, sans bouger, devient tête à son tour, enfin.2

The poet, conscious of his own technique in imagining his fantasies, has recreated in Peintures an image of the imagination at work. The objects which surround Segalen and inspire his work are characteristically ancient, precious, artistic, exotic. The writing grows from the contemplation of such an object, or a text — most frequently a work of art or of human genius which causes Segalen to reflect on the nature of the creative process. The concern with artistic values is continually present, either consciously or unconsciously. Hence within the text of Peintures there is a critical comment on the purpose of fiction:

... Vous n'etez pas decus? Rellelement, vous n'attendiez pas une representation d'objets? Derriere les mots que je vais dire, il y eut parfois des objets; parfois des symboles; souvent des

1 Stèles, Peintures, Équipée, op. cit., p. 197.
2 Imaginaires, op. cit., p. 104.
fantômes historiques... N'est-ce pas assez pour vous plaire? Et si même on ne découvrait point d'images vraiment peintes là-dessous... tant mieux, les mots seraient image plus librement.

The real world, the point of departure into Segalen's exotic world, is here reduced to a minimum. Certain Chinese paintings, screens, painted porcelain and works of art inspired the form, the ideas of this work, which then developed freely in the writer's imagination. The erudition of these sources has been demonstrated in other studies. We are more concerned with the way in which the writer moves from the real to the imaginary within the exotic world he has chosen. The Peintures illustrate the fact that literature has its own reality, which is deeper and more meaningful than the everyday world. Once created, a character has his own life. The artist in Peintures hardly dares to put away his work because his portraits seem to him so real: 'Et maintenant, comment l'enserrez-vous?... On ôse seulement la rouler pour l'enfermer dans le cercueil de cèdre comme les autres..." Like the 'Flamme amante,' or the 'Cinq Génies aveugles,' his painting has for the artist more meaning, more life than anything else. The Taoists believed that 'les réalités sont suscitées par les emblèmes' an idea found also in Villiers de l'Ile-Adam's L'Ève Future, as in Peintures. However only those with the ability to 'see' can appreciate this deeper reality. The Emperor interested just in material wealth seeks to follow the artist, who has entered his painting through a little door:

... devient esprit et disparaît.

L'Empereur aussi, comme vous le savez, et franchit de même la porte... fermée, effacée. Toute la peinture et les autres déjà roulées ont disparu.

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5. V. above, p. 145.
6. Marcel Griaule, La Pensée chinoise, Paris, Albin Michel, 1950, p. 329: 'Une fois pensé, qu'est-ce qui n'arrive pas d'un seul, dans le mystérieux Univers?'
The idea suggests the stories of Galdós, 'The Door in the Wall' and 'The Magic Shop', which describe a marvellous world opening up from a door in the street — but only to certain privileged readers. It is the convention adopted also in Alice in Wonderland: a wonderland exists for those who know how to find it. Segalen, who showed interest in the work of Wells and Lewis Carroll, clothes the idea in an exotic Taoist form:

Tout peut se tourner-boum! rien ne sera change:
les vieillards vont devenir enfants et ces nouveaux-nes des vieillards. Tout est-tout n'est pas deux. Tout danse, tout pétille; tout est prêt à se rouler en spirale.

Moving outside, the material universe of space and time, the Master-Painter becomes lost in the intoxicated world of a strange world of contradiction and paradox, the ever-changing spiral of ceaseless change. Objects are weightless, defying logical laws of gravity: 'Des poissons volant dans la vase aérienne, remontent comme des plongeurs et vont percer la coque mince.' This topsy-turvy world of delight in the irrational has, however, a more universal appeal. Exotic in subject-matter and attitude, unique in form, it represents an attitude towards fiction which is characteristic of twentieth-century writers: a movement away from linear, rational narrative towards creative play with the paradoxes and fantasies lying deep within the unconscious mind. The writer, like the Master-Painter, seeks to give artistic expression to the extraordinary universe he perceives in his moments of contemplation:

Les commentateurs ont traduit: 'Qu'il cherchait lumière unissant enfin à jamais joie et vie, vie et... et ils se sont moqués comme d'un ivrogne et d'un fou.
Et pourtant, cette vision enfloit, ce regard pénétrant, cette clairvoyance peut tenir lieu pour quelques-uns — dont vous êtes? — de toute-la raison du monde, et du dieu.'

The question is demanding: the reader must choose either to live on the conventional plane of reason and logic, or to follow the ray of light which leads to joy and illusion, through the creative use of language.

\[1\] V. above, p. 136; and below, p. 336, note 1.
\[2\] Stèles, Feintures, Equipée, op. cit., p. 187.
\[3\] ibid., p. 230.
\[4\] ibid., p. 179.
7. THE ANTI-CLAUDEL

Si Claudel a mis sa marque sur la Chine, une certaine Chine, ... il ne semble pas que cette Chine ait mis sa griffe sur Claudel.¹

'Care à Claudel', Pierre Ythurbide wrote to Segalen in 1913; '... car je considère qu'il est aussi embarrassant pour un littérateur d'écrire sur la Chine après Claudel, qu'il était... embarrassant en 1902, pour un musicien, de composer après Pelléas.' To which Segalen declared, 'J'ai répondu en marge par une boutade.'² In his reply to Ythurbide, Segalen outlined what he saw as the differences between Claudel's approach to China and his own. The claw of the Chinese dragon could not leave its mark on Claudel's work, he suggests, because Claudel's view of the universe was closed. Claudel was not, according to Segalen, interested in the other for its own sake, but rather imposed on the other his own personality and attitude: 'Il y a mis surtout cette prodigieuse chose qui est lui...'³ As a writer on 'exotism' he seemed to Segalen to neglect the potentiality of his subject, to remain wilfully blind to new ideas, and to ignore Chinese literary forms:

Claudel n'a pas vu les ressources nouvelles d'un texte bref et joli, adouci de commentaires. Ni tout ce symbolisme brutal et originel contenu dans les figurations primitives. Ni cette rhétorique prudente de l'Ode qui s'avance par une sorte de piétinement: — ni l'impersonnalité fonctionnelle de l'histoire annalistique. Ni ce dialogue impérial où des réticences, des chutes soudaines de voix, remplacement le mot Empereur...⁴

Segalen is referring to the influence of China on his own work, for example the form of the classical Chinese ode, enriched by numerous commentaries, which was put to ironical use in his Odes; stylistic devices

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¹ Segalen to P. Ythurbide, 1 April 1913, Annexe 2A, Le Combat pour le Sôl, op. cit., p. 159.
² Ythurbide to Segalen, quoted ibid., loc. cit. Debussy's reply would have been equally emphatic, as he expressed to Segalen his desire to go beyond this initial success (Segalen's record of a conversation with Debussy, 8 October 1907, Segalen et Debussy, op. cit., p. 71).
³ Segalen's letter to Ythurbide, ibid., p. 162.
⁴ ibid., pp. 161-2.
suggesting respect, dread or awe, inspired for example by the word 'Emperor': the symbolism of primitive Chinese calligraphy. Segalen's own knowledge of Chinese literature was not as extensive as he suggests. However having studied the Chinese language under Vissière in Paris in 1908-9, and again as a student interpreter in China, he had some knowledge of calligraphy. As he wrote to his wife, both he and Louis Laloy, whom he described as 'le plus discret des sinologues parisiens', had originally believed that Claudel's literary style was influenced by the qualities of calligraphy: 'Nous avons reconnu, clair comme le jour, l'influence du style chinois écrit, sur sa prose... Lucidité des critiques lointaines... The density of language, the juxtaposition of paradoxical ideas which suggested to the scholar of Chinese a knowledge of calligraphy was due in Claudel's case to the influence of Rimbaud: '... son maître, son sauveur, son guide, son déclencheur, l'intitü qui le fit voir, entendre et sentir... ce fut Arthur Rimbaud.' Segalan and Claudel are at the opposite poles of a similar anarchistic literary cult whose high priest was Rimbaud, and whose aim was to demolish the façade of convention in order to perceive deeper realities. The innovatory syntax of Rimbaud's prose, its arbitrary associations and juxtapositions, its cult of violence opened the way to new literary developments. Segalen's letter to Claudel was for Segalen a lasting source of stylistic inspiration. En route to China he wrote to his wife, 'Il est évident que Claudel pèse actuellement beaucoup sur moi. Je ne m'en effraie pas. Il me faut des sortes de tremplin dont je m'évaude ensuite... While he admired the rhythm, power and innovatory qualities of Claudel's language, he rejected the poet's dogmatic assumptions, reading into the work quite different interpretations from those intended by the writer. He wrote to Claudel that...

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3 ibid., loc. cit.
4 Letter to Yvonne Segalen, 29 April 1909, ibid., p. 23.
Thus the intensity of Claudel's evocation of the divine is for Segalen an indication of man's desire to create something other than the self, with the appeal of that which is inaccessible, mysterious and infinite. Although Claudel was aggressively Catholic in attitude, like Segalen he delighted in creative dialectic. The literary forms of the drama and the 'conversation' with an imaginary double were for him means of exploring a subject from various perspectives:

D'en haut, de côté, de par derrière, du futur, du passé, cela n'interaitait et finirait par dégouliner vers une espèce de centre jamais atteint par toutes sortes de chemins et de méandres.

The idea of moving around a subject, exploring it from different angles, suggests the Taoist procedure described above. Segalen observed to his wife that Claudel, 'comme moi, ... est d'emblée en Chine allé vers le Tao-té King, l'abyssale pensée du vieux Lao-tseu'. However, Claudel's knowledge of Taoism was almost entirely filtered through the erudite interpretations of missionaries such as Fr Léon Wieger, and coloured by the evangelistic doctrines of the French Futurist school, as we shall see in discussing Le Combat pour le Sol.

Segalen's attitude towards woman is, moreover, similar in tone to that of Claudel, for whom she is 'Mary', man's inspiration and guide, or 'Eye', his temptation: 'La chair vient de la femme, et comme elle, elle est curieuse et lâche, et traîtressement elle livre l'esprit qui dort.' Christian theology plays a large part in this attitude towards the female principle in both writers. Woman, representing material beauty, is either a means or an obstacle in man's effort to create meaning from natural phenomena: an attitude which Lafcadio Hearn described as a characteristically Western approach towards women, quite foreign to Asian minds.

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1 Quoted in the preface to Hs. Œuvres en Prose, Paris, Gallimard, Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 1965, p. xviii, with his lines to Honegger about the generative effect writing had on his style: '... pas une ligne hors de moi aboutissant à la phrase, qui ne provoque un écho, une réponse, un débat, une controverse...'. The words might well have been written by Segalen.

2 v. above, p. 191.


4 'Le Repos du Septième Jour', Théâtre de Paul Claudel, Paris, Gallimard, Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 1952, p. 822. Segalen expressed admiration for the figure of Yésin Partage de Midi, 'l'interdite', who because of her inaccessibility is the object of desire. There are parallels here with Segalen's idea of feminine 'exoticism'.

5 In his essay 'Of the Eternal Feminine', discussed by Beongcheon Yu, op. cit., Ch. XI, 'The Eternal Feminine. Beyond Western Passionalism'.
Despite Segalen's effort to suppress European attitudes, his interest in Asia was in fact an aesthetic appreciation of certain limited aspects of ancient civilization. Both he and Claudel were condescending in their attitude towards contemporary Chinese scholars and artists. Neither had any personal relationship with the Chinese. Their aggressive individualism contrasts with the greater tolerance and sympathy for Asia shown by, for example, Saint-John Perse, Lafcadio Hearn or Sir Edmund Backhouse, whom we shall discuss further in Part III. Although they held widely diverging philosophies of life, they were shaped by a basically similar intellectual and social climate.

Like many artists and writers of his time, Claudel desired intensely to escape from European civilization, which he found intolerable. In China he felt at home: 'Ici, au contraire, tout paraît naturel et normal.' Later he expressed in 'Choses de Chine' his enthusiasm for 'cette Chine à l'état de friture perpétuelle, grouillante, désordonnée, anarchique...12 However, like Segalen, he despised Confucianist philosophy as stultifying pedantry, preferring to see in Taoism 'la clef de l'âme chinoise'.3 He delighted in the sense of the supernatural which penetrated everyday life in China, as in pre-Renaissance Europe. In his appreciation of Chinese theatre, art and life-style he reveals unusual powers of perception. The petty details of everyday life in the streets — the filth, the smells, the flesh — are all part of a general delight in creation. He shows a much greater appreciation of modern China than Segalen. Yet he refused to undertake any serious study of Chinese language or civilization:

Je n'ai pas suivi aucune étude méthodique et toute ma connaissance du pays résulte de l'atmosphère dont je me suis laissé imprégner... des impressions recueillies au fil des jours et des nuits et des lectures plus ou moins incohérentes que j'ai piquées de tous côtés.

This deliberate desire to limit himself to sensory impression is an attitude similar to that discussed in our earlier chapter on Loti and the Romantics. It reveals a different intention on the part of the writer. It might be

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2 Paul Claudel, Œuvres en Prose, op. cit., p. 1022.
3 'Sous le signe du dragon', ibid., p. 1063.
4 'Une Promenade à travers la littérature japonaise', quoted by G. Gadoffre, op. cit., p. 224.
explained initially as a desire to allow the spontaneity of untutored sensory impressions free play, giving rise to fresh perceptions of reality. However ultimately it must be seen as a desire to dominate rather than, like Segalen, to open himself to other possibilities. Claudel was less concerned with China for its own sake than with universal considerations. His refusal to study Chinese is the more remarkable because it caused difficulties in his profession, giving rise to complaints from his colleagues.

Although he knew nothing of the language, nevertheless he showed deep sensitivity to the graphic and aesthetic qualities of calligraphy, seeing the character as an entity existing for and of itself in space, like 'ailes noires, établissant dans l'invisible des points de repère'. He observes that whereas European writing demands a continuous flow of syntax, 'une chaîne ininterrompue de verbes, de prépositions et d'incidentes', the Chinese poem 'se fait dans l'esprit du lecteur'. The symbolic whiteness of the page plays a dynamic role in Chinese literature, he claims: 'Partout, c'est le non-visible qui donne aux choses efficacité.' In his 'Idéogrammes occidentaux' and 'Cent Phrases pour éventails', he sought to convey to the more abstract European phonetic alphabet the pictorial quality of calligraphy.

Segalen, with greater knowledge of Chinese calligraphy, was never tempted to make such analogies. Nor was he tempted, like Apollinaire and Mallarmé, by typographical innovations. He was more concerned to bring out in his writing the symbolic qualities of calligraphy, and the mystique with which it was surrounded in Chinese culture, disregarding the fact that the character also represents a sound:

Ils dédaignent d'être les. Ils ne réclament pas la voix ou la musique. Ils méprisent les tons changeants et les syllabes qui semblent chaotiques. Ils n'expriment pas; ils signifient; ils sont.

The characters at the head of each Stèle, like the poems themselves, have an autonomous reality with which the poet associates the solidity and permanence of characters carved into stone.

The power of language to create its own reality is, as we have seen, an idea central to Segalen's work. *Les Immémoriaux* reveals the importance of

Dans le vaste territoire de l'Empire, elles seules impliquent la stabilité.
the spoken word in primitive culture; Chinese calligraphy symbolizes the magic powers of writing. Bardon has observed that the word in China is not a simple abstract sign which depends for its meaning on grammar and syntax:

Dans sa forme immuable de monosyllabe, dans son aspect neutre, il retient toute l'énergie imperative de l'acte dont il est le correspondant vocal, — dont il est l'emblème.

It was regarded by the Chinese as having a mystical creative power: "Savoir le bon, dire le mot, c'est posséder l'être ou créer la chose." This idea was not limited to China; it is found in most early civilizations, as in St John's Gospel: "In principio erat Verbum." By naming an object one is often believed to acquire a specific power over that object. This idea, which remains in most cultures vague and unformulated, finds specific expression in the Chinese theory of the efficacy of the emblem. In this theory Segalen discovered a rich and exotic symbol for the creative power of writing.

Given Claudel's appreciation of Chinese calligraphy, philosophy and civilization, it is extraordinary that in his lecture on French poetry and the Far East, given in 1937, he should ignore the very existence of Segalen's Œuvres, Odes and Peintures. He had acknowledged receipt of the magnificent first editions given him by Segalen (the former is in fact dedicated to him), commenting however mainly on their superb presentation. Œuvres he considered "un des soubassements les plus précieux de ma bibliothèque. L'édition est admirable de goût." Again, of Peintures he remarked: "Quel papier! où l'avez-vous trouvé. Cette espèce de feutre noir où l'on voit par transparence des algues, des cheveux de femme, des herbes de poissons, des cultures d'étoiles ou de bactéries, la vapeur et tout un monde en formation..." Thus he sees a strange world emerging in the paper rather than the words. Totally oblivious to the originality of form and technique, he sees only "visions nostalgiques de la vieille Chine."

His failure to acknowledge the quality of Segalen's work — except for a reference to René Leyss as 'le beau livre de Segalen sur la fin de Pékin' —

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2 ibid., p. 41.  
3 Claudel to Segalen, 8 June 1915, Cahiers du Sud, No. 288, op. cit., p. 289.  
4 Claudel to Segalen, 23 November 1916, ibid., p. 294.  
5 ibid., loc. cit.  
6 'Poésie française et Extrême-Orient', op. cit., p. 1038.
can probably be put down to religious intolerance. In the same way he 
dismissed Mallarmé's work as artificial and 'sans importance particulière', 
and Glidé as irresponsible. He no doubt saw Segalen's work as escapism at 
best, and sacrilege at worst. Segalen's violent attacks on the Church, 
indirectly expressed even in certain Stèles, may have antagonized him. 
However, in discussing 'French poetry and the Far East' he took examples from 
Mallarmé, Verlaine and Toulet without mentioning Segalen, whose poetry 
conveys a far deeper knowledge and awareness of the subject. The poems he 
chose reveal his own concept of exoticism: he quotes from Verlaine 'l'art 
japonais effraie mes yeux de Français... from Mallarmé his desire to 
imiter le Chinois au coeur limpide et fin'; from Toulet 'Le Poète', a light 
piece addressed to the traveller in China. These poems consist of 
observations from an outsider with no great knowledge of China. Segalen 
however sought to portray from within, with empathy, identifying with his 
subject as closely as possible through study, contemplation and the 
suppression of personal feeling. In his 'Notes on Exoticism' he defined the 
essential difference between his attitude to exoticism and that of Claudel: 

L'attitude ne pourra donc pas dans ces proses rythmées, denses, 
mesurées comme un sonnet, ne pourra donc pas être le je qui 
ressent... mais au contraire l'apostrophe du milieu au voyageur, 
de l'Exotique à l'Exotiste qui le pénètre, l'assaille, le réveille 
et le trouble. C'est le tu qui dominer.2

Segalen is conscious of Claudel's influence on his prose style, which can be 
seen in the early writings in China, the Brique et Tuiles which provided a 
basis for his later work. However, in seeking to suppress the self by 
contemplation of the other, he achieves a different tone towards his subject. 
Although in fact he rarely attempted to write from the point of view of the 
'milieu' — a difficult concept — he sought to capture something of the 
esential spirit of a place by becoming absorbed in his subject, and 
considering it in depth.

Most of the prose poems in the Connaissance de l'Est are not directly 
concerned with China, but with Claudel's own ideas and feelings: his 
arrivals and departures, his delight in living. China is often only a 
generalized background, as in 'La Pluie', 'Heures dans le Jardin', 'La Nuit à 
la Vérandah', 'Splendeur de la-Lune', 'Sur la Cervelle'. It is a symbol of

1 Quoted by G. Offre, op. cit., p. 23.
2 Essai sur l'Exotisme, op. cit., p. 21.
the Earth, to be enjoyed in its fullness, with appetite, as the pig 's'y
vautre avec énormité'. 'N'applique point à la vérité l'œil seul, mais tout
cela sans réserve qui est toi-même.' Sensory experience of various natural
phenomena is assimilated into a total view of the universe, catholic in the
broadest sense of the word. 'ivre de voir, je comprends tout,' he claims in
Connaissance de l'Est. The desire to 'know', expressed in titles such as
Connaissance de l'Est, Connaissance du Terre and Le Livre sur la Chine,
reveals an approach very different from that of Segalen.3

Moving from the particular to the general, from diversity towards unity,
Claudel sees in China a symbol of the world awaiting redemption. That which
is unique in Chinese civilization is not developed, and tends to become
assimilated in a sweeping, universal vision. Thus when describing 'Le Fleuve'
in Connaissance de l'Est, Claudel moves from the theme of the river to the
land: 'c'est la terre toute entière que nous accueillons, la Terre de la
Terre, l'Asie, mère de tous les hommes, centrale, solide, primordiale: l'
abondance du sein! Segalen, on the other hand, is concerned with 'Le Grand
Fleuve' as a symbol of individualism. Where Claudel delights in the
cosmopolitan nature of the coastal ports, Segalen closes his description of the
river before the moment where it merges with the sea, losing its unique savour.
Where Claudel's vision is all-compassing, Segalen's is narrow, concentrated,
iteitist.

Where Claudel sees Asia as the mother earth, as loving and life-giving,
Segalen shows fierce antagonism for the image of the mother, preferring the
rebellious outsider, hors-la-loi.4 There is among his heroes a sole figure of authority:
The king or emperor: Yez, Siddhartha, Orpheus and Kouang-siu.

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1 La Connaissance de l'Est, Œuvre Poétique, Paris, Gallimard, Bibliothèque de
2 ibid., p. 45.
3 Segalen's note in Briques et Tuiles headed 'Le Livre sur la Chine' may have
been a comment on Claudel's project:

... Puis, cette obstination, après avoir... regardé le Chinois, cet
entièrement à vouloir fixer à jamais, et ce qu'il est, et ce qu'il n'est
pas! Stupidité audacieuse et boîteuse! Définir, cataloguer, limiter,
classer! Tout d'abord, toute affirmation Chinoise, (ou autre, n'est-ce
pas?) appelle sa négation même... Et dans quel but? Que ce jeu
m'indiffère! (Briques et Tuiles, Montpellier, Fata Morgana, 1975,
p. 90-91).

4 Connaissance de l'Est, op. cit., p. 62.
rejecter are rejected by the populace. Their kingdom is 'apart from this world'. In contrast with Claudel, Segalen shows a Nietzschean contempt for his fellow-men, and particularly for the vast multitudes of modern China, which is occasionally expressed with cruel virulence. 1

Certain prose poems in Connaissance de l'Est are, however, broadly similar in theme and idea to those of Segalen. For example Segalen's prose 'Le Siège de l'Ame', inspired by visits to certain imperial tombs, may be compared with Claudel's reflections in Religion du Signe', inspired by a similar experience in a Confucianist temple, and with his 'Tombes'.

'Religion du Signe' opens with a reflection on the difference between the Roman letter and the Chinese character. Claudel sees in the latter a complete entity, 'un être schématique, une personne scripturale, ayant, comme un être qui vit, sa nature et ses modalités... 2 The character symbolizes for him the autonomous power of writing. The text depends purely on personal impressions. He imagines certain properties in the various parts of the sign, which remains for him closed and enigmatic. However he observes the power attributed to this sign by the Chinese. As an example of this power he describes the exalted position of an inscription inscribed at the very heart of a vast temple, unaffected by time and human presence: 'Il existe, et l'assistant face à face considère le nom lisible.' 3 This silent expression of eternal meaning symbolizes the Absolute. 'A similar experience lies behind 'Le Siège de l'Ame', but as we shall see—it is treated from a different perspective. Segalen's prose might also be compared with 'Tombes', where Claudel explains the burial rituals in China designed to appease the spirits of the dead:

C'est ainsi que la terre, lui-oùvant, pour ainsi dire, les bras, le fait sien et se la consacre à elle-même. Devant est placée la tablette où sont inscrits les titres et le nom, car les Chinois pensent qu'un certain tiers de l'âme, s'arrêtant à lire son nom, s'attarde dessus. 4

The immediacy of the sensation of strangeness is lost by this rational explanation. Segalen prefers to plunge directly into his narrative without explaining to the reader, a habit which makes his texts more obscure and

1 e.g. 'L'Homme de Bâti', Ch. xvii, Equipee, op. cit.; compare Claudel's 'Elégie des Chinois', Œuvres en Prose, op. cit., p. 1029.
2 Œuvre Liturgique, op. cit., p. 46.
3 ibid., p. 48.
4 ibid., p. 42.
difficult, but more dramatic. Through his greater knowledge of Chinese history, art and architecture, and his sensitivity to atmosphere, he conveys the exoticism of his subject in its fullest sense. In his 'Notes sur l'Exotisme' he stated his intention to open up perspectives unknown to exotic literature until then:

Car il y a peut-être, du voyageur au spectacle, un autre obloque retour dont vibrer ce qu'il voit. Par son intervention, parfois si malheureuse, si aventurée (surtout aux vénérables lieux silencieux et clos), est-il ne va pas perturber le champ d'équilibre établi depuis des siècles?

'Le Siège de l'Ame' gives an example of the desecration of one of the most sacred imperial tombs by a blundering group of tourists. Presented with considerable knowledge of his subject, it reveals Segalen's sensitivity to the 'spirit of the place' which he sees enshrined in the calligraphy of the Emperor's memorial tablet.

'Le Siège de l'Ame'

This story, first posthumously published in the Mercure de France of April 1921, is inspired by Segalen's visit to the Thirteen Tombs outside Peking, which revived memories of the Ming Tombs at Nanking. In his 'Lettres de Chine' he writes of the strange sense of disillusionment he felt in Nanking, when after the monumental access to the tomb of Hung-wu he found nothing inside the vast tomb but bushes and trees:

Rien d'autre: le Mausolée est vide. Et cette promenade triomphale ou fantastique aboutit à cela: l'image d'un des côtés de la Chine, sans doute.

'Le Siège de l'Ame' centres around this concept of the void. It is based on an experience in the tomb of Yung-lo, brother and illustrious successor of Hung-wu. In his letters Segalen describes his tomb as 'le plus vaillé et le plus classique, le plus pur.' Yet there was a disconcerting disparity between its magnificent architecture and the general air of neglect in the monument:

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Segalen's story develops from his reflection upon these elements of personal experience: the vastness of the room, the fragile tablet set — not even fastened down — in the centre of the hall, seeming out of all proportion with its surroundings. The atmosphere of dilapidation and neglect is seen as unimportant, indicating the inevitable erosion of material objects. The narrative opens on this affirmative note:

Tous ces tombeaux dynastiques avaient incliné moins vers le néant d'usage, que raffermi dans une posture familière: dois-je m'en réjouir? Je ressens peu les lamentations sur la vanité des choses et la fuite d'un passé dont on est le maître, après tout, qu'il rempli notre présent joyeux.2

The demonstrative pronoun 'ces' refers to some hypothetical description which precedes. As in the many texts opening with the pronoun 'je', Segalen seems to be relating this prose to a total body of work. The idea expressed in this opening paragraph also suggests that he saw a particular text not so much as a 'slice of life' in the Gidean sense as a slice from the organic fabric of his writing. The Stèle 'Aux Dix Mille Années', written about the same period, is a celebration of the transience Segalen observes in Chinese architecture.

There is no attempt to defy the ravages of time by building in stone. Instead the Chinese would, according to Segalen, build in wood upon clay, rejoicing in the ineluctable course of destruction and change:

Rien d'immobile n'échappe aux dents affamées des âges. La durée n'est point le sort du solide. L'immobile n'habite pas vos murs, mais en vous, hommes lents, hommes continuels.3

Segalen sees the fragile monument as an offering to appease the greedy god of Time. In his essay 'Le Philosophe dans la Vie' he notes the effect this text had on his life, revealing to him an aspect of his unconscious self which might direct him along new paths. 'Le Siège de l'Amé' takes up the theme, developing it in a different way:

2 Imaginaires, op. cit., p. 53.
3 Stèles, Peintures, Equipée, op. cit., p. 57.
Ce qui régnait d'ailleurs, aux dépouilles de l'Ouest, où le mort revêt les mêmes couleurs que le Vivant de la Ville Interdite, — ou bien dans ces tombes orientales où trône le fondateur des Ta-Tsing, — les Pours, — même les débris monumentaux qui jalonnent les routes et les âges dans cette Chine du Nord, impériale, hautaine et délabrée, ne m'apprenaient pas autre chose que la prolongation posthume, et, par le moyen des signes, la durée victorieuse des noms. 1

This passage reveals the essential idea lying behind all Segalen's work. His archeological expeditions through China, his discoveries of tombs and statues dating from the early Han era, his impassioned interest in the myth of the 'eternal' emperor — which will be our concern in Part III — are for him a means of arriving at the central point of his quest: that eternal quality of 'l'âme', the spirit of man the creator which is revealed in his work. "The spirit of man lives on, according to Chinese belief, as long as there is some 'sign' of its existence. 'L'éternité de l'âme dépend de la permanence de la dépouille..." 2 Segalen observes in his notes for his Mission archéologique en Chine. Yet in the lightness of architecture of Yung-lo's tomb, the roofs curving upwards towards heaven, he saw a symbol of mobility and change:

une toiture ample aux courbes originales, aux pans creusés comme la peau des ténèbres sous le vaste poids du ciel, et resplendissant de l'or céréal des tuiles par millions. Une seconde toiture, lèvre inférieure avancée, qui reprend le geste et l'incline doucement vers les quatre espaces. 3

Paradoxically here the heavns have more weight, more lasting reality than the glittering roofs of harvest gold, with upturned roofs suggesting cyclical movement and flux. In contrast with this sense of instability in the building, the Chinese character suggests stability. Its magical power over objects as an emblem symbolizes the writer's power of creativity, which will win him immortality.

In 'Le Siège de l'Ame' Segalen expresses in allegorical form the function of the writer. The 'throne of the soul', the tablet which he knows to retain

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1 'Le Siège de l'Ame', Imaginaires, op. cit., p. 53.
2 Mission archéologique en Chine, op. cit., p. 4.
3 'Le Siège de l'Ame', ibid., p. 55. — Claudel also compared the Chinese curved roof to a nomad's tent — a theory of Paleologue which had however been proved erroneous: G. Gadoffre, op. cit., pp. 241-2 and n. 4.
toute l'âme essentielle de l'empereur" represents his own work, which retains his own 'soul', his innermost self and most precious values. The narrator represents Segalen himself, whose intense contemplation within the monument revives erudite glimpses of moments of Chinese history, mythological beliefs and attitudes towards life: 'Mais, retiré sous les thuyas enchevêtrés de la seconde cour, je somgeais de toute ma force. The fact that his contemplation takes place within the monument rather than outside, and the specific detail of exotic vegetation, are symbolic of the writer's method.

The initial sensation of shock Segalen felt on entering the tomb, described in his letters, is the quality he seeks to explore in the narrative by a dialectical play on the idea of the void:

Voici les termes: le Siège de l'Ame. — L'absence de l'Ame.
Antinomie: Seigneur d'équilibre plus vertigineux que la chute!3

His account, structured with a Taoist delight in paradox, is developed by a binary opposition between the ideas of 'âme-corps', 'âme-corps', and 'préente-absence'. The initial sense of absence suggests certain possibilities, according to Chinese mythological belief:

L'âme d'un Empereur réside au bien sous les Caractères dynastiques ou bien au Ciel des Empeures Sages. Ceci est fort comme un axiome. Ceci ne peut pas ne pas être, dans l'Empire, ou bien l'Empire ne serait pas.

The narrator plays lightly here with a double contradiction which increases the sense of paradox and fantasy in Chinese ontology. However he points to the centrality for China of the eternal nature of the Emperor, which is expressed by complex ritual. If one destroyed the myth, the whole system would collapse. Thus if the Emperor's spirit is absent the whole tomb threatens to collapse as if into a vacuum: 'comment les poteaux et les toits peuvent-ils épaule encore la poussée des choses à l'entour?'5

The material world is represented here as a shell maintained by the strength of an inner reality, a spirit which... déborde de la demeure... se répand sur la terrasse, s'exhale dans le parc au-delà des murs et va couler dans toute la vallée'.6 The sensation of vertigo created by the sense of the void is shown as a subjective creation of the narrator's mind:

1 'Le Siège de l'Ame' p. 57. 2 ibid., p. 59.
3 ibid., loc. cit. 4 ibid., loc. cit.
5 ibid., p. 58. 6 ibid., p. 57.
Je ne me sens pas très bien vivre dans ce lieu devenu négatif, ce lieu d'absence, ce moment qui n'est pas. Me \( \text{vôllî prz de vertige comme si la pesanteur devenait indifférente, comme si le temple tournait de haut en bas; et mon regard títube sur les caissons verts du plafond;} \) et tout me devient égal, informe, vide enfin! 

The sense of emptiness, the absence of the soul represent the drabness and monotony of an outlook which lacks imagination, symbolized here by the tourists. Insignificent 'parasites', they hardly trouble the immense surface of the monument, little aware of the spirit of these 'lieux silencieux et clos'. They come and go 'avec la grâce même de la vermine sur la paille'. The narrator's scorn indicates the writer's fierce rejection of superficiality, particularly in the field of 'exoticism'. Seemingly inoffensive, they are unconscious of their blunders, their 'énormités sottes'. They represent the stultifying values of smug, conventional life: 'un mari à lunettes naissibles; une "jeune dame" déformée bien avant ses couches...'; or its gloomy frustration: the old man, and 'deux filles plus âgées, suant la virginité morose...'. These characters contrast with Segalen's ideal, the fierce, defiant outlaw. The Chinese Emperors whom he singles out for mention generally are remarkable for their innovations: the notorious Shih Huang-ti, Emperor One, who by burning the books declared that history would begin with himself; and in this case Yung-lo, who contributed greatly to the power of the Ming Empire, and who moved the capital from Nanking to Peking.

The contrast between the limitations of representational art, symbolized by the values of the tourists, and the magic world of poetic fantasy, is described through an analogy with Taoist mythology, with its 'danse des idées ivres':

... Sans doute, la Terre plate, immobile, solide, est le bon 'tremplin grossier d'où l'on saute au milieu du monde; et sans doute aussi qu'à l'extrême, l'ether infiniment dur et cristallin... infiniment pur et joyeux tourne autour d'elle d'une vitesse infinie, globe de diamant-voir que n'use pas même le flottement du Grand-Vidé'. 'Tout cela est simple, aux deux bouts'...

1 'Le Siège de l'Ame', p. 58.
2 ibid., loc. cit.
3 ibid., p. 58.
4 ibid., p. 59.
5 Reischauer & Fairbank, East Asia: The Great Tradition, op. cit., p. 296.
6 'Le Siège de l'Ame', p. 60.
Through the fantasies, depicted frequently in Taoist art, of spiralling paths leading towards the nine heavens, the writer suggests the chaotic play of the imagination. At one point lies the source of inspiration — the real world with its exoticism, its diversity; at the other the black diamond of art, which withstands the corroding effects of time. The interest for Segalen lies less in the two poles than in the Way, the Tao, the strange paths which man can never fully explore. Hence his continual interest in creativity. His fiction reveals a fascination with the way in which human minds create for themselves meanings out of ever-changing natural phenomena.

After the initial sensation of a void, the narrator imagines that the Emperor returns suddenly from the heavens like a storm: 'Et soudain, un tournoiement fou... une grande chute; comme un orage crevant...'. His spirit is immense, his presence 'plus redoutable que le vide qu'elle ne comble pas'. Again there is another analogy between the physical object, the source of the narration, and the 'spiritual' reality of the imagination: 'cette lune chauve-souris indécise, frangée de violet qui vibre, avec des lueurs, des pâleurs, des opacités'. The description reveals the values the writer seeks in his prose: subtle qualities of suggestion conveyed by the uncertain — 'indécise'; the multiple — the multi-coloured 'opacités', 'lueurs'. The spirit wanders, seeks, explores every angle and corner, anxiously seeking in silent fury — 'Elle cherche... elle cherche quoi?'

The narrator's uncertainty is a device for stimulating the reader's curiosity. Perhaps coming back to earth is the cause of its anguish? At this point he discovers the problem: the tablet of imperial characters, the 'Throne of the Soul', has disappeared!

The spirit's desperate flight through the monument in quest of the tablet becomes incidentally a means of describing details of architecture and layout which reveal a different attitude towards death and burial: the procession de murs de la montagne qui ferme la caveau... Like the living Emperor in his palaces and moats, the dead are enclosed within a fortified but silent necropolis. Thus Segalen's intimate knowledge and appreciation of the building complex is integrated into the plot. As the

1 'Le Siège de l'Ame', p. 60.
2 ibid., p. 61.
3 ibid., loc. cit.
4 ibid., p. 55.
spirit 'oscillait... le plus en plus lente, parmi des odeurs anciennes, réveillées', its movements stir 'des siècles d'air calme'. There is a Proustian echo in the idea that the odours awake sensations of the past: 'toutes les colonnes de l'Odre rouge réexhalaient ces parfums du sud, ces senteurs mutes mûries autrefois par les soleils...'. However in this case we are concerned with the spirit of the monument, responding to the sensitivity of the stranger, the 'Exoté: celui-là qui, Voyageur-né, dans les mondes aux diversités merveilleuses, sent toute la saveur du diers'. Through his experience of the other the narrator explores moments of past ages, revived in the perfume of the cedar, which retains the savour of its origins like the waters of 'Le Grand Fleuve'. The monument itself, penetrated by the spirit of the Emperor, has its own life: 'respirait avec ampleur'.

Following the spirit back towards its tomb in the mountain, the narrator reflects self-consciously on his narrative:

'Pourtant, je n'ignore rien de ce qu'elle fait ni de ce qu'elle ignore: l'âme interroge. l'cadavre, et réclame son siège, et, quoi faire pour le reconquérir? J'admire comment, par des moyens grossiers, sans divination ni magie, je détiens le secret que cette âme limpide doit arracher à son corps en se faisant sa propre nécromancien!'

His secret is the gift of sensitivity and imagination, purely human gifts which give him power over the spirit. Gradually the latter weakens, lacking the calligraphy which gives him reality: he stumbles, and shows signs of the decrepitude of material objects. At this moment he discovers the perpetrators of the sacrilege: the tourists. They stand, transfixed, before an immense stone guardian of the tomb, frozen with terror, as it seems to the narrator. However, their perceptions are too limited for such feeling. Dwarfed by its mass, one observes: 'Cela manque de proportion'. Living on the surface of reality, they can appreciate only conventional artistic representation. The tablet itself, the dwelling-place of the imperial spirit of Yung-lo, is for them not particularly beautiful, and a nuisance to carry: but they take it all the same: 'Ce sera un petit souvenir de coeur. On le mettra dans la chambre de Caroline, près de la pendule...'. This ironical idea reveals an
incapacity to appreciate the subtlety of the most refined forms of exoticism. Segalen juxtaposes here an art beyond the ravages of time with trivial objects of purely sentimental value. The tourists associate the imperial calligraphy with a clock—a symbol of the bourgeoisie and of a mechanistic view of the universe. Their lack of awareness contrasts with the narrator's dramatic vision of the Emperor:

... Il va les terrifier, les torturer, dépecer leurs âmes viles. Voici sa face, enfin! Elle rit de colère; ses yeux roulent avec féroce.

The paradox of laughing with anger suggests the total power of the Emperor. He would not, the narrator implies, feel threatened by these pitiful humans. Yet he no longer has the power to counter-attack. His imperial authority diminishes simultaneously: He no longer uses the central entrance reserved for his use, 'où des dragons jouent dans les nuages'...1

However the narrator, returning to recreate the imperial character, has this imperial right: 'au milieu, par la voie droite: j'ai droit!'2 Thus the writer assimilates with the Emperor, whose spirit he revives through the emblematic power of the sign:

Et je reste en suspens, sans haleine ni pensée, — ma lâche rempie, — jusqu'à connaître, par une grande volupté peu définissable, que l'âme est revenue tenir son lieu dans l'espace et réoccuper sa demeure formelle aussi longtemps que les signes seront énigmes.

The pleasure of this art is, the narrator claims, beyond rational analysis. It lies in the exploration and the expression of an exoticism which has faded over the centuries, losing its powers of sensation: the exotic splendour of the Imperial Court, with its fantasy, its cruelty and its might. The narrator's pleasure lies in the sense that this spirit is recovered in some measure in his narrative; it is given the lasting form of written expression.

Le Combat pour le Soi

'Le Siège de l'Ame' reveals a more sensitive and erudite awareness of the meaning lying behind certain manifestations of Chinese civilization than corresponding texts by Claudel. Our discussion of these conflicting

1 'Le Siège de l'Ame', p. 66. 2 ibid., p. 56.
3 ibid., p. 67. 4 ibid., p. 68.
attitudes towards exoticism would not be completed without a reference to
Segalen's drama Le Combat pour le Sol, planned initially as his 'second
version' of Claudel's Repos du Septième Jour. As he wrote to Claudel:

... J'ai tellement retourné le 'Repos' que le voyant seul de vos drames, privé d'une seconde version, j'ai eu l'audace passionnée de lui en écrire une en renversant tous les rôles, et que ceci, m'échappant des mains, est devenu un drame sans lien ni foi communs avec le vôtre... ¹

He expresses his reaction to the 'Repos' more openly in his letter to
Ythurbide:

... Il tenait entre ses deux grands poings un conflit, l'un de plus grands conflits qu'on puisse imaginer sous le Ciel puisque le Ciel de Chine rencontrait le Ciel Latin. Le résultat: deux longs sermons ennuyeux. — J'ai peine à indiquer la payrée du décor impérial, les maladdresses dans un protocole dogmatique qu'il vaut mieux ne pas aborder si l'on n'en est pas maître. Enfin, ceci pouvait se racheter par le conflit signalé: mais un conflit suppose des adversaires. L'un, le Fils du Ciel, est déjà bien terne, embarrassé, verbeux à l'extrême. L'autre, le Fils de Dieu, n'est pas encore devenu le magnifique Dieu Claudélien qui n'existe qu'en tant que l'homme le crée, c'est à besoin que l'homme l'aime pour être aimé. — Et je ne puis pas dire autre chose que l'ennui douleurieux de voir un aussi grand sujet enterré sous des pelletées de mots.²

The hero of Claudel's drama was Shih Huang-ti, the Emperor One, symbol for Segalen of imperial power and its most ferocious and creative. The discovery of his tomb — or rather a re-discovery for the European world, as the tomb was too vast and famous to be unknown to the Chinese — was the high point of Segalen's archeological expedition in 1914. His Peinture 'Tombeau de Ts'in' conveys a sense of the savagery of this self-created Emperor:

Ici donc, il décide d'abolir le passé derrière lui. Il fait un seul bûcher de tous les livres; il enterrer vivants les Lecteurs des Livres. Il renie tout prêtre, les bons et les autres.

Et il se proclame Origine, Empereur UNO.

Claudel's portrait of the Emperor conveys nothing of this historic past, no sense of the Emperor's fierce individualism and cruelty, none of the vivid

² Letter to Ythurbide, 1 April 1913, ibid., p. 161.
³ Stélas, Peintures, Equipés, op. cit., p. 305.
immediacy of this "painture". The drama is, in fact, a pretext to present the belief, held by the French "Figurist" school in China, that there had been a form of pre-Christian revelation in China. The "conflict," which Segalen saw between East and West, is thus sacrificed by Claudel to a presentation of Christian theology.

Claudel's drama opens at a point where the empire is haunted by the spirits of the dead. In order to discover why these spirits are restless, Shih Huang-ti, like Aeneas or Orpheus, undertakes a journey into the underworld. There he meets the blind, tormented spirit of his mother, who describes to him the horrors of a Buddhist type of hell, where demons inflict terrible tortures on their victims. The demon of the graves, at the gateway to hell, reveals to the Emperor the cause of man's downfall:

- La Créature,
Voyant l'être qui lui était remis, s'en saisit,
Faisant d'elle-même sa fin, et tel fut le premier rapt et le premier inceste.

Claudel implies here that Buddhism is an agent of evil, by encouraging the individual to look into himself for enlightenment rather than outwards towards God. In Connaissance de l'Est, where the imagery is similar, the reference is more specific: Buddhism is the epitome of pagan blasphemy, "le mystère dernier et Satanique, le silence de la créature retranchée dans son refus intégral, la quiétude incestueuse de l'âme assise sur sa différence essentielle". The lines reveal a basic conflict between the attitudes of Segalen and Claudel.

The Angel of the Empire indicates to Shih Huang-ti that the path to salvation lies in the recognition of God as Prime Cause (Claudel, newly converted to Catholicism, was immersed while in China in the study of St Thomas Aquinas), and in worshipping Him on the seventh day of the week. The Emperor returns to his people with this message of salvation in time to quell an uprising with his imperial sceptre which has taken the form of a cross. Contaminated by the underworld, he has become a leper, a living sign of his vision. Therefore, bequeathing his empire to his son, he renounces

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1 'Le Repos du Septième Jour', Théâtre, op. cit., v. 1, p. 332.
2 Claudel had, however, an ambivalent attitude towards Buddhism. In contrast with Segalen he was repelled by the Theravada Buddhism he saw in Colombo, but attracted by certain forms of Mahayana Buddhism in China and Japan.
the world to await death in seclusion — a reflection of Claudel’s desire at this period to enter the monastery.

Claudel’s drama therefore reveals little of the exoticism of his subject. The pomp, majesty, ritual and mystery which surrounded the Emperor of China, and especially the first Emperor, are lacking. Instead, he is put in the humble position of a catechumen. The reader learns little about China; the major part of the drama is taken up with Christian theology. Hence Segalen’s-violent reaction, and his desire to tackle the subject in a different way. The first manuscript, as Bouillier tells us, was drafted in 1913, and then rewritten in 1918, at the period when Segalen wrote of broadening his theory of exoticism into a more universal system to rival that of Claudel. It was, therefore, initially written in reaction to Claudel rather than as a result of personal inspiration.

As the title indicates, Le Combat pour le Sol takes the form of a conflict between two religious systems — the Christian and the Chinese. As in Claudel’s drama, the land is threatened — in this case by a mysterious ‘Influx’ — an unknown disturbance which causes great suffering. The Emperor as mediator between Heaven and Earth undertakes a sacrificial fast for three days in order to conciliate the gods; an idea more in keeping with imperial rites than Claudel’s romantic stratagem. In order to avoid unnecessary falsification of historical detail Segalen does not name the emperor. The arrival of two Christian strangers in a cortège of tributes to the Emperor inevitably sets in train those disturbances described in his Notes sur l’Exotisme. Their presence threatens social order by introducing new ideas and beliefs which challenge convention and suggest other patterns of behaviour.

In Segalen’s drama, as in Les Immémoriaux, it is the Christians who appear exotic. The rituals and customs of the Imperial Court are regarded as the norm. Hence the realm is not only plunged into an exotic situation, but also seen Europeans in a new light. The appeal of Christianity is presented in the form of ‘L’Étrangère’, the Emperor’s new and favourite concubine. Her clear eyes, unruly golden hair and odd behaviour are foreign to the Chinese: ‘vous avez été près de moi, immobile, inaccessible, — et étrange étrangère.’ She awakens in the Emperor the desire for the unknown: ‘Cet

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1 Bouillier, op. cit., p. 248.
2 v. above, p. 120.
3 v. above, p. 201.
4 Le Combat pour le Sol, op. cit., p. 65.
qui nous était inconnu... vraiment maintenant qu'il est là, était attendu,
estait inévitable... Cela est. The opposing terms 'Ceci... était / Cela
est', with the unexpected reversal of the demonstrative adjective, presents a
dramatic contrast between the ideas of past ignorance and present realization.
The Emperor suggests that the appearance of the Other was "inevitable", as all
terms imply the existence of the opposite quality which defines their own
being. Her physical characteristics underline this complementary nature:
she is fair as the others are dark; her hair is unruly, as the others' is
neat, controlled. She represents the 'other' side of his world, that
necessary counterpart in the ceaseless whirl of contradictions and distinctions
which is the Tao. Thus she expresses something deep inside himself, of which
he was unaware until this moment. He is attracted to her by her very
difference, seized by the desire for primordial unity which is the origin and
the ultimate end of all created being.

Her golden hair is associated with the earth gilded by the harvest, and
with the flame of the lamp: 'elle a les cheveux couleur de flamme jauné...'
... Elle est jaune, comme le Terre.' She represents the ideal female form
we have seen in Eurydice and Krishna: 'Divinatrice', source of inspiration to
the artist as the earth provides material for his art. Like the 'Flamme
amante' of Peintures, she appears to him in the lamplight during his fast.
Unlike the earlier heroines we have mentioned, she is desirable to the Emperor
in both body and spirit. This variation suggests either a change in Segalen's
attitude or, more probably, the author's desire to contrast the spiritu
tal evangelism of the Christians with the different attitude towards sex displayed
in the Imperial Court. Thus the Empress takes particular interest in the
Foreign Concubine, as she sees in her a means of procuring an heir to the
throne — who would become for her a source of personal power. Segalen's
drama is therefore concerned not only with religious conflict but with the
complex power struggles and jealousies characteristic of court life in the
Forbidden City.

While the Empress remains in the background as a foil to the Foreign
Concubine, the conflict takes place chiefly between the Emperor and the
Foreigner, the Christ-figure accompanying the Foreign Concubine, who, wears a
crown of thorns, is clad in red robes and covered with spittle. This idea of

1 Le Combat pour le Sol, p. 75.
2 ibid., p. 57.
divinity is extraordinary to the Chinese. His parables suggest to the Emperor that he may be a vampire, or a hungry spirit who seeks to be placated by men. Throughout the drama the Emperor misunderstands the Christian message, interpreting it in a totally different light — a technique characteristic of Les Immémoriaux.

Because of his miraculous powers, the Foreigner seems to the courtiers a sorcerer. After being executed as a danger to the Empire, he appears to the Emperor as a spirit; with the Pentecostal gift of tongues, speaking in erudite Mandarin; moreover he answers the Emperor's 'impossible' wish:

L'impossible... Que celle-ci m'écoute, et me comprenne enfin et m'entende — un moment! et que tout finisse après lui!

After this moment of supreme understanding, when the Emperor communicates with the spiritual double of the Foreign Concubine, the couple are for ever separated; and although the Emperor sees her once again in the flesh, she has renounced physical love in the hope of winning him for God. After her death however she reappears with the Foreigner in the sacrificial flames on the esplanade of the Temple of Heaven, 'Genie-touche, vierge-élue... droite, longue, immobile, les mains et les yeux étrangers'.² 'Elue-du-Ciel', as the Emperor has chosen to call her, she seems to reach like the flames towards Heaven. Yet which Heaven has conquered? 'Nous ne le saurons jamais,' declares the Emperor in despair.³ As the Emperor observes, he himself had given her the name 'Elue-du-Ciel', and hence in some sense had created her destiny. He himself had chosen one supreme moment of joy, and after that, nothingness.

After this moment the mysterious 'influx' disappears. It is impossible for men to know its cause, or the reason for its disappearance: the sacrifice of the Christians, the imperial rites, or simply a spontaneous eruption of forces beyond human comprehension, which coincided with these events. Segalen's notes on the manuscript indicate the last of these: 'Le cours inconnaissable de l'influx plus vaste que les petites religions'.⁴ Yet Bouillier's dismissal of the drama as 'un pamphlet antireligieux' is much too simple. It is not a mere reaction against Claudel but takes on a deeply personal meaning, as Segalen insisted in his letter to Claudel. He is in

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1 Le Combat pour le Sol, p. 66.
2 Ibid., p. 130.
3 Ibid., p. 135.
4 Quoted by Bouillier, p. 249.
part presenting about religious bigotry and the limitation of meaning to
certain formulas and laws; however Le Combat pour le Sol presents a develop-
ment of ideas we have seen in his earlier work: an expression of man's need
for diversity, tolerance and a mind open to the infinite. In the last years
of his life, Segalen saw this idea of exoticism as essential to mankind.
The love of beauty and illusion seemed to him to be vanishing in the war-torn
world.

Le Combat pour le Sol has a less optimistic note than his earlier work.
Redrafted in the last year of his life, when his strength was already drain-
ing away, its closing line suggests little hope of joy to the Emperor: 'Nous
ne mangerons jamais plus à notre fain.' The Other, the exotic one, has
fl ed. The shadow of death seems already upon the author, who projects into
his lonely hero an awareness of the void within himself. However he has
achieved the moment of joy which was his supreme desire. Could he in fact
be expressing here his innermost feelings? If death is drawing near, yet he
has known those moments of creativity which were for him the supreme joy.
It is not improbable, as a month after redrafting his manuscript he
mentioned his strange wasting disease in a letter to Claudel that revealed his
spiritual anguish. Two weeks later he wrote to Jean Lartigue that he had
for a long time realized 'une angoisse secrète' that his strength was
ebbing away.³ The fleeting note of triumph in Le Combat pour le Sol,
sounding through the despair, echoes the lines of Tibet, the swansong of the
poet:

Je te possède, ô mon objet! je t'ai vaincu ô mon poème
Et l'autre s'enfuit et me sourit
De ce regard et de ce feu dans tout ce visage suprême.
— Mais où la trouver désormais...
C'est fait, tout est fait, et j'attends, — j'ai dit, tout
Est dit, et je meurs
— Mais qui songerait à la tuer,
Celle qu'on chasse et qu'on poursuit, celle qu'on désire
et qu'on pleure,
— Mais qui la saurait accoutumer?}{

¹ Le Combat pour le Sol, p. 138.
² Although we have no record of this latter, its contents are apparent from
Claudel's reply, which tactlessly refers to 'saving his poor soul' (Claudel
to Segalen, 1 April 1919, quoted by Bouillier, p. 374).
³ Segalen to Jean Lartigue, 21 April 1919, quoted by Bouillier, p. 374.
⁴ Tibet, text established, presented and annotated by Michael Taylor, Paris,
Mercure de France, 1979, LII, p. 84.
The moment of discouragement at the end of the drama is that moment in 1918 when the poet no longer had the strength to continue. "Nous avons gagné le Combat, mais livré notre coeur en nourriture." His drama closes on a note of despair because the Other, who is joy, or the future, or hope itself, has gone: "... mêlé aux fumées quelque chose d'insaisissable et d'inconnu s'est enfui..." Putting aside Le Combat pour le Sol, Segalen expressed more explicitly in Thibet this growing sense of disillusionment and despair: "Les cimes tombent, la fange monte; un plat univers s'accomplit..." Yet if the future holds no hope, the poet has reached the heights of literary expression: "Je t'ai fait, Pèlerin découragé, la Hauteur, le Symbole — le Dieu." 

Segalen moved far beyond his initial reaction to Claudel's overwhelming universalism. His battle for freedom of thought and expression, which had the intensity of a religious crusade, won the silent enmity of Claudel, and decades of obscurity. The struggle against what seemed a tidal wave of uniformity and anonymity is nowhere more apparent than in his fiction. We shall therefore now turn to his novel on the Emperor of China, Le Fils du Ciel, which represents the purity and erudition of this exclusive attitude towards exoticism.

1 Le Combat pour le Sol, op. cit., p. 138.
2 Ibid. Cf. Thibet, op. cit., LI, p. 84.
3 Thibet, op. cit., LVII, p. 90. On 9 September 1918 he wrote: "J'ai seulement différé de quelque temps Le Combat pour le Sol, à qui la seconde version a conféré un nouveau feu, et m'en prends jusqu'à exhaustion [sic] de texte à la Statuette et à Thibet" (Documents épistolaires, Annexe 2, Le Combat pour le Sol, p. 158).
4 Thibet, op. cit., LVII, p. 90.
PART IIIA

Le Fils du Ciel
Exoticism and the quest for identity

... L'immense et unique Personnage de tout mon premier livre sur la Chine: l'Empereur. Tout sera pensé par lui, pour lui, à travers lui. Exotisme Impérial, hautain, aristocratique, légendaire, ancestral et raffiné.

(Letter to Yvonne Segalen, 2 August 1909, Lettres de Chine, p. 122)
1. THE IMPERIAL COURT AS A SOURCE OF FANTASY


Six weeks after arriving in China Segalen declared in triumph in a letter to his wife, 'Je tiens mon Personnage.' Within the person of the Emperor Segalen saw encapsulated his idea of the essential qualities of Chinese civilization — a highly developed hierarchical culture dominated by the mythological concept of a semi-divine ruler, mediator between gods and man. The concept of the Son of Heaven, which dominates Segalen's imaginative writing over the next six to eight years, is coloured by reading Chavannes' translations of Ssu-ma Ch'ien. This scholarly record of Han thought presents the ideal emperor as the 'True' or 'Unique' Man, microcosm and master of the universe. According to Taoist thought, mastery of the universe depended on mastery of the self. The Emperor should be able to rule without arbitrary intervention, laws and regulations, controlling all things harmoniously through the integration of his dynamic will with universal order. The elements of Taoist magic and of Nietzschean self-development suggested by this concept appealed to Segalen's imagination. The Emperor became a symbol

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2 Letter to Yvonne Segalen, 2 August 1909, ibid., p. 122.
3 After his return to France in 1914, disillusioned with China, he turned to Tibet as a symbol of literary aspiration.
4 Les mémoires historiques de Ssu-ma Ch'ien, 5 vols, translated by Edouard Chavannes, Paris, 1895-1905 (The Historical Records of Ssu-ma Ch'ien).
of the artist, isolated in the autonomous enclave of literature, who mediates to mankind the creative energy of which he is a supreme source.

This idea is elitist in its preference for an 'aristocratic' art. The China of Segalen's writings is described in 'Le Siège de l'Ame' as 'impériale, haute et délabrée'. It is the China of the archeologist and the aesthete, inspired by the ideas and monuments of great men of the past. The China of the common people, although mentioned in the quotation above, hardly impinges upon his consciousness. Concerned with quality of vision, his China 'tient toute, je le sais bien, en certains regards élus qui la virent...' This exclusive tone is part of a desire to penetrate into areas of consciousness which are only accessible through effort and visionary power. We have remarked the intensity of Segalen's reaction against mediocrity, which he considered destructive of deeper values. The mundane stifles creative energy and angers the mind.

The idea of his novel Le Fils du Ciel developed, Segalen tells us, out of a series of prose poems written soon after his arrival in Peking, 'qui tant obstinément le Fils du Ciel, sous ses forges diverses. Cela est né de l'oeuvre même.' He suggests here that the concept expresses something deep inside himself, which is unconsciously revealed in his writing, and becomes for him a vein of future productivity. The composition which sparked off his sudden résolve was written after the visit to the Ming Tombs which also inspired 'Le Siège de l'Ame' and the Stèle 'Edit funéraire'. It opens: 'JE SUIS EMPEREUR. Je choisie ma sépulture...'. With a characteristic desire to avoid simple representation of physical detail, Segalen plunges into a contemplation of the attitude which lies behind the Chinese concept of the tomb. He presents this attitude directly, through the technique of 'objectivity' used in Les Immémoriaux:

Il se composera décidément de deux parties, l'une, récit impérial d'allure aussi exotique que Les Immémoriaux, l'autre, mes proses personnelles...

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1 v. above, p. 203.
2 Briques et Tuiles, op. cit., p. 86.
4 v. above, p. 105.
5 Letter to Yvonne Segalen, 31 July 1909, Lettres de Chine, p. 121.
6 Letter to Yvonne Segalen, 24 October 1909, ibid., p. 192.
There is in La Fils du Ciel a diversity of perspective which we shall
discuss in a later chapter. The presentation of conflicting attitudes
reveals the greater detachment of the author, who focuses on contrast rather
than on a particular point of view. Correspondingly there is less tendency
towards naturalistic description of customs and objects than in the earlier
novel. However in Le Fils du Ciel Segalen expressed his essential ideas
about China, as in Les Immémoriaux he expressed his essential ideas about
Tahiti:

J'ai cette chance, un mois après mon arrivée dans un pays, de tenir
mon livre: Tahiti; arrivée 23 janvier, 1er mars: Immémoriaux,
Chine. 12 juin-1er août: Fils du Ciel ou équivalent. ¹

The qualification in the word 'équivalent' refers to Segalen's hesitation
about the title to be given to this book, which he saw as his particular
interpretation of China, and which was to occupy much of his leisure time for
the next few years. The subject, as he noted, was vast and audacious:
'C'est un projet colossal.' ² It demanded extensive knowledge of court life
and protocol, history, philosophy, mythology. Between 1910 and 1912 he wrote
two versions of the novel, the manuscripts of which were encased in elegant
boxes lined with Chinese brocade. Some months after the Emperor's abdication
he could still write to G.D. de Monfreid:

Je me suis remis avec acharnement à mes Annales Kâwang Siu qui me
tiennent depuis trois ans et sont horriblement dures à écrire;
mais je pêtrine avec rage, jour par jour, mon cahier de besogne. ³

Nevertheless the abdication must have played its part in his eventual
decision to put aside the manuscript. He referred in René Leys' to 'ce livre qui, sans
Lui, n'a plus aucune raison d'être... ⁴

Once the Chinese Empire joined those of Babylon, Egypt and Turkey ⁵ in the
unreal world of the past, the subject lost its urgent appeal. Other works,
other tasks occupied the next few years. The opening section was published
in the Almanach Littéraire under the title 'Chronique des Jours souverains'.

¹ Letter to Yvonne Segalen, 8 August 1909; Lettres de Chine, op. cit., p. 128.
² Letter to Yvonne Segalen, 31 October 1909, ibid., p. 201.
³ Letter to Monfreid, November 1912, quoted by Hme A. Joly-Segalen, Le Combat
pour le Sol, op. cit., Annexe 2, p. 156.
⁵ V. 'Jardin Mystérieux', Imaginaires, op. cit., p. 102.
In 1918, a year before his death, he expressed the intention of redrafting the novel in order to express the theme more clearly. It was in his mind his major work,\(^1\) although never completed to his satisfaction. Not until 1975 was a definitive version of the text published as *Le Fils du Ciel: Chronique des Jours souverains*.

The various titles Segalen considered for the novel indicate that he was concerned with far more than an account of Kuang-hsi's reign. *Épopée de l'Histoire chinoise*, one of his earliest ideas, reveals the breadth of his original topic. Although he was reluctant to limit himself to historical data, at times the form of the novel seemed to leave little room for the imagination. He commented on the manuscript: *'Il faut se résigner à écrire un roman historique.'*\(^2\) References in his notes to Mérimée's *Chronique du règne de Charles IX* indicate his interest in this model, which he described as 'un fort bon roman historique'.\(^3\) In an earlier chapter we observed analogies with Segalen in Mérimée's erudition and his objective, ironical style. However the theme of the novel was of broader significance than the description of historical events, being concerned with the idea lying behind the physical manifestation. Other projected titles reveal Segalen's idea of the Emperor as a man struggling against the forces of tradition: *Les Recommencements glorieux, L'Ère éternelle, Le Règne de l'Homme, Les Retours glorieux*. None have the simplicity yet depth of association of his original title, *Le Fils du Ciel*, which he abandoned with disgust when Pierre Loti and Judith Gautier published their drama *La Fille du Ciel* in 1911.\(^4\) The Chinese characters which express the concept 'Son of Heaven' were for Segalen a source of inspiration, conveying a graphic image of the idea he explores in his novel. He explains his interpretation of the character for 'Heaven' in his *Odes*:

> Le caractère 'Ciel' est l'un des plus purs et des plus beaux: un homme, jambes déliées et souples, les bras tendus horizontaux sous l'imparable trait plus haut que lui qui le limite ou l'écrase. C'est ce trait, ce dôme, cet arrêt, cette voûte, le toit du monde, le toit du front que le Poète a prétendu perce.

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2 Unpublished manuscript notes.
3 Unpublished manuscript notes.
4 *v. below*, p. 225.
The theme of the novel may well have taken shape in Segalen's reflection on this character: man bracing himself against the crushing weight of the authority of Heaven. As the concept took shape it became more explicit. Segalen saw the means of expressing his idea more concretely through the life of a particular Emperor, the young Kuang-hsü, who had just died. During his long term of imprisonment after the 'Hundred Days' reform programme in 1898, Segalen imagined, 'il a dû rêver d'immenses choses'. Within a few weeks he saw the novel as 'dans le plus haut sens du terme, le Roman de Kouang-Siu':

... De la sorte, j'ai un pied solide sur la terre (principe du Mystérieux) et je puis me donner toute carrière pour mettre sur pied ce héros immense, l'Empereur éternel, en le faisant vivre dans les rêves de ce mélancolique enfermé, dont la vie ne déborde pas le récit, mais s'en nourrit et s'en exaspère.  2

This closing line indicates the conscious art of a writer who is not concerned with some exterior reality which he is seeking to reflect in his novel, but on the contrary develops a new vision of reality through his writing. The life of Kuang-hsü is to be a pretext for the presentation of Segalen's reflections on the Chinese concept of the imperial role, and its effect on a human personality.

Nevertheless, the character of Kuang-hsü became more and more central to the novel. Something about his life-story captured Segalen's imagination, stirring unconscious associations. The more abstract idea of reviving the past through a continual reincarnation of the figure of an eternal emperor dropped into the background. It took form in the Emperor's hallucinatory madness in Part III, but was never as fully developed as Segalen had originally intended. Planned as a specific example of a more general idea, the story evolved its own life:

Ne pas quitter l'histoire apparente de la période Kuoang-siu et tous les faits extérieurs dont les contemporains ont fait le fond du règne. Les indiquant, ils ne mettront que mieux en valeur la raison profonde du drame; l'écrasement d'un homme par le Ciel ancestral qui étouffe le faible au lieu de l'élever. — Le pouvoir du dogme tuant le vivant, l'individu, en lui arrachant tout vouloir personne.  3

2 ibid., loc. cit.
3 Unpublished manuscript note (p. 167, 1st ms.).
This well expresses Segalen's fierce resentment of authority. The terms 'Ecrasement', 'écrasé', 'tuant', 'arrachant', indicate that he associated 'Heaven' and 'dogma' with stifling repression. In *La Fille du Ciel* we find themes which recur throughout his fiction: an affirmation of the rights of the individual to self-expression; a rebellion against dogmatic authority, represented by Confucianism and personified in the mother, the Empress-Dowager Tz'u-hsi. The conflict between the latter and her adopted son Kuang-hsiu provides a study of a universal problem of psychological repression which gains intensity through its presentation within the Chinese imperial tradition. The appointment of Kuang-hsiu as Emperor, advocated by Tz'u-hsi as a means of gaining personal power, was a contravention of the traditional laws of imperial succession which hangs over the Emperor's head throughout the novel.

Tz'u-hsi's domination of the political scene indicates the power of the mother, and particularly of the Empress-Dowager, in Chinese history. According to Granet, this power originates in an ancient religious dualism where the mother is respected as the symbol of the earth and of fertility. In Segalen's interpretation of the traditional role of emperor the rationale of the woman's role is not considered. The power of the Empress-Dowager Tz'u-hsi, which was almost entirely due to her strong personality and political aptitude, is seen only as a threat to Kuang-hsiu. As in all Segalen's fiction, the woman is given no positive identity in her own right, but is seen as either help or hindrance in man's pursuit of his goal.

The problem of rendering intimate life at court troubled Segalen for a few months, until suddenly he had "... cette chance d'être allé droit à l'homme qui plus que tous les Européens pouvaient m'ouvrir le Palais". Maurice Roy was a young Frenchman aged nineteen years, son of the Postmaster General in Peking, who spoke several Chinese dialects fluently. Engaged to teach Segalen Chinese, he claimed to have access to the Forbidden City as member of a group of actors who played regularly before the Empress-Dowager Tz'u-hsi. Moreover, he eventually declared he had been a friend of...

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Kuang-hsū, and the lover of his widow, Lung-yu. His descriptions of
adventures at Court delighted Segalen, who described him in a letter to
Monfreid as 'l'Européen le plus versé dans le haut milieu chinois... qui
m'êpargne des années de recherches'. In his enthusiasm for such an
excellent source of information, Segalen was certainly credulous; and yet
remarkable stories were common in the Peking of that period. He was
completely taken in for over a year by Maurice Roy's extraordinary stories.
After a few days Segalen copied the relevant notes from his diary into a
special notebook, which he entitled Les Annales secrètes de Maurice Roy. A
source for Le Fils du Ciel, these notes were the basis for the novel René
Leys, which teases the reader by an enigmatic interplay of fact and fiction.

The manuscript of Le Fils du Ciel bears witness to Segalen's thorough
research of his topic, his desire to capture an authentic tone and setting.
Maurice Roy's comments about points of court procedure and verisimilitude are
written around the margins of the first version of the manuscript, as well as
Segalen's own observations and amendments. His primary concern was with
finding a form at once suitable as a vehicle for the Emperor's prose poems and
free enough to convey a variety of perspectives. Maurice Roy at first
questioned the idea of a Court annalist; but although later he found that
there was indeed such a person in the Forbidden City, Segalen had decided to
persevere with this fictional device regardless of actual Court practice. As
with Les Immortels, he was prepared to sacrifice minor details where
necessary for the presentation of an idea which remains true, however, to the
spirit of a civilization as he saw it.

Hence his portrait of Kuang-hsū is based not only on historical events
and details furnished by Maurice Roy, but also on the personality of Dong
Khanh, Installed by the French as Emperor of Annam in 1885. Tormented by
doubts about the legality of his accession to the throne, Dong Khanh,
according to Boissière, wavered between austerity and debauchery. With a
professional interest in the question of split personality, Segalen imagined
Kuang-hsū to be torn by a similar conflict between opposing attitudes.

2 e.g. v. below, p. 291.
3 Dated from 14 June 1910, probably the date on which Segalen copied the
entries from 4 June 1910, according to Mme A. Joly-Segalen.
4 Segalen's source for this portrait was Jules Boissière's Cahier de Route
(manuscript notes, and Bouillier, p. 228).
Moreover he alters the historical dates of his story in order to render the action more concentrated and dramatic. The annals are introduced in the style of traditional Chinese chronicles, opening: "Période Kuang-siu, quinzième année, douzième lune, vingt-troisième soleil". At this period Kuang-hsü is about seventeen years old; according to history he died nineteen years later, at the age of thirty-seven. The most dramatic period during his reign was the so-called 'Hundred Days' of reform in 1898 which led to his overthrow. Segalen concentrates his attention on this part of his reign. He notes on the manuscript his intention:

Le faire mourir à 22 ans, ce qui serait bien, et de ma convenance. Travail de rassènement, très analogue au point de vue 'temps' à celui de la Composition en général.

By speeding up the pace of events he hoped to create a sense of greater intensity. However there were problems in falsifying the dates of well-known events such as the first Sino-Japanese War (1894), the Boxer Rebellion (1899-1900), and the death of Kuang-hsü (1908). In adopting the Chinese system of dating from the accession of the Emperor he would in part mask from the general reader this distortion of chronology; yet as with Le Mître du Jour the disparity between fact and fiction is disconcerting in a work based on a historical personage. Perhaps for this reason he gave dates only for the first few entries of the chronicle, reserving the others to be resolved at a later date.

Some details are invented for the sake of structural unity, for example, the decree giving Ts'u-hsi's decision to flee from Peking during the Sino-Japanese War. Others convey greater dramatic intensity than would a strict adherence to historical fact, for example, the decree issued by the European Allies (at the end of Part II), requiring the Imperial cortege to enter the city secretly, at night and by a back gate. In fact the Court's return to Peking had attracted large crowds because of its size and extravagance, and because the Emperor was travelling for the first time by train. In contrast with the pomp and display of the actual event, Segalen's hero anticipates a victorious return to the capital, only to be suddenly awakened to the reality of his situation by the Allied request. By having the Court return secretly,

at night, through the back gate, Segalen conveys a more vivid sense of China's humiliating defeat, and of the Emperor's powerlessness.

Kuang-hsü's special relationship with the Pearl Concubine takes a particular form in Le Fils du Ciel. It was common knowledge that Kuang-hsü had never accepted the wife chosen for him by Tz'u-hsi — her niece, Lung-tu — preferring two of his concubines, Chên-fei and Chin-fei, intelligent and attractive sisters. His favourite, Chên-fei (the 'Pearl Concubine'); had the qualities of spirit and determination by which Tz'u-hsi herself had risen through the ranks as a concubine. For this reason the Empress-Dowager feared her. In 1894 she was humiliated and beaten for having interfered in the appointment of court officials.¹ She is depicted in memoirs of the period as loyal to Kuang-hsü to the point of heroic defiance of Tz'u-hsi.²

In Segalen's novel, however, she, too, is depicted as a puppet of the Empress-Dowager. She is presented not as a concubine, but as one of Tz'u-hsi's ladies-in-waiting: 'Il y a des suivantes pleines d'ambition parmi mes suivantes.'¹³ Thus she is independent of Kuang-hsü; distant and inaccessible; she is a source of illusion and desire. However she is placed symbolically under the authority of the Empress-Dowager, thus leaving the Emperor a more isolated figure.

Segalen's imaginative reconstruction of the reign of Kuang-hsü does not pretend to be a historical record. However he claimed to respect Chinese attitudes towards the imperial role, in contrast with more romantic novels on the topic. When he first conceived the idea of this book he foresaw the popularity of the subject:

"Et puis, si je n'osais pas mettre en scène l'étonnante figure de Kouang-siu, mort 'imperceptiblement' il y a deux ans, d'autres le feraient, et comment!"³

² E.g. by Reginald B. Johnston, Tutor to the Emperor Hsüan-t'ung (Pu-yi), Twilight in the Forbidden City, London, Victor Gollancz Ltd, 1934, pp. 46-49.
³ China under the Empress-Dowager, op. cit., pp. 143-144.
⁵ Letter to Debussy, 6 June, 1910, Segalen et Debussy, op. cit., p. 122.
At this point he wrote to his wife that the subject of China was 'intact dans les lettres françaises...'. Although in his more thoughtful moments he observed that he was seeking in China not subjects but literary forms. He made no mention of Judith Gautier's novel *Le Dragon Impérial*, the story of a Chinese uprising against the Manchu Emperor K'ang-hsi. The author, who had no personal knowledge of the country, reveals a wide knowledge of Chinese literature and mythology; however her characters display European attitudes without regard for court protocol and tradition, and the plot is a traditional French love-story.

In 1911 Pierre Loti and Judith Gautier jointly published their drama *La Fille du Ciel*, set in China at the time of the Taiping Rebellion, a Chinese uprising against Manchu rule. The drama suggests a romantic resolution of this conflict through a love affair between the young Manchu emperor and an imagined Chinese empress, regent and mother of the rebel leader. It is European in tone and style, with no concern for verisimilitude. Therefore it is not very different from other sentimental European dramas, except for a thin veneer of local colour. It is not 'exotic' in the full sense of the word, indicating little interest in the full possibilities of the theme.

Segalen's reaction was predictably scornful and indignant. He wrote to Gilbert de Voisins: '... on a défloré le plus beau, le plus impérial de nos jardins'. His anger was directed principally against what he called the sacrilege of distorting the ancient title of 'Son of Heaven' by attributing it to a woman: 'Ils ont cru à un féminin possible!'. Thus the authors misunderstood and falsified a tradition going back thousands of years:

Dire que voilà quatre mille ans que *Le Fils du Ciel* existe, puisqu'on le Nomme, et qu'avec le nom, par le moyen continu des filiations, séniales ou adoptives, op le prolonge, on la ressuscite à chaque événement... pour que l'on vienne écrire, en feignant le sérieux, *La Fille du Ciel*.

Segalen found their idea a travesty of Chinese tradition. In labelling it 'irresponsible' he revealed the earnestness of his theory of exoticism, his sense of mission in art. Soon afterwards he decided to change the name of

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3 Unpublished letter to A. Gilbert de Voisins, 16 May 1911.
4 Ibid.
5 Ibid.
his novel which, 'dégouté profondément par la dénommée Fille du Ciel de
Mélanie Pierre Gautier et Judith Loti, s'appellera d'un nom moins prostitué:
Livre des Annales Kouang-Siu.'¹ No doubt Segalen over-reacted to what seems
a typical piece of Europocentric romantic literature, paying the authors back
in their own kind by what he saw as the ultimate insult of confusing their
name, sex and identity. He felt that his own novel was cheapened by Loti and
Gautier's choice of a similar subject and title.

Other European novels on the imperial court flourished in the next few
years, as he had predicted. They include salacious accounts of court
scandals, such as Charles Petit's Fils du grand eunuche, in 1920, followed
by Les Amours d'une Impératrice et d'un detchie^ jeune homme (1922). The
French sinologist Georges Soulé de Morant, under the pseudonym Lé-Sou,
published a biography of the Empress-Dowager T'z'u-hsi, followed by erotic novels
such as La Passion de Yang Kwei-fei, and Bijou de Ceinture, acteur-actrice.

Among biographies of the period are the various memoirs by Der Ling, who was
ready-in-waiting to T'z'u-hsi in 1903-4 before leaving for America. Her vivid
reminiscences of court life are valuable particularly because her intimate
knowledge of the Empress-Dowager is combined with a certain detachment which
derives from her European education. Pearl Buck's novel Imperial Woman, like
all her novels on China, reveals her wide and sympathetic knowledge of the
country and its people. It is likely to remain of much broader appeal than
Segalen's more erudite Fille du Ciel, partly because the novelist interprets the
motives and feelings of T'z'u-hsi according to European ways of thinking.

However, the difference between the novels mentioned above and that of Segalen
lies predominantly in the author's attitude towards writing. Whereas the
former seek to entertain, to edify or to describe, the 'book' was for Segalen
a work of art.

In form, his novel has more in common with the work of certain historians
of China. Jonathan Spence has recently published a portrait of the Emperor
K'ang-hsi which consists of translations of various imperial documents which
reveal something of his personality.² Like Segalen, Spence reveals a Western
concern with individuality which is foreign to Asian thought. Moreover the
Emperor of China, above all others, was required to sacrifice his own desires
and feelings to the fulfillment of rites and obligations in the service of his

² Jonathan Spence, Emperor of China: self-portrait of K'ang-hsi, London,
Jonathan Cape, 1974.
people. Spence looks as a historian for glimpses of the personality which emerges from the historical documents. Segalen, on the other hand, seeks to underline in his novel the different mentality which prevailed in Chinese concepts of the Emperor.

There is a remarkable analogy between Segalen's novel and the historical studies by Sir Edmund Backhouse and J.O.P. Bland. Their joint study of China under the Empress Dowager, appeared in 1910, followed by the Annals and Memoirs of the Court of Peking. In this work they claim to present authentic documents of the 'Sovereigns, annalists, commentators and despatch writers', in an effort to recreate the atmosphere of the imperial court. Segalen refers in his notes to this historical study which has similarities in form with his own work. Since it was published after his manuscripts were written it probably had no influence on him. Recent research by historians into Backhouse's work has revealed other analogies with Segalen's fiction: China under the Empress Dowager is based largely on the Ching Shan diary, which the enigmatic English sinologist claimed to have discovered during the Boxer Rebellion, and which is now considered to be a brilliant piece of forgery.

Controversy has raged among sinologists since the recent disclosure of an extraordinary autobiography by Backhouse, which throws new light on his character. Fact and fantasy are inextricably interwoven in the life and the writings of a figure comparable in his taste for enigma with Segalen's René Leys. Leaving aside the question of fantasy for the moment, we shall simply

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3 Richard Ellmann, 'In defence of Dr Hoepli', Times Literary Supplement, 26 November 1976, followed by a heated exchange of letters between Ellmann and Trevor-Roper. Before his death R. Hoepli gave a chapter of Backhouse's autobiography for publication to Asiatische Studien/Études Asiatiques, Zurich, xxvii, 1, 74, pp. 1-48. Typecripts of the two unpublished manuscripts by Backhouse, The Dead Past and Décadence mandchoue, have been donated to the Australian National Library, in Canberra.
4 v. below, p. 291.
observe that Backhouse, by his erudite forgery of court documents, succeeded in writing what was passed off as an authentic history of life within the Forbidden City. Segalen was concerned with a deliberate pastiche of such documents, seeking not the illusion of historical accuracy but a literary interpretation of their meaning. It was not his intention to dupe the reader into believing that his annals were authentic. On the contrary, he wished to stimulate the reader to consider the implications of events. By studying his literary technique we shall assess the effectiveness of this attempt to convey a sense of exoticism in its most rarefied form.
2. REFLECTIONS ON A MOMENT WITHIN THE ETERNAL CYCLE

... Il s'agit de ces malheureuses et néfastes Annales Kouang-siu... Elles reviennent, comme les cochons à leur auge, au genre Roman. — Si, d'ici mon départ, elles ne sont pas cristallisées pour toujours dans le Système géométrique (angles droits et durs) que j'avais composé jadis pour'elles, ... elles sont perdues, amorphes, colloïdales, diffusibles, élastiques, solubles, gommeuses, et dignes en un mot des 'valeurs-caoutchouc'.

The shapeless form of the traditional novel is for Segalen the ultimate crime against art. The quality of elasticity suggests an undisciplined diffuseness of style, where the story is carried along interminably, following established literary conventions. The reference to rubber suggests not only this tendency to draw out the narrative, but its association with the mercantile world of manufactured objects. Lacking in individuality and craftsmanship, such objects are mass-produced for the general public. They have, moreover, lasting value: they are 'soluble', easily erased, and sticky in their sentimentality.

Against the limitations of the popular novel Segalen posits a clearly defined form, geometrical in its precision. The imagery of sharp, clear angles refers to form rather than meaning. Language itself should, according to Segalen, be imprecise and open to multiple interpretation. Within the confines of an established mould the writing takes on its own momentum. The difference from subjective prolixity lies partly in the selection of a particular point of view. The writer is not merely voicing his own sentiments, often without considering their implications, but is attempting to consider other ideas and attitudes. His material is coloured by a specific set of values whose bias is openly admitted to the reader.

In Les Immémoriaux Segalen endeavoured to break away from linear narrative to a more contemplative circular form. Le Fils du Ciel is more complex in structure, revolving around the theme of the Emperor. We have

observed a tendency in the modern novel towards spatial forms, which allow the presentation of a subject from contradictory viewpoints. Circular structure, which is seen by many critics as characteristic of twentieth-century art, is associated, according to Roger Shattuck, with a 'concentration of forces in self-reflexiveness, art turning upon itself.' In a novel of circular form, Sharon Spencer claims, its centre must be thought of as representing the subject of the book; the circumference, the point of view or the perspective from which it is seen...

The subject or theme of Le Fils du Ciel is defined in the original title. The 'annals of Kuang-hsu' which provide the background are an illustration of this wider theme, demonstrating the manner in which the role of emperor affects an individual. The duties and conventions of this role are the central point of interest for the characters, dominating their attitude towards the behaviour of Kuang-hsu.

In general terms, the structure of Le Fils du Ciel might be compared with modern novels such as Nabokov's Pale Fire. This work is similarly composed of diverse parts: an ironical preface; a long, naive narrative poem written by an American poet-professor, in a burlesque Romantic style; a commentary and index written from a totally different viewpoint by an unconventional paranoid colleague, Dr Charles Kinbote, who claims to be Charles II, the exiled King of Zembla. As in Segalen's work the unity of the text is established by the ironical interplay of different attitudes and styles juxtaposed within the narrative.

The art of commentary on a literary text is, moreover, a traditional Chinese discipline. As we have observed, Segalen adopts for his Odes the form of a lyrical poem followed by its commentary, 'suivant obligé et bavard'. Thus he establishes two contrasting parts within the poem: the 'song', expressing love, passion, or a religious aspiration towards that which is other, infinitely distant and desirable; and an ironical criticism, attempting to elucidate certain subtle or erudite allusions, opening the text to a plurality of interpretations: 'Ainsi, refermée sur elle-même, un autre l'ouvrira, montrant sa charpente, ses raisons, ses enchaînements.'

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1 Roger Shattuck, op. cit., pp. 351-352.
2 Sharon Spencer, op. cit., p. 187.
3 Odes, suivies de Thibet, op. cit., p. 15.
4 ibid.; loc. cit.
poet maintains the illusion of a literary critic commenting on the poetry of
other writer: 'Le Poète entend sans doute ici...'.
'Cette ode au Passé ne peut donc être ancienne...', 'Très habilement le poète...'
This literary structure allows a dialectic between inspiration and conscious craftsmanship
which is equally characteristic of Segalen's fiction.

In *Le Fils du Ciel* the form of poem and commentary is adapted to become
the fictional device of the court chronicle. The annalist's commentary
circles around the poetic reflections of the Emperor and the imperial decrees,
considering their import in the light of his official function. The form of
the novel was described by Segalen in his notes as 'Triple trame, et chaînes
enlacées'. The three threads of poetic prose, decrees and commentary are
woven into a text reflecting on the concept of the eternal Emperor, Son of
Heaven.

The structure is modelled on the mythological ideas underlying the text.
In traditional Chinese thought the number 3 was considered the first and
perfect number. It was associated with Heaven, with masculinity and 'yang'.
The division into three parts therefore indicates the major role played by
'Heaven' in the novel: the three limited viewpoints focus on this underlying
theme.

In a prose poem on the Yung-cheng Emperor, Segalen associates the reign of
an emperor with the cyclical movement of the sun: 'Le soleil est mort lui-même
ainsi qu'un monarque au règne éclatant...'. His death is followed by the dawn
of a new era, similar in form to the last:

Le jour s'apprêtrait au même sacrifice, et le jeune soleil
immuablement rond, plus clair et plus vif; recommençait un
règne prometteur. Alors, j'ai méprisé la durée unique...
Un Empereur tombé qu'un autre lui succède: un palais
meurt, qu'on en hausse un second exact et répété. Un jour
s'abat, vienne le lendemain promis... et que, si les êtres
passent, leur série coule du moins avec une fuite éternelle
et durable en ses retours.

1 Odes, suivies de Thibet, op. cit., p. 19.
2 ibid., loc. cit.
3 ibid., p. 23.
4 M. Granet, La Pensée chinoise, op. cit., pp. 154 & 284.
6 ibid., loc. cit.
The sun thus symbolizes the eternal emperor, who dies only to be reborn in a different form. The Emperor was compared to the sun in early Chinese mythology. According to protocol, he was to make a customary tour of the Empire every five years, "commençant par le Levant et suivant la marche du Soleil, de manière à adapter exactement les Temps aux Espaces". This imperial tradition was used as a face-saving justification for the excesses of the imperial court from Peking during the Boxer Rebellion, in Part II of *Le Fils du Ciel*, which was officially described as a 'tour of the provinces'.

The Emperor, situated at the heart of the universe, was the agent of the dynamic power issuing from the centre. The emblem of the centre is for the Taoists, as we have seen, a dynamic force comparable to the axis of the wheel, around which revolve the contingencies and phenomena of an ever-changing universe. The reign of Kuang-hsü is just a 'moment' in an eternal cycle of imperial lives, similar to his in their surroundings and ritualistic routine. Even the personality of the Emperor was subordinate to his fulfilment of the requirements of his semi-divine function as servant of both gods and men: "Voici quatre mille années qu'un homme qui n'est plus un homme s'appelle le Fils du Ciel." Through the form of his novel Segalen intended to convey a sense of the pitiless wheel of life on which Kuang-hsü was caught and finally sacrificed.

The spokes of the wheel

Official decrees are presented at regular intervals during the narration as documents indicating the major events of Kuang-hsü's reign. In the structure of the novel they are like the spokes of the wheel, marking out stages in the revolution of the cycle. Written in formal, classical style, they have a conservative tone. Their reference to historical events and their precise presentation of decisions on matters of ritual or state have a more solidly realistic air than the dreams and conjectures of the other voices of narration.

Nearly two-thirds of the decrees are issued by the Empress-Dowager, in the Emperor's name. Generally they flout the dictates and desires of Kuang-hsü, presenting a more traditional point of view. Tz'u-hsi's opinions are not

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1 *La Pensée chinoise*, op. cit., p. 102.
generally presented in the narrative, which is limited to the Emperor’s actions and words; thus her edicts are more dramatic and unexpected. They reveal Kuang-hsü’s impotence before the forces of conservatism entrenched within the palace. The text focuses completely on the person of Kuang-hsü, leaving those who oppose him in the background. We see only the memoirs and edicts conveyed to the Emperor, and their effect on him.

The Empress-Dowager’s first edict at the beginning of the novel announces that the Emperor, having reached his majority, will marry, and then take over the reins of power. In the opening lines Kuang-hsü acknowledges his reception of the edict, and respectfully accepts the decision without comment. His introductory words establish the theme:

MOI l’Empereur, en notre Palais de Pei-king, ai très respectueusement reçu de Notre Mère, Impératrice-Régnante, ce Décret:

The voice of the Emperor, the subject, is heard first, but his words are passive and conventional, accepting the authority of the Empress-Dowager. Thus the ancient dualism at the heart of the Chinese political system is immediately asserted. The tone has been set for the sacrifice; the victim is conditioned to accept his fate. Preparing to relinquish power, Tz’u-hsi then promulgates a second decree appointing an annalist to record the intimate details of the Emperor’s private life. Juxtaposed with the preceding decree, the decision takes on the air of strategy designed to keep her informed about Kuang-hsü’s actions.

Before long, it is followed by a lengthy decree concerned with the exacting protocol of the official marriage ceremony. By concentrating on this marriage arranged by the Empress-Dowager rather than on the Emperor’s accession to power, Segalen accentuates the personal tone underlying the narrative. The ‘edict for the Celebration of the Marriage of a Sovereign’ is, moreover, the occasion for a detailed account of the pomp and splendour of the event.

The following decrees are concerned with official ritual. Kuang-hsü’s first decree announces his intention to fulfil the traditional two-day sacrifice to the gods in order to obtain rain. This ceremony is associated by Segalen with the storm which destroyed the Temple of Heaven in 1899—the year following the ‘Hundred Days’ reform period. It is presented in the

Heaven rejects the Kuang-hsi Emperor:
The Temple of Heaven, destroyed by a lightning-bolt in 1899, was rebuilt soon after.
opening section of the novel as a dramatic indication that Kuang-hsü's initial attempt to fulfil his imperial obligations aroused the anger of the gods. It is immediately followed by two edicts purporting to come from the Emperor, but presumably issued by the Empress-Dowager. The first imposes on the Emperor a recognition of personal responsibility which is inline with the principle that 'all faults have their origin in the emperor', as source of harmony on earth:

... et Nous courbant devant le Ciel, conscient de l'immensité de Nos fautes, Nous Nous accusons devant Sa colère en Nous offrant à Son châtiment. Respect à ceci.¹

Beneath the reference to the concept of imperial responsibility lies an analogy with the Christian doctrine of original sin. The decree presents the supposition of man's inevitable guilt, and his need to propitiate the gods with humility in order to avoid further punishment.

The second decree is an attempt by Tz'u-hsi to explain the disaster by referring to the growing influence of the Europeans:

... tout, dans l'Empire, revêt une perfection trop grande pour que cet incendie et ce tonnerre soient le Signe d'un mal intérieur; et qu'il faut chercher dehors.²

Her attitude of complacent isolationism is ironically exaggerated here; its very exaggeration suggests an attempt to shift the blame for the disaster from an indictment of the appointment of Kuang-hsü, for which she was personally responsible. Pressure is applied to make the Emperor change his policies through the presentation of an official petition by two censors, which associates floods, famines and portents in the countryside with the conduct of affairs of state:

Or, tout désordre apparaissant dans la nature est l'indice d'un désordre caché dans l'administration de l'Empire.³

Veiled references suggest that this protest is also the work of Tz'u-hsi. Kuang-hsü remarks on its polished literary style; he points out that in the past those who have dared to criticize the Emperor, such as the annalist's father Wu K'o-tu, have committed suicide to prove their sincerity: 'Le chant de l'oiseau qui s'étangle est un chant plaintif.'⁴ Yet in this case the men

² ibid., pp. 27-28. ³ ibid., loc. cit. ⁴ ibid., p. 38.
who have audaciously criticized the Emperor's policy continue their leisurely life in the Civil Service. Moreover, Tz'u-hsi'a part in the affair becomes clear when her councillor Jung-lu presents to Kuang-hsü the Empress-Dowager's "secret commentary" on the protest:

"... Bien que durant Notre long règne, les Censeurs n'aient jamais eu à Nousadresser de telles suppliques, Nous pouvons aisément expliquer les raisons de celles-ci."

By her condescending tone Tz'u-hsi'a assumes her own superiority in the management of imperial affairs. Within such brief decrees and submissions to the Emperor Segalen outlines the dominating personality which sapped Kuang-hsü's confidence in himself, and led to his downfall.

However for a brief moment Kuang-hsü succeeds in resisting Tz'u-hsi'a's control. A decree is suddenly presented to him during the Sino-Japanese War announcing the Court's intention to flee from Peking. Its periphrastic wording expresses a characteristic desire to save face:

"Devant l'insolence de ces esclaves qui oserent porter leurs pas contre Notre capitale, Nous décidons que Notre seule réponse sera le mépris. Nous nous retirons donc..."

The Emperor interrupts its reading to question the origin and motivation of the decree, thus revealing his total ignorance of political realities. This ignorance provides occasion for a statement from the armed forces giving details of China's crushing defeat by the Japanese, and expressing fears of an attack on the capital. Kuang-hsü's response is to issue his own decree announcing his intention to remain in his capital. In this spontaneous assertion of his own will Kuang-hsü is driven by a desire to act freely, untrammelled by tradition and the authority of others.

"... que j'accomplisse pour la première fois enfin ce que nul ne m'aura dicté ni enseigné. Je donne l'exemple. Je décide."

Although Kuang-hsü's decision was justified by circumstances, Segalen relates it to purely personal considerations. Thus, once he realizes that his action is not without historical precedent, and that he has in fact only followed the example of certain predecessors, he becomes discouraged and torn by doubts. The next decree is the last expression of his imperial power. Ironically it announces the appointment of Yüan Shih-k'ai to train a new imperial army, giving military power to the very man who is the agent of his downfall.

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1 Le Fils du Ciel, p. 40. 2 ibid., p. 50. 3 ibid., p. 53.
The decrees in Part II herald a second stage in Kuang-hsü's reign, where he attempts to impose his will, but is ignored. Imprisoned on the Ocean Terrace in the lake, he has no power to enforce his orders. Although he dictates a decree designed to maintain his supporters in their official functions, that promulgated by the Empress-Dowager announces their execution as traitors. Whereas earlier his decree had successfully countermanded that of Tz'u-hsü, the situation is now reversed. The latter claimsto be supported by the conservative forces of law and tradition: "...notre grande dynastie gouverne toujours d'après les Rites et les Lois.

The sole decree accepted from Kuang-hsü is a pathetic renunciation of his ideas for modernizing the education system; a sign of repentance for his attempts at reform. It meets with silence.

By a similar technique of suggestion and dramatic silence the annalist omits from his chronicle the Empress-Dowager's decree appointing a successor to the T'ung-chih Emperor. Her action ignores the existence of Kuang-hsü. Thus the problem of the imperial succession is raised once again. While he is absorbed in the implications of the question, the annalist only refers indirectly to the decree, thus provoking the reader's interest.

During the Boxer Rebellion, which occurs towards the middle of Part II, the Empress-Dowager promulgates an edict similar to that in Part I, announcing her intention to leave the Imperial City. Sudden and dramatic in its brevity, it gives as reason for this hasty departure the traditional "voyage d'inspection, dans les autres métropoles." It is followed by a longer edict from outside the capital, giving instructions for the defence of the city. In its invective this second edict recalls the emotional tone of the Boxers, and contrasts with European versions of the invasion of Peking. The invaders are described as treacherous barbarians, who attacked at night, from behind, sneaking into the Imperial City like rats through the sewers: "on reconnaît là ce peuple de nains ou de grands diables noirs!" These words are true to the personal fury and hatred Tz'u-hsü was reputed to feel towards Europeans after the sacking of her Summer Palace.

Since his political decisions are swept aside, Kuang-hsü then turns to more metaphysical considerations. During his "tour of the empire," he announces his decision to perform a religious ceremony acknowledging the mountain as a symbol of imperial power, a motionless, eternal link between

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1 Le Fil du Ciel, p. 86. 2 Ibid., p. 99. 3 Ibid., p. 103.
heaven and earth. Once again Tz'u-hsi brushes aside his decree, thus revealing that her conflict with the Emperor is not purely over political considerations but a battle of wills. Part II closes with a brief decree, abruptly announced to Kuang-hsu at the end of his long reverie about a triumphal return to Peking:

En raison des convenances demandées par les Etrangers qui sont encore les hôtes de la Capitale, l'entrée de la Cour ne se fera point par le Sud, et de jour, mais vers le milieu de la nuit, au Nord, et par la porte Postérieure.

Respecte cet.

This idea of a humiliating return in secrecy is invented by Segalen, as we have noted, to symbolize the historical reality of the situation. Representing the will of the conquerors, it is another example of Kuang-hsu's impotence.

In Part III only two decrees are presented, both by Kuang-hsu; however they are totally divorced from political reality. Frustrated in all his attempts to impose his own will, he takes refuge in madness. This device allows Segalen to introduce the original idea of his novel: the presentation of a chain of emperors fulfilling the eternal functions of the Son of Heaven. Bland and Backhouse observe that Kuang-hsu used to identify with the Ming Emperor Ch'ing-t'ai, who had also been nominated as Emperor by the Empress-Dowager, in preference to his brother. Later he had been assassinated and disgraced. Segalen describes in his hero a similar sense of identification with his imperial predecessors, which develops into a case of neuroasthenic hallucination. Kuang-hsu issues a decree in the name of the K'ien-long Emperor, ordering that all foreigners be driven into the sea. Thus the situation in Part I is totally reversed. Whereas the Empress-Dowager and her followers now receive the foreigners and treat them with respect, Kuang-hsu has reverted to the isolationist policies of Tz'u-hsi and of past emperors.

His second decree is promulgated in the name of the last Ming Emperor, Ch'ung-chen, who had, it was claimed, hanged himself before the arrival of the Manchu invaders. A tree in the Forbidden City bears chains to symbolize its

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1 Le Fils du Ciel, p. 119.
2 v. above, p. 223.
3 Annals and Memoirs of the Court of Peking, op. cit., p. 438.
supposed pair in the death of an emperor. In his decree Kuang-hsu speaks in
the name of Ch'ung-chen, exonerating the tree from blame:

... Il n'a pas tué un homme, mais aidé l'Empereur qui ne peut pas
mourir, changer de règne seulement, et de nom dynastique.

The referential detail of the chained tree is presented as a starting-
point for the Emperor's meditation on the death of his predecessor, and on the
fall of a dynasty. Kuang-hsu, absorbed in living out his role as 'eternal'
Emperor, sees the illogicality of blaming the tree for Ch'ung-chen's death, if
the Emperor could not die. 2 The passage represents the creative process by
which an object or an experience inspires in the writer an imaginative
reflection on its implications. The annalist's comment on Kuang-hsu's
decree develops this parallel between the Emperor musing on his predecessor
and the writer musing on his character:

Il convient de pénérer la puissance d'un Empereur qui le premier,
semble-t-il ose tourner le temps, emprunter les paroles et vivre
les périodes des Empereurs du passé, et par ses larmes, ses
sanglots, tient le mystérieux pouvoir de revivre ses morts. 3

An improbable reaction of the court annalist towards what was apparently
madness, these lines represent the author's idea for his imperial character
rather than the impressions of the annalist. They describe Segalen's plan for
a 'phoenix-emperor', who is continually reborn in different physical
manifestations. Segalen presents this idea through the device of a psycholo-
gical regression. Thus Kuang-hsu finally achieves something unique, according
to the censor, by reliving the lives of his predecessors. Ironically, it is
only when he no longer cares about doing something original that he seems to
succeed. However the annalist's observation serves principally to underline
the presentation of what Segalen felt was a new idea in fiction. 4 The
attempt to relive the ideas and feelings of the other, an essential feature of

1 Le Fils du Ciel, p. 139.
2 The Peinture [Libération de Ming] represents the tree as simultaneously
heroïc and culpable: heroic in saving the Emperor from humiliation, culpable
for its part in an emperor's death (Stèles, Peintures, Équipée, op. cit., p. 353).
Bland and Backhouse state, however, that contrary to tradition the
Emperor did not hang himself on this tree, but strangled himself in a pavilion
nearby (Annals and Memoirs of the Court of Peking, op. cit., p. 103).
3 Le Fils du Ciel, p. 139.
4 As above, p. 216.
Segalen's exotic method, is characteristically associated with an autocritical reflection on the writer's intentions.

Cleverly integrated into the text, it is an original literary device with potentiality for a Proustian play with chronological time. Unfortunately it is not fully developed. Where in Part I there are ten decrees or commentaries, and in Part II seven, in Part III there are only two, although notes on the manuscript express Segalen's intention to write others. As this device is a structural element, the lack of proportion between Parts I and III, together with other stylistic factors, indicate that the novel remains in an unfinished state.

The imperial decrees represent various points of view: not only the conflict between Kuang-hsü and the Empress-Dowager, but the changing attitudes of the Emperor himself, which mark stages in his quest to establish his own identity.

The annals revolving around the subject of the emperor

In deciding to take responsibility for inventing the device of the court annalist Segalen remarked, "Cela vaudrait mieux que la "formule roman"," by which he means relation of the life of Kuang-hsü by an unspecified, perhaps omniscient narrator. Through the stratagem of imperial annals he was required to respect the limitations of a particular world view.

As annalist of Kuang-hsü's reign he has Tʻu-hsʻi make the remarkable choice of Wu Kʻo-leang, son of the censor Wu Kʻo-tu. This official had committed suicide in protest against Tʻu-hsʻi's nomination of her young nephew Kuang-hsü as Emperor. The appointment violated the traditions of imperial succession by leaving the late Emperor, her son Tʻung-chih, without an heir. By imposing on Wu's son the task of annalist to Kuang-hsü, the Empress-Dowager forces him to make an official record of the reign which his father had died to protest against. The very person of the narrator is, therefore, a reminder of the unorthodoxy of Kuang-hsü's appointment which is a dominating factor in the novel. On one level it plays on the Confucian belief that disaster is a sign of Heaven's disapproval. On another level it illustrates

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1. e.g. for p. 153, La Fille du Ciel.
2. v. below pp., 250 & 266.
3. Unpublished manuscript note.
Tzu-hsi'a defiance of tradition in pursuit of her own ambition. Her
wilfulness conflicts with her avowed support of Confucianism and the
traditional social order.

The question of imperial succession is raised again later in the novel
when Tzu-hsi finally appoints an heir to Tung-chih, thus defying the rules
of succession once more by passing over Kuang-hsu. His very existence seems
to be negated by her pronouncement. The annalist is therefore caught in a
dilemma:

Faut-il écrire, faut-il enregistrer ceci? — Faut-il s'armer du
droit d'un Censeur, et comme le Père de l'Annaliste qui, écrit
ceci, faut-il respectueusement adresser la supplique et mourir?
Mais ce décret remplit précisément le but de la supplique du
Censeur Wou K'o-t'equ.

Through the annalist's perplexed ruminations on the implications of Tzu-hsi's
decree, Segalen juxtaposes this decision with the earlier event, and
establishes dramatic parallels between the two cases. There is, moreover, an
ironic contrast between the heroic action of the father, in the past, and the
weakness of the son in the present case. No one, it seems, dare to challenge
Tzu-hsi's decisions. Segalen thereby not only indicates Tzu-hsi's growing
power, but suggests a lack of heroism and personal integrity in contemporary
China which contributes towards Kuang-hsu's gradual disillusionment with the
present, and refuge in dreams of the past.

Ironically, Wou is chosen as annalist for his Confucian qualities of
virtue, skill in calligraphy and filial piety. Through the latter he is
involved directly in the conflict. None of his virtues indicate great powers
of perception as a court-annalist. His classical Confucian education leads
him to interpret Kuang-hsu's actions and words in a particular light which
gives the narration a unique exotic tone:

Ignorer est une faute. Connaitre à l'excess: quel manque de goûT!
Savoir modestement ce qu'il est juste de savoir comme ayant existé...

Thus the narrator explains his attitude in Confucian terms to the reader.
There is an analogy with the 'objective' attitude described in Part I above:
he does not analyse secret feelings and motives, but limits his narrative to
an account of Kuang-hsu's words and actions. However a moralizing tone
colours the annalist's presentation. He is concerned with presenting an

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1 Le Fil de la Cale, p. 92. 2 ibid, p. 10.
Therefore he ignores any signs of personal emotion, weakness or unconventional behaviour in the Emperor, interpreting all his actions in a sense more appropriate to his idea of an imperial figure. He reads Kuang-hsū's poetry as a literary game, revealing clever play with figures of contrast, juxtaposition or analogy, or modifications of literary convention:

... C'est par une poétique attention qu'il feint de se déparir, pour la Princesse, de sa personnalité haute, et qu'il lui prête une réponse que nulle Suivante commune n'oserait dire, — il faut le supposer à leur honneur, — mais qui, exprimée sous ce tour délicat, termine heureusement la strophe.

Aussi bien ce sont là sans doute, fiction agréable et délices.

The moralistic attitude of the annalist conveys dramatically to the reader a sense of the isolation of the Emperor's position, which is maintained by stringent court protocol. Poems which express deep personal feeling are dismissed here as light fiction. Frequently they are related to the classical tradition:

Cette poésie présente la tournure ambiguë de s'emprunter en partie au livre des Vers et, d'autre part, se recomposer de nouveau.

As in the Odes or the 'Stèle sur la Composition', Segalen satirizes the attitude of the conventional reader through a seemingly objective presentation of his point of view: 'Mais un commentateur, même le plus respectueux, doit témoigner son étonnement ici...'; 'étonnement', a matter for disapproval on the part of the annalist, is for the Emperor-artist a source of creativity. The annalist occasionally voices a subtle criticism of such an unconventional attitude, only to assure the reader that it is purely a literary device on Kuang-hsū's part:

L'Empereur a sans doute fait preuve d'une grande habileté à rédiger les Odes antiques. Par là se montre-t-il meilleur poète que bon époux, donnant à l'expression littéraire et au retentissement des vers une valeur prépondérante sur la joie conjugale. Il n'est pas besoin, en cette pièce de circonstance, de chercher d'autres desseins...

Si ce n'est, peut-être, celui de plaire à la Princesse Ta'ai-yu, très expérte à de tels jeux de poésie et d'amour...

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1 Le Fils du Ciel, p. 60.  
2 ibid., pp. 22-23.  
3 ibid., p. 15.  
4 ibid., pp. 15-16.  
5 ibid., p. 16.
The annalist represents the conservative Confucian virtues of duty towards family and society. The ironical tone of the author can be detected in his pompous platitudes about the joys of an arranged marriage: 'la joie conjugale', 'la joie officielle', 'la hâte matrimoniale'. His values are scorned by the author as hypocritical and conventional. His attitude towards literature, like his attitude towards life, is moralistic.

Through the limitations of the annalist's chronicle Segalen satirizes the idea of presenting an accurate biographical study. In *Les Immémoires* and the manuscript for *Le Matre du Jour* the narrator indicates, like Sartre's Roquentin, his problems in gathering accurate information for his study. The annalist has a more naive attitude towards historical detail:

L'Annaliste doit maintenant veiller plus que jamais; il ne pas omettre un souvenir ni un écho dix fois redondant.

Car l'Histoire, qui est le Miroir des actes des Princes, le Bassin des Faits accomplis, le Fût vaste où vient se refléter tout ce qui tremble dans l'air, ne doit rien laisser fuir de ces moments héroïques.2

History is ironically described here as a pool of facts like a bottomless well which are gathered together by the narrator and faithfully represented as a mirror reflects reality. This idea of writing recalls Stendhal's idea of the novel as 'un miroir qu'on promène le long du chemin'. In direct opposition to this idea of a realistic portrayal of 'reality', the following lines indicate that the annalist is unaware of the source of the decree he is recording:

L'Empereur a fait soudain interrompre la lecture du décret. Ce décret ne venait donc point de Sa personne?3

By juxtaposing these texts the author reveals the limitations of his narrator, and also the relativity of historical truth. The 'heroic moments' the annalist intended to record now seem shameful. Far from conquering the Japanese, the Chinese are planning to flee. The idea of recording every 'echo', every detail of Kuang-hsü's reign is an impossible dream of realistic narration. Moreover it is not consistent with the general tone of the novel, which is concerned with recording significant events in a certain manner.

While the annalist frequently seems to be unaware of the biased nature of his reports, the Empress-Dowager has a different attitude towards historical

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1 *Le Fils du Ciel*, p. 15.  
2 *ibid.*, p. 50.  
3 *ibid.*, loc. cit.
accuracy. We have noted the propagandist tone in her decrees. Similarly she issued a fictitious account about the imperial audience for the foreign ambassadors in Part I. The Emperor is reported to have questioned her counsellor Jung-ly about this travesty of the truth:

... pourquoi ce récit répandu dans les provinces? Je sais bien, Moi, que ces gens n'ont pas tremblé devant Moi.

Jung-ly murmura, s'inclinant: — Elle le sait bien aussi. Mais s'ils n'ont pas tremblé, — et voici les paroles de la Mère du Royaume, — n'est-ce pas de la faute de l'Empereur?

The dissemination of information is seen here not as a mere reflection of fact, but as the presentation of an ideal, by which the writer seeks to influence popular perceptions of the situation. Official reports are intended to influence the future course of events rather than to reflect the status quo. However the annalist is not involved in these questions of policy, and generally presents details from a blinkered viewpoint within the Forbidden City.

By respecting this limited perspective, Segalen presents with dramatic immediacy a particular mentality, coloured by Confucian precepts. Details which are outside the range of his subject are omitted from the narrative. Thus Part I closes with an account of what eunuchs in the Palace overheard of the final secret meeting between Kuang-hsü and K'ang Yu-wei before the Emperor's downfall. The few whispered snatches of dialogue, illustrated by gestures and physical expression, vividly convey the sense of a listening spy:

Il faut qu'il s'empare de... On ne peut entendre de mot, mais on vit soudain l'Empereur, immensement effrayé, saluer ce nom des deux poings réunis, dans un respect soudain.

The ritual gesture accompanied by the expression of terror needed no verbal explanation. Thus the first episode of Kuang-hsü's reign ends on a note of dread and uncertainty. No account of the Empress-Dowager's coup d'état is given; Part II opens directly on to the scene of Kuang-hsü's imprisonment in the island pavilion. A certain knowledge of China is desirable; therefore, in order to understand fully the historical references, and allusions such as the gesture of respect for the Empress-Dowager, or the circle drawn by Kang to refer to Yuan Shih-k'ai. In his notes Segalen expressed the intention of explaining, later in the novel that the name 'Yuan'

1 Le Fils du Ciel, p. 40.  
2 ibid., p. 78.
had a similar sound to the character meaning 'circle': a detail which was to have special relevance at the end of the novel; however the reference remains obscure. Such elements demand effort from the reader.

The annalists' style contrasts with that of the formal decrees and the Emperor's poetry. Concerned principally with reporting events, it consisted of a seemingly objective enumeration of facts: 'L'Empereur dit...', 'On répondit...'. However behind Wu's unwillingness to analyse motives and feelings lies the Confucian ideal of the impersonal ruler: 'Le Fils du Ciel a pour devoir admirable et premier de n'être plus humain...'. His attitude is presented in the conventional language of court protocol: 'Le très miserable et indigne écrivain...'; 'Mais le Père indulgent pardonne à l'ancien petit-fils coupable s'il témoigne de grands efforts...'. His rigid presentation of the imperial ideal is a concrete illustration of the stifling atmosphere of the Forbidden City.

The Emperor's reflections on the eternal wheel

The Emperor's poems were the starting-point of the novel. We have observed that the idea of Le Fils du Ciel originated with Segalen's poetic reflection on the Ming Tombs, which opened, 'JE SUIS EMPEREUR'. Similarly, Le Fils du Ciel opens, 'MOI, L'Empereur'. Segalen identifies with his subject, seeing in the Emperor the ideal figure whose identity was created by Shih Huang-ti and the early Han emperors — the five-clawed imperial dragon of all knowledge and power. The poems reveal the narrow perspective of the novel itself:

... craignons la généralité. Le 'Fils du Ciel' n'a point l'immanse que le titre lui prête: le peuple n'y a d'accès que selon le bon vouloir de la cervelle polie, maniérée, pleine d'éducation, de mon héros imaginaire.

In his choice of an imperial hero Segalen espouses subtlety and refinement of language: what Barthes has called 'une pratique mandarinales'. The density of this artistic medium is a source of inspiration to the reader, demanding effort and creativity. Through the suggestive powers of language an exotic world opens up, which is 'in-human', 'other': the world of illusion, ruled by

1 Le Fils du Ciel, p. 29. 2 ibid., p. 60. 3 ibid., p. 88.
4 Briques et Tulles, op. cit., p. 91.
a symbolic emperor. He is both creator and ruler of that autonomous world, hors-la-loi, beyond the restrictions of conventional laws and traditions. In contrast with this freedom, the role of the Emperor of China entailed in practice a life regulated by etiquette and tradition, dedicated to meditation and expiation for his people before Heaven. Kuang-hsu's poems in Le Fils du Ciel convey a sense of oppression, fear and resentment at a yoke imposed on him from above, which crushes all powers of personal expression.

A number of the original poems which were the germ of the novel were not finally incorporated into the text. Segalen noted on the manuscript that the text must develop spontaneously out of the writing. It was difficult to incorporate into this organic growth preconceived fragments and ideas:

Je vérifie une fois de plus l'impossibilité qu'il y a à faire entrer, même à accommoder, un tout, un ensemble conçu avant le rythme d'une œuvre, dans cette œuvre. L'un et l'autre y perdent. — Malaise, et double mauvaise utilisation.1

Writings concerned with the more general idea of the emperor were put aside, to become in many cases les or Peintures. The idea of the eternal emperor, 'sans cesse renaissant, phénix du trône',2 which he saw as the kernel of the text, was finally seen through the eyes of Kuang-hsu. The text thus expresses the personal struggle of this young, melancholy emperor against the forces of conservatism. In the following chapters we shall observe how closely Segalen identified with this conflict. Kuang-hsu's interest in radical reform, modernization and freedom of the individual is interpreted by the novelist as a desire to impose on his reign the mark of his own personality. Throughout his reign he seeks to escape the repressive authority of established tradition, represented by the Empress-Dowager. However, his hesitancy in such matters as his decision to remain in Peking during the Korean War, and his later retraction of his ideas about education, reveal a fundamental instability of character, and an inability to withstand the forces of oppression. Once deposed by the Empress-Dowager, he finds new hope in his love for Ts'ai-ju:

Parmi toute l'absence heureuse il y a pourtant ce grand vide,
Qui fait qu'une absence est plus grande que toute autre.
— Parmi le chagrin, les désarrois, les pleurs,
Une venue suffirait à tout combler.3

1 Unpublished note for the poem 'Considération de la Terre', p. 120 of the 1st manuscript, not included in the novel.
3 Le Fils du Ciel, p. 84.
Whereas the annalist reduces the text to a clever juxtaposition of words and ideas, Kuang-hsü is expressing personal feeling. The gulf which separates him from Ts'ai-yu is a source of both desire and hope. The novelist sees in this passion compensation for the loss of an empire, for Ts'ai-yu's love is a recognition of his unique qualities as an individual. Yet even this illusion is destroyed when Kuang-hsü suddenly realizes that Ts'ai-yu has deceived him. She too is an instrument of the all-powerful Empress-Dowager:

Et Elle vous a envoyé comme une esclave, vers moi, devant les Eunuques, pour m'empêcher de tout savoir, pour me tromper, pour m'aveugler, pour dire ce qu'Elle voulait que je fasse... oh! Esclave! — Et maintenant pour me décider à fuir... o toutes nos poésies... 1

In this crushing realization of Ts'ai-yu's duplicity, Kuang-hsü is particularly dismayed to discover that her poems were in fact dictated by T'z'u-hsi. This deception is for him a betrayal of artistic integrity, a destruction of his fondest illusions. The Empress-Dowager has made a mockery of an art which expresses the deepest values of the inner self. Thus Segalen underlines the illusory nature of human belief, and the essential isolation of the individual.

At this point Ts'ai-yu rebels against the Empress-Dowager, in support of Kuang-hsü, and therefore meets her historical fate. However her death is never explicitly described in the novel. In contrast with eyewitness accounts, 2 in Segalen's novel Kuang-hsü knows nothing of her murder. His ignorance is the occasion for prolonged dramatic irony as he dreams of finding her again. In love as in politics he lives in a world cut off from reality.

The poems in the latter part of Part II are inspired by archeological discoveries of the sites of an early Neolithic culture in the Wei valley: "Voici le berceau. Voici l'origine; voici le foyer et le feu." 3 Kuang-hsü's journey through the Empire parallels Segalen's first expedition through China. In Briques et Tuiles the novelist relives the moments of this dramatic flight: "Maintenant, je dois mener ici mon Fils du Ciel en déroute." 4

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3 Le Fils du Ciel, p. 106; v. below, p. 272.
4 Briques et Tuiles, op. cit., p. 52.
He imagines the Emperor driven from his palaces, wandering with despair and bitterness through the vast Empire. Then suddenly, as he contemplates a mountain peak reaching into the void, he realizes the meaning of his existence:

Le Ciel de Chine doit rester désert. L'Empereur (le Fils du Ciel) n'y cherche pas des dieux, mais lui-même.¹

Segalen sees the Son of Heaven as a substitute for the gods of other religious systems. In this semi-divine figure, as in the image of Siddhartha, he seeks the man within the role. In the novel, the Emperor discovers in the contemplation of the mountain a sense of his own identity as a link between heaven and earth, source of stability and power at the centre of the earth. The Emperor's journey through China is primarily the occasion for a reflection on Chinese tradition. Details of landscape, cities and buildings are incidental to the narrative:

La marche longue, à travers la terre Jaune, les embûches, les sauts dans la fuite, le fleuve qui abreuve les vivants jusqu'à les noyer de ses eaux...²

The Emperor makes little attempt to describe the countryside. Hidden behind the curtains of his litter, he saw very little. Only once does he comment on the teeming population of China; his comment applies to a single figure, a beggar, representing the world of poverty and disorder:

Aujourd'hui j'ai vu l'horreur des choses; parmi le désarroi des monts, cet homme est venu que je ne connaissais. Avec lui, après lui, il y en a d'autres encore?³

Such is the isolation of the Emperor, Segalen suggests, that in his travels through China this is his sole encounter with reality! His everyday world is one of order, harmony and regulation; the beggar with his untidy hair (the only detail described by the annalist) represents an unknown world of trouble and dissection, which awakens in Kuang-hsü a desire for freedom:

Il faut maintenant que je voie... Je verrai derrière les Murs. Je chercherai. Je règnerai enfin.⁴

His long poem, written in a moment of hope before he returns to Peking, is ironical in the light of historical reality: "Car maintenant personne sans doute n'oserait s'opposer à moi."⁵ His impossible dreams of rediscovering

¹ Briques et Tuiles, p. 53. ² Le Fils du Ciel, p. 116. ³ ibid., p. 117. ⁴ ibid., p. 118. ⁵ ibid., loc. cit.
the Princess Ts'ai-yu, and reigning with greater freedom, are more poignantly
because the reader is aware of their futility:

Car elle sait que je reviens; — ou bien j'enverrai vite des
courriers à deux cents li par jour...

Kuang-hsü's confidence renders his total ignorance of the situation more
extraordinary. His world is one of complete fantasy. The poem is a celebra-
tion of the powers of the imagination, which alone can make reality bearable:

Mais d'abord, louée soit l'heure présente qui me fait imaginer avec pompe tout cela qui va s'ensuivre...

Henceforth Kuang-hsü will live entirely through the imagination. The opening
poem in Part III expresses the pathos of his position. Everyone at court
conspires to keep him in ignorance of Ts'ai-yu's fate. There is no one to
listen to the voice of the poet: 'Je reviens à sa rencontre. Elle n'est
pas.' Kuang-hsü is now completely isolated. A period of silence marks
his anguish, until his discovery of Ts'ai-yu's memorial arch confirms his
suspicions of her death. After this moment he loses all interest in reality.
Moved like a puppet through the performance of certain functions and duties,
he is unconscious of the world around him. He now lives in the past, seeing
his role as a rope which binds him to the eternal cycle: a rope which he
shapes into a noose, 'Lien fatal qui délivre.' At this point, as he
contemplates suicide, life seems to him an endless comedy: 'D'âge en âge,
comme les Comédies, les actes se répètent, se mêlent et se font.'

Like Hamlet, a prince similarly torn between filial piety and resentment
of his mother, the Emperor takes refuge in madness to escape from an
intolerable situation, and uses the drama as a means of self-expression.
Although he refuses Ts'u-hsi's suggestion for a theatrical festivity, he
transforms his own life into a play. Asking for costumes and music from
earlier times, he recalls scenes from the lives of his predecessors. The
poem which he recites during one such theatrical event indicates a mental
derangement where fantasy mingles with madness. As in the Peinture 'Pédition
de Chang-yin', it is the Empress who delights in cruelty, offering as a

1 Le Fils du Ciel, p. 118. 2 ibid., loc. cit.
3 ibid., p. 125. 4 ibid., p. 140. 5 ibid., p. 137.
6 Senley noted on his manuscript at this point: 'trop long, trop facile —
un peu Hamlet.'
7 v. below, p. 280.
"Drum in the Forbidden City"

The Empress-Dowager Tzu Hsi playing the part of the Goddess of Mercy, Kuan-yin
to the Emperor the white hands of a concubine, which had given him pleasure:

Comme la nacre, et comme les parfums je les veux entourer de soie, les embaumer dans une bouche tiède...
Et ce soir, Lui présenter avec grâce dans cet écrin fait pour elles, plus blanches ce soir, mais bien fardées du sang de leurs veines.
C'est là mon poème à moi, et mon plaisir.¹

The presentation of a 'real' object as a work of art is not only a satirical comment on naturalistic art. Through a reference to the decadence of earlier eras in Chinese history, it conveys the element of horror associated with the detail ironically presented as 'true'.

Through the unlimited freedom of the imagination, Kuang-hsü discovers a new empire:

Nous sommes puissants dans l'Arrière-monde.

Finally, as master of theatrical illusion, he has the ability to create his own world outside the limits of time and space, and rational knowledge. No longer holding power in his own era, he announces not a new era,

Mais véritablement l'ère qui n'en est pas, l'Ére continue, la révolution perpétuelle, la Grande-Heure, celle qui ne connaît plus de révolution, ni d'espace.²

His poem merges in tone and imagery with the first of his styles, 'Sans Marque de Roi', which honours the unique era,

... sans date et sans fin, aux caractères indiscibles, que tout homme installe en lui-même et soule;

A l'âge où il devient SAGE et RÉGENT du trône de son cœur.

Thus in Sepalsen's novel Kuang-hsü triumphs over historical necessity. Like the emperor in Le Combat pour la folie, through the creative powers of art he knows a moment of supreme joy, which any further experience could only diminish. Therefore Kuang-hsü declares: 'Je désire entendre plus rien.'³ Under the

¹ Le Fils du Ciel, p. 144. ² ibid., p. 151. ³ ibid., loc. cit.
⁴ Sérén, Peinture, Équipés, op. cit., p. 40.
⁵ La Fille du Ciel, p. 150.
pretend of undertaking a ritual fast for his people he seems to will to die.
The reversion from a moment of poetic inspiration to apathy follows a
movement characteristic of Segalen:

"... Il y a eu la montée et l'éclat, — le Mot, — et puis soudain
le silence, la torpeur, la nuit sans nouvel espoir, sans sommeil."

In Segalen's poetry — Odes, Tribes — as in Le Combat pour le Sol, this
movement is marked: an ascension to the rarefied heights of the mountain
peaks, followed by a plunge into the void. The Emperor's final poem, written
after his audience with the Dalai Lama, expresses the anguish of a dying man
who in a moment of weakness looks for the support of a religious belief:

"L'empereur doute du Ciel, il doute de son Ciel, et veut le troquer
une de ces écharpes roses... Il sait que ces gens ont de
vrais soutiens rouges de prières..."

This is an attack on all religious systems. The Dalai Lama, like
Kuang-hsü, is described as a 'slave': he is the 'living Buddha', part of an
ancient tradition which in Segalen's view3 betrays the Buddha's dying message
that each man must discover his own way of self-development. The details of
tradic. formulae and devices for prayer are seen here as a means of support in
weakness, but interchangeable, and lacking in intrinsic value.

Kuang-hsü's last poems express ideas and feelings central to Segalen's
writing in the latter period of his life. Like the decrees, there are
proportionately fewer poems in Part III: twenty-one in Part I, six each in
Parts II and III. However those which were completed convey a development
within the character of Kuang-hsü from vacillation and uncertainty towards an
acceptance of the inevitable. Having recognized the futility of action in
the real world, he becomes in effect a puppet of the author: a means of
fantasizing about past emperors. From the threads of evidence about the life
of Kuang-hsü, Segalen has constructed a novel which is consistent with the
major historical events of the period; and of certain aspects of Chinese
thought, but which is at the same time a reflection on the man's desire for
freedom.

The Emperor-poet seeks escape from the wheel of life through creating a
world of fantasy. His poems are expressed in simple yet noble language;

1 Odes, suivies de Tribes, op. cit., p. 13.
2 Le Fils du Ciel, pp. 159-160.
3 v. above, p. 158.
intensely personal, they avoid sentimentality through the use of suggestion, symbolism and analogy:

Dans les tiges de bambous lustrés, dans les ruisselets qui joignent la source vive et l'étang fade,
Il y a des noeuds coupant la sève; il y a des coudes déviant le courant.

Dans la Succession de nos jours, dans la coulée de Notre règne,
Dans le fleuve Glorieux des heures d'Empire,
Placer aussi des bris et des Noeuds! Raviver la voie courante par un printanier renouveau!

The image of bamboo by a stream conveys a Chinese theme to a theme found in many Segalen's writings: a desire for change, which will break up the monotony and create new inspiration. The analyst comments on the structure and the technique of the poem: its play on apposition, contrast and repetition. By granting him this role Segalen is not downgrading craftsmanship, but indicating that a poet is more than merely technical skill. Kuang-hsū's poems formulate ideas and feelings which open up vistas to both author and reader, suggesting other possibilities in life.
3. THE CREATIVE POWER OF THE NAME

Reformé sur moi comme le hérisson dans la caverne de ses lances, quand je pèse ce que je porte en moi; Dix milliards de soleils n'éclairaient ma pensée qui tourne sur ses profondeurs. Et, poussant un cri, je m'interroge: Qui répondra du creux de moi-même? Qui me vêtra d'une cuirasse unique? Qui m'enseignera qui je suis?

The Kuang-hu emperor is, as his title proclaims, the Emperor of the Glorious Succession. His identity was created for him by T'ai-hou, at the moment when he adopted him and brought him as a baby to the Forbidden City. At this moment he put aside for ever his personal name (Ts'ai T'ien), becoming known under his dynastic title. According to traditional Chinese thought, the name expressed the essence of being. It was seen as an emblem which created and controlled reality. Language held for the Chinese, as for most early civilizations, a magical power. He who knows the word or the name has control over the object: "Sa signification, dit le mot, c'est posséder l'être ou créer la chose." By defining, distinguishing and limiting, moreover, the name established order and hierarchy, shaping the role and the destiny of all created things. From this viewpoint Kuang-hou's role was defined by his dynastic title. He was no longer Ts'ai T'ien, but a link in an endless chain of emperors, within the eternal cycle of natural phenomena.

The Chinese metaphysical belief in the magical power of language provides the occasion for a more universal study of the manner in which language operates, creating or destroying illusion, and shaping our attitude to life. As Mallarmé observed, to name an object is to destroy its mystery and its evocative power. On a slightly different note, Sartre observed that "Il n'est chose qu'on nomme; c'est déjà plus tout; à partir de là, elle a perdu son innocence." The name imposed a certain idea on an object, catalogues it and places it in a systematic world-view. It is taken for granted, fitted into

1 Le Père du Ciel, p. 29.
3 La Pensée chinoise, op. cit., p. 61.
4 Quoted by Stephen Heath, op. cit., p. 28.
preconceived scheme. This idea is influenced by Hegel's theory that man in discovering language both mastered and annihilated objects by transforming them into ideas.¹

Exoticism is for Segalen a means of renewing our vision of the world. Through renewing language the writer jolts the reader into fresh perceptions. Whereas that which is presented in transparent, predictable language is accepted and brushed aside, Segalen aims to make the reader hesitate and reflect. The illusionary quality of words is illuminated, making language a source of creative play.

In *Le File du Ciel*, Kuang-hsi desires to see beyond the narrow horizons of the Forbidden City. Isolated in his palaces, ignorant of the rest of the world, his first act on attaining his majority is to defy convention by climbing Prospect Hill to see as far as he can. His repeated questions about what lies beyond meet with the stifling explanations of the eunuchs:

— Il n'y a plus rien. Car cela est l'Empire; qui est le Milieu, qui est tout.

Mais le visage de l'Empereur regardait obstinément vers le Sud une fumée danseuse à l'horizon visible, plus loin que les murs les plus lointains.²

This first entry in the Chronicle prepares the way for Kuang-hsi's attempts at innovation in the novel. The young Emperor's interest in modernization is shown as a desire to discover the unknown, the exotic symbolized by the fugitive qualities of smoke on the horizon. The eunuch's language of dogmatic definition is associated with the walls of palaces, cities and empires. The gates of the Palace open for a moment, and then are firmly closed.

More closely than the other voices of the narration, that of Kuang-hsi echoes the aspirations and feelings of the author: I, the Emperor, autonomous ruler of my own being. In the case of Kuang-hsi the title is ironical and finally tragic. His thought spins endlessly around the question of his identity as the gyroscope spins around its axis, yet he is unable to break away from the chains of his role. Against the description of his timid efforts toward self-expression — suggested in the image of the hedgehog — stands Segalen's opening style, *Sans Marque de Régne*.

¹ Quoted by Stephen Heath, *op. cit.*, p. 28.
² *Le File du Ciel*, p. 12.
Attentif à ce qui n'a pas été dit; soumis par ce qui n'est point promulgué; prosterné vers ce qui ne fut pas encore,
Je consacre ma joie et ma vie et ma piété à dénoncer des règles sans années, des dynasties sans avénements, des noms sans personnes, des personnes sans noms,
Tout ce que le Souverain-Ciel englobe et que l'homme ne réalise pas.¹

There is a central dichotomy in the novel between the named and the un-named, the known and the unknown, the accessible and the inaccessible, which we shall study more closely in the next chapter. Kuang-hsü's wish to go beyond established frontiers expresses the struggle, characteristic of Segalen's heroes, to develop their unique potential out of warring desires and instincts. Self-expression is associated with a critical reflection on language, indicated in his notes on 'Moi et Moi':

... Mais il y a du vertige dans tous les mots sur lesquels on s'arrête un peu: combien de fois n'ai-je pas retourné ceci: 'Et qui suis-je... quoi suis-je? Qui est-ce qui est moi, et pas un autre...' On a dit égoïsme... les ignorants!
J'essayais de ne pas tomber... et qu'avais-je à faire, vraiment, des autres, et de leur existence, quand j'avais, tout d'abord, moi-même, à exister!²

Speculative freedom is an essential feature of Segalen's fiction. Philosophical play with ideas is inspired by reflection on the meanings of words, leading to a 'vertiginous' sense of the illusory nature of the universe: 'Réalité no longer seems stable and solid. Considering an event or an idea according to different world-views, the writer and his reader become aware of the subjectivity of perception, which is shaped by the preconceptions inherent in conventional language. The form of the novel, which allows a relatively free play of perspective around a subject, is for Segalen a poetic medium, where intrigue is secondary to the stimulation of sensation and wonder.

The identity of the characters is consciously literary. Where the traditional novelist generally sets out to represent a well-rounded character with specific physical attributes and qualities, Segalen seeks to explore the implications of a name or a title, such as 'the Son of Heaven'. The text develops around his reflection upon the meaning of the name. The character

¹ Stèles, Peintures, Equipes, op. cit., p. 39.
² Imaginaires, op. cit., p. 86.
is therefore a focus for ideas, a lever or 'embrayeur' which sets in gear a specific emotion or a train of ideas.

At the very beginning of his reign, Kuang-hsü is blamed for the destruction of the Temple of Heaven. In the poem that follows this censure he meditates on the reason for this seeming injustice:

Pourquoi suis-je frappé pour eux?
Pour eux. Oserez-vous écrire? Je l'ai écrit. Le pinceau devance la pensée. Pour eux. Pour leurs fautes sans doute,
Je suis leurs personnes vivantes, et sous le coup, ils ont tremblé tous en moi.
Je suis lié à leur succession glorieuse.

As Son of Heaven, Kuang-hsü must accept that 'the principle of all faults has its origin in himself'. Seeing no particular cause for censure in his own actions, he realizes that he is cen trored in his role as living embodiment of countless emperors of the past. A certain identity has been created for him by his dynastic title, Emperor of the Glorious Succession, which emphasizes his role as a link in this imperial chain.

Details of Kuang-hsü's personality provide an ironical reflection on this title. The poem quoted above contains the germ of his future actions, hallucinations and tortments. For a brief period, he struggles to impose his own will; however he reveals a fundamental weakness of character which points to the failure of his innovatory ideas, and his inability to rise above the restrictions imposed on his actions:

O mes Pères! Ils sont immenses et vénérables. Je les vénère. Ils ont tout accompli. — Qu'oserais-je, — ni bien, ni mal, qu'ils n'aient pas déjà dépassé?

In examining his past life, Kuang-hsü finds none of the daring originality which marked his great predecessors; founders of cities, dynasties and empire:

'Qu'oserais-je, — ni bien, ni mal, qu'ils n'aient pas déjà dépassé?'

This admission of weakness reveals passivity and lack of confidence in himself. Wavering and hesitant in manner, he has no sense of identity. He lacks that strong sense of individuality which distinguishes for Segalen the 'exotés', those who can savour the sensation of difference between the

self and the other: 'Ne peuvent sentir la Différence que ceux qui possèdent une Individualité forte.' While he angrily reacts against authority, he has no overriding vision of an alternative. He merely desires to do something unique which will establish his identity. These qualities contribute to the sense of a man who is trapped within his role.

The alternative in Chinese terms would be a Taoist rejection of conventional concepts, and an assertion of personal freedom. However Kuang-hsü's desire to be different, and his preoccupation with his own individuality, are more characteristic of 'fin-de-siècle' European thought than Chinese philosophy, where man is seen as part of a total pattern of existence. His struggle for freedom takes the characteristic pattern of a conflict within the self.

This conflict is associated with the appearance of a physical double or sosie who is asked to play the Emperor's role, thus challenging his identity. For the Chinese, as we have seen, the name and the emblem were considered to have a magical power over the object. In a similar way, the image of an object was identified with that object and regarded as 'an alter ego of the living reality' — an association which De Groot described as the 'backbone of Chinese religion.' With this Chinese tradition, the Emperor feels acutely threatened by his double. By having him impersonate the Emperor and carry out his duties, the conservative forces within the Palace are able to deny Kuang-hsü's existence as an individual:

Moi l'Empereur, moi l'Unique, on a double ma personne. Ayant volé ma Présence, il a reçu l'Outrage que j'étais seul à recevoir, et qui eût été plus doux que ceci.

3 The expression 'sosie' refers to the character 'Sosia' in the comedy Amphitryon of Plautus, taken up in Molière's Amphitryon. The god Mercury adopted Sosia's name and form. Confronted with this physical double, Sosia began to doubt his own identity (Larousse, op. cit., v. IX, p. 919).
5 Le-Fils du Ciel, p. 46.
Kuang-hsu is doubly insulted, in his person and in his position as 'Unique Man', sole representative of mankind before Heaven. The Emperor is replaced by 'un homme de la poussière! un marchand! un esclave!'2. His importance as an individual is negated. He becomes no more than a figurehead manipulated by the Empress-Dowager. In Part II, Kuang-hsu sees his double with horror as a sign of his own nonentity. While the double represents the external self, he struggles to assert the individuality of the inner self, which is more elusive and difficult to identify. Only by his reaction to other ideas and attitudes can he define his own nature. Hence he tries to escape from the chains of his role, which are represented by his dynastic title, and to be open to new ideas:

Des chaînes! pour étrangler une pensée! pour lier toutes les branches qui s'échappent. Des liens, pour enchaîner la succession.3

Freedom of thought is strangled by the conventionalism of court officials. The Emperor seems, paradoxically, to be no more than a slave, like his double, following the dictates of ritual and tradition. In order to break free he decides to create a new dynastic title which will express a different idea of himself. By giving the task of devising this title to the annalist whose father had devised his original title, Segalen both respects tradition and establishes a contrast between past and present. Kuang-hsu repudiates his past, which was dominated by the image of Tz'u-hsi, aspiring towards that which is unforeseen:

Il vous faudra désigner un événement considérable que les Caractères, ni votre père, n'avaient point prévu.4

Kuang-hsu is seeking a name which will suggest rather than define. A title to express the essential nature of his reign could however come only from the Emperor himself. The request to the annalist was therefore a formality, a literary convention to present the idea. The poems which follow are a development of the Emperor's thought. Broader and more general in scope, they express his desire for a fresh outlook on life. A world in which the very stars are named and classified offers nothing but tedium and drapery:

Elle compte avec ses doigts, une et une, et dix mille étoiles.
Elle en murmure tous les noms.

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1 Chinese Civilization, op. cit., p. 388.
2 Le Pôle du Ciel, p. 45.
3 ibid., p. 54.
4 ibid., p. 56.
The apparition of another, unknown star offers new hope to the world, auguring the advent of some prodigy. It is therefore a propitious sign for the beginning of another reign. The event demands a title which will suggest this desire to explore the unknown. The words 'le Grand Recommencement' are simple and direct. Reflecting the final image of the previous poem, 'un printanier renouveau', they suggest a fresh burst of energy and life. For a brief moment Kuang-hsü sees in this light a new era marked by reform and modernization. However the reformers themselves dispel this hope by declaring that there is nothing essentially new in their ideas. Ironically they believe that in this way they will forestall objections. K'ang Yu-wei assures the Emperor that

The promised era of reform has little in common with the 'ère unique, ... aux caractères indécodables', which is the poet's ideal. The reformers themselves confess that they have made no effort to change their ways of thought; they are still bound by traditional concepts. Kuang-hsü expresses his disenchantment with their ideas in a poem:

Les plus beaux discours enfermaient sous des phrases nouvelles tout ce que nous savions déjà; qu'ils n'avaient rien promulgué que nos Littératores n'avaient écrit à l'avance; et que, s'inspirer là de leurs dîres, c'était en toute sécurité, remonter aux ancêtres et prolonger l'immuable série.

The Emperor, enclosed within the walls of the Forbidden City, dreams of a strange new world. His expectations are disappointed. As in Équipée, there is a contrast established between the expectations created by the

1 Le Fils du Ciel, p. 61.  
2 Le Fils du Ciel, p. 62.  
3 Stèles, Peintures, Équipée, op. cit., p. 40.  
4 Le Fils du Ciel, p. 64.
imagination and actual physical experience. In this case fantasy triumphs; reality is a source of disillusionment. The poem is presented in artistic terms, where the reference to painting techniques suggests an analogy with literature. As the painter may experiment with colour and line, a writer may retain the quality of interest and wonder in his work by experimenting with words, structures and forms. Kuang-hsü's effort to escape from the closed mentality of Palace officials parallels the writer's desire to break away from a conventional representation of the world, and to open up new vistas through language.

In Part II Kuang-hsü has the opportunity to move outside his habitual environment, to experience new sights and sensations:

Les murs sont tombés, la Route est libre; tout l'Empire appartient à qui sait bien le parcourir...2

The poem presents an analogy with the literary parcours. The Emperor is that unnamed sage whose visionary power is allied with an ability to convey an awareness of the immensity of his subject. The way is free: his technique is untrammeled by literary convention. Kuang-hsü is following a route travelled by the author, and like the author explores in poetry his reflections on the meaning of what he sees. However, although opportunity offers for a 'new beginning', the Emperor is still disturbed by fears and uncertainty:


The conditional tense expresses the doubt within his own mind. He is enslaved by his historic situation, drawn on by forces outside his own understanding and control. Because he is not master of his own decisions, he cannot relate fully to his experience of reality. His poems therefore reflect his wavering indecision.

Nevertheless in the Wei valley his doubt is appeased through a mystical experience inspired by the contemplation of the sacred mountain, Hua-shan. One of the twelve emblems of the emperor, symbolizing his grandeur, the

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1. In Equipée the sensuous pleasure of physical experience is given a larger part.
2. Le Pôle du Ciel, p. 68.
4. Le Pôle du Ciel, p. 49.
mountain awakens in Kuang-hsü an awareness of the meaning of his dynastic title, and of his own purpose in life. The moment indicates a shift in his attitude. His vision of the mountain peak through the clouds, tinged with the violet colour of the Imperial palaces, leads him to reflect on the analogy between the abstract nature of his role and the physical nature of the emblem:

Le Fils du Ciel et le Mont sont frères de stature. Trait et lien, poteau grandiose, pavillon dont le toit pivote dans la première spirale, et qui reste stable au milieu du tourbillon des cieux.¹

A link between heaven and earth, the mountain symbolizes the Emperor's role as mediator. Its eternal stability suggests to him a model of wisdom and strength. It represents the still point at the axis of the ever-changing world, which is for the writer the point of departure for his contemplation of phenomena. For Kuang-hsü it is a moment of reconciliation with his role:

Ceci m'a donné mille ans de sagesse. J'ai fait, malgré moi sans doute, ce qu'ils faisaient, mes Ancêtres, quand ils visitaient leurs royaumes.²

The parenthetical phrase 'in spite of myself' indicates how little Kuang-hsü is fulfilling his own needs. Although he is now adjusted to his situation, he remains ignorant of its implications. He imagines the enemy to have fled, and his princess to be waiting for him. Freedom lies only in his imagination.

In Part III, therefore, when all his illusions about 'reality' are dispelled, he takes refuge in hallucination and madness. His double is called upon to fulfil his obligations in the 'real' world, leaving him free to escape into fantasy. The idea that he is the 'phoenix of the throne', the reincarnation of the eternal emperor, becomes in his mind a reality which he enacts in historical dramas. Segalen had read in K'i-cha's Histoire Royal de Hou of a reputed power to 'faire renaitre le passé par les sons musicaux'.³

He was delighted to find within Chinese tradition a device which would support his idea of having Kuang-hsü relive moments in his ancestors' lives. There is a Proustian echo in this idea that a sound or a musical phrase can revive memories of the past. Segalen plays also on the metaphysical belief that the emperor is remembering his former lives. Precise clinical details of the symptoms of hallucination recall Segalen's earlier study of Les Cliniciens des Lettres:

¹ Le Fils du Ciel, p. 110.
² ibid., p. 118.
³ Unpublished notes, 1st ms. (pp. 266 and 288).
Les musiques jouent. L'Empereur, se recueillant au fond des âges, ne dit rien. Mais tout d'un coup, ramenant ses mains autour de son cou, il ouvrit la bouche, respira, puis, tout le visage Impérial devenant bleuâtre et violâtre, les yeux renversés, l'Empereur parut vouloir Mourir là, à cette place.1

This passage can be read on various levels: à Chinese historical legend; as a case of hallucination, with a clinical analysis of the symptoms; as a reflection on the power of the name to recall historical anecdotes and personalities of the past. A title, a reference, a musical note awakens echoes in the memory. Kuang-hsü identifies so closely with his predecessors that he relives their experience. This device adds depth and colour to the portrait of the Son of Heaven, breaking away from chronological narration to move more freely around the topic of the imperial succession. Various interpretations of the Emperor's 'Illness' are suggested:

... Ils ont remarqué que la maladie de l'Empereur changeait de jour en jour, comme aussi sa figure; ils ont dit (mais ceci n'est pas compréhensible) que l'Empereur s'en allait longuement contempler les portraits des Ancêtres, et que tous les jours son maintien rappelait l'un des points et traits favoris d'un défunt. Les Personnes se personnifiaient donc en lui 'Maladie d'Empereur'.2

The parenthetic doubt presents a challenge to the reader, inviting reflection. A lighter tone is adopted by the Empress-Dowager, who dismisses the idea that the Emperor could identify to this point with his predecessors, and substitutes the prosaic explanation that he is overtired.

Through his imaginative contemplation of the past, Kuang-hsü at last created a personal empire outside time and space — the era of 'le Récommencement perpétuel'.3 In triumph he prepares to announce 'cet événement incommensurable, et ce nouveau éternel'. He has thus earned the title of the 'Great Renewal'.

Kuang-hsü therefore lives up to both dynastic titles. Through his weakness he is chained into the conventional role of the Emperor, from which he escapes only in fantasy. In his darker moments he finds guidance in the Princess Ts'ai-yü, whose name (translated as 'jade éclairant') reflects her role as the poet's source of inspiration:

Mais si je regarde vers elle, — elle n'a point d'affeux, et point de perplexités changeantes, et vit sans s'interroger,

La seule lune limpide coule son jade éclairant, et tout mon lac blême, à ciel, reflète sa tranquille unité.4

1 Le Fils du Citron, p. 149. 2 ibid., p. 153. 3 ibid., p. 151. 4 ibid., p. 29.
In comparing Ts'ai-yu to the moon in the heavens, Kuang-hsü associates her unconsciously with the authority of Heaven represented by the Empress-Dowager. Higher in his consciousness was her capacity to enlighten, indicated by the epithet 'éclairant'. In comparison with the more dominant power of the sun, the light of the moon suggests purity, peace and passivity. Ts'ai-yu too was illuminated by reflection. She was admired not for herself but for what Kuang-hsü saw in her. Thus around her name Segalen has developed the attributes of the ideal female figure of his imagination. All his heroines she is an enigmatic character. Kuang-hsü admires her tranquillity and her freedom. Yet later he realizes that many of the qualities he saw in her came from his own fantasy. The name 'luminous Jade' was, it seems, given her by Segalen. Jade is 'associated in Chinese thought with immortality'; thus her name suggests her role in inspiring immortal verse. The image of the pearl refers to the name by which Chén-fei was known to Europeans: 'ce duvet de lumière où se meuvent les regards, où palpite toute la beauté'. Shimmering like water, or a mirror, it suggests the chameleon movement of the imagination. References to the 'dying' light of the pearl prophesy the approaching death of Ts'ai-yu:

... une perle véritable qui s'en allait mourir pendant la lune nouvelle; car déjà son petit visage se faisait mat et sans miroitements.

This line is the only reference to the hardship which the Pearl Concubine is reputed to have suffered at the hands of Ts'ê-hsi after Kuang-hsü's downfall. It foreshadows the impending tragedy, without diverting attention from the central theme of the narrative. Within their limited perspectives, the annalist and the Emperor seem to remain oblivious to these premonitions of death; however Ts'ai-yu reveals a solicitude and attentiveness towards Kuang-hsü which reveal her intention to defy the Empress-Dowager. In their next meeting she dares to address him by his imperial title, which has been ignored since his imprisonment:

Le nom retentit comme un tonnerre dans la salle et dans les oreilles; comme le nom d'un Inconnu qui soudain est présent; comme un nom fantôme; les Ennuques se réveillèrent et écoutèrent plus attentivement, sous le plafond, quelqu'un cita des échos et les tentures et les bois en vibrèrent quelque temps.

2 Le Fils du Ciel, p. 94.
3 ibid., loc. cit.
4 ibid., p. 98.
The name is at this moment given the value of an emblem, recreating the threat of Kuang-hsū's power. The air is heavy with fear and suspicion. The words echoing in the room set up vibrations which suggest the repercussions of Ts'ai-yu's action. Subtle clues indicate that she has been overheard by spies of the Emperor-Dowager and is therefore doomed.

However her past, like her life remains mysterious. References to jade and perfume suggest that the Emperor frequently thinks of her during his absence from Peking. On his return, when he asks for Ts'ai-yu, another Ts'ai-yu appears, 'vieille et sans grâce'. The name is of no value in recalling the physical presence of the princess, although there are signs of a spiritual presence which haunts the Emperor's sleep. The suggestion of an indefinite number of princesses, all answering to the same name, is dehumanizing. It recalls the impersonality of the system of concubinage in the Forbidden City. Ts'ai-yu however always remains apart from the others:

Mais elle, que je n'ai pas choisie, que personne ne m'a montrée, qui n'a point son nom sur la liste et son âge dans des tablettes,
Lui ai-je parlé, à peine?  

The name has lost its suggestive power in this case. Too easily accessible, it is taken for granted, ignored, meaningless. Behind it there is nothing. It represents a tendency of language to destroy appreciation of the existential qualities of an object. Ts'ai-yu is given a totally different function from the concubines. She is un-named in the imperial record, free, inaccessible. Her silence is enigmatic and tantalizing. In a passage describing her magic appeal Kuang-hsū contrasts the monotony of ritual behaviour with her mysterious smile. Her response to the Emperor's question is a language of suggestion: an oblique glance, a smile, an obscure remark:

Je lui ai dit: 'Voici que je suis vraiment Empereur. Vous seule, au Palais, feignez de l'ignorer.'
Elle a répondu: 'Je l'ignore.'

By her negation she implies that Kuang-hsū has for her a specific identity beyond his role as Emperor. What seems to the announced shocking impropriety can therefore be seen as a mark of sincerity. When Kuang-hsū no longer holds

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1 Le Fils du Ciel, p. 118.
2 ibid., p. 124.
3 ibid., p. 42.
4 ibid., p. 22.
empire, their relationship seems to deepen and grow. Te'ai-yu visits him of her own free-will. it seems; "Leurs saluts n'ont plus été du Maître accueillant une esclave." The question of personal liberty which is the unifying thread of the novel is central to their relationship.

However Te'ai-yu, who seems to Kuang-hsü independent and strong, remains to the last dominated by Ts'u-hsi. Kuang-hsü's parting words to her reveal his disenchantment: 'Oui, obéissez... vous savez trop bien obéir... Oui, toutes nos poésies!' This moment illustrates the dichotomy between the literary ideal and reality. However 'reality' in the novel is complex and uncertain. Ts'ai-yu's death suggests her loyalty to Kuang-hsi. In his first manuscript Segalen described Ta'ai-yu as 'cette princesse dont la personnalité reste douteuse encore.' In the later version he leaves this conclusion to the reader. After her death, there seems to be no trace of her:

... le nom de cette-fille n'étant plus de la liste officielle du Dedans, nul n'avait plus charge de l'aller maintenant quérir.

Although there is no physical trace of her name, she lives on in the memory of Kuang-hsü, who clings to the hope of seeing her again.

There are overtones of spiritualism common in Chinese literature but also suggestive of Edgar Allan Poe, in the strange impulse which leads Kuang-hsü to the early dawn to the brink of a well. There an inscription on a newly-built memorial arch for Ta'ai-yu comforts what he was dreaded up to now:

Ceci en mémoire de la Suivante au Palais dont la vertu parfaite a bu la mort stagnante pour échapper aux outrages...

Backhouse and Bland observe that Ts'u-hsi issued a memorial decree conferring posthumous honours on the Pearl Concubine, partly to conciliate public opinion, and partly as atonement to the spirit of Ch'en-fei, for Ts'u-hsi was very superstitious. The discovery of the arch is more dramatic, allowing a build-up rich in implications, until the moment when Kuang-hsü reads the name. The discovery conveys a sense of disillusionment and anticlimax.

By leaving Kuang-hsü uncertain about Ta'ai-yu's fate until this point, Segalen creates dramatic tension within the narrative. The thematic element

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1 Le Fils du Ciel, p. 94.  
2 ibid., p. 102.  
3 Unpublished note.  
4 Le Fils du Ciel, p. 124.  
5 ibid., p. 132.  
6 China under the Empress-Dowager, op. cit., p. 253.
of the love-affair is thus prolonged into Part III. This element of
suspense gives greater unity to the structure, and reveals the extent to
which Ts'ai-yu is for Kuang-hsü a figment of the imagination, a source of
hope and 'illumination'.

The name 'Ts'ai-yu' echoes through later pages of the novel, like the
tolling of a bell, or like a spirit haunting the narrative. Kuang-hsü
discovers in a young lady-in-waiting another Ts'ai-yu, who has in common with
her namesake certain powers of language unknown to the other court women.
She attracts Kuang-hsü by remembering the words of his poem, revealing that
she too is capable of appreciating the world of art and literature. There
is a suggestion of Poe's 'Ligeia' in her strange words to Kuang-hsü:
"... nous avons voulu renaittre de nouveau pour l'aider dans ses Renaissance.
This supernatural element relates the narrative to the magical world of
Chinese legend, thus creating a sensation of unresolved mystery.

The name is often more effective when suggested rather than stated.
Segalen had dramatic powers of suggestion in the respect shown by the Chinese
for the title of Emperor. Similarly the name of the Empress Dowager
inspired both respect and terror, as shown by Kuang-hsü at the end of Part I.
In the scene between Kuang-hsü and the Empress Lung-yu, there is no need to
express the name of Ts'ai-hsü:

"... Et puis, qui donc saurait ce que je dis si je ne le veux pas?
La jeune Impératrice n'a répondu que par la salutation qu'elle
faire au prononcé d'un nom très vénérable et comme s'il elle venait
de l'entendre prononcé soudain."

Without words Lung-yu reveals her dread of listening epics. The rustling of
curtains, movements behind doors and walls are suggestive of the Empress-
Dowager's presence, which is more powerfully evoked through silence and
absence. When Kuang-hsü seeks desperately to know her opinion, he is not
allowed to see her. When finally she reads his message, she says nothing:
"elle est terriblement."
The web of her power gradually covers the
Forbidden City: 'elle inspire chaque Eunuque, qui est des siens.'
The chains of the 'Glorious Succession' which bind Kuang-hsü are woven from the
silk of this web.

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1 Le Fils du Ciel, p. 154; cf. Great Tales and Poems of Edgar Allan Poe,
2 v. above, p. 192.
3 v. above, p. 263.
4 ibid., p. 73.
5 ibid., p. 95.
Teu-hai appears physically only once in the closing scene at the Emperor's death-bed:

Alors, apparition grandiose et terrible de la Vieille, que l'on a été prévenir sur son propre lit de mort. Terreur sur son passage...

Although this scene exists only in note form, it conveys the sense of dread which has gradually been built up around reference to the Dowager's name.

The cause of the Emperor's death remains mysterious, as in historical accounts. However a name is subtly suggested as instrumental in his downfall. Segalen's notes at the end of his manuscript indicate that he planned to build the closing scene around the symbolic gesture Kuang-hsü is reputed to have made in his dying moments:

Le geste O, et le dernier Complot, très calme, très posé.
Le dernier geste du peuple, se revanche, sera un cercle, fatal, qu'il faudra faire interpréter, avec cette seule indication: que c'est là ce qui tua l'Empereur. Alors, gloses nombreuses, maladroites.

Pour les uns, il s'agit tout simplement de Yuan, le Traître, qui, si l'Empereur meurt n'a qu'une chose à faire: aller se soigner dans sa province. Pour d'autres, et surtout pour l'Annaliste, il ne peut y avoir de doutes: un cercle se dit Yuan, et ne s'écrivait pas comme Yuân. Un cercle? mais cela ne peut désigner que le Ciel, dont le symbole est précisément la parfaite circonférence...

This final commentary would elucidate various implications of the gesture. The character for 'circle' has a similar sound to the name 'Yuan'. Yuan Shih-k'ai betrayed Kuang-hsü's plans to the Empress-Dowager, thus causing his arrest and imprisonment. On this immediate, concrete level the gesture recalls the intervention which leads to the Emperor's disgrace, and to his early death. On a metaphysical level the gesture refers, the annalist tells us, to Heaven — le parfait cercle écrivant son contour éternel — the wheel of eternity which torments Kuang-hsü with its endless monotony and repetition. Perhaps

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1. Le Fils du Ciel, p. 163.
2. In his Lettres de Chine (24 October 1909, p. 192) Segalen claims that Kuang-hsü died 'étranglé d'un lacet de soie jaune, présenté par ordre de l'Imperatrice agonisante', an account similar in general to that given by Backhouse in his dubious Le Fils de la décadence mandchoue ('Their Mortal Hour', op. cit., p. 14).
3. Also described by Backhouse, ibid., loc. cit.
5. 'Portrait ancestral', Peintures, op. cit., p. 337.
Heaven, the annalist suggests, is responsible for this mysterious death, as it had earlier sent its thunderbolts to destroy the Temple of Heaven; symbolizing its disapproval of his reign. On a literary level, the dying Emperor's gesture might suggest that his death is only a convention; and that he will live on as a character in the autonomous world of literature. In this sense there is a rapport between his death and that of René Leys, which is made explicit in the latter novel.

Attempts to explain or define, the author warns us, limit the text and destroy its mystery. No single meaning is imposed on the gesture; it remains symbolic, leaving the passage open for the reader's consideration, and generating new ideas. Thus it sums up the nature of the novel. A meditation on the tyranny of the name which is not limited to the case of the Kuang-hsü Emperor, Le Fil du Ciel makes wider reference to a general functioning of language.

1 v. below, p. 358.
CONFLICT AND RESOLUTION

Suis-je en fuite ou bien en triomphe; 
suis-je poursuivi ou bien est-ce moi qui 
attaque? — Dans tout cela pas de réponse, ô 
ville. Tes murs de terre n'ont pas d'échos 
pour renvoyer ma voix.¹

Le Fils du Ciel gains its momentum from a constant dialectic between the 
opposing forces of originality and convention. The debate is a source of 
conflict not only between Kuang-hṣu and the conservative element within the 
Forbidden City, but also within the mind of the Emperor. The novel grows 
out of this creative dialectic. The Emperor's quest for identity symbolizes 
the creation of a character, which is gradually built up through the 
vicissitudes of the plot.

The Emperor's self-questioning reflects the problems of the author in 
deciding on the presentation of his subject. The portrayal of an event as 
victory or defeat is relative, depending on attitude, intention and point of 
view. Tz'u-hai prefers to see flight as triumph — the traditional tour of 
inspection of the Empire.² In Kuang-hṣu's case the author prefers not to opt 
for either version, but to exploit the Emperor's indecisive nature in order to 
symbolize the puppet-like nature of the literary character.

In the first half of the novel Kuang-hṣu is tormented by doubts about his 
identity. His poems reveal constant uncertainty: 'Who am I?' 'What am I?' 
'What is my purpose in life?' His introspection creates a refrain running 
through the narrative, revealing an ignorance of political realities which is 
an apt symbol to illustrate the limitations of the individual point of view. 
His vacillations and fears during the Sino-Japanese War in Part II are echoed 
by his bewilderment in Part II as to whether he is playing the role of 
benevolent sovereign visiting his subjects, or refugee from the conquering 
Allies:

... suis je le Victorieux dont l'exploit retentit en arrière, 
et ennoblit tout avant lui? 
Ou plutôt le vagabond d'un lieu qui me tolère?³

The dichotomy between victory and defeat, freedom and slavery pervades his thoughts, revealing a Sartrean sense that man creates his identity through his actions. Victory is associated with innovation; it demands serene confidence, daring and power. Defeat is associated with acceptance of conventional standards; it implies humiliation, slavery and weakness.

At the beginning of his reign Kuang-hsu reflects that he has as yet performed no action which will establish his identity: "Ni bien, ni mal, je n'ai rien fait." His decision to remain in Peking during the war with Japan is taken purely to defy the forces of convention:


In making his own decision he suddenly feels free and confident. He has a new sense of his own solidity as a person. His fears are momentarily allayed by his triumph in doing something new and unexpected; it makes no difference to him which direction he takes, so long as it expresses his own ideas rather than those of others. Since his only desire is to defy tradition, however, this is not true freedom. His actions are still dictated by others. Moreover his confidence is shattered when his tutor, Weng Tung-ho, assures him that his decision conforms with those of les plus imitables Empereurs... Que l'Empereur Unique se rassure: Il n'a rien promulgué d'inattendu, ce qui serait terrible. Il n'imagine point. Il n'invente pas, il suit, il est conforme.

The repetition, like a battering-ram, drives the message in mercilessly. Part of Kuang-hsu's tragedy is his almost complete isolation: no one, except perhaps Ts'ai-ai-yu, understands his wishes. Once his decision is seen to conform with tradition, he no longer has the necessary enthusiasm to face the dangers which it seems to involve:

Et maintenant que tous me disent: On demeure! On s'oppose, on se tient, front aux hordes comme une stèle divisant un troupeau,
Moi seul, envahi, conquis, pris de peur, ne sais plus que m'opposer à moi-même, me divisant, et donnant des coups ici et là...

1 Le Fils du Ciel, p. 26. 2 ibid., p. 53. 3 ibid., p. 54. 4 ibid., p. 58.
In contrast with the motionless solidity of the stele, Kuang-hsü is divided by conflicting impulses. The image of the stele suggests that the written word conveys permanence, in the face of the mindless wavering of the herd.

Kuang-hsü lacks the strength to carry through his decision, and to remain unshaken. 'Mon coeur est dans l’inquiétude comme si j’écrasais la queue d’un vifigre roulant sous le pied.'\(^1\) The image gives a vivid sense of unsteadiness and terror. Kuang-hsü is 'indigne et chancelant', dominated by conventional ideas of his reign: '... il cherche comment ne pas commettre la faute.'\(^2\) He has none of the fierce will-power and positive energy which is found in Segalen's real hero — Gauguin, Siddhartha, Orpheus, Faofai. His weakness does not lie purely in his introspection, but in his failure to choose between the conflicting interpretations of the self offered by this introspection, and to impose his own meaning on his actions.

Segalen himself was deeply introspective, yet succeeded in escaping from his environment. In writing of his concern with establishing his own identity Segalen referred to the vertiginous effect of meditation.\(^3\) The term appears in Kuang-hsü's first poem, inspired by looking out at the distant horizons from Prospect Hill:

Moi, penché sur l'Empire je retiens mon envol,  
Et de vertige, je ferme les yeux.\(^4\)

Later, the image of closing the eyes is repeated to describe the Emperor's panic as he ventures into unknown territory: 'Fermer les yeux pour mieux courir.'\(^5\) The blindness of the Emperor leads to his political downfall. He lacks the insight and the strength of purpose to carry through his ideas. He is weakened by conflict both within and without:

Pénètre bien en moi-même! Il y a de nombreux dangers autour de moi aussi bien qu'auprès de moi, aussi bien qu'en moi.\(^6\)

His battle for personal expression, like that of the author, is fought against his own milieu, represented by the authority of mother, church and s\-gr\-te. His desire for freedom is stifled by the conservative forces within the closed world of the Forbidden City, represented by Tz'u-hsi, who uses the power of tradition to achieve her own ends. Far-sighted and practical, she

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\(^1\) Le Fils du Ciel, p. 68.  
\(^2\) ibid., loc. cit.  
\(^3\) v. above, p. 254.  
\(^4\) Le Fils du Ciel, p. 12.  
\(^5\) ibid., p. 74.  
\(^6\) ibid., p. 52.
sees all, knows all, and therefore her control is rigid and inescapable. Her power contrasts with Kuang-hsü's impotence. Opposed to political innovation, she inculcates into the Emperor a sense of personal responsibility and guilt which saps his confidence. Her authoritarian rule and ambitious scheming are ironically described as the loving care of a mother:

Par tout cela, la Vénérable Mère du Royaume affirme ce rôle très éminent, plein de bonté sans limites et de très douce mansuétude dont Elle aime à revêtir le doux costume, Kouan Yin Déesse, qui Regarde-tout-dans le monde, — dont la générosité s'étend aux plus petites choses. 1

Under the unimpeachable title of the loving mother she claims unlimited power to watch over and guide her adopted son, even in spite of himself.

'L'affection de la Mère de l'Empire traverse les murailles et transparaît derrière les murs de briques et de soie.' — Je répète ses paroles. 2

sounding 'affection', which recalls Ambréosine Segalen's close supervision of her son during his student days, is a means of spying on the Emperor and coordinating him to her wishes. According to Confucian principles he owes her respect and obedience; moreover he owes her his throne, 'par une adoption toujours généreuse malgré les besoins dynastiques et les adoptions nécessaires'. 3 Behind the conventional words of praise, there is pointed sarcasm in the juxtaposition of the final words which remind us that the annalist is the son of the dead censor.

The first example of the mother's repressive yoke is her arrangement of a bride for Kuang-hsü. The blows of a hammer building the Emperor's bridal chariot suggest hammering nails in a coffin. This monotonous rhythm contrasts with the instinctive rebellion of the horses:

... Bandant leurs rênes comme les soies d'un luth, ils résistent, ils se cabrent et leurs sonnettes tinent: ils ne veulent pas me mener, / 4
Et voici que d'eux-mêmes ils ont soudain changé la route, qu'ils m'emportent en crévant l'horizon. Un vent de bonheur se lève:
C'est une Autre enfin que je vois! 5

Representing instinct and the impetuosity of desire, 5 the horses carry the Emperor beyond the horizons of the charted world of convention and duty towards the unknown, the other, the unforeseen. On a deeper level, they

1 Le Fils du Ciel, pp. 95-96. 2 ibid., p. 40.
3 ibid., p. 96. 4 ibid., p. 15.
5 Dictionnaire des symboles, op. cit., v. 1, pp. 350 ff.
represent the power of poetic inspiration, which is irrational and spontaneous, transporting the Emperor-poet into the world of illusion, associated with the music of the lute and the horses' bells.

Ts'ai-yü, elusive and inaccessible, is a source of hope for Kuang-hsü. When his political innovations have failed, he finds new life in her love for him, which indicates an acceptance of him as an individual. In the giddy turmoil of his brain, her serenity is symbolized by the moon, whose subtle light contrasts with the rigidity of Palace statements. Later, when Kuang-hsü wanders as a fugitive through the Empire, she exists only as a constant thought in his mind. Her death by drowning in the well, never made explicit but suggested by the image of a star covered with water, symbolizes her release from time and space into the creative void. Henceforth she represents pure inspiration. Stars and moon, which were among the twelve symbols of imperial power, link her with the creative role of the Emperor. The symbol of water, representing the fertility of inspiration, also indicates that her identity has the fluidity of subjective fantasy.

The lovers, Kuang-hsü and Ts'ai-yü, who represent poetic freedom, are thus opposed to the Empress-Dowager and her niece, the Empress Lung-yü. However the essential isolation of Kuang-hsü's position is emphasized by the shadowy liaison of Tz'u-hsi with Ts'ai-yü. In reality the three women form a triangle, headed by Tz'u-hsi, against Kuang-hsü:

... Mais par-dessus l'une et l'autre, que dire de Celle qui les inspire toutes deux: ordonnant l'amour à la première, la retenue à la seconde: par là manifestant cette habile mesure et cette vertu dont toute Sa vie impose l'exemple. 2

Thus Tz'u-hsi stands for the concept of an omnipotent heaven, the unseen authority which tyrannizes over men's lives.

Frustrated both in politics and in love by Tz'u-hsi, in the middle of Part II Kuang-hsü sets out on the journey through the Empire in which he becomes reconciled with his essential self. He remains torn by doubts and conflicts until he arrives at Haia-hsien (Hia-hsien), 3 the presumed site of the legendary Haia dynasty, which has recently been linked with the 'Painted Pottery Culture' of the Neolithic period. The area is accurately represented

1 Le Fils du Ciel, p. 131. 2 ibid., p. 95.
3 Reischauer and Fairbank give the meaning 'county' or 'district' for 'hsien' (op. cit., p. 708); for the following details on the Haia dynasty, v. ibid., pp. 34-39.
as the source of Chinese culture. This obscure era saw the origin of the belief that China is the unique land of civilization, the 'Middle Kingdom' (Chung-Kuo). Here one finds the first expression of religious, social and political beliefs which were to endure throughout the centuries. The archeological site of this first dynasty, lost in the mists of time, inspires the Emperor's poem:

Voici le berceau. Voici l’origine; voici le foyer et le feu, la terre parente et maternelle d’où sortirent ces millions d’êtres... Ils se pendent aux dynasties comme les abeilles à la Mère, et se balançant à chaque reflux du Temps, leurs battements va [sic] frapper la cloche dont chacun de leurs noms est un mot.
Tout au long des âges le bêlier résonne. Mais pour retrouver le son original, c’est ici, au centre de l’Empire, que l’on doit frapper.

The poem expresses the author’s predilection for the earliest periods of history, known only through archeology, legend and tradition. The ideas, the ‘words’ of the founding fathers of the Empire echo through the ages, the poet suggests, like the tolling of a bell. The echoing of the bell is a type of duplication, a doubling of the original sound. The bell is, therefore, a symbol for the written and oral language which develops around the original word or concept, in ever-widening circles of association and reference. The Emperor returns to the source of tradition in an effort to brush aside the accretions of the centuries, and to consider his role in a fresh light.

Moreover, the bell commonly symbolizes the evocation of spirits, through magical powers of communication with the heavens and the underworld. Thus, it is a means of linking Kuang-hsü with the spirits of his predecessors. In his travel notes, Briques et Tuiles, Seghers describes the overwhelming sense of the void aroused in him by the contemplation of the heavy brass ‘wall’ of the bell, surrounding a central emptiness: ‘Poids sonore et colossal où j’enfume un instant mon regard, ma vision, mon angoisse.’ Here, the bell suggests the Emperor’s anguished quest for identity. References to these richly symbolic meanings remain cryptic, echoing themes already present in the novel and opening up further perspectives.

1 Fils du Ciel, p. 106.
3 Briques et Tuiles, op. cit., p. 27.
When Kuang-hsü arrives at the middle of his empire, he moves into a space which is similarly symbolic on various levels. In Chinese metaphysical thought, the centre is the creative void, source of energy mediated to the world through the Emperor, "Homme Unique au Centre du Monde, qui commande toutes choses sans interférer en aucune chose".1 By occupying a central point in a defined area of space and time, the emperor creates a moment of immobility and total harmony which has power over reality. On an allegorical level, this suggests the writer’s power to move outside time and space through the illusion of his characters. At this point Kuang-hsü enters into the role originally devised for him, phoenix of the throne, eternal emperor. On a structural level, the centre of the novel is a pivot around which the narrative centres. The swing of the pendulum between one alternative and another becomes resolved into a circular pattern reinforced by imagery and metaphysical concepts. Kuang-hsü’s mystical experience in contemplating the Sacred Mountain of the West (Hua-shan) at Tung-kwan reinforces this idea of a creative central point of the novel. The mountain is universally recognized as a symbol of the point of origin, the axis of the world.2 It is a microcosm representing unity and totality, carrying Taoist overtones of the vital force at the centre of the wheel of life. By identifying with this emblem, Kuang-hsü adopts a Taoist attitude of serenity and detachment: "Que les événements et les chutes, les Barbares, les voyages et les intrigues ne troublent désormais sa personne."3 He is no longer disturbed by the ceaseless turmoil of external events. Dualistic distinctions between right and wrong, good and evil, life and death, victory and defeat belong to the rational order of consciousness. He has entered into a more contemplative state of mind:

... Celui-ci ou celui-là, ici même ou ailleurs. Au milieu de dix myriades d’hommes et de neuf cent chars de guerre, ou bien suivi d’Eunuques ou de petits enfants, l’Empereur n’est-il pas à tout jamais l’Empereur, et ne porte-t-il pas avec lui l’Empire qui est tout. Ainsi le Ciel Souverain ordonne. Ainsi le Mont a-t-il clairement enseigné.4

In the theory expressed above Segalen finds his idea of the emperor as symbol of China.5 The novelist seeks to convey an idea of Chinese civilisation through this figure at the centre of the Empire, whose role has been

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1 La Pensée chinoise, op. cit., p. 263.
2 J.E. Cirlot, op. cit., p. 219.
3 Le Père du Ciel, p. 110.
shaped by conflicting philosophies throughout the centuries. By identification with the emblem of the creative centre, Kuang-hsü adopts a contemplative Taoist outlook, in contrast with the more practical Confucianist demands of Tz'u-hsi and the Court officials. Before this moment Kuang-hsü is continually trying to analyse and judge his actions. However, a propensity towards passivity and meditation is indicated very early in the novel.

Notre fils est un rêveur... un fâcheur de poésies,' Tz'u-hsi declares in the opening pages. He is enclosed in a world of dreams and illusions. A Taoist note of resignation is already revealed in the poem written after his decision not to flee from the enemy, figuratively presented as 'la mer' (‘mère’) and 'les sauterelles':

Mais moi l'Empereur je regarde paisiblement approcher l'Une et les autres.

Relevant ma manche avec soin, je trace délicatement ce poème.2

The idea of non-violence or 'wu-wei' encouraged by Taoism corresponds with Kuang-hsü's decision to remain in Peking. However, he remains caught in the turmoil of event until his mystical experience reveals to him a deeper level of reality. Then he enters the eternal cycle of his ancestors, reliving dramatic episodes of the past, and accepting his role in the novel as representative of a 'Glorious Succession' of emperors:

A travers moi frémit la trame dont un bout est au bout des âges,
et l'autre déjà tendu vers l'extrême et le recommencement.3

Part III describes his rejection of reality for a life of sheer fantasy. This idea is vividly illustrated through the device of the double. The latter was introduced in Part I, as we have seen, in order to accept the censure which was vigorously rejected by the Emperor.4 Through the stratagem of justifying this device to the Emperor, Segalen situates its use in Chinese tradition.5 However, the idea becomes an integral part of the structure of the novel, symbolizing the dichotomy between the Emperor's wishes and the demands of duty. By splitting off the one from the other, Segalen allows freer rein to


2 ibid., p. 53, referring to the Japanese who won the war through their superior naval power (Fairbank, Reischauer & Craig, op. cit., p. 383); but also, through a play on the word 'mère' (‘mère’), to the Empress-Dowager.

3 *Le Fils du Ciel*, p. 54.

4 v. above, p. 2.

5 *Le Fils du Ciel*, p. 45.
his hero, while at the same time indicating the mental anguish he experiences through this fundamental denial of his individuality and free will. The one is the mirror image of the other, "sans fond et sans trace." The expression suggests that the Emperor and his double are in fact the same being, since the spiritual double is known by the fact that it does not cast a shadow. Segalen develops the sense of a mysterious link between the two men:

L'Empereur souriant, s'est dit satisfait; et l'on a cru voir sourire en même temps, du même sourire, les lèvres de l'esclave se croyant seul.

Thus the resemblance is not only physical, but a close identification of character which suggests two aspects of the same person, "comme un miroir vivant."

In Part III, Kuang-hsu hands over his responsibilities in the everyday world to his double, becoming absorbed in a hallucinatory identification with his ancestors. Here the double represents the physical presence of the Emperor, whereas Kuang-hsu represents the original idea of the novelist, the concept of the eternal emperor. The double is to fulfill the necessary functions, obeying the demands of the Empress-Dowager, and taking possession of the imperial concubines. The presentation of a young man to the Emperor introduces a reference to the reputed homosexuality of Kuang-hsu.

The triangle of Kuang-hsu, young man and concubine sleeping peacefully together is followed by a contrasting tableau of Kuang-hsu, double and concubine. In these tableaux Kuang-hsu represents the 'spiritual' double, detached from the physical self, who watches the latter's actions.

In terms of Segalén's philosophy of life as a dramatic spectacle, he has become purely a spectator, no longer taking an active part in life. There is no interaction between the real and the imaginary, which is for Segalen the source of vitality. Instead, he is living in a world of pure fantasy.

The scenes between Kuang-hsu and the double become more dramatic towards the end of the novel, as the latter takes over more fully the

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1 Le Fils du Ciel, p. 46.
2 Crawley, op. cit., p. 860.
4 ibid., loc. cit.
5 v. above, p.129 ff. These two aspects of the self are comparable to the Freudian concept of super-ego and ego.
functions of the Emperor. Awakening from a deep reverie, Kuang-hsü sees his
double in full regalia before him, like a premonition of his death:

— Ou bien, dans quel miroir! ou bien, par quelle mauvaise magie,
sommes-Nous donc là, à la fois agenouillé devant Nous!  

Although the vision fills him with sudden fury and rebellion, he sinks back
into the inertia which is his undoing. Reality no longer matters to him.
The double averts him the exhausting demands and humiliations of real life,
and example examination by importunate Western doctors. The attitude of
officials towards the Emperor's death seems to them inhuman and
incomprehensible, since the underlying concept of the role of emperor is
totally alien to them:

... Que sa naissance est parfois extra-humaine, que sa mort est
faite de pérennité, et n'est pas autre chose que la plus noble,
la plus nécessaire de toutes les Cérémonies?  

This scene leading up to the Emperor's death presents in microcosm Segalen's
idea of the "exoticism" of his theme, presenting contrasting attitudes
towards the subject. The foreigners consider their intervention reasonable
and humane, though once looked at from the Chinese side, it appears
paternalistic, inward and insensitive towards an ancient culture. The
Chinese attitude seems inhuman, and indeed it is. It is based on metaphysical
considerations of eternal values, where the death of an emperor is but a
fleeting moment in a cycle that is forever renewed. Thus it presents an
analogy with the literary attitude, which is equally detached from sentimental
and humane considerations.

A note on the manuscript indicates the author's intention to establish a
relationship between arrangements for the marriage ceremony in the opening
pages of the novel and the formalities of the imperial death in the closing
pages. Nothing in the life of an emperor should be "natural": "Ce serait
plein d'irrespect." His actions should be surrounded by pomp and ritual.
The protocol of the imperial court serves the allegorical element of fantasy.
The life of the Emperor, like the life of a character in a novel, is
conventional, and planned to fit into a certain pattern.

The theme thus revolves around the moment at the heart of the novel when
Kuang-hsü moves into his role as eternal emperor. The first half describes
his internal and political conflicts, which are resolved in the middle of
Part II, and followed by a development of this idea in Part III. *Le Fils du Ciel* represents a movement away from linear structure towards a circular form which reinforces the contemplative nature of the theme.

The novel opens with Tzu-hsi's decree transferring power to Kuang-hsi; it closes with the death of both Tzu-u-hsi and Kuang-hsi. In appearance therefore it is a linear text describing the reign of Kuang-hsi. However, we have seen that it has a broader significance. The Emperor's first action was to climb Prospect Hill — more poetically, 'la Montagne de la Contemplation' — to look down upon his Empire. The poem which follows describes the vertigo which seizes him at the beginning of his reign. Kuang-hsi returns to this image at the end of Part I, ironically declaring confidence in his own power: le vertige est loin. La peur a cessé.1 At the very moment where he is most secure he is deposed and imprisoned. Thus his reign is a come full circle, and power remains with Tzu-u-hsi as at the beginning.

The symbol of the circle is repeated in the form of his island prison, where, the annalists suggest ironically, le rempart de l'eau circulaire que ne coupe aucun pont permanent le défendra contre les soucis même volontaires; contre Lui-même.2

In fact the opposite is the case. The Emperor, shut in upon himself, falls into deep depression, during which he refuses to look at his books, and ignores the passage of time, represented by two water-clocks. A parallel is established with Part I in his tour of the island:

De même que l'Empereur, trois jours avant sa Majorité glorieuse a considéré la Capitale et l'Empire du haut de la montagne de la Contemplation, — de même en possession de son nouveau domaine, — l'Ile Ying-t'ai du Lac du Sud, — il a désiré en faire le tour, comme un inspecteur souverain.3

In contrast with the earlier passage where he looks out towards distant horizons, this time he turns inwards to the lake which cuts off all communication with the mainland. The water seems lifeless:

Parce que le miroir est tenu des exhalaisons vertes et moisies... Parce que la peau délicate est empr de la viscosité des eaux stagnantes...

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1 ibid., p. 83.
2 ibid., p. 83.
3 ibid., p. 87.

Nature reflects the atmosphere of stagnation which oppresses the Emperor, stifling poetic creativity. His sole diversions during his isolation on the Ocean Terrace are the moments he shares with Ts'ao-yü, taken up largely with subtle allegorical poems; and reading the works of Chu Hsi, a Neo-Confucian philosopher of the Sung period whose writings, influenced by Taoist thought, help to reconcile him with his lot. Segalen planned to introduce here a reference to alchemy, which was associated with the search for immortality by Taoist sages and particularly by the First Emperor. The idea is ironical in the light of the threat to the Emperor's life presented by the Empress-Dowager.

At the opening of Part III, the annalist sums up the movement of the narrative: 'La hâte du départ, le vide énorme, le retour glorieux... The Emperor's tour of his Empire is seen as a return to the creative void in which he becomes adjusted to his role. The poem he writes for Ts'ao-yü on his return takes the same form: in the annalist's words, 'revenant par un détour, au début [c'est bien l'image de l'absence circonscrite entre le départ et le retour'].

The structure of the novel follows a similar movement of mounting tension, a central plateau and a sudden anticlimax as we return to the 'status quo'. However nothing is quite the same. Thus at the beginning of Part III Kuang-hsi is once again given the title of Emperor, whereas all power has returned to Ts'ao-hsi. As in Part I, Kuang-hsi's double is called upon to take his place at certain functions. This time, however, Kuang-hsi welcomes his presence, and willingly opts out of everyday life. He retraces the moments of his past life on his island prison; then, on discovering the death of Ts'ao-yü, he lives entirely in the past.

Part III closes with the death of the Emperor, stage-managed by Ts'ao-hsi. She directs the opening and closing scenes of his reign, which is shown as an

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1 Le Fils du Ciel, p. 87.
2 'Ajouter à cette partie: Recherche, hantise et obtention. (Jusqu'à la Coupe, presque les lèvres, mais non au coeur de la Grande Longévité)' (Note, ibid., p. 170).
3 Reischauer & Fairbank, op. cit., p. 102.
4 China-watchers of the period expected the Emperor to die suddenly, in suspicious circumstances (China under the Empress-Dowager, op. cit., pp. 145-6).
5 Le Fils du Ciel, p. 123.
6 ibid., p. 125.
7 His position was anomalous after Ts'ao-hsi appointed an heir to the T'ung-chih Emperor, ignoring his existence; v. above, p. 236.
interlude in the eternal comedy of life: 'D'âge en âge, comme les Comédies, les actes se répètent, se mélangent et se font...'

The duplication of themes and events corresponds with a duplication of characters. Kuang-hsu is confronted with his double. Ts'ai-yu, after her mysterious disappearance in Part II, seems finally to return in the form of the young lady-in-waiting, 'doublet injustant sorti du puits et des âges'. Wu the annalist presents a variation on the role of his father. The Empress-Dowager is associated with the Empress, her niece, in opposition to the Emperor.

This device of repetition and duplication is also developed in the style. The repetitive patterns within the Emperor's poems are pointed out by the annalist, who remains oblivious to the significance of this form:

Après l'attente et le retour, dois-je encore désigner son nom pour qu'elle vienne?

Dois-je appeler, pour l'entendre, sa voix?

A binary rhythm is established in the sentence through phrases and clauses in apposition: 'l'attente et le retour'; 'appeler, pour l'entendre'. This rhythm carries over into the chronicles: 'Lui-même, devant tout régler, doit tout unir en lui.' Sentences are broken up by qualifications and specifications:

Le lecteur, envoyé par l'Impératrice-Douairière, m'en était chargé pour épargner, dit-il, à l'Empereur la réponse à une question inutile...

Statements are continually modified, or called into question through devices such as irony, which challenge the given interpretation. Thus the annalist stimulates debate on the Emperor's poems by his provocative commentary: '... une poésie d'autant plus exquise qu'elle enferme peu de sens...'. Or, 'les deux caractères Ts'ai-yu, jade éclairant, sont fort bien à leur place et n'ont d'autres raisons qu'une heureuse euphodie.' The technique of conflict and duplication extends from play on the meanings of individual words to a repetition of patterns within sentences, paragraphs or verses, and chapters. The balanced presentation of alternatives slows down the pace of the narrative by breaking up the flow of language, and demanding reflection:

1 Le Fils du Ciel, p. 137.
2 ibid., p. 154.
3 ibid., p. 125.
4 ibid., p. 29.
5 ibid., p. 28.
6 ibid., p. 89.
7 ibid., p. 29.
Sans différer, les Étrangers ont redemandé, non sans politesse, à contempler l'Empereur, — pour s'enquérir sans doute si le voyage a été heureux ?

The annalist's ironical interpretation of events presents a constant challenge to the reader, which is maintained by devices such as interjection, apposition of clauses and phrases, questioning ('sans doute') and complex constructions (the double negative 'non sans politesse'). The repetition of patterns and events breaks into the magnetic path of the intrigue, and recalls the reader to earlier parts of the narrative. The more contemplative, circular form of the novel is reinforced by devices such as irony, allusion, symbolism, analogy — the 'shutters' described by the author in his notes 'Sur une Forme Nouvelle du Roman', opening up an 'arrière-monde' unique to the reader.

Despite these devices, which establish a sense of circularity, the novel retains the tripartite division characteristic of classical European literature. Segalen was conscious that this form in many ways seemed incongruous with his theme:

Cette division de mon livre en trois parties me semble absolument Européenne et factice — La conserver dans le rythme — La supprimer à l'extérieur.

In fact the external division remained in the second manuscript. It reflects what Segalen described to Debussy as 'une espèce de rythme que je porte en moi...', and which we have observed in many of Segalen's works. It is a movement based on an analogy with literary inspiration, arising from everyday experience, allowing a brief moment of joy, then fading into oblivion. In order to escape from a final sense of pessimism, the novelist must redirect his reader from the finality of a conclusion towards the central message of hope offered by artistic inspiration. This technique is very successful in René Leya. However in Le Fils du Ciel the theme is oppressive, so that the classical tripartite division adds to the sense of irrevocable doom.

1 Le Fils du Ciel, p. 125.
2 v. above, p. 64.
3 Unpublished note, 1st ms., p. 242.
4 v. above, p. 154.
Le Fils du Ciel moves away from the traditional form of the novel towards a form half-way between poetry and prose. Seemingly concerned with a narrow, elitist picture of imperial life in China, it invites reflection on the nature of freedom and self-expression. Kuang-hsü caught a glimpse of this freedom in the opening scene of the novel. His political failure is seen as part of the decadence of the Manchu dynasty: 'semblable à l'arrière-petit-fils après cent générations, qui n'a que peu de sang véritable'.

There is a Nietzschean tone in this accusation of weakness and degeneracy. In his Briques et Tuiles Segalen reflects on the forces within the Forbidden City which conspire to corrupt the Emperor:

Si l'Empereur, las de maître enfin d'une race enfermée, d'une famille étouffée et que l'impuissance et l'ennui blanchissent et étioient... s'il venait du dehors, enfin, le maître nouveau, s'il venait du Sud, du coeur de la Chine... voici ce qu'il verrait...

The Manchu dynasty was doomed, Segalen suggests. New vigour must come from outside the Forbidden City, as the Manchus themselves had come, with the full-blooded energy and fresh insight of the conqueror. However over the centuries the invaders had lost their vitality. Pampered and depraved by eunuchs, stifled by the isolation and ritual of court life, their dynasty had at this period, it seemed, run its full cycle; the flower was ready to fall. This decadence is reflected in Segalen's portrait of Kuang-hsü. Only as poet and dreamer could he break out of the role imposed by convention — the role symbolized in Odas by the implacable horizontal line of the Chinese character, for 'Heaven', bearing down on the figure of man:

C'est ce trait, ce dôme, cet arrêt, cette voûte, ce toit du monde, ce toit du front que le Poète a prétendu percer.

Le Fils du Ciel is on the surface a study in depth of a highly refined and limited subject. We have observed that in concentrating on a particular figure Segalen succeeded in opening his subject to questions of universal significance. Limitation is, paradoxically, a means of enrichment, suggesting a plurality of references and possibilities. However the constraints imposed by the artificial nature of the theme, and the demands of the 'exotic'

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1 Le Fils du Ciel, p. 88.
3 Odas, suivies du Thibet, op. cit., p. 32.
narrator, led him to break free in René Leya, expressing himself with greater freedom and delight in spontaneous creative play.

Although Segalen saw Le Fils du Ciel as a more profound and serious study, it has a more restricted appeal. In the terminology of Roland Barthes, it calls for an 'aristocratic' reader, who will savour the subtlety and richness of the text. It is not the polished work which Segalen intended; the structure is uneven, and certain sections are incomplete. However it presents an erudite reflection on certain aspects of Chinese thought as they pertain to the human situation. Ultimately the question of freedom is shown to be an attitude towards language. In accepting names and concepts as they are presented in conventional society we are imprisoned within a limited worldview. Exoticism is for Segalen a means of escape from this prison, opening up frontiers, revealing other attitudes and possibilities. The story of Kuang-hsü must be seen on this broader level. True freedom demands an openness of mind which is revealed in an evocative language encouraging the individual to look beyond the limits of his horizon.

1 *Le Plaisir du Texte*, op.-cit., p. 22.
René Leys

Exoticism as creative play

Il ne vivait que par un certain décalage, dans de certains pelages, au milieu d'espaces fictifs, réels, il jouait avec des personnages qui existent si l'on veut (les journaux en parlent) mais dont la vie ne valait que par une certaine attitude qui est tombée, c'est la délie de tout.

('Jardin Mystérieux', Imaginaire, op. cit., p. 101)
1. THE GAME OF REFERENCE

Ce garçon est décidément surprenant... 
Mais part à deux! part à moi-même... 
saurais-je jamais ce qui lui vint de moi? — 
Restent des moments inexplicables... des 
aperçus, des éclats, des éclaircies... des 
lueur, des mots impossibles à inventer, 
des gestes impossibles à imiter...

The text of René Leys sprang up around the margins of Le Fils du Ciel like a series of cells developing from a parent organism. The ferment of ideas, questions and doubts centring around the earlier novel was further stimulated by collaboration with the enigmatic Maurice Roy. The enthusiasm generated by the project spilled over from the narrow confines of the 'Roman de Kouang-siu' to become a new work exploring the most subtle aspects of exoticism: the tantalizing appeal of that which is mysterious, intangible and ultimately unknowable.

René Leys was published posthumously by the Revue de Paris in 1921, and again by Créa in 1922. At that period critics were troubled by its unconventional style and syntax, and its enigmatic tone. It remained little known until 1971, when it was republished simultaneously with Pierre-Jean Rémy's prize-winning novel, Le Sac du Palais d'Été, which makes numerous allusions to Segalen's life in China and the mysterious character of René Leys. Acclamation of Segalen's novel followed immediately. It has since reappeared in paperback form, and has been translated into English and Italian. What had earlier been seen as a pure fantasy is today recognized as a masterpiece reflecting the process of literary creativity.

Opening on a tone of discouragement, the novel follows the account of its own generation. Absorbed in writing his great work on the Emperor of China, the narrator-novelist, 'Segalen', confides his ideas and problems to his young tutor in the Peking dialect, René Leys:

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1 René Leys, op. cit., p. 239.
2 e.g. André Billy, Œuvres, 2 January 1923; François Tosca, Revue européenne, March 1923: reviews.
3 Described by André Billy (ibid.) as 'vaguement opaque'.
... Je lui communiqué ce que je sais: le mystère... toutes les suppositions... celles que j'ai faites — en portant aux limites logiques le merveilleux clos et contenu là, près de nous, au coeur de la Ville Violette...

In the magic of this moment his dream takes on new life, developing its own momentum, and shaping reality by its power. Breaking up the flow of fantasy, the refrain 'True or false?', 'Real or imaginary?' presents that element of wonder and doubt in which Segalen saw the magnetic appeal of fiction. The meaning of the term 'reality' is presented with a complexity characteristic of much later novelists. The author himself is a reader who, being confronted with the strangeness of his text, gradually becomes aware of its autonomous power.

The novel takes place in spaces which are 'mi-fictifs, mi-réels': that place of conflict between two different worlds in which Segalen chooses to base his fiction. He seeks to establish the reader's confidence by recreating a world of seemingly solid realities: place-names, linked with a precise description of a certain decor; the plan of a city; historical events; people who have really existed. Then suddenly an element of fantasy enters the story, or preconceived ideas of reality are called into question:

Pour la première fois, depuis plus d'une année, je me demande si le nom de la ville que j'habite plus et mieux que nul de ses habitants, que j'essaie de posséder, de dominer autant et plus que l'Empereur lui-même, si cette ville et son nom détiennent une existence solide, foncière, autre que légendaire et historique.

The narrator arrogantly assumes that he appreciates Peking on a much deeper level than the Chinese. However suddenly Maurice Roy makes him aware of a new dimension, by revealing the official Chinese name of the city, 'Chouen-tò fou'. The Peking of the narrator suddenly seems unreal, a city of history and legend unrelated to the realities of Chinese officialdom. The name of Peking 'still exists', however, René Leys assures him, in that it is written 'somewhere' in the city: 'le déchiffrage est difficile.' A contrast is thus established between the name used for business documents, and the name

1 René Leys, p. 33.
2 e.g. as defined by A. Robbe-Grillet, 'Du réalisme à la réalité', Pour un nouveau roman, Paris, Editions de Minuit, 1963, p. 143.
3 René Leys, p. 182.
4 ibid., p. 183.
which is rich in literary connotation, and therefore, symbolically, less 'accessible' to the public. The dichotomy is central to Segalen's work, representing an effort to renew the force of language. René Leys's story about the name of Peking is given symbolic value in the closing Stèle, 'Nom caché':

Quand le vide est au coeur du souterrain et dans le souterrain du coeur, — où le sang même ne roule plus, — sous la voûte alors accessible se peut recueillir le Nom.

Mais fondent les eaux dures, déborde la vie, viennent léitort dévastateur plutôt que la Connaissance!

The fullest connotations of the name can be known, the poet suggests, only through a mystical experience, when bodily functions are for a moment suspended. This moment is, as we have noted, associated with the iciness of mountain peaks and rarefied air. However such an experience is not dynamic; it leads to detachment from the values of life. The poet prefers the passionate sensations of living to the spiritual state of 'Enlightenment'. By avoiding the specific name, the writer opens the text to a plurality of meanings, awakening the interest of the reader.

The Peking of the novel is not merely the city mapped out in the introduction to René Leys. It is a city of many levels, which are accessible only to a mage, a René Leys with strange powers of perception. It is this quality of perception which has reality for Segalen. He saw it in the young and suggestible Maurice Roy, until the vision faded:

... Ce qui existait de particulier, ce qui existait comme différent, ce qui était, enfin, en lui, n'est plus...

What really 'exists' for an individual depends on his consciousness, and ultimately his attitude. If he accepts the world passively, without question, it may not really 'exist' for him at all. A full, existential experience of life depends on active participation in the creation of meaning. In René Leys the reader is called upon to share with the narrator in this creative activity. By reference to various levels of meaning Segalen opens up possibilities which extend the horizons of the novel.

In this chapter we shall consider references to a world outside the novel. Examples of the writer's erudition, they do not narrow the meaning.

1 Stèles, Peintures, Equipée, op. cit., p. 173.
or restrict the interest of the novel, but on the contrary enrich the field of reference, tantalize the reader, and stimulate curiosity.

Based on personal experience, René Leys describes the hypnotic effect of fiction on the minds of both narrator and hero. The novel is not merely a source of entertainment, but an illustration of the power of fantasy. Segalen discovered this power in Maurice Roy's extraordinary accounts of palace life, which were inspired and given impetus by his own manuscript. He became engrossed in the intrigue which gradually unfolded, and which served the purposes of his own fiction. As he later wrote to Jean Lartigue, 'Ce fut peut-être du laisser-aller sentimental.' Realizing the potential of their dialogue, he quickly gave separate form to his notes and reflections on the subject, which he entitled Les Annales secrètes de Maurice Roy. This manuscript is the basis for the novel, where the encounter between the two men is given artistic form. There is, therefore, a complex relationship between Segalen's experience in writing Le Fils du Ciel, the reflection on this experience in diary form in the Annales secrètes, and the creation of René Leys.

In the Annales secrètes we find all the sensational elements which become in René Leys a source of satire; accounts of the various personalities at Court, their mannerisms, their secret lives; threats of bombs and daggers. Segalen notes precise details about imperial life at Court given him by Maurice Roy, for example the manner in which the mandarins speak to the Emperor:

... mais simplement on s'arrête de parler, on coupe la phrase. (Équivalent des placas vides laissées dans les caractères), on la reprend ensuite et le parler et les écouteurs s'inclinent avec respect devant ce Silence où toute la majesté impériale a passé.  

Such details were a source of exorcism in the style of both Segalen's novels on life in the Forbidden City. They reveal not only the information conveyed by Maurice Roy, but the novelist's dramatic interpretation of this information. Silence is seen as creative and dynamic.

Details about Kuang-huai and Tz'u-hai in the Annales secrètes also carry over into both novels, although in René Leys these two figures are shadows

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1 Unpublished letter to Jean Lartigue, 25 October 1912.
from the past. The mysterious death of Kuang-hsü, which provides material for speculation in the closing lines of Le Fils du Ciel, inspires a similar concept at the beginning of René Leys:

... Je suis sûr qu'il est mort comme toutes les autres, de dix maladies toutes naturelles, mais dont tout de cette onzième, méconnue; qu'il fut Empereur...

The novelist discussed various hypotheses about Kuang-hsü's death with Maurice Roy, who questioned the common theory that Ts'ü-hsi had poisoned him, thus broadening the sense of mystery.

Metaphysical concepts and symbolism of the Emperor flow from one novel to the other. These, however, come from Segalen's research rather than from his exchanges with Maurice Roy. In the Annales secrètes, the novelist presents not only material given to him by Maurice Roy, but reflections and hypotheses about the sources of this information. Is it fact or fiction? 'Des mots impossibles à inventer...' Segalen finds the evidence too specific and detailed to be dreamt up. If it is true, then how did Maurice Roy find it out? How did he get into the Palace? Why was he allowed to witness intimate scenes between Kuang-hsü and his concubines? These questions carry over into the novel, where various possibilities are subtly suggested and left for the reader to ponder.

One such possibility is the idea of hallucination. As a doctor with experience of mental disorder Segalen took particular interest in Maurice Roy's powers as a medium and clairvoyant:

Le Tempérament de Maurice Roy ne doit pas être loin de celui d'un médium. Non pas dégénéré évidemment. Il m'a raconté de curieux phénomènes...

The vividness of these hallucinations illustrates the power of the imagination. René Leys gives a dramatic account of encounters with spirits similar to those of Maurice Roy, which were to him intensely real:

... Enfin, j'ai été mordu. J'ai sauté de mon lit. J'ai entendu sonner à la porte. J'étais seul... Je suis allé ouvrir... J'ai vu une grande flamme...

— C'est la flamme qui avait sonné, dis-je en riant avec sarcasme.

1 René Leys, p. 14.
2 Annales secrètes, 17 July 1910.
The narrator declares a certain scepticism about these apparitions. The subject is a literary commonplace, and the idea naive. However, whether they really happened or not, they were a source of strange sensations and visions inaccessible to the narrator and to the youth's more materialistic father. This faculty alone wins the interest of 'Segalen', who at this point invites René Leye to become his house-guest.

Among other hallucinatory experiences described by Maurice Roy was the visual phenomenon of a scene persisting before his eyes long after he had stopped looking at it. In René Leye Segalen describes a stranger faculty of clairvoyance:

... il a tout à coup la certitude de voir, devant lui, mais comme dans un miroir aux images symétriques, le point correspondant, mais en diagonale exacte; en ce cas, la rue de coin Nord-Est; mieux: il se promène à sa guise dans ce lieu géométrique, aussi longtemps qu'il garde les yeux grands ouverts; sans aller. Il lui faut aussi ne pas respirer... 2

The optical illusion described here becomes a means of developing on another level the complex play of duplication, reflection and inversion within the rigid geometrical outline of the text. We have noted Segalen's own interest in spiritualism, psychic powers and hypnotism, which were seen by him as a means of broadening the field of human perception. Some of the phenomena described by René Leye are based on personal experience; some, perhaps the above example, may be culled from his studies of psychophathy. He himself had certain hypnotic powers, as well as a profound interest in all forms of mental suggestion. In the novel there is an implication that the narrator exercises such a power over René Leye. When listening to his theories and suggestions, the latter seems to fall into a trance; his eyes are wide open, with 'cet étrange envahissement de tout l'iris par le sombre de la prunelle'. 3

He shows at such moments remarkable sensitivity to 'Segalen's ideas:

— Vous ne craignez rien pour vous?
— Ma question semble impliquer René Leye en une subite torture...

1 René Leye, pp. 40-41.  2 ibid., p. 212.
3 ibid., p. 233.  4 ibid., p. 125.
Similarly he is terrified if the narrator mentions fire or wells. Through the description of an abnormal mental state, Segalen reveals the power of the word to conjure up intense visions and feelings. Precise clinical details of physiological changes are given to support the authenticity of the account, suggesting that the fantasies of René Leys may have their origin in schizophrenia.

Je n'ai plus devant moi qu'un enfant dans un fauteuil, la tête penchée en arrière, les yeux chavirés, les lèvres blanches. Je sais, cela dure dix minutes, et ça lui vient après des émotions diverses.

The swoon which follows René Leys's flights of fantasy symbolizes the plunge to the void from the peaks of poetic inspiration which Segalen saw as an essential part of human experience. As in his earlier medical studies he sees these psychic qualities as a privileged condition: "il les vit dans la moisson avec une intensité enviable, presque redoutable." Whereas abnormality is condemned as madness by conventional society, it is cultivated by the creative individualist.

Segalen's curiosity about the origin of Maurice Roy's stories opened up various other fields of inquiry. His wife raised the possibility that he was admitted to the Palace as a homosexual. Segalen noted that this was perhaps the most probable hypothesis:

Maurice Roy est beau, fin, très jeune. Yeux sombres pleins de velours, cernés un peu et pas seulement excavés par les veilles et les aiguets. Il méprisait car il les femmes, au moins leur commerce... (Et son père le voit noceur!)

This idea is subtly suggested in the novel. At seventeen years old, René Leys is even younger than Maurice Roy. He is physically attractive, with a delicate skin 'semblable au toucher délicat de l'épiderme chinois' and 'une parfaite élégance symétrique.' His great charm lies in his mysterious eyes, "ces anciens... indémissables," which reflect the enigma of his essential nature. Against overtones of homosexuality, implied by his initial lack of interest in women, and against the narrator's impressions of his timidity, stand the accusations of Jarignoux, which provide a comic contrast in the text:

2 Annales secrètes, 14 June 1910.
3 René Leys, p. 233.
4 ibid., p. 40.
Monsieur, c'est un fameux meurt !
— Oh! Par exemple!
J'entends encore la candide voix de René Leys qui a si peur de coucher hors de sa famille.

A hypothesis suggested to explain René Leys's access to the Palace is the idea that he obtained entry as a member of a troop of actors. Ts'u-hsi had established a tradition, continued by her niece Lung-yu, of inviting actors regularly to play in the Forbidden City. There were moreover rumours, noted by Segalen in his Annales secrètes, and mentioned by Backhouse and Bland, of love-affairs between the Empress-Dowager and certain young actors. Hence on this level also the stories of Maurice Roy and René Leys were credible.

An interesting light is thrown on the background of the novel by Sir Edmund Backhouse's autobiographical manuscript, Décadence mandchoue. There are striking analogies between the stories of Backhouse and those of Maurice Roy. In the manuscript, written just before his death in Peking in 1943, Backhouse claims to have shared intimately in the licentious practices of the Manchu nobility before the imperial abdication. He professes to have been the lover of the Empress-Dowager Ts'u-hsi from 1902 until her death, two years before Segalen met Maurice Roy. In honour of this relationship, he asserts that he received a number of distinctions in rank and privilege including, like Maurice Roy/René Leys, a yellow riding-jacket. In his manuscript he relates similar stories to Maurice Roy/René Leys's account of boating on the lake with the Empress-Dowager. Accounts in René Leys and De Fils du Ciel of sexual practice in the Forbidden City, which came initially from Maurice Roy — the lack of privacy, the constant presence of eunuchs and servants, an element of 'voyeurism' — are found in Backhouse's manuscript in erotic detail.

The latter professes to have introduced to the Empress-Dowager several handsome young actors, and mentions her affairs with other Europeans,

1 René Leys, p. 44.
3 v. above, p. 227, n. 3. The manuscript is in English except for the title and occasional expressions in French, perhaps to give a salacious tone to the account.
4 v. below, p. 311.
Above: Maurice Roy dressed as a Chinese
Below: Sir Edmund Backhouse and Princess P'u-hin
Above: Maurice Roy dressed as a Chinese
Below: Sir Edmund Backhouse and Princess P'u-hsin.
including a young Frenchman, Wallon. He frequently took part, he alleges, in amateur theatricals both inside and outside the Forbidden City. He was fluent in several Chinese dialects, and thoroughly versed in Chinese literature and protocol; after teaching English at the Imperial University in Peking from 1903 to 1913, he was appointed to the Chair of Chinese at King's College, London — an appointment he never took up. Thus he, rather than Maurice Roy, fitted Segalen's description as 'l'Européen le plus versé dans le haut milieu chinois'. He lived in Chinese style, isolated from most of the European community in Peking, mixing largely with the Manchu nobility.

The aspect of Maurice Roy which fascinated Segalen is fully incarnate in Backhouse: total absorption in a dream-world which was for him reality. Whereas Maurice Roy's stories were mainly reserved for Segalen, Backhouse caught up politicians, civil servants and academics in his web of fantasy.

There may well be a link between these extravagant accounts and those of René Leya. Although there is no definite evidence that Segalen knew Backhouse, the latter refers in Décadence mandchoue to having met Pierre Louys at Gilbert de Voisins' home in Paris. It therefore seems likely that Segalen would at least have heard of him from the latter. Since Segalen does not mention him it is more probable, however, that either Backhouse was influenced consciously or unconsciously by Segalen's novel in writing his memoirs, or he was the source of Maurice Roy's extraordinarily detailed knowledge of court life.

Maurice Roy, like René Leya, only gradually revealed fragments of information to Segalen, as if he needed time in which to do his research. He wrote to Segalen after the latter's move to Tientsin in May 1911:

... il ne faut pas tout dire en une seule fois; ce sera pour la prochaine, car il passera de l'eau sous le pont dans cet inter-valle et qui nous apprendra peut-être que des projets, sortes de châteaux bâtis en Espagne, se sont réalisés ou sont en voie de réalisation. Je vous expliquerai plus clairement ma pensée, sorte d'énigme de sphinx, dans ma prochaine lettre.

1 Décadence mandchoue, op. cit., pp. 23/306.
3 y. above, p. 222.
4 His relationship with J.O.P. Bland and G.E. Morrison is discussed by Hugh Trevor-Roper, op. cit., pp. 50-68.
5 Décadence mandchoue, op. cit., p 230.
6 Unpublished letter from Maurice Roy to Segalen, March 1911.
The episodic nature of the revelations of René Ley’s become for the novelist a means of illustrating the manner in which suggestions work on the imagination. The clichés and the naïve style of Maurice Roy’s letters, his deliberate reticences and evasiveness, provide material for the satirical thread of the ‘anti-novel’ running through the narrative. Segalen’s letters were headed ‘S.O.’ (‘Secret Officiel’) on the top-left-hand corner to keep their correspondence secret from Maurice Roy’s tyrannical mother (or so Maurice Roy pretended). Those of Maurice Roy were written on a flowery notepaper in a handwriting which was, Segalen noted, initially ‘quelconque’, but which gradually developed personality. They too became an integral part of the text. One dated ‘17th day of the 17th moon’ (August or September 1911) was written according to Maurice Roy in the presence of the Empress-Dowager: ‘sois heureux d’avoir reçu une lettre écrite dans un tel endroit’. Another, describing a boat-ride with the Empress-Dowager, includes a poem purporting to be written by her for Maurice Roy. The text of both letter and poem is very closely followed in René Ley’s. Certain prosaic terms are given a more exaggeratedly poetic quality, e.g. ‘une légère brume s’élevait au-dessus du lac’ becomes ‘couvrait le lac’; ‘un bateau’ becomes ‘une barque’; ‘l’oiseau et sa femelle’ become ‘le paon et la paonnes’. An ironical quality is conveyed to the lyric by the use of traditional Chinese clichés and indications of hierarchy: ‘mandarin de quatrième classe’; ‘eaux colorées de cinq couleurs’; ‘dix mille arbres qui se mirent sur ses bords’. Thus the author has heightened and exaggerated the sentimental, conventional tone of the letters of Maurice Roy. Here his art lies in the significance which he reads into this naive raw material, and in the skill with which he incorporates it into the narrative.

Like the narrator of René Ley’s, Segalen only began to doubt the stories of Maurice Roy late in 1911, as revolution threatened the country. The Empress-Dowager had some months before, according to Maurice Roy, given birth to a girl. After this point Segalen’s notes became more sparse; finally he re-read them, and realized their literary potential. ‘Mais quelle nécessité de tout écrire!’ In René Ley’s he seeks to transfer to the reader as closely

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1 As in René Ley’s, Maurice Roy refuses to reveal how he first gained admission to the Palace (Annales secrètes, 14 June 1910).
2 René Ley’s, pp. 151-153.
3 Annales secrètes, 18 August 1911.
as possible the drama of his own enthusiasm, wonder and doubts. The novel therefore takes the form of a diary, modelled on the *femmes secrètes*, in which he satirizes his own naivety in the person of the narrator, "Segalen".

The narrator is given the author's name, "Segalen", his Chinese house near the Tartar City; his literary ambitions; certain traits of his personality: his pride, his scorn of banality. However he is a mere shadow of the author, a caricature of a naturalist writer concerned only with facts and realistic details. He is portrayed as a superficial bachelor looking for adventure at Chi'en-Men-wai, or with Mrs. Wang, the wife of his tutor in Chinese. Her portrait is inspired by a young Manchu noblewoman of an 'exotisme interloquant', whom Segalen describes in his *Lettres de Chine*:

"Coiffure édifiée des heures durant, cheveux plats, lèvres peintes d'un rouge étonnant, joues plaquées d'un rose Maurice Denis très exact, sourcil prolongé... Enfin, tout ce qu'il y a de plus textuel dans l’ex-Européen, l’ex-centrique... Ma semi-conversation chinoise l’a déridée tout de suite, mais quelle distance effroyable! quel exotisme, ô dieux! Ah! je suis bien servi.

The narrator's description of the theatrical quality of the characters in *Rene Lays* echoes Segalen's impressions of the timeless China he saw in the streets. "On y coudoie les milliers d’années défunte..." People and costumes seemed "issus de tentures, de tapisseries, de peintures et de vases". At that moment in Peking life appeared to have the eternity and the fantasy of art. Fact was to 'Segalen', as to many Europeans, stranger than fiction, yet offering promise of the 'real'. The doll-like quality of Mrs. Wang and the 'singing girls' is therefore based on the author's impressions. However the narrator's reaction to this feminine 'exotism' in *Rene Lays* becomes an occasion for satire, a means of illustrating the gulf between European and Chinese attitudes towards women.

The narrator shows equally little knowledge of Chinese medicine, scorning the idea of acupuncture — 'pointes enfoncées un peu partout'. Moreover he ridicules the idea that he himself would have any medical skills: "Me prend-il pour un médecin?" he asks ironically at one point, playing on the rapport between author and narrator. He is ready to lie, and to betray Segalen's deepest values, for example that of friendship.

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2 *ibid.*, p. 79.
4 *ibid.*, p. 208.
Il suffit qu’avec mensonge et politesse il explique la présence de ce dernier chez moi. Il remplira une fonction anodine, il sera mon secrétaire... ou, plus commodément, mon ami. C’est fort bien. J’ignore en chinois comment s’énonce “secrétaire” et j’use depuis longtemps, à tort et à travers, de l’épithète avantageuse d’“ami”.

The ‘Stèles amicales’ reveal the biting irony of these words. For Segalen the friend has a special role, sharing the intimate life of the poet, ‘La même où ni père ni amante ni le Prince lui-même ne pourront accéder jamais’. Segalen’s writings suggest that he sees the friend as a kind of double, reflecting similar attitudes and feelings. The question of the narrator’s friendship with René Leys is central to the debate in the novel: ‘si lui, que j’ai appelé mon ami, est digne d’amitié, oui ou non...’ The reservations which the narrator imposes on his friendship symbolize the dichotomy between the ‘original’ René Leys and the literary character who gradually emerges. The narrator’s bitterness in the closing chapters echoes Segalen’s resentment at being ‘duped’ by Maurice Roy. In a letter to Jean Lartigue, who first questioned Maurice Roy’s stories, he commented that the ‘tutoiement’ which seemed natural at first later bothered him: “Il donne moins de prix aux autres mêmes marques.”

The debate in René Leys thus centres around deeply-held values of the author. The ‘first’ René Leys holds no interest for the narrator. Scoring the mercantile world of Mr Leys the grocer, ‘Segalen’ is only interested in the creation of his character. Similarly Segalen notes in the Annales secrètes, ‘Il aime beaucoup ses parents. J’ai essayé de l’en détacher.” It would seem from this cynical statement, characteristic of the Decadent period, that the author made a similar effort in real life to shape Maurice Roy’s ideas and attitudes. ‘Saurais-je jamais ce qui lui vint de moi?’ In the Annales secrètes as in René Leys the novel shapes the life of the character.

1 René Leys, p. 21.
2 ‘A Celui-là’, Stèles, Peintures, Equipée, op. cit., p. 82.
3 ‘Stèles’ amicales,” ibid., pp. 74-88; Equipée, op. cit., pp. 225 ff.; and a letter to Segalen’s very close friend, Max Prat (Essai sur l’Exotisme, p. 29). Segalen’s pseudonym, Max Anély, was symbolically taken in part from his name.
4 René Leys, p. 223.
6 Annales secrètes, 12 August 1910.
The name, seen by Segalen as the source of identity in literature, is given a generative power in the text. The name 'Leys' means in Flemish 'magus', creator of the magic spell of the narrative. Moreover it indicates a dichotomy in his nature. René Leys is half French, half Belgian. His first name, René, indicates the Mediterranean world of his mother, the world of the imagination; his Belgian name, the business world of his father. In Chinese his name is equally symbolic, meaning 'Jardin Mystérieux'. Revealed late in the text, it was originally considered as a title for the novel. In his note 'Mon ami, Jardin Mystérieux', Segalen reflects on the mystery of that garden known only to René Leys. Like the child in H.G. Wells' story 'The Door in the Wall', or in Alice in Wonderland, he has the power to see the world in its strangeness, with a fresh perception which is for Segalen the essence of exoticism.2

... Celui que fréquentait mon ami était, sans magie, contemporain, frère, analogue, de celui de Babylone au temps des Rois, ou de Thèbes quand éclata le Disque solaire, ou de Stamboul, qui donne, voici quelques ans, la répétition générale d'une grande chute. C'était dans la ville du monde la mieux faite pour donner le décor.3

Last of the world's ancient empires, China was for Segalen represented by the person of the Emperor, who rules at the symbolic heart of Segalen's fiction on China:

... le plan triple de ses villes n'obéit pas aux lois des foules cadastrées ni aux besoins locataires des gens qui mangent et qui peuplent. La capitale du plus grand Empire sous le ciel a donc été voulu pour elle-même...

— Mais le carré principal, la ville tartare-mandchoue fait toujours un bon abri aux conquérants, — et à ce rêve:

À côté, dans le profond du milieu du Palais, un visage: un enfant-homme, et Empereur, maître du sol et Fils du Ciel...

Introducing the reader to Peking, the 'mysterious garden' which is the closed world of the novel, the author points out its autonomous nature: it is first and foremost 'voulu pour elle-même', a literary unity with its own nature and laws which are different from those of the referential world of people and events. The geometrical precision of the city is transformed by

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1 Unpublished letter to Jean Fétigue, 27 December 1914: 'Jardin Mystérieux, devenu Notes d'Après René Leys, sera prêt à la vente Bientôt.'
2 *op. cit.*, p. 191.
3 *Imaginaires*, *op. cit.*, p. 102.
the author into a new reality, that of the book. Streets, Palaces, Emperor are no longer persons and things but words with their own sensuous appeal and associated meanings. The narrator wandering through the streets of Peking, seeking to discover the secrets of the Forbidden City, represents the writer exploring his text, discovering hidden sources of power in his writing. Segalen sees the city of Peking as an architectural masterpiece, 'un chef-d'oeuvre de réalisation mystérieuse'. His reflections about the idea underlying this work of art represent the writer's efforts to recreate in literature his experience of the city.

At various stages in the narrative the narrator tries to find his bearings either by considering the general plan of the city or by pondering over the map. At one point he considers climbing to the top of the ancient bell-tower, the 'Chung-lou'. From here he knows he can follow with his eyes the major axis of the city, leading from the southern plains in through the Chinese City, past monuments rich in history and symbolism such as the Temple of Heaven, through the concentric inner cities and the maze of palaces to the hidden centre. There, the emperor traditionally receives tribute, facing to the south, the direction of fire, life, summer, and the male energy force of yang. However, the narrator decides, there is no point in following a path which is already known:

Je sais d'avance tout ce qui se fera, tout ce qui est... tout ce qui demeure impossible. Pourquoi fatiguer de rédiger ce manuscrit?... — Mieux vaut sortir librement, plus tard, quand le jour se refermera, afin de mûrir le dessein, — grandir au fond du crépuscule inéveillé du seul rêve, — dans ce moment intérieur qui roule sur lui-même, ne se répète n'aimoins jamais.3

The novelist is not concerned with a mere description of physical realities, but with his 'dream': the literary presentation of a unique personal vision, deepened by reflection, and by a poetic vision which is of its very nature, subtle and obscure. Therefore he seeks paths which are less open, direct and 'superficial' than the main avenues to the Palace.

From the physical reality of the city he draws implications and ideas which convey a mysterious life to the text. The attraction of this vision

1 René Lays, p. 13.
2 La Pensée chinoise, op. cit., pp. 88 ff.
3 René Lays, p. 68.
for Segalen lies largely in its exoticism — the associations with Chinese thought, history and legend which convey a unique tone to the narrative.1

Seeking to explore this 'other' way of thinking, he identifies with the Emperor Yung-lo, who moved the capital from Nanking to Peking.2 As the Emperor conceived the idea for his new capital, the novelist-narrator now considers the outlines of his own work of art, which will enclose his dream of the 'Son of Heaven'.

Similarly in contemplating the plan of Peking later in the novel he makes an effort to understand the thought lying behind the geometrical lines: 'Je l'encercle, je le domine; j'équarris mon œil à sa forme; je le comprends.'2 He sees the city according to Chinese thought as an emblematic square, representing the imposition of order and harmony in space.3 Within that space, each building, each enclosure is a microcosm contributing to the well-being of the whole, like a bee-hive, where l'esprit est le même: la ruche a travaillé dans la cire pour un seul de ses habitants, — une seule, la Femelle, la Reine.4

The image vividly illustrates the idea of the emperor receiving tribute from hundreds of millions of subjects:

... Mais, protégé, abrité, défendu contre les incursions barbares... en l'honneur du seul habitant mâle de ces Palais, — Lui, l'Empereur. Et tout ceci, — métapsychose ou parabole, — projeté sur le papier de ce plan.5

This passage illustrates the manner in which Segalen develops a literary concept from the contemplation of a text, a monument, or, in this case, a map. Following the carefully planned geometrical contours of the city, he considers the idea lying behind the reality, with its historical and metaphysical associations. These concepts are unexplained in the novel, conveying a certain mystery, and presenting a challenge to the reader.

Thus the narrator's quest takes an allegorical form, based on the Chinese idea of the emperor as source of creative power:

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1 v. above, p. 201.
2 René Leya, p. 107.
3 La Pensée chinoise, op. cit., pp. 90-96.
4 René Leya, p. 107.
5 ibid., loci cit.
Je songe, qu'allongé, la tête ici et les pieds là, tout près de ce coin sud-est de la ville tartare, je me trouve exactement étendu du nord au sud. Comme toutes les maisons, les palais ou les huttes de Pei-king, ma maison, ma hutte ou mon palais est très astronomiquement orienté, occidenté, dressant ses bâtiments majeurs exactement face au midi. Ceci est une règle impériale entre toutes que l'Empereur soit nommé Celui qui face au midi ! Je me sens ainsi — non point participer à cette vie pouilleuse et 'unanime' des vers grogillants sur le surnier, ou des ténias intestins, mais vivre parallèlement, dans toute la rigueur de et mesure du terme, parallèlement à la vie cachée du Palais, comme moi face au midi.1

By following the ritualistic actions of Chinese imperial protocol the narrator identifies with the Emperor, arrogantly claiming 'parallel' rights as a creator who dominates and controls his subject. A contrast is drawn with lower forms of life existing within an organism, like the vast population of a city, without thinking for themselves or mastering their own environment. The mathematical precision of the term 'parallèlement' indicates on another level Segalen's preference for a 'geometrical' plan for the novel, with hard, clear angles and precise limitations.2 In identifying with the secret life of the Emperor he rejects the well-worn, mindless paths of the popular novel.

Erudite analogies are established with the sun's movement towards a central point in the sky, which establishes a moment of harmony between time and space:

par désœuvrement, je mesure, je jauge; à la course de mon ombre oblique s'approchant de l'axe des bâtiments majeurs, quelle est l'heure, marquée par le jour, à cet instant que voici. Et quand l'ombre de mon corps se confond exactement en cet axe, je sens à travers moi qu'il est midi vrai au méridien du lieu que j'habite, où je suis, planté, sur les dalles pénétrées de lumière dans la cuve quadrangulaire de la cour qui est mon Palais à moi !3

The narrator's casual tone is misleading. As in the former case he makes a precise effort to establish an emblem of the moment of totality and creative harmony. The idea, with its overtones of Chinese metaphysics, is used as a leitmotiv to recall the spirit of the emperor. René Leys appears at such moments like a magus, conveying an air of magic to the narrator's manipulations of the narrative. There is a continual play of analogies between René Leys, the narrator 'Segalen' and the Emperor, which is presented through reference to

1 René Leys, p. 47.
2 v. above, p. 229.
3 René Leys, p. 64.
imperial emblems. Through the dynamic power which issues from the centre, 'Segalen' recalls the spirit of the Emperor. The ancient bell-tower, the 'Chung-lou', which was, he claims, originally situated 'tout au centre de l'antique cité défunte mongole', is for him such means:

Je sais que, me détournant, me recueillant au sombre du monument qui me porte, je puis faire sonner du bout des doigts la cuve en bronze de la cloche... éveiller pour moi seul sa voix de fer et de cuivre et d'airain étouffé... qui découpe le temps des veilles, comme je viens de recadastrer l'espace étendu...

The passage recalls a similar text at the centre of Le Fils du Ciel, where the Bell is a symbolic means of establishing a moment of perfect harmony in time and space. This moment represents the timeless quality of the imagination. The tolling of the bell recalls the past and revives the spirit of the emperor. It is a means of transporting the reader outside the limits of present-day Peking.

The novel has chosen to accentuate the role of the Bell Tower, by assimilating its function with that of the Drum Tower nearby, the 'Ku-lou', which measured time by means of a water-clock. The watches were in fact sounded first by the beating of a drum, followed immediately by the tolling of the bell.

Segalen refers only to the latter, which presents a more complex play on symbolism, association and suggestion.

Through a constant movement between the 'real' and the imaginary, the seen and the unseen, the noble and the ignoble, Segalen juxtaposes contrasting attitudes towards art and literature. In a letter to Henry Manceron he revealed his distaste for modern China:

Et d'abord, il faut délibérément supprimer toute la Chine moderne, nouvelle et républicaine.
Franchement, ce n'est point de parti pris que je la hais, mais d'essence et de non-sens. C'est la sinistre même, le Bovarysme piteux, la mesquinerie, la courardise, la lâcheté de toute nature, l'ennui, l'ennui surtout. L'antienne reste belle, mais seulement vue à travers certaines gens; il faut comprendre, rediger, refaire.

1 René Leyn, p. 67.
It is this special quality of vision which Segalen seeks in *René Leys*: not simply a representation, but a re-creation, based on understanding and knowledge, developing the particular qualities of the literary medium. Against this self-conscious stance of the writer exploring his craft are massed the forces of 'republicanism', which represent a more conventional attitude towards literature. The battle between these contrasting forces is the 'game' of *René Leys*: a game which is played for stakes of crucial concern to the novelist.
PLAY ON THE TRADITIONAL NOVEL

— je ne saurais donc rien de plus. Je n'insiste pas, je me retire... respectueusement d'ailleurs et à reculons, puisque le Protocole le veut ainsi, et qu'il s'agit du Palais Impérial, d'une audience qui ne fut pas donnée, et ne sera jamais accordée...

C'est par cet aveu, — ridicule ou diplomatique, selon l'accent qu'on lui prête, — que je dois clore, avant de l'avoir mené bien loin, ce cahier dont j'espérais faire un livre. Le livre ne sera pas non plus. (Beau titre posthume à défaut d'un livre: 'Le livre, qui ne fut pas!')

René Leys opens with a negation which presents the central idea of the novel. Slightly bitter in tone, it gradually changes to a more positive note. This negative opening is characteristic of Segalen's style. Various short stories, novels and poems begin in this way: the manuscript for Le Maître du Jour ('Je n'ai pas connu cet homme...'); 'Dans un Monde Sûre' ('Je ne sais comment l'idée me vient de renouer connaissance...'); 'Un Grand Fleuve' ('J'ignore d'où il coule exactement...'). The Stèles also illustrate this technique of defining by negation, which suggests an inability to plumb the depths of a subject by rational means. In literary terms, it indicates an emphatic refusal to limit the text by a dogmatic presentation of fixed realities.

In his Annales-secrètes de Maurice Ray, Segalen recorded his intention to publish two editions of his book, one for the general public, one reserved for certain privileged readers 'revêtue de toutes ses préfaces, débauches de rires bien permis'. The former edition was designed 'à succès et à prostitution, as a serial story to be published by une Société générale des Editions à gros tirage'. Segalen played with the idea of various ironical titles: L'Amant de la Ville violette, Le Mystère de la Chambre violente, Le Livre qui n'est pas, Le Décongé, Mon Ami Jardin Mystérieux, or even simply P.S. (Police Secrète). The prefaces designed for the second, more

1 René Leys, p. 13.
2 e.g. the opening and closing Stèles, 'Sans Marque de Règne' and 'Nom Caché', quoted above, pp. 249 & 254.
4 ibid., loc. cit.
restricted edition were to include extracts from the Annales secrètes de Maurice Roy, revealing the background of the novel, and commenting ironically on sensational aspects of the narrative. This scorn for the average reader is characteristic of many writers of the 'Belle Epoque', but particularly of Segalen, whose desire to renew the pristine values of language was passionate to the point of aggression.

The novel may, therefore, be read on a number of levels. The diary form suggests that it is an authentic record of personal experience. The disjointed, colloquial style contributes to this impression. Sentences broken by parentheses, qualifications and hesitations, tailing off as if into moments of reflection, convey the illusion of a novelist quickly jotting down his observations 'fresh from life'. This literary convention is a parody on the naturalist claim that literature can be a faithful record of 'reality':

J'avais cru le tenir d'avance, plus 'fini', plus vendable que n'importe quel roman patenté, plus compact que tout autre aggloméré de documents dits humains. Heux qu'un récit imaginaire, il aurait eu, à chacun de ses bonds dans le réal, l'emprise de toute la magie épisodée dans ces vers... où je n'entrais pas.

The narrator's attitude is geared towards the recognized mould of bestselling fiction. Ironically, he sees his novel as a mass of facts, organized in a clear, rational style which sees 'in advance' the movement of the narration. No place is left for the spontaneous creation of meaning through the ambiguity of the written word. Fantasy has no place either in this realistic presentation.

Segalen's satirical attack on the naturalist attitude evolves from a constant tension in his fiction between the 'real' and the imaginary. He too saw a 'magic' in reality. However it was not a magic which could be captured by conventional description. Research, documentation, personal observation played their part in his work; in Les Immémoires and Le Fils du Ciel they were essential to his method. Yet, his work could never be described as an 'agglomeration of documents'. The erudite presentation from within another culture, erg or outlook does not attempt to reflect a fixed reality, but illustrates the illusionism of perception, and the creative powers of language.

1 René Laye, p. 13.
The dialectic between the narrator and René Leys represents a continual debate within the author's mind over the question of literary method. This autocritical device is a means of criticizing conventional styles of writing in order to create a new synthesis of the realistic and the imaginary.

The narrator therefore represents an aspect of the author: his desire to 'penetrate to the heart' of Chinese civilization. However where the author understood this idea symbolically, the narrator takes the words literally. His vision is limited to surface realities. He too wishes to write a novel about the Emperor as 'victime désignée depuis quatre mille ans' comme holocauste médiateur entre le Ciel et le Peuple...1 Yet he is discouraged by the gulf between his dream of a mighty empire and the reality of the present situation:

Mais tout est fini. Le palais actuel est aussi muet que l'autre, et ne contient plus qu'un grand vide, et pas une majesté. — Pas de 'successeurs', pas d'héritiers. — Des simulacres... des 'Altesse' dont le titre de respect, si j'avais à les aborder, serait pour moi, non plus 'Votre Excellence', mais 'Votre Haute Insuffisance'...2

Whereas he wishes to portray a unique form of civilization locked in ancient tradition, the regime is in fact crumbling before what are presented as the levelling forces of modernization and materialism. In place of the mystery and terror which had reigned in the Forbidden City, under the Empress-Dowager Tz'u-hsi, a nondescript regent holds power for a child of six:

— Voyez-vous, je suis arrivé juste trois années trop tard. La vieille Impératrice est morte après soixante ans de règne. Lui aussi... après trente-quatre années de vie... seulement. Et peut-on même dire: de vie réelle? Je ne sais plus. Je ne veux plus savoir...3

The 'reality' of the Emperor's life as prisoner is debated in _Le Fils du Ciel_. René Leys develops into a general consideration of the nature of reality. The physical reality of the material world is opposed to the 'spiritual' reality of the imagination, represented by art. This dichotomy takes form in the schizophrenic personality of René Leys. He represents both the mercantile and the artistic worlds. At first he appears as 'le bon fils d'un fort bon épicierr

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1 René Leys, p. 14.  
2 ibid., p. 49.  
3 ibid., loc. cit.
...Mais il parle avec un tel respect de son père, du commerce, de la famille, des économies, des domestiques, des voitures, des chevaux, et des principes de son père, — qu'il est manifeste qu'il y trouve impossible de mener à Peiping une autre vie honorable que celle de son père... — Littérairement, il relit Paul Féval.1

This Breton author who was highly successful in the nineteenth century represents the prolific novelist despised by Ségalen. His works support conventional social ideas of honour and patriotism. His name is an indication of the literary influences working on René Leys, whose stories can be read on the level of a detective story; a sensational romance or a sentimental tale. The narrator is, meanwhile, anxious to establish the veracity of these stories in order to incorporate them into a novel based on naturalist premises.

On all these levels, writing is seen as a means to an end rather than as a source in itself of creativity and exoticism.

The sentimental novel

— Je n'en sais rien.
   Puis, sa voix change tout d'un coup. Il s'ètre, se redresse, se regarde, avec un certain regard que j'ai appris à connaître. Et, lentement, profondément:
   — Je vous remercie, mon ami, de m'avoir appelé votre 'ami'.2

René Leys may be read as the tragic story of a timid, impressionable, motherless boy, distrusted and temporarily abandoned by his father who is about to remarry. This psychological level of interpretation is maintained throughout the novel. The entry of René Leys into Ségalen's house, and thus, symbolically into the intrigue, is seemingly motivated by his fear of being left alone. Moreover, Jarignoux reveals soon after,

René Leys, paraît-il, a passé par une enfance négligée. Il a eu le malheur... (on n'ose jamais appeler ceci d'un autre nom), il a eu le malheur de perdre sa mère à l'âge où l'on refait ses premières dents. (Je ne saurai donc pas si cette mère valait la peine d'être gardée.)3

The narrator interrupts the flowing tone of the narrative to question its assumptions. By a continual movement between sentimentality and satire Ségalen leaves the text open to interpretation.

1 René Leys, p. 18. 2 Ibid., p. 130. 3 Ibid., p. 44.
René Leys discovers a certain security with ‘Segalén’, in ‘la quiétude géométrique de ma maison’.

He turns to the narrator as a father-figure, ‘un père pré aux indulgences, efficace bien plus qu’un père!’ ‘Segalén’ has a more ambivalent attitude towards him, which is shown in his ambivalent use of the personal pronoun:

... nous avons pris, d’instinct, l’usage de nous servir à volonté, avec souplesse, du ‘to’ ou du ‘vous’ — selon les incidents, l’heure, et l’humeur, le sériéux ou la gaiété.

In practice René Leys was more inclined to adopt forms of intimacy — ‘Mon cher Victor... (déjà?)’ — while ‘Segalén’ takes a more formal tone. In moments of enthusiasm, however,

... brusquement, spontanément, je change de ton:
— Tu veux risquer le tout pour le tout? Tu m’as tutoyé en poésie chinoise; laisse-moi te rendre aujourd’hui.

The question of friendship is a major theme in the novel. At first the narrator flirts with the term: ‘... il sera mon secrétaire... ou, plus commodément, mon ami...’ however later he adopts an attitude towards friendship more characteristic of the author, asking himself: ‘Si lui, que j’ai appelé mon ami, est digne d’amitié, oui ou non...’ Thus the theme of friendship is associated with that of veracity, and concerned principally with literary questions. For the first René Leys, however — the symbol of everyday life — the idea seems to have more personal connotations. The narrator’s friendship matters deeply to him:

— Vous m’avez demandé autrefois si vous pouviez compter sur moi?
Ceci le réveille, le redresse: il n’hésite pas:
— Oh! oui. Je voulais pouvoir compter sur vous!
— Bien. Comme ami?
— Oh! oui, comme ami.

The motivation of René Leys is consistently attributed to his need for support and friendship. Thus the author builds a basis of credibility for his fantasy.

The creation of fantasy follows a regular pattern, alternating between realistic accounts of personal problems and colourful descriptions of extraordinary adventures. Typically, an episode is introduced on a realistic note:

1 René Leys, p. 46.
2 ibid., p. 118.
3 ibid., p. 221.
4 ibid., p. 151.
5 ibid., p. 176.
6 ibid., p. 21.
7 ibid., p. 223.
8 ibid., pp. 223-224.
... qu'est-ce que cette mine éteinté, et ces yeux battus?...
je suis sûr qu'il a pleuré depuis pas longtemps.\(^1\)

At first René Leys may speak of mundane family matters, 'de la même voix confidentielle qui, l'autre soir, ouvrait des portes au Palais!'\(^2\) However the narrator, coldly indifferent to such trivialities, lifts the conversation to a 'higher' level — that of the imagination:

Et brusquement, avec la simplicité énergique de l'enfant qui passe sa manche sale sur les yeux, reprenant sa voix et son calme, René Leys rédevient lui-même, précis et informateur...\(^3\)

The 'real' René Leys, for the narrator, as for the author, is the imaginary hero. The 'other' René Leys has no value, as the narrator openly indicates to him: 'Va-t-il... me prendre pour exutoire des amours de son père?'\(^4\) He rudely repulses accounts of family life by yawning and pretending to go to sleep, or by quickly changing the subject. His rejection of the commonplace for the heroic symbolizes the creation of a literary figure. However on a more sentimental level René Leys may be seen as a sensitive youth pushed into a tragic role by the ambition, arrogance and indifference of the narrator, who despises his family and background:

Décidément, je n'en saurai rien. Car René Leys, changeant de ton et de mesure, s'empresse de me parler de son père, des projets de son père... et... (horreur!) des amours, si cette dernière prostitution est possible... des amours déplacées de son père!
Il ne me reste qu'une défense: m'endormir! ou feindre de dormir, silencieusement.\(^5\)

The dichotomy between the two aspects of René Leys — the pathetic orphan, the magus — is dramatically illustrated in their final scene together. 'Segalen' hounds his victim to death by his pitiless demands:

... son air d'angoisse véritable. Sentiments! Reflets! Ne jouons plus, ou enfin jouons plus serré. Tant pis si je suis dur.\(^6\)

The word 'véritable' plays on the naturalistic illusion that the narrator is describing 'real' grief; whereas the author is continually reminding us of the difference between literature and life. The harsh tone of the confrontation between two attitudes towards literary illusion is reminiscent of the story 'La Tête'. An emotional interpretation of the account limits the text to an account of human relationships on a mundane level, ignoring the full...

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\(^1\) René Leys, p. 92.  
\(^2\) Ibid., p. 93.  
\(^3\) Ibid., p. 94.  
\(^4\) Ibid., p. 120.  
\(^5\) Ibid., p. 132.  
\(^6\) Ibid., p. 225.
possibilities of the artistic medium. Confronted with the dead body of René Leys, still strangely beautiful, his 'boy... pleurait comme un chien sentimental'.¹ For the author, however, this death is part of the symbolic play of literature, which is concerned with eternal values. René Leys the literary character has, he suggests through this analogy, far greater glory than his prototype in the exterior world.²

Through a sharp distinction between fantasy and everyday affairs the author indicates the limitations of a 'realistic' reading of the text. The narrative falls suddenly from flights of fantasy into the flat world of the banal:

Oh! je m'en remets encore moins, d'une secousse telle! Cette nuit de confiance et d'orage, cette nuit d'obscur beauté où ce jeune homme m'avoue enfin ce qu'il est... où je devine ce qu'il deviendra... Ces projets, cette crise, tout cela conclu par un faire-part dramatique de remariage paternel! je ne sais plus...³

Driven on by enthusiasm for the extravagant claims of René Leys, and 'admiram mon prête à crever le gros nuage... dans la nuit supérieure',⁴ the narrator embellishes these romantic stories, suggesting daring escapades and new dangers which lead to a storm of tears and the symbolic collapse of the hero. Thus Segalen represents on a human level the release of tension and the return to normality.

If the novel is interpreted simply as a psychological study, the author implies, art is reduced to pathos and moralizing. The narrator, however, repeatedly leaves the text open to ambiguity: 'Je ne sais plus...'; 'je n'en saurais rien...';⁵ 's'il savait...'.⁶ Thus he suggests the autonomy of the work of art, which creates its own meanings through a complex play of associations and suggestions.

¹ René Leys, p. 232.
² The character Augusto Perez develops the idea of the greater reality of the literary character, in the novel Mist (Niebla) by Miguel de Unamuno y Jugo, op. cit.
³ René Leys, p. 99.⁴ ibid., p. 96.
⁵ ibid., p. 131 and p. 13.⁶ ibid., p. 94.
The detective story

By following the thread of an imaginary thriller Ségalen adopted a satirical method which later became popular in new fiction in France. The writer of detective stories presents a number of clues to the reader in order to stimulate his curiosity. Manipulating the movement of the narrative from an unseen, omniscient viewpoint he uses language merely as an instrument in a prearranged pattern of meaning. He teases the reader with his superior knowledge, leading rapidly towards a conclusion which resolves and thus kills the mystery. The detective story is to be read and thrown away. It is the popular novel par excellence, inherently condescending towards the reader.

Through satirizing this literary genre the novelist suggests a different set of values; a refusal to reduce fiction to a set of limited meanings, which are finally abolished and rejected; a presentation of writing as an artistic medium with depth and sensuous appeal. The device of the detective story conveys an element of mystery to the narrative which is not dispelled, but remains unresolved.

The revelations of René Leys originate at a symbolic point outside the walls of the Forbidden City. Both men are caught out in a lie, having claimed they were going in different directions. After this moment René Leys gradually discloses secret information about life within the Forbidden City. The word 'secret' intrigues the narrator. It is planted in the narrative as if it evolves from the narrator's imagination as he wonders about Mr Wang's position in the Palace:

... ses fonctions, — ses fonctions professorales dans une école du Palais, — une école de Police... Oui, maintenant, je suis bien sûr d'avoir compris: 'Police secrète'.

By breaking the flow of the sentence Ségalen conveys a sense of hesitation as the narrator pauses to reflect on his words and their associations. Doubts created by the barrier of language create the sense of secrecy which

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1 René Leys, p. 140.
2 As in A. Robbe-Grillet's novels, e.g. Les goûtes, Le voyeur.
3 René Leys, p. 21.
is a dynamic force in the novel. Soon René Leys and all his friends are seen as part of the secret police, René Leys being the chief. There is even a 'counter-secret-police', set up in opposition within the Palace. The mysterious activities of these various forces stimulate the interest of the narrator, reader of the thrilling stories of René Leys. As 'Segalen' moves through the city — to the walls of the Forbidden City, to the theatre, to the 'Gay Quarter' outside the 'Alien Men', he weaves a web of intrigue over people and events. His continual fantasizing illustrates the way we continually create fiction out of our everyday lives, relieving the monotony of events by the ability to wonder and question.

At first the imperial family seem to the narrator colourless and lacking in literary potential. However René Leys suddenly animates the subject, dramatizing their secret lives. The account of an attempt on the Regent's life, which 'Segalen' has read in the newspapers, seems of little interest until René Leys brings inside knowledge of the discovery, and claims to have been involved in the event. The episode sets off a train of intrigue. As René Leys dreads further attacks from within the Forbidden City, the narrator 'enters into the game', suggesting melodramatic means of counter-attack. However his words — references to bombs, daggers, fire, water, wells — have an extraordinary effect on René Leys. Leaving aside for the moment their symbolic meaning and their part in the structure, we shall consider here their dynamic role in the intrigue. By describing the young man's terror, the author conveys an ironical sense of authenticity to the account which is supported by such affirmations as 'vraiment confus', 'vraiment épouvanté...'. More particularly his emotion illustrates the suggestivity of language, which has an almost hypnotic power over the listener:

... J'excuse tout, j'ai compris: il se prépare un nouvel attentat. Après la bombe, quoi? Le poignard? ou bien le... Comme il s'agit peu de cela! J'ai parlé vite: il achève froidement: — Je suis très occupé par mes élèves.

However some time later René Leys returns to the subject:

Il dit comme en écho de mes paroles:
— Après la bombe, le poignard. Vous ne pouviez croire si bien dire.

1 The 'front' gate, or central south gate to the Tartar City.
2 René Leys, p. 98.
3 ibid., p. 99.
4 ibid., p. 120.
5 ibid., p. 121.
The intrigue develops momentum in the narrator's fertile mind as he tries to imagine the roles played by the various personalities within the Palace, characters in an extraordinary drama:

... Si notre Dame Long-Yu est un peu ambitieuse, la personne vivante du Régent doit lui sembler peu nécessaire au bien général de l'Empire, et néfaste à son bien particulier. Donc, le Régent a mauvais goût à vivre encore. Si j'étais méloDRAMATURGE, je n'hésiterais pas à imprimer à cent mille exemplaires que l'Impératrice Long-Yu 'aiguisa elle-même le bras du meurtrier!' Silence improbatif de René Leys.
Il me faut aller plus loin. Alors, dans une série de déductions serrées de plus en plus, je rassemble mes arguments...

The narrator's outline of a hypothetical intrigue follows the style of a popular thriller. A story within a story, like the concentric palaces of Peking, it is complicated further by the dual role of the narrator, who is both author and reader. René Leys has the power to turn his ideas upside down, and with a wave of his magic wand to evoke entirely new perspectives and ideas:

— Mein? Pour ne pas 'en' être encore de la P.S. ... ai-je deviné? Flairé? Oui, ou non?
... Il reste muet. Il se renverse-en arrière avec un port de tête très allongé. Il me regarde. On dirait qu'il prépare une confidence amoureuse... Lui?

A new thread of intrigue develops, inspired by the erotic dreams of the narrator, which we shall consider in the next chapter. As if he were living out the daring exploits of a thriller, René Leys gradually takes on the role of a hero, becoming protector of the throne, lover of the Empress—Dowager, Grand Treasurer of the Palace, with the authorization to wear the coveted 'yellow riding jacket'. This rare distinction had been granted to General 'Chinese' Gordon for crushing the Taiping rebellion. The mocking reference in René Leys seems to parody Gordon's proud recognition of this honour, and his refusal of pecuniary recompense:

1 René Leys, pp. 144-145.
2 Ibid., p. 146.
3 I may say the Chinese government have conferred upon me the highest military rank and the yellow jacket, a distinction conferred on not more than twenty other mandarins in the empire, and which constitutes the recipient as one of the emperor's bodyguard. I have declined money in any shape... (Letter from Gordon to his family, published in Events, quoted by Marina Warner, op. cit., p. 95).
The narrator's account of René Leys' extraordinary adventures presents an analogy with the author's effort to create a hero who will surpass his precursors in similar situations. This analogy is established by ironical parallels with literary and historical precedents. For example, the riding jacket is compared with the sacred veil in Salambô. René Leys carrying away his trophy plays a dual role, 'un Mathé mâlé de Shahabarim' — the lover who is also protector. Comparisons with other famous adventurers are discussed in the following chapter.

René Leys' magic power to enter the Forbidden City is comparable with an ability to envisage scenes and episodes suggested by the narrator's words. The 'ubiquity' of this mage seems to be a quality of the imagination which, stimulated by a word or a phrase, recreates the setting in vivid detail. By piecing together the fragments offered by René Leys, the narrator builds up a picture of the Emperor which will convey colour and life to his novel. This process of suggestion, illustration, criticism and development of the intrigue is a reflection on the creative process. René Leys' accounts have a certain inevitability, just as a traditional narrative follows a hidden logic which is gradually unveiled to the reader:

Je m'y attendais un peu. Cela explique bien des choses. Mais je n'aurais jamais inventé le détail...3

The intrigue takes on its own life, following the conventions of the genre: 'Le reste s'enchaine de lui-même.' Amazed and bewildered by the fantastic qualities of René Leys's stories, 'Segalen' tries to elicit precise information. His concern with detail indicates the appeal of the 'real-life story'. Segalen is parodying the literary convention, which flourished in the nineteenth century, of claiming authenticity even for tales of fantasy — a preoccupation with veracity which stems from the positivist confusion of science with art. The narrator is only interested in the account if it is 'true':

1. René Leys, p. 159. 2 ibid., p. 196. 3 ibid., p. 94. 4 ibid., p. 122.
CITE VIOLETTE INTERDITE

Mais, centrale, souterraine et supérieure,
n'ou des palais, de lotus, d'eaux portes
d'envoies et de porcelaines, est
ma Cité Violette interdite.
... combien d'épisodes, combien de 'mots' ne relèvent que du 'moment vécu' et par là seraient dignes, avec le Prix Goncourt, de l'École du Document humain.

Et l'on n'invente pas des détails... comme...
— Ce qu'on voit du haut de la Montagne de Contemplation...¹

The narrator's consideration of the evidence is an autocritical device by which the author reviews the debate. Trained in naturalist techniques, 'Segalen' is looking for hard, clear evidence of the authenticity of the narrative. That which René Leys supplies is convincing in its precision and vividness:

Cela est pérémptoire. Cela est... Si jamais il ce venait un doute sur l'entrée de René Leys au Palais, une telle scène, posée comme il vient de le faire, ne rendrait le doute ridicule.¹

René Leys describes court life to the narrator, just as Maurice Roy had done for Segalen. The impression of authenticity is conveyed by intimate details such as Kuang-hsi sitting down suddenly in the middle of a game, followed immediately by all his concubines; the Regent's habit in shaking hands of taking only the thumb. However earlier in the novel a friend of René Leys has shaken the narrator's hand in the same way.² Thus clues are planted in the narrative to sow seeds of doubt. The refrain, 'Est-ce vrai? Oui ou non?' grows steadily more insistent.³ The narrator's demands for proof and for specific facts extend to the most intimate areas of René Leys's adventures at Court:

Mais René-Triomphant n'en est plus à ne marchander des détails intérieurs. En peu de mots, je deviens spectateur de chacun des actes prévus.⁴

By means of his close personal knowledge of his subject, René Leys is able to describe not only scenes in the narrator but sensations and feelings:

The narrator's detective instinct is awakened by this suggestion that these stories do not come from personal experience. Gradually he begins to question their veracity. At this point René Leys provides the most specific proof of written documents:

¹ René Levy, p. 216.
² ibid., pp. 48-49.
³ ibid., p. 69.
⁴ ibid., from p. 88.
⁵ ibid., p. 166.
⁶ ibid., p. 167.
These documents remain as material evidence to support the more insubstantial words of René Leys. As proof of his love-affair with the Empress-Dowager Lung-yu, he offers 'Segalen' a copy of a poem she has composed for him, and which he has copied on to the flowery paper he uses for his letters. It would seem therefore that he learnt it by heart when she 'showed' it to him. "Qu'en dis-tu? Ceci fait-il bonne figure dans les "documents" que tu cherches sur Lui?" asks René eagerly; and he asks for this incriminating evidence to be destroyed. 'Voilà qui est fait,' declares the narrator ironically at the end of his transcription.

A document which he never pretends to destroy, but keeps with him always, is the paper written in Chinese characters which René Leys claims is the receipt for his first entry to the Palace. This precious document is a key to the enigma of the novel. It refers to two types of language: the precise, transparent language of commerce, which holds no value in itself; and a more complex, difficult language which suggests rather than defines. The narrator sees in the calligraphy of the receipt a richly symbolic and sensuous language which stimulates the imagination:

"'Segalen' lek effort to discover the meaning of the characters is a creative activity, leading him to reflect on the concrete reality of the written word.

By representing contrasting attitudes to language, the receipt is, moreover, an ironical image suggesting a mercenary transaction over something of inestimable value. An unpublished note on the manuscript reveals that Segalen originally saw this idea as a basis for a short story:
leurs quatre petits points. Il y a des sabres, des lianes à
croc. Un homme sous un couvercle: un tombeau, un piéton,
etc... j'établis une traduction suggestionnée — hallucinée —
Arrive un mot en Français de lui, — banal.¹

The technique is similar to that of Peintures, where the reader is invited
to recreate magic scenes from the words of the text. By leaving the receipt
untranslated, Segalen retains the equivocal play between various possibilities
which is the essence of the novel. Thus he rejects the concept of 'representa-
tive' language — language as a means of exchange — in favour of the
'unreadable'.² In contrast with the Chinese characters which introduce the
Stèles, calligraphy is not introduced into the novel, but suggested, thus
avoiding the possibility of translation.

The document seems to the narrator an important piece of evidence;
although René Leys treats it very casually, forgetting that 'Segalen' still
has it.³ 'Honteux de ne pouvoir le déchiffrer',⁴ the latter is unwilling to
have it translated; not only out of personal pride or loyalty to René Leys,
but also because translation would kill its mysterious appeal.

The language of precise information is represented by satirical
references to figures and prices.⁵ By stating the exact amount he paid to
enter the Palace, René Leys gives weight to his claims; yet later he
contradicts himself:

... J'avais d'abord payé cinq mille... — Pardon! Trois mille quatre. C'est noté. Je m'en souviens
à une sapeque près.⁶

Blending with stories of bargaining over the price of entry to the Palace,
and sharing the cost with a Manchu prince, the theme of the receipt presents
the two sides of René Leys: his bourgeois family background, and his
mysterious ability to pass through walls and gates into the most sacred
precincts. The theme recurs with humorous effect:

¹ Unpublished manuscript note.
pp. 10 and 81 ff.
³ Maurice Roy, on the other hand, claimed that the eunuchs had kept the
receipt (Annales secrètes, 14 June 1910).
⁴ René Leys, p. 166.
⁵ Similarly, Segalen satirizes the rigid hierarchy of the Chinese nobility:
'suivantes du Huitième rang de la septième Concubine durant la période Hien-
Pong' (René Leys, p. 20).
⁶ ibid., p. 165.
— Oh! dites-moi... mais c'est assez délicat... si vos premières 'nuits' vous coûtaient cher...
— Oui, six mille dollars...
— Pardon! Quatre mille... J'ai le reçu dans ma poche!¹

The 'numbers game' has a comic role in the text, indicating René Ley's indifference towards strict accuracy. As Grand Treasurer, he is supposed to pay out vast sums of money to all the Manchu princes, for which he is paid a handsome salary. Although he never discloses the exact figure, he later quotes the percentage of increase he receives for this unspecified amount.

Certes! Je ne me risquerai pas à demander 'quatorze pour cent' de quoi! Cela doit être extraordinaire! Je félicite en toute confiance!²

Beneath the narrator's words there sounds an ironical tone of doubt. When finally René Ley entrusts him with his money, before Yuan Shih-k'ai enters the city, there is a comical anticlimax: '... quelques sapées sauvées... mais de quelle immense banqueroute... '³ Indeed, René Ley's explains, the banks have all failed, he himself ordered them to close.

As 'Segalen's uncertainty grows, 'reality' no longer seems to him such a simple concept. He can no longer distinguish between fact and fiction, and asks himself:

... si l'Empire et le Palais tout entier ne sont décidément pas un rêve d'historien, avec tout ce que je viens d'écrire à ce sujet, gênante dansant sur une écumée de non-sens!⁴

The reference to the revolution which is gaining ground outside Peking outside the confines of the novel — allows the complex play on reality and illusion which we have seen to be characteristic of Segalen. The narrator's comment reflects a literary technique which relies on the contrast between representation of an exterior reality and its imaginative transformation. However with a more naive attitude towards reality, the narrator sees the sole merit of René Ley's stories in their factual basis, and would feel tricked and humiliated at being deceived. On his manuscript Segalen notes:

A partir du moment où je commence à douter, remplacer le ton d'ironie oscillante par: franche et grosse mauvaise humeur... j'ai horreur d'être dupé!⁵

¹ René Ley, p. 214.
² ibid., p. 160.
³ ibid., pp. 199-200.
⁴ ibid., p. 196.
⁵ Unpublished manuscript note.
Through this psychological trait Segalen satirizes both the narrator and the conventional movement of the narration. Attitudes and expressions are suggested without words, indicating incredulity:

Je vais vous confier une chose de la plus haute importance; et que vous serez seul à connaître, avec le Régent et moi... Je le regrette. Je lui ai fait de la peine.

The economy of the style suggests tension, and quickens the pace of the narrative. At the decisive moment, when the revolutionaries enter Peking, 'Segalen' expects a grand denouement, a battle to the death with dramatic scenes of heroic self-sacrifice. Enthusiastic for the imperial cause, like the author himself, he offers René Leys his services: an offer taken up by the latter, who sees in it another idea for a romantic adventure. He will save the Empress-Dowager's life by offering her a refuge. In his strange hypnotic state he seems to speak without thinking of the practical consequences, as if self-consciously writing another chapter to the novel. In a tense final scene with the narrator the two men await the final proof, which never comes:

Qu'il dise ceci ou cela... J'attends l'affaire, pris sur le fait, le grossier événement palpable que je toucherais de mes doigts...

The Biblical image of the doubting Thomas represents the scepticism of the Rationalists who demand palpable proof in order to believe. By his unrelenting logic the narrator drives René Leys to a point from which he cannot retreat.

However at no point does he deny his stories, although the evidence begins to mount against him. At the very last moment, asked by the narrator for proof of his affair with the Empress-Dowager, he declares simply, 'La preuve? ... L'enfant.' The child looks like him, he claims: 'Il a un nez européen.' This statement seems to contradict his preceding remark, 'Je ne l'ai pas vu...'; moreover the narrator could verify on rereading his notes that René Leys has known the Empress-Dowager only three months: 'Il me semble que le terme est un peu court, entre ma suggestion et l'enfant... Thus the author has his reader playing the role of the narrator, checking dates and figures. Segalen has shortened the length of René Leys's affair with the Empress-Dowager in order to destroy the last piece of proof offered by the former. (In the Annales sert tes, Maurice Roy had known Lung-yu for almost a

2 ibid., p. 222.  
3 ibid., p. 225.  
4 ibid., p. 226.  
5 ibid., p. 238.
year before the birth of her child.) Once again René Leys reveals his inadequacy with facts and figures — in spite of his profession as a political economist.

With a bitter tone of disillusionment, therefore, 'Segalen' reminds him of the traditional means of avoiding defeat: 'Il écoute avec un sérieux tel que je voudrais me taire, tout d'un coup...'. The hallucinatory manner in which he accepts the narrator's suggestions conveys an air of reality to the text. Through the illusion of mental suggestion 'Segalen' indicates the manner in which language works on one's consciousness. The narrator hesitates, becoming aware of the pernicious effect of his words. However he has too limited a view of language to be able to understand the process involved: Hence when the Emperor abdicates he packs his bags.

Et d'un geste machinal, relisant le premier feuillet du manuscrit, je souligne ces mots: 'Je ne saurai rien de plus... je me retire... Et j'ajoute d'une tout autre écriture: ... et he veux savoir rien de plus.3

By those bitter words which seem to efface his whole book the author suggests the death of the naturalist novelist. At this point 'Segalen' renounces his intention to verify, and to "know". "The text circles back to the narrator's original doubt about the impossibility of writing his novel. He too remains 'faithful to his words', although the author has reserved a melodramatic surprise which changes his attitude. At the end of the novel, when he takes up these words again, they have an entirely different tone and implication. The news that René Leys is dead sounds like the traditional ending of a popular novel: 'Oh! la belle histoire! Une de plus à toutes celles qu'il m'a déjà si bien contées...'. However if his death is in fact 'true', the narrator must reconsider the question of the authenticity of his stories. The subtle play of fiction within fiction clouds the narrative.

The linear thread is broken. The sole path left open to the narrator is to retrace his steps through his written record of events:

Et je reviens, et je me retrouve face à face avec mon seul témoin valable: ce manuscrit, — dont j'aurais voulu "faire un livre", voici dix mois, et que je regarde avec une défièrance lourde de tout

1 Annales, op. cit., August 1910 to July 1911.
2 René, pp. 226-227. 3 ibid., p. 226. 4 ibid., p. 231.
remains true: he would not have written this novel but for his death. This death confirms his concept of reality, which is the story which he sets out to narrate. As Segalen wrote of Gauguin's death, it illuminates his life, setting a seal on the fabric of mystery surrounding his role in the novel. Like Segalen himself in the forest of Huelgoat, five years later, his character has what Segalen describes elsewhere as 'l'honneur ou le talent de périsr avec beauté'.

The events of René Leys thus lead to the central concern of the author: the power of language in our lives to create mystery, 'exoticism' and fantasy, qualities which transform reality. In rereading his manuscript the narrator realizes the limitations of his concept of exoticism, which was based on a false concept of reality. By his narrow concern with truth and fact he is 'killing' the essential life of his manuscript:

— J'étais son ami, — devrais-je dire avec le même accent, le même regret fidèle, — sans plus chercher de quoi se composait exactement notre amitié... dans la crainte de le frapper ou de la tuer une seconde fois... ou — ce serait plus coupable encore — d'être mis brusquement en demeure d'avoir à répondre moi-même à mon-doute, et de prononcer enfin: oui ou non?
Through rereading the manuscript the narrator realizes finally that his conventional attitude towards literature is destructive. Precise analysis and clean, logical discourse have their place in business transactions; in literature they are counterproductive, negating the power of language to suggest and create new meanings. By refusing to distinguish between fact and fiction, reality and imagination, truth and falsehood, the narrator now suggests that literary truth goes beyond rational distinctions. Much the same point has been made recently by Alain Robbe-Grillet, who associates contemporary attitudes towards literary realism with twentieth-century scientific theory: 'La vie d'aujourd'hui, la science d'aujourd'hui, réalisent le dépassement de beaucoup d'antinomies catégoriques établies par le rationalisme des siècles passés.'1 Segalen's narrator finds a similar attitude towards reality in Chinese thought:

Tout ce que j'ai dit, il l'a fait, à la chinoise, puisqu'il vient, à la chinoise, de m'en donner, par sa mort, la meilleure preuve — qu'il préférerait perdre la vie et sauver la face... et ne pas se trahir ni me trahir; et ne pas dénîtrer... Tout ceci est donc vrai, à la chinoise?2

Segalen is not referring simply to a desire to 'save face', valued in Asian society. Beneath this surface meaning is an analogy with the Taoist concept of a creative void within which all distinctions and antinomies are reconciled. René Leys had, the narrator suggests, assimilated this Chinese metaphysical attitude. 'He represents the ability to enter into the very spirit of a civilization, and to create dramatic literary scenes out of his exotic experience. His friendship with the narrator, fully accepted only after the death of the physical being, represents the synthesis of literary qualities which Segalen seeks in exotic literature. His personal knowledge of language and culture, his empathy with the Chinese and his ability to convey the full flavour of an exotic scene combine with the narrator's greater erudition, imaginative vision and skill as a craftsman to create the final text. While the 'ordinary' René Leys, symbol of conventional literary attitudes, is dead, René Leys the magus lives on as the 'alter ego' of the novelist, his literary creation which offers to the narrator, novelist and reader glimpses of another world: an exotic 'Mysteries Garden'.

1 'Du réalisme à la réalité', Pour un nouveau roman, op. cit., p. 143.
2 René Leys, p. 238.
3. EROTIC PLAY AS A DRIVING FORCE IN THE NARRATIVE

... Mais la lampe baisse; les couleurs trop vives reculent; la coiffure largement écartée se perd dans les ombres... Il ne reste que des yeux presque débridés; un nez... existant, presque modelé, et surtout ces épaules minces sous la soie souple et mince de la robe...¹

As the narrator becomes embroiled in the intrigues of palace life, a new element enters the story, introduced by the wife of his tutor, Mrs Wang. She brings the freshness of the unexpected, for the Mrs Wang 'Segalen' had expected to dine at his house was an elderly Manchu princess,

'suivante du Huitième rang' de la septième Concubine durant la période Hien-Fong... (Second Empire! Voilà qui ne rajeunit pas!).²

In contrast with this aging wife of rigidly defined rank and era, Mr Wang presents to his pupil not a second but a third wife. There is an element of caricature in this marriage between an older man and his glamorous young wife. This Manchu lady captures the narrator's imagination, arousing erotic fantasies which become a driving force in the narrative. 'Spectacle inoublie', she represents the exotic in its most exaggerated form. In his precise description of her extravagant toilette the narrator turns playfully to traditional Chinese concepts of beauty, which contrast with conventional European standards:

... Enfin, le cou possède évidemment ce 'poli gras du suif épuré et figé...' (Livre des vers, ode dix millième...)³

By this satirical reference the narrator mocks conventional poetic imagery. Part of the theatrical play of the narrative, Mrs Wang reveals beneath her mask tantalizing glimpses of humanity which tease the narrator. She stimulates desire, which Segalen describes elsewhere as 'plus joyeux, plus fort... que tout autre penser humain'.⁴ This passion, the creative fire inspiring poets and heroes, is fuelled by distance and by dreams of attaining

¹ René Leys, p. 62. ² ibid., p. 20. ³ ibid., p. 61.
⁴ 'Le Double' Rimbaud', op. cit., p. 487.
that which remains inaccessible. Mrs Wang represents these qualities to an exaggerated degree. In the dim lamplight precise details merge into the shadows, blurring details to the suggestive outlines of the silk robe and of the eyes, which seem "débridées" — a pun referring both to shape and to a licentious quality imagined by the narrator. Her very modesty is for him provocative:

— Vraiment, l'on conçoit ici toute la féminité de la longue et impudique robe, à voir la femelle chinoise se pantaloner de deux fourreaux chastement ficelés à la cheville, serrés à la taille, et inexpugnable à tous les désirs qu'elle a, par avance, éteints.  

The dress is 'impudique' only in the mind of the narrator. The very decorum and inaccessibility of this mysterious being inflames him with curiosity and a desire to conquer her. The narrator is thus impelled towards another source of fantasy. The theme of Mrs Wang, representing the enchantment of superficial exoticism, recurs ironically, giving new impulse to the intrigue.

The dinner scene is repeated later in the narrative, this time with the Wangs as hosts. The occasion provides a means of satirizing the conventional literary 'ménage à trois'. From the Chinese point of view, the idea of Mrs Wang at table with the two men is already improper. The rest of the Wang family, retire,

... bien avant le repas qu'il eût été inconvenant d'absorber en famille, femmes et mâles mêlés.
"C'est donc à moi, l'étranger, qu'ils ont pieusement laissé le soin de commettre l'inconvenance.
Certes, j'espère bien, en son temps, ne pas y manquer.
Restent donc, en présence, sur trois côtés de la table parfaitement carrée et laquée, — elle, moi, le mari."

The choice of a square table accentuates the unbalanced nature of the group. The burlesque scene, which has the autocritical tone of the opening passages of 'Dans un Héros Sonore', ridicules not only the characters but the situation. Mr Wang is seen in the role of a procurer; ready perhaps even to 'sell' his wife to 'ingratiate himself with the Europeans. Later his motivation is revealed by his desire to take refuge with 'Segalen' during the 'revolution'. The narrator also is seen as insensitive to his position as a guest and avid for adventure:

1 René Leys, p. 62.  
2 ibid., pp. 127-128.
Après le repas, la nuit commence. La nuit, faite dans la meilleure société de promesses, d'aventure, d'essais, et de refus... Même — le vin de roses ou de maïs aidant aux illusions brèves, — j'en arrive à me demander si la — suite serait possible... (la nuit et le mari aidant) si, entre l'étranger, accueilli ou toléré que j'ai conscience d'être, et cette jeune femme manchoue, si... quelque chose ne pourrait exister, au prix de gestes ou de mots, ou d'argent même; autre chose que ce qui se passe et va passer: un obscurn état de désir ou d'ironie...

The narrator's erotic hopes are in themselves creative, driving him to imagine possible developments and the manner in which a Manchu lady might react to his advances. He admits the hypothetical nature of his conjectures, calling attention to their literary nature. The occasion leads to a reflection on the theme of love:

... Je la dis, mais il m'amuse à mon tour de savoir si elle considère l'amour physique et tout ce qui s'ensuit comme un jeu d'enfant aussi (et c'est une hypothèse), ou bien comme une honte, une nécessité, un service, une fonction, une aventure, une mode, un moment, une habitude, une manière bien apprise, une cérémonie, un sacrifice, un rite enfin, réglementé par des pages précises de la Bible physiologique inculquée dès le sein maternel à toutes les femelles fécondables sur la terre et dans les enfers! Ah! si j'étais romancier, que la chose serait vite réglée! Vite! un 3,50 en 300 pages!

The narrator has moved towards a more precise reflection on Mrs Wang as a potential character in a novel. He considers different ways in which he might portray her reaction to love, the conventional theme of the popular novel. Having decided upon his literary style, which might be realistic, romantic, heroic, epic, 'exotic' or sociological, the rest would be easy... writing a 'novel' is, he suggests ironically, simply a matter of following the conventions of the genre. However, by refusing to define her attitude, he indicates his rebellion against these conventions, suggesting the impossibility of entering into the mind of another human being. Mrs Wang, the most inscrutable and distant of the characters in René Leys, represents the essential mystery of the other... On an allegorical level she is a puppet of the author, fulfilling certain needs within the text. Without analysing her feelings, the narrator indicates various possibilities, leaving the matter open to the imagination.

1 René Leys, p. 129. 2 *ibid., loc. cit.*
The theme of Mrs. Wang indicates the importance of fantasy. The reality of the situation is banal: the narrator receives a few pieces of meat from the lady's chopsticks, and stammers a few words which are translated by the husband. Since language is an obstacle he gives free rein to the imagination. His interest in Mrs. Wang's physical appearance is a source of surface 'exoticism' which is unique in Segalen's fiction. No other character is depicted with such attention to detail. This scrutiny casts the narrator in the role of 'voyeur', trying to see through the flimsy material of her dress:

... Sous la blouse, des seins discrets, précis dans leur angle. Enfin des jambes indiscutablement longues. Je m'attarde, afin de mieux mesurer...

The suggestive qualities of Mrs. Wang's dress symbolize the evocative power of language, provoking fantasies. The eroticism that she awakens stimulates further developments in the intrigue. The day after she first visits 'Segalen', René Leya suggests an evening with the 'Chi Nü', or 'Joy Girls' of the 'Gay Quarter' outside the Ch'ien Men. The Chinese frequented the houses of these singing-girls for 'company': tea, music, games and light entertainment. However on hearing of the quarter, the narrator immediately jumps to false conclusions: 'O!... je vois ça d'ici.' Therefore he looks forward to an evening of erotic adventure:

C'est soir même. Entendu. La comparaison sera fraîche entre ma dame mandchoue, d'hier, et nos prostituées chinoises d'aujourd'hui.

This misunderstanding leads to a satirical scene playing upon his expectations: 'L'on va donc s'amuser. Enormément.' He is to dine with young Manchu noblemen 'of excellent families', among them 'l'oncle du neveu du Prince Lang', whom the narrator mistakes obsequiously for the prince himself. Moreover among them he identifies the leader of the palace guard, who seems to him typical of the ferocious Tartars:

Oh! je revois derrière lui toute la Mandchourie dévalant et caracolant du nord au sud, irascible et pourtant loyale au nouvel Empire établi! Bons sabreurs... avant tout... intelligents... ensuite... et terribles quand ils ont...

1 René Leya, p. 128.
3 René Leya, p. 44. 4 ibid., p. 66. 5 ibid., p. 68.
Eh bien, qu'il s'enivre! Et s'il casse terriblement quelques verres après boire, eh bien, je les paierai! Enfin, l'on va s'amuser.1

The stage is set for a voluptuous evening of entertainment. The amusement for the reader comes from the contrast between his anticipation and the anticlimax which results from his misconceptions. The narrator is cast in the role of a snobbish, licentious 'barbarian' with little sensitivity to his surroundings.

The names given the singing girls are characteristically flowery, romantic and even comical: 'Preté indiscutable' and 'Patience expérimentée'. Moreover each girl the narrator approaches seems to be betrothed to another. He is dismayed to find that the girl he finally chooses, ironically called 'Jade aux Cinq Couleurs', is the 'Belle Policière' who, according to René Leys, discovered the bomb planted to kill the agent:

Je voudrais bien retirer mon choix: l'amour policier me trouble par avance: je vais être fouillé, déshabillé, retourné jusqu'au fond de l'âme; je vais être dénoncé, inculpé, impliqué dans des forfaits gratuits, alors que je médite tout au plus un attentat — payant — à l'impudeur! 2

The threads of the detective story and the erotic tale intertwine with comic effect. The 'lovely policewoman' seems, like Mrs Wang, almost totally inaccessible; his companions play a childish game of 'doigts montre' (a game which suggests René Leys's power to read others' minds); while the prince's uncle negotiates a price with his projected concubine. In contrast with their trifling preoccupations, the Européans in the next room, who seem paradoxically to be respectable married ladies, appear to be having an uproarious party. Suddenly the narrator finds Peking less exciting than Paris, where conventions and inhibitions can be thrown aside in the 'pagan' nightclubs of Montmartre.

Left with nothing but the bill to pay, the narrator still hopes for the expected night of pleasure:

... Nos Dames éclues nous invitent chez elles, à leur tour. C'est là sans doute qu'arrivera ce qui, dans le Paradis des Romains à Gros Tirage, arrive toujours à l'heure dite.4

1 René Leys, p. 69. 2 Arlington & Lewisohn, op. cit., p. 272. 3 René Leys, p. 71. 4 ibid., p. 76.
Instead of letting his reader down a second time, he admits at once that his hopes were deceived: 'Il n'est rien arrivé du tout. J'aime mieux ne pas me faire attendre, et me l'avouer sans plus...'. maintaining the convention of a narrative written fresh from experience, he suggests the passage of time between the two episodes by a space of a few lines, underlining the artificiality of the literary convention.

The 'adventure' has a cumulative effect, one scene closely following another. The narrator's hopes are aroused, disappointed, revived again by the change of venue, and once again betrayed. His expectgions represent those of a reader eager for excitation. This analogy is particularly clear with reference to the Palace guardsman, who leaps to his feet at the sound of a tumult outside and has to be restrained by René Leys:

... il se serait fait reconnaître comme policier! Il est déjà brûlé! Et terrible quand il a...

- Bu.

Je sais. Il vient de boire encore, et, le regardant un peu plus, je devine des explosions dans ce petit homme bâti de muscles et de rondeurs solides...  

'Segalen', continually building stories around the events taking place before him, suggests hypotheses to René Leys, who either admits their possibility or provides his own romantic version. In this case he is not equal to the occasion. His realistic description of the guardsman's confrontation with drunken European soldiers after the Siege of the Legations is an anticlimax after 'Segalen's flights of fancy:

- Ils avaient des revolvers. Il a joué. Ensuite ils ont exigé qu'il dansât...
- Et il a dansé?... Et il les a poliment reconduits à leur voiture? J'attendais mieux.  

Doubly disillusioned — by both story and personal experience — the narrator is ready to go home. At this point his interest is awakened for a third time. The writer's artistry lies in the triple movement of rising and falling expectations. This time the narrator's illusions are not dispelled. René Leys's claim to hold power over princes and concubines is spoken as always:

d'un ton naturel et simplement comme l'expression de ce qui est.
- Je n'ai vraiment aucune objection à faire.

1 René Leys, p. 76.
2 ibid., p. 77.
3 ibid., p. 78.
4 ibid., p. 81.
The simple statement sets 'Segalen's' imagination working. 'Who is this René Leys? What strange power does he hold? Is it the power of money? Occult charms? His physical appeal?' Words lead to new ideas; René Leys the romantic hero takes shape:

Ces amours d'étrangères pour le bel étranger, classiques. évidemment et connues (celui de la Reine Noire pour Salomon, de l'Africaine pour Vasco de Gama, de toutes les autres pour Loti), m'ont toujours laissé quelques doutes: ils ne vont jamais jusqu'au bout: ils n'obtiennent jamais d'enfants (du moins dans la Bible, l'Opéra, les oeuvres complètes de Loti).¹

Literature is built on the literary conventions of the past. Although the author would like to create something entirely new, his text reveals an awareness of this limitation of the human mind. However by attacking Romantic concepts of the exotic hero he suggests other possibilities. The narrator reflects on literary and historical precedents for René Leys. Biblical or Romantic, they neglect the rich potential sources of the 'real'. Moreover they present only one side of their subject — the sentimental, the subjective, or the moralistic. Segalen is more concerned with the manner in which the writer creates his idea of the hero, and the power of this idea over reality. The development of the intrigue indicates the way in which fiction influences René Leys's life. He begins to fulfill the role suggested to him by the narrator, providing an answer to his queries:

— René, mon ami René, qu'est-ce que vous en pensez? Un Européen nubile et normal peut-il aimer une Chinoise? Exactement, une Mandchoue. Et surtoute, peut-on en être 'aimé'?²

The question has less effect on René Leys than the form of address, which deeply moves him. Out of a desire to fulfill his role as a friend, perhaps, he mentions that the Regent has offered him a concubine, whom he has refused. The narrator imagines reasons for this refusal, which he finds odd:

'Peut-être doit-il jouer pour elle le rôle imp recruiters que. 'Indiscutable Pureté' assume là-bas dans sa retraite de Ts'ien-men-wai; vis-à-vis du Deuxième Fils du Prince... Peut-être, par ordre supérieur, doit-il demeurer inébranlablement fidèle? Fidèle; mais à qui? Par ordre... mais... par ordre... de qui?³

Within the framework of the narrator's quest the various threads of intrigue lead inevitably towards the Palace, and within the Palace to the centre of power. This line is first followed in the story of the prince's son:

¹ René Leys, p. 82. ² ibid., p. 140. ³ ibid., p. 139.
The simple logic of the narrative movement makes it seem to the narrator inevitable and credible. The thread of eroticism follows a similar movement towards the centre, progressing from concubine to empress: ‘... Et pourtant, combien tout ce qui suit devient logique et nécessaire! inévitable!’

Ironically Segalen plays with words and paradox, indicating various levels of meaning: ‘Il vient d’assiéger et de vaincre le cœur impérialement clos, la Personne triple et quadruplement enceinte!...’ The narrator’s vulgar puns on the realistic nature of René Leys’s romance strike a discordant note in this imperial context. His words make satirical reference to the drama of Pierre Loti and Judith Gautier’s La Fille du Ciel, which Segalen saw as a travesty of the Chinese concept of the emperor:

The ‘Chinese’ reader will perceive the anomaly of bestowing the term ‘phoenix of the throne’ on a female. Yet, besides symbolizing for Segalen the role of the Son of Heaven as ‘eternal emperor’, the phoenix is for the Chinese the emblem of the empress. Paradoxically the narrator is led to follow Loti’s example in presenting a heroine in place of his imperial hero, through the logic of the symbol, as well as through that of the ‘intrigue’. His novel is taking a turn reminiscent of the sentimental tradition found in both Chinese and European literature.

The erotic thread of the narrative has evolved from the first encounter with the ‘inexpugnable’, inaccessible Mrs Wang to the very ‘heart’ of the Palace. The narrator’s dreams lead rationally to the prosaic ‘bed’ of the conclusion. René Leys seems to have outclassed earlier European adventurers in China: ‘Comment ai-je pu comparer René Leys à Robert Hart et même à

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1 René Leys, pp. 121-122.  
2 ibid., p. 151.  
3 ibid., loc. cit.  
4 v. above, p. 225.  
5 René Leys, p. 150.
Following in the footsteps of Solomon and Vasco da Gama, yet with the ability of a Marco Polo or a Robert Hart to transact business with the Chinese, he provides personal insights into Chinese imperial life. He promises to be a unique figure in exotic literature, a synthesis of romantic and realistic styles. Illusions of romance are continually undermined by the author's ironical tone, questioning and reflecting on meanings. Moments of fantasy alternate with suggestions of a more practical nature:

Et je comprends tout: le débat n'est ni tragique, ni biblique, ni comique, encore moins appasionné sur le mode Hugolâtre! mais report tout entier du programme qu'il profe sa à l'école des Nobles: Économie politique. 2

Both politics and economics enter into the question, bringing the narrator's flights of fancy back to earth suddenly. The Empress-Dowager is not so much a source of erotic desire, it seems, as of personal advancement and material gain. The hero's actions are not dictated by notions culled from Romantic novels, but by the Naturalistic determinants of heredity and environment.

The reference to political economy suggests the dichotomy established by Mallarmé between two literary styles: Tout se résume dans l'esthétique et l'économie politique. 3 The language of political economy is a clear, business-like instrument, without value in itself. An 'erotic' language, on the other hand, is autonomous, creating pleasure for the reader through suggestion: Às Roland Barthes writes in Le Plaisir du Texte, eroticism is aroused not so much by the description of an erotic scene as by expectation: 'Il se trouve que le propre de la jouissance, c'est de ne pouvoir être dite.' 4 The sensation of 'enjoyment' is stimulated by the reader's desire to know more. For Barthes, 'la jouissance du texte' is created through innovation, 'Car seul le nouveau ébranle la conscience.' 5 Exoticism has a similar function in Segalen's work, disturbing the reader and challenging cultural assumptions by means of a strange and provocative language.

René Leys whets the narrator's appetite by giving him tantalizing glimpses of life in the Palace. His descriptions evoke the sensuous qualities of his subject:

1 René Leys, p. 150. 2 ibid., pp. 157-158.
3 Quoted by P. Sollers, L'écriture et l'expérience des limites, op. cit., p. 74.
4 op. cit., p. 92. 5 ibid., p. 65.
Mais René-Triomphant n’en est plus à me marchander des détails intérieurs. En peu de mots, je deviens spectateur de chacun des actes prévus. Je sais comment l’on s'étend sur le lit tiède, fait de briques crues, adouci de coussins de soie, et qu'en hiver on chauffe par la bouche extérieure comme un four, en y brûlant des herbes odorantes. Grâce à lui, je pénètre véritablement au milieu le plus intime du Palais.1

René Leys is the actor, and the narrator-reader a spectator, a ‘voyeur’, peeping into these intimate scenes of imperial love-affairs. The sensory details of the odour, the warmth, the touch of silk, contrasting with the rough brick, convey an erotic quality to the narrative. Through such details, the narrator declares elsewhere, ‘J’ai vécu vraiment, un instant de la vie la plus intime du Palais’.2 Language is a means of ‘seeing’ a particular scene through the recreation of specific qualities; ‘Cela est vu...’.3 Je vois la suite...

Occasionally, René Leys slips into the ‘fault’ of presenting his own descriptions as a flight of the imagination where he himself is a ‘voyeur’, spectator rather than actor: ‘Je me revois encore, habillé en mandarin de quatrième classe, assis près de sa chaise...’4 and again, ‘J’ai eu trop peur quand je suis venu pour la première fois... dans le Palais’.5 Like his visions of flames or his strange mirror-vision, these scenes are very vivid in his mind. Their driving force seems to be not so much passion for the Empress-Dowager as desire to contribute to Segalen’s fiction.

There is an analogy between the way the narrator looks in on the love-scenes of the Emperor or the Empress-Dowager, and the general lack of privacy in the Palace:

— Je vous envie... Je vous félicite aussi de pouvoir ainsi demeurer seul avec elle... 
— Seuls? Mais pas du tout! 
Et il s’étonne de ma question, de mon envie. Seuls? Et les Eunuques, imposables à écarter?... Et les servantes? Les ‘petites servantes empressées’ dont parlait déjà, voici trois mille années, le Livre des Odes...6

Once again René Leys has slipped from an account of ‘lived experience’ to references to Chinese literature and tradition, presenting the inextricable blend of these elements in any written narrative. Thus his statements have

1 René Leys, p. 166.  2 ibid., p. 124.
3 ibid., pp. 48-49.  4 ibid., p. 78.
5 ibid., p. 152.  6 ibid., p. 168.  7 ibid., pp. 167-168.
an equivocal quality: 'Je l'ai vu... Il jouait avec ses femmes à des jeux innocents..." The meaning of the verb 'voir' is another source of ambiguity. It is used by René Leys as a substitute for more active verbs:

Kuang-Siu... n'avait encore jamais vu de femmes...
— Jamais 'vu'?
René Leys tueit comme un rhétoricien impubère. 'Voir' tient donc dans son récit la place que l'autre verbe, non moins actif, 'connaître', occupe dans la Bible des Hébreux.2

Thus the eroticism of René Leys's stories is linked with the literary evocation of a scene, rather than with physical action. René Leys and the Kuang-hsi Emperor have slipped from their active roles to become 'spectateurs'. Their actions are described as cerebral, their pleasures as of the mind.

René Leys as magus seems to live in a magic world of fantasy. Through his naturalistic preference for solid facts, the narrator is unable to enter into this world. In his eagerness to do so, he inebriates himself with Chinese rose wine at the gaming-houses of Ch'ien Hén-wai, as at dinner with the singing-girls or Mrs Wang. He cheapens poetic inspiration by associating it with alcoholic intoxication: "le vin de roses ou de mais aidant aux illusions bêvues'.3 Similarly the Manchu guardsman's lack of spirit is attributed to the fact that 'il n'avait pas bu ce jour-là'.4 However René Leys, has no need of artificial stimulants.5 His illustrations of the narrator's ideas have a natural spontaneity, directing the narrative in unforeseen directions.

The symbol of the horse is closely linked with René Leys in the instinctive development of the intrigue; "Il ne faut pas lui laisser monter ce grand cheval: Amour d'impatrice. — Le sport est un peu trop près de l'écurie."5 Horse and rider represent the linear movement of the intrigue, leading swiftly and spontaneously towards a conclusion. Conflicting literary styles are suggested by the realistic reference to the stable, countering the 'romantic theme'.

The horse, a rich source of symbolism, plays an important role in the structure. It represents the unconscious psyche, the impetuous force

1 René Leys, p. 48. 2 ibid., p. 146.
3 ibid., p. 129. Segalen rejected the protracted use of artificial stimulants (v. above, p. 23).
4 René Leys, p. 78. 5 ibid., p. 157.
of instinct and desire. Like the horse in *Jacques le Fataliste* it sometimes takes over control of the narrative from its rider, leading the story into unexpected paths. René Leys has difficulty controlling his beast. Its rebellious bucking outside the walls of the Forbidden City introduces the role of *magus.* Together with its rider, the horse is terrified of underground tunnels, water and wells, which undermine the solid ground of 'reality,' and suggest the deep, labyrinthine chaos of the void. Later the narrator reminds us of this scene:

Et son étonnante habileté à faire cabrer son cheval, — cette mystique bête issue tout droit d'une apocalypse mongole avec pedigree improvisé aux courses à l'européenne de Tientsin-Bank & Co — aux prises avec la divination que les poètes et les théosophes ont prétée faute de mieux à cet animal obtus! — ce cheval, ce cabrer avec cet à-propos sur ce terrain qui sonnait vraiment creux!

The narrator self-consciously reflects on the implications of the symbol, weaving historical, literary and mystical associations, and a satirical reference to the Tientsin races, around 'the initial experience based on personal observation. Having lightly sketched the possibilities of his subject, "Segalen" returns to its role in introducing 'l'extraordinaire promenade révélatrice," where he discovers his hero in René Leys. Far from being 'obtuse,' his horse has, strange powers of divination — divination, not of a purely theosophical nature, but broader in its implications, as a motor-force in the intrigue.

The two facets of René Leys are symbolized by two types of steed. In the daytime he goes to class in a Chinese cart, 'dort 'la mule a vraiment bonne allure..." At dawn or at dusk, moments of subtle suggestive light, may suggest to the narrator they take out the horses. These excursions represent 'new developments in the narrative? 'A mon tour de partir au galop. J'ai besoin de détente, de joie vive!' The analogy with writing is indicated by a continual movement between the symbol and its function in the narrative:

... et pourtant il est beau dans l'action, le mouvement libre dans l'air, à cheval, ou chevauchant une histoire au galop, avec moins de faits et de gestes qu'une belle domination continue de l'acte et de ce qu'il dit.

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2 *René Leys,* p. 184.
3 Ibid., loc. cit.
4 Ibid., p. 133.
5 Ibid., p. 156.
6 Ibid., p. 117.
René Leys conveys animation to 'Segalen' s ideas, breaking away from a static concern with facts and figures to revitalize language by imbuing it with a sense of mystery and drama. Dominating the act as a rider dominates his horse, he harnesses this spontaneous creative energy to the narrative; drawing the intrigue towards a-climax. Through his \"étonnante habileté à faire cabrer son cheval\" he unleashes the intoxicating forces of eroticism and desire in his narrator-reader, reviving a novel which seemed to have been brought to a standstill.

However at the first meeting of the two horsemen, René Leys s steed shows its awareness of the threat posed to its rider by 'Segalen' on his more disciplined mount:

\[Au même instant, le cheval a volté, s\'est jeté sur le mien, puû sur moi, les lèvres démasquant un furieux râtelier.\]

The fury expressed by its bared teeth suggests that it associates 'Segalen' with the threat of intellectual control. The narrator represents the rational world where spontaneous movement is analysed, criticized and mastered. In literary terms, he is responsible for the autocritical reflection and craftsmanship of the novel. Thence when he is intoxicated with wine, at Chien Ren-wei, he delights in turning the ordinary course of events back to front, riding backwards downstairs and thus terrifying his horse:

\[Et il est mal conduit dans un escalier pris à rebours, en descendant par le train d'arrière. Il s'est à peu près assis par terre. Il n'était pas assez ivre. Comme je l'étais, moi, par principe!\]

The narrator's horse, which in contrast to René Leys's steed is usually well-disciplined, cannot cope with this unnatural behaviour, which symbolizes the abstract movement of literary exploration. Like René Leys and his steed, it lives in the world of instinct, whereas the narrator takes pleasure in intellectual and artistic play with his subject. The full eroticism of the text is developed when 'Segalen' learns to harness the spontaneous flow of inspiration represented by René Leys and his Horse, and to capture their meeting movement in a work of art.

\[1\] René Leys, p. 184.  \[2\] ibid., p. 30.  \[3\] ibid., p. 179.
THE GAME OF CHESS

... La capitale du plus grand Empire sous le ciel a donc été voulue pour elle-même; dessinée comme un échiquier tout au nord de la plaine jaune; entourée d'enceintes géométriques; tracée d'avenues, quadrillée de ruelles à angles droits et puis levée d'un seul jet monumental...

Mais le carré principal, la ville tartare-mandchoue fait toujours un bon abri aux conquérants, — et à ce rêve:

Au milieu, dans le profond du milieu du Palais, un visage: un enfant — homme, et Empereur, maître du sol et Fils du Ciel...  

In the opening pages of the novel the space to be explored is defined as an autonomous area, with its own rules and conventions. This area, the geometrical plan of the city of Peking, is a departure-point for the novelist's quest for the Emperor which is the source of the narrative. The text itself takes the complex form of a game of chess played between the forces of imperial China and the encroaching armies of republicanism. However this meaning is allegorical, in the very broad sense given the word by Segalen.  
The roles of the various players are not rigidly defined, but subtly suggested, some pieces remaining mysteriously in the background:

The symbol of the chess-game is prompted by the plan of the city. Marco Polo had observed in the thirteenth century that

the whole interior of the city is laid out in squares like a chess-board with such masterly precision that no description can do justice to it.  

The symbol is apt not only to convey the physical layout of the city, and the historical conflict which is the background of the novel, but also to represent the underlying meaning of that conflict: the debate on language presented by the narrative.

1 René Leys, p. 14.
2 v. above, p. 66.
The map of Peking which prefaces René Leyde
Chess is traditionally an aristocratic game, demanding intellectual skill and insight. It has been used in the twentieth century as a symbol for the dynamic interplay of words and meanings. As Ferdinand de Saussure has pointed out,

"Mais de toutes les comparaisons qu'on pourrait imaginer, la plus démonstrative est celle qu'on établirait entre le jeu de la langue et une partie d'échecs. De part et d'autre, on est en présence d'un système de valeurs et on assiste à leurs modifications. Une partie d'échecs est comme une réalisation artificielle de ce que la langue nous présente sous une forme naturelle."

The structure of the game of chess, like that of language, is governed by laws and conventions; but each move has an effect on the other pieces, as the placing of a word affects the meaning of the whole. For Raymond Roussel, as for Ferdinand de Saussure, the game illustrated the diachronic element in language. The movement of the chessmen represents historical changes in meaning. Philippe Solliers develops this linguistic symbolism in his novel "Framas", linking the idea of the chessboard with the I-Ching, the ancient Chinese manual of divination. The novel takes the form of an "échiquier mobile", consisting of sixty-four squares or hexagrams.

Like Segalen, Vladimir Nabokov sees the game of chess in more general terms as a structural device which offers a "keen pleasure derived... from adjusting in a certain mysterious pattern the various phases of the narrator's quest". As René Leys, the form of the game is for Nabokov a means of suggesting a subtle, evasive law shaping the movements of the characters, which teases the reader and challenges his participation in the creative game of the novel.

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1 Ferdinand de Saussure, op. cit., p. 125.
2 In Briques et Tuiles Segalen reflects on the value given a word or, in this case, a character, by its position in a text: "Quand, enchaînés par la logique du discours, ils pendent les uns aux autres, se superposent et empruntent leur valeur à ceci qu'ils sont là et non pas ici... alors ils forment une trame soudain figée pour l'artiste lui-même..." (op. cit., pp. 51-52).
4 Quoted by Stephen Heath, op. cit., pp. 228-229.
In adopting this form for his novel, Segalen may have been influenced by Lewis Carroll’s *Through the Looking-Glass*, which he mentions in his ‘Notes on Exoticism’ as an example given by Gilbert de Voisins of the exoticism of the ‘fantastic’. 1 Carroll sets out the roles and moves of his characters before beginning the play. In René Leys the game is more obscure and mystifying, illustrating Segalen’s idea of the ‘exotic’ through ‘un jeu libre des mots et des sens’. 2 The opposing sides are clearly defined, but it is left to the reader to discover the chessmen and their subtle roles in the narrative.

Peking offers the springboard of reality which is Segalen’s preferred means of illustrating the illusion of the text. The sixty-four symmetrical squares of the chessboard represent the ‘four hundred million ’cases d’échiquiers’ 3 within the greater ‘square’ of the Middle Kingdom, which for the Chinese meant civilization. Each house was built with geometrical precision according to strict geomantic regulations:

- Comme toutes les maisons, les palais ou les huttes de Pékin, ma maison, ma hutte ou mon palais est très astronomiquement orienté.

The metaphysical system underlying the architecture of the city, and shaping the lives of its inhabitants, symbolizes the structures of language inherited from the past, which govern our perception of reality. 5

The ‘game’ played out on the chessboard of Peking is the 1911 revolution leading up to the imperial abdication in 1912. The forces supporting the Emperor prize tradition and culture; they represent nobility, diversity and mystery. The republican forces, supported by businessmen and foreign powers in China, represent materialism and a dull uniformity through the levelling process of democracy and industrialization. Their ‘king’ is absent: he is the abstract god-king of ‘sammon’. Ultimately the two sides represent conflicting attitudes towards language similar to those defined by Mallarmé:

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1 *Essai sur l’Exotisme*, op. cit., p. 46.
2 *ibid.*, p. 65.
3 René Leys, p. 107. In the seventeenth century the term ‘house’ was used for the squares of the chessboard (Stephen Heath, *op. cit.*, p. 228).
4 *René Leys*, p. 47.
5 Saussure writes on this subject: ‘En fait, aucune société ne connaît et n’a jamais connu la langue autrement que comme un produit hérité des générations précédentes et à prendre tel quel’ (quoted by Stephen Heath, *op. cit.*, p. 229).
a richly symbolic, sensuous language, inviting reflection and wonder; or the clear, prosaic language of business transaction.

When he visits the Palace by day, the narrator comments on the sensation of emptiness created by the absence of the Emperor. This absence can be either creative or destructive:

un Palais... qui serait vide, vide, à s'en inquiéter, si les murs, laquées de rouge, les colonnes de bois laquées de rouge et surtout le plafond lourd et riche, caissonné, ouvré, niellé, minutieusement compartimenté et menuisé, ne meublait ce vide et cette absence à l'égal d'un trésor royal attendant le souverain...

This sense of anticipation is the key to the power of the Imperial forces. It unleashes the creative energy symbolized by the Emperor, and leads to an interest in physical reality as a source of wonder. The vitality of this interest depends on a renewal of the meaning of language. Without the dramatic qualities of complexity, depth and mystery, language becomes simply an instrument. The empty square on the chessboard left by the absent king of republicanism represents the emptiness of language devoid of fantasy and creativity, and hence of life.

The game of René Leys centres around the figurehead of the Emperor, or 'king', who remains immobile at the heart of the conflict, hidden in his 'square'. The 'queen', or Empress-Dowager, has greater powers of movement. These symbols aptly convey the historical situation in China: the powerless child-emperor; the potential power of the Empress-Dowager, dramatically illustrated by Tz'u-hsi. The Regents or 'bishops' (fous) who stand on either side of the king and queen represent powers near to the throne, as we shall see shortly. Around these central figures Segalen arranges the other chessmen, their counterparts and opponents who gradually take form in the game. The pieces are generally introduced in pairs, with complementary characteristics, and then contrasted with their opponents.

René Leys, the first character to be introduced after the narrator, seems at first to belong to the republican side. The son of a bourgeois grocer, he is a teacher of political economy, who respects popular values. However at the moment when the narrator is about to abandon hope of writing his novel, he is brought forward as 'une chance dernière de pénétrer dans le "Dédans"'.

1 René Leys, p. 103. 2 ibid., p. 17.
Apparently 'rejected' by his Belgian father, he opts for the world of the imagination, represented by the French narrator and by his French mother, who was, perhaps, from the Midil: 'ceci expliquerait ce teint mat, et ces beaux grands yeux'.1 According to the narrator he prefers his mother's nationality: '... sa mère était Française, et il ne veut pas être Belge.'2 With his dark eyes and smooth olive skin he is able to pass for a Chinese.3 Thus racial characteristics become part of the dichotomy of the game. The Germanic races of Northern Europe, represented by Belgium, Holland and England, stand for business interests; the Latins of Southern France are closer to the traditional Chinese in their interest in the irrational and the aesthetic. As we have observed, René Leys's movement in the mysterious world of the imagination is associated with riding on horseback.6 In his moments of inspiration he plays the role of 'knight' (cavalier) in the game of chess.

Immediately after René Leys, his opponent is introduced: another teacher of the Peking dialect, Mr Wang, who is a comical character: 'un petit homme sans âge', remarkable for his extraordinary umbrella 'sans âge aussi, et sans bouch'.7 Without its aggressive point, symbol of virility and drive; the umbrella symbolizes emasculation. Mr Wang represents the impotence of the Chinese at that era. As a 'Bannerman' he belongs to a group of Chinese who at the time of the Manchu invasion went over to the winning side: '... et qui trouvèrent opportun de servir, avant tout autre, les Conquérants.'8 His first wife is a Manchu to whom he owes his position in the Palace police-force. His grubby French visiting-cards indicate his desire to insinuate himself into the society of Europeans, seen as the new 'conquerors'. Therefore he had been suddenly converted to Catholicism, and taken refuge with the French during the Boxer Rebellion. Later in the novel he asks for refuge from the revolutionary forces. In Mr Wang Segalen caricatures those who find it expedient to betray their ancestral traditions.

1 René Leys, p. 44. 2 ibid., p. 93. 3 ibid., p. 233. 4 ibid., p. 102. 5 Mr Leys's shop-sign is written in English. Similarly at the imperial reception only French honour is 'safe' (ibid., pp. 35 & 103). 6 v. Above, p. 332. 7 René Leys; p. 19. 8 ibid., p. 20. For the Chinese Bannermen, v. Reischauer & Fairbank, op. cit., pp. 364-365.
A short, blond, stocky Frenchman from Picardy who appears immediately after the two tutors leave is the counterpart of Mr Wang: a European who has become a naturalized Chinese. He too presents to Segalen "un carton à double face". Like Mr Wang he is a civil servant — bourgeois, law-abiding but calculating. These men are associated with Mr Leys the grocer — the mercenary background of René Leys — in their conventional values and their opportunistic support for the revolution: "Ça fait plaisir de voir un beau pays, et riche alors, s'ouvrir aux lumières du progrès!" Segalen satirizes their numerous marriages for personal advantage, which seem to him a prostitution of the word 'love'.

Having introduced these characters with their subtle, indirect manoeuvres, the author proceeds to compare their values. Close parallels and contrasts are established between the two pairs. Although René Leys shows at times a certain sympathy for the middle class, he is rejected by both his father and Jarignoux as a reprobaté, and Mr Wang claims to know nothing about him. At the beginning of the game he leaves his father's shop to live with Segalen, thus seeming to forsake materialism for the imperial cause. Jarignoux lives in the same street as Segalen, but at the opposite end. He belongs to the north end, Segalen to the south; he frequents the 'honest' commercial world, while the latter prefers the 'dissolute' aristocratic world.

Like Jarignoux, René Leys identifies with the Chinese later in the novel: "Nous? Tiens! vous êtes Chinois, mon cher Leys?" However his identification remains uncertain. It is a role he is playing, rather than a betrayal of his identity, he tells the narrator:

— Ecoute: n'oublie jamais, en Chine, que tu es Européen.
— Il se redresse:
— Je sais bien! ma mère était Francaise. Il faut que je me déguise en chinois!" His continual movement between the worlds of business and the imagination provides the enigma of the text. The narrator, who sees in Jarignoux a representative of the 'other' side of René Leys, frequently uses the term to indicate a contrast between the two characters: "... qu'est-ce que cet autre vient encore faire chez moi? Cet autre, c'est le fonctionnaire chinois, Jarignoux..." L'autre, en revanche, le Jarignoux..." 'Segalen' seems

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1 René Leys, p. 22. 2 ibid., p. 202. 3 ibid., p. 86.
4 ibid., p. 176. 5 ibid., p. 90. 6 ibid., p. 134.
In René Leys a quality of vision which 'peut-être l’empêcher de jamais devenir Chinois à la façon de Jarignoux son ami'. The term 'ami' is ironical. Jarignoux, who at first pretends not to know him, is a friend of his father's. However the expression suggests a link as well as a contrast between the two characters. During the day René Leys rides in a traditional mulecart like Jarignoux, who states proudly, 'J'ai des mules, — pas des chevaux!' However in the uncertain light of dawn or dusk, he rides on horseback. At such moments he identifies with the narrator's quest for the Emperor.

On his first visit to 'Segalen', in contrast with Jarignoux, René Leys shows no interest whatsoever in entering Chinese society. The narrator, more interested in Wang and Jarignoux, dismisses him on pretext. Both men, having expressed their intention to go their various ways, set off in the opposite direction to that stated, and suddenly meet at the walls of the Palace. Some mysterious force regulates this dual move which, like René Leys's strange faculty for mirror-vision, leads him to fulfil the wishes of the narrator. He is, moreover, quite unabashed to be caught out in a lie: 'Il me saule très poliment, sans étonnement et sans honte.' Thus he shows a different attitude from the narrator's towards truth: a recognition of some unseen influence regulating his movements, which symbolize his role as a pawn in the literary game.

Before the narrator meets René Leys, he hesitates for a moment at a symbolic point on the central axis of Peking, at the gate of Cheng-Yang-men:

la 'Porte droit au Midi', que tous les gens de la ville appellent familièrement 'Ts'ien-men' et qui marque, dans un tunnel, l'échange entre les deux mondes: l'un extérieur, 'Ts'ien-men waî', l'empire chinois avec ses plaisirs, ses tributs, ses bombances, et l'autre restreint, cerclé, enmuré, 'Ts'ien men nei', la cité intime et, en son milieu, le Đôdans. Immobile un instant entre la vertu fermée à ma droite et le vice bâtant à ma gauche, j'évite l'une et l'autre, et je passe.'

In this passage the author sees Peking as divided essentially into two worlds: the closed world 'within' the Imperial City, and the 'outside' world of the Chinese City, with its popular pleasures, ironically described as 'open vice'.

There is an underlying parallel, with Segalen's literary method, the movement

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1 René Leys, p. 93.
2 Ibid., p. 23.
3 Ibid., p. 30.
between two worlds to which he frequently refers in his critical notes. The Chinese City, representing the everyday world, contrasts with the more restricted world of aesthetics. The contrast between one city and another betokens the dichotomy between a conventional representation of external realities and a deeper, more obscure art accessible only to the elite reader. The moment when the narrator hesitates between these diverging paths represents the moment of stillness or meditation which is a means of entering a state of poetic awareness. Then, from his position as mediator between two sides, he moves into the game.

Suddenly he is confronted with a tall building:

Cette mosquée domine assez curieusement le mur impérial. Elle observe, avec une obstination impuissante. Elle risque jour et nuit le regard que je voudrais donner, le coup d'œil par-dessus la muraille...2

With twenty million Muslim supporters, 'rallies de force et depuis peu à l'Empire', the mosque represents one of the powers outside the Manchu city, which is 'spying' on the Imperial party. It is closely followed, on the narrator's tour of the walls, by another 'foreign' element, the 'Tour Blanche'. Similarly, 'étrangère au Palais', this Buddhist monument seems to the narrator to have no right to be there among the more 'authentically Chinese' monuments of the city. These two buildings are the castles (tours) of the exterior forces.

The 'Tour Blanche', the White Pagoda Temple, built in 1092,3 is in fact one of the earliest buildings referred to in the text. It is 'young' in the sense that Buddhism was introduced from India in about the first century of our era.4 Therefore it is associated here with the forces which threaten the traditional Chinese culture which Segalen identifies with Taoism. The architectural form of the temple, which is a silver, bell-shaped stupa — 'un peu... art nouveau'5 — gives concrete evidence of its foreign origins, contrasting with the curved ridges and upturned roofs of the Chinese pagodas. Thus the physical reality of the monument provides for the narrator evidence.

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1 v. above, p. 137.
2 René Loye, p. 28.
4 Reischauer & Fairbank, op. cit., pp. 135 ff.
5 René Loye, p. 29.
of its 'inauthenticity'. It too represents the betrayal of the inner self, and the acceptance of foreign dogma.

On the map prefacing the novel, the 'White Tower' is shown together with the 'Pei-t'ang', the North Cathedral. Thus a certain association is established with the other great foreign religion, Christianity, referred to obliquely by Wang's conversion to Catholicism. The cathedral is not mentioned in the text, perhaps because Segalen preferred the representatives in his game to be more deeply rooted in Chinese life. However it is clearly marked on the map, together with the White Pagoda Temple, in opposition to the Imperial castles situated together, on the central axis of the city: the Chung-lou, or Bell Tower, and the Ku-lou, or Drum Tower. Therefore it is possible that Segalen originally intended to introduce the cathedral as the second 'castle', and that he would have changed this detail on the map before publication.

The Bell Tower is presented as the most ancient monument of the city: 'douairière de tous les monuments'. In reality it was built in 1285, later than the White Pagoda Temple, and having been destroyed by fire was rebuilt in 1745. Its rôle is therefore symbolic rather than historical: it represents the 'heart' of China. We have noted that Segalen assimilated the functions of the Drum Tower with those of the Bell Tower. Like the cathedral, the former plays only a shadowy rôle in the game as a supportive partner.

The moment when 'Segalen' meets René Leys on horseback near the Palace walls marks the opening of play. René Leys suddenly reveals inside knowledge of the Forbidden City: 'Je le regarde. Il n'a pas changé. Et pourtant il sait qu'il y a dans le Palais un Kien-tsi-tien...'. Another means of access to the Palace seems to open to the narrator, who confides to René Leys his ideas for a novel about the Emperor. His companion, who listens with attention, claims to have seen Kuang-hsi: '... Thereafter the ride of the two horsemen through the intricate back streets of Peking, close to the walls of the Forbidden City, follows the irregular pattern of the knight's movements in the game of chess.'
L'itinéraire que je croyais constant à angles droits dans la grande ville échiquéère, prend le dessin d'une "marche du cavalier".  

The following day Jarignoux enters the game. He too is caught out in a lie. At first he pretends not to know René Leys; then he claims to know him as a rascal who is letting down his father's side. In spite of the narrator's objections he reappears from time to time to give a different perspective on René Leys.

The moves are plotted within the square of the narrator's courtyard, where the chessmen are animated by the dialectical play between the narrator and René Leys. In their first scene together there, René Leys describes dangers which threaten the 'bishop' (fou): the Regent, next in line to the emperor. The narrator instantly thinks of Yuan Shih-k'ai, 'le plus fin, le plus fort' 2. In a later scene he returns to the subject, presenting Yuan and Sun Yat-sen as a real threat to the Empire. 3 The opposition between the Regent and Yuan becomes clearer towards the end of the novel:

... Le Régent le demande, le Régent qui monte, Yuan Che-k'ai, a respectueusement fait connaître au Régent d'aujourd'hui... qu'il faut abdiquer... 4

In an oblique reference to their role in the game the narrator, commenting on the threat posed by Yuan, declares to René Leys:  "Vous êtes... les deux leaders, equally 'fous', stand against the Regent and his counterpart. This shadowy figure is presented to the narrator-reader immediately after the Regent, when they emerge from the Palace. In contrast with the latter, who rides in a 'déplorable voiture de gala européenne', like Yuan Shih-k'ai on his arrival in Peking, 6 he travels in traditional Chinese style.

Une chaise à huit porteurs, jet, 'dedans', la silhouette large du Grand Conseiller Na-T'ong, premier Protecteur. Il est vrai, beau à voir, assis et puissant, mais difficile à suivre exactement à son allure de roi. 7

Like Sun Yat-sen, he makes only one appearance as a complement to his partner.

1 René Leys, p. 31. 2 ibid., p. 48. 3 ibid., p. 83. 4 ibid., p. 218. 5 ibid., p. 197. 6 ibid., p. 207; v: below, p. 347. 7 René Leys, pp. 60-61.
The final major pieces in the game immediately enter: the queens. The first queen to appear represents modern Chinese materialism. She is the 'real' Mrs Wang, as opposed to the narrator's erotic dream. The young third wife of the ageing Mr Wang, she is associated with his opportunism and readines to betray Chinese traditions. Hence she eats with the men and flirts with the narrator, who is aware of l'indécence, pour cette honnête femme, à se trouver près de son mari assis à la même table.' The narrator's enthusiasm for her exotic charm is a satirical attack on the amorous play of the popular novel. She symbolizes the prostitution of exoticism, and the diminution of diversity.

The Manchu queen appears last of all. René Leya plays the part of romantic 'Knight' to this queen, much as the narrator had played 'Knight' to Mrs Wang, not being conscious of her real role in the game. He wins the heart of the Empress-Dowager, and risks his life to protect the Imperial family from the enemy. His secret manoeuvres lead up to the last move planned to crush his opponents. When he discusses his plans with the narrator, he has a premonition of defeat: 'Je vous confie ce que je voudrais qu'on fasse, et je meurs.' Unwilling to stand idly by, the narrator promises his support and 'afin de mieux jouer le jeu, je me suis véritablement enivré du vin.' His attempt to become intoxicated symbolizes, as we have seen, the effort to throw off his rational doubts about the intrigue, and enter into the literary game:

... J'entrerai tout montre, dans les salons et les maisons de jeux... Et je dessine, maintenant, de mémoire, la marche du cavalier... du cavalier... un jeu ivre de vin de roses. — sur le quadrille compliqué et souvent très déformé qui n'obéit point comme les belles avenues de la Ville Tarare, au grand échiquier cardinal; Nord, Sud, Est et Occident... J'ai f... d'être ivre, par habitude policière... Tout Européen est sans partout, s'il pâtit bien.
The narrator has moved out of the main 'square' of the Tartar City, which enshrines the Forbidden City, and into the more populous Chinese City which is less formal and rigidly geometrical in plan. His move corresponds with an effort to enter the chaotic world of René Ley's mysterious visions. Feigning intoxication 'par habileté policière', on the realistic level 'Segalen' is justified in performing the irrational acts demanded by the knight's devious manoeuvres.

Meanwhile the opposite side plan secret moves which threaten the Empire. Although René Ley seems unconscious of the danger, the narrator retains a clearer hold on 'reality'.


The narrator studying the possibility of various moves, represents the author manipulating his men on the chessboard. 'Segalen' points out here the need to observe the rules and conventions of the literary game. Within the limitations of the form of his novel he allows free rein to the 'knight', René Leys. However, the historical background is respected. Its significance is, moreover, regarded by the narrator as more profound than the fantasies which René Leys is now putting forward, for it threatens the Empire which is for Segalen the symbol of the literary world:

Non, vraiment, je ne puis accepter... Ce qu'on a découvert, est un peu trop anodin pour les temps que nous, allons vivre.

Suddenly the narrator refuses to play René Leys' game, which he sees as either blindness or deliberate 'mystification'. He demands a solid basis on which to build his hypotheses, without which it seems as if

l'Empire et le Palais tout entier ne sont décidément pas un récit d'historien, avec tout ce que je viens d'écrire à ce sujet, fusionnant sur une écumée de non-sens?

He demands a certain respect for referential detail in fiction. By ignoring the fact of the revolution, René Leys is neglecting a powerful source of drama in the everyday world for sheer fantasy. The intrigue, however, based on experience of a 'real' world outside the novel—the solid chessboard of Peking—and linked with that world by a constant satirical interplay of fact and fiction.

1 René Leys, p. 192.
2 Ibid., p. 193.
3 Ibid., p. 196.
On the other hand, René Leys and those within the closed world of the Forbidden City show little knowledge of the action outside the walls of Peking. They seem to Segalen to be calculating a secret move, or else to be quite mad. Mr Wang's account of the hysteria within the Palace would seem to support the second hypothesis:

... on a, paraît-il, une peur extraordinaire aux Chinois, on ne sait pas exactement de quoi, et s'il faut craindre que Sun-Yat-sen ne renonce tout à coup le canal Impérial de Hang-tehou à Mentain à bord d'un vaisseau de guerre japonais; ou bien qu'un perpétuel descendant des Ming ne se fasse sacré empereur à Nan-King? On a vu des signes dans le ciel: un dragon, sans tête coiffé d'un chapeau de feutre noir, de la forme du melon d'eau, et une tortue jaune écorcée revêtant un complet européen.

Here Segalen plays with fantastic hypotheses based on possible sources of danger to the Manchu regime: the Republic, the Chinese, the Japanese, the Russians, the Europeans, natural catastrophe. The symbol of the dragon and the Imperial colour yellow, associated with items of European clothing, suggest the disastrous effect of Imperial efforts at westernization. The reading of signs in the sky reveals that fear too can be a source of creativity. Rational and irrational elements mingle in this heterogeneous flood of terrified rumours characteristic of those kept in ignorance of current events, and therefore creating their own meanings in a specific historical and sociological context. Ignorance is thus a source of fantasy, like the receipt which the narrator is unable to translate. The text moves towards a synthesis of the two attitudes: neither blind ignorance nor dogmatic certainty, but an open attitude which considers all contingencies.

As the revolutionaries approach the city the pace of the narrative speeds up. Finally everyone seems to be running to the station; "Il arrive" - the capital letter ironically conveying a respect usually reserved for the Emperor. Le vieux renard a bien joué, admits the narrator. This description of Yüan Shih-k'ai corresponds with accepted views of him as a cunning and ambitious man who negotiated between the Manchus and the revolutionaries to secure the peaceful abdication of the Emperor, but who was suspected of desiring Imperial power for himself. This possibility is

1 René Leys, p. 203.
2 The technique is later exploited in Peintures; v. above, p. 188.
3 René Leys, p. 208.
suggested early in the novel: 'Yuan est un Mandarin de l'Ancien Régime... Un fondé de pouvoirs impériaux...,' His move towards the Palace is now presented as the first step towards becoming Emperor in his turn:

Bien que déjà très sûr de lui, il a eu cette patience, cette décence de ne point exiger qu'on ouvrît les vantaux du sud, imperialement clos. Il sait placer dans leur ordre chacun de ses gestes.2

Yüan appears only to checkmate the Emperor towards the end of the novel. In a note on the manuscript Segalen states his intention that this character 'doit se glisser dans le récit bien avant son arrivée — comme un prépersonnage, mystérieux, absent, dangereux peut-être'. Like the Emperor Shih Huang-ti in the Stèle 'Éloge et Pouvoir de l'Absence', and like the Empress-Dowager in Le Fils du Ciel, his figure gains dramatic effect by l'étonnant pouvoir de l'absence'.4 Until the moment of his arrival at the station, none of the imperial forces know what is happening, although those on the other side are better informed. 'Yuan est une invention Européenne,'5 René Léa claims early in the novel. However this 'invention' is given real power by the Allies in order to support their designs in China. It is this play-on 'réalité' which fascinates Segalen: 'Oh! c'est un peu vif! Yuan est tout autre qu'un pantalon... C'est précisément ce qui m'intéresse en lui.6 Through his knowledge of historical factors the reader is presumed to be aware of the dramatic irony of the situation. Hence there is no more than a suggestion of the republican moves outside the city, until Yüan finally arrives. There follows a characteristic note of anticlimax, when instead of burning the city or directly challenging the Emperor he is carried off comfortably seated in a European carriage, symbolic of the source of his power, 'et va loger, en bon père de famille, dans le Yamen bien protégé de son fils ainé...7 Representing the encroaching forces of conformity and universalism, he is depicted as no more than a prudent bourgeois. The sense of mystery and dread evoked by his name is thus revealed as an illusion which is dispelled by the prosaic description of the event.

The threatened revolution follows a similar pattern of anticipation and anticlimax. Segalen noted on the manuscript, 'À partir de l'arrivée de Yuan',

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1 René Léa, p. 86. 2 ibid., p. 207. 3 Unpublished notes. 4 Stèles, Peintures, Équipée, op. cit., p. 163. 5 René Léa, p. 86. 6 ibid., pp. 85-86. 7 ibid., pp. 207-208.
This idea, which seems strange in a text planned to violate literary traditions, reveals the author's desire to give a dramatic form to the climax of the novel. Although he has not rigidly observed these classical rules, he speeds up the historical course of events, having the Emperor abdicate a few days after Yüan's arrival in Peking. The game of chess seems to be suddenly resolved by this unexpected checkmate. The narrator, who had more theatrical expectations, is utterly disillusioned by this ending, in which his side seems to be defeated. He prepares to leave the 'chessboard' of Peking, which means putting aside his account of the game.

However, with a characteristic ability to bring to life a seemingly stagnant reality, René Leys makes his final enigmatic move. Discovering new levels within the game, the narrator then returns to study the various moves of the chessmen. Through reflection on their meaning, he realizes that the Emperor for whom René Leys was fighting was not merely the physical representative within the Palace, but the eternal creative force which he symbolizes. The narrator, detracked by his emphasis on fact and naturalistic proofs, had misunderstood the nature of the game. By his mysterious death René Leys makes a last move which reveals hidden depths of significance. The literary game is not actually resolved: 'Il avait eu ce geste et ce mot: Tout est à recommencer!'\(^2\) At the end of the game, therefore, the narrator-reader discovers that it is not in fact finished; he must return to the beginning, and recreate meaning for himself from the various possibilities contained within the structure.

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1 Unpublished note.
2 René Leys, p. 234.
5. THE TEXT AS THEATRE

Peu importe ce qui se pensa et ce qui se passa là... Pourtant, dessous ces gestes, s'il y avait par aventure, un drame! — une action tendue vers un but! Si cela n'était que péripéties ménagées vers... je n'ose sais quoi...

The narrator never discovers the truth about René Leys. The opening theme, 'Je ne saurai donc rien de plus...', recurs at intervals up to the final lines where 'Segalen' renounces all desire to know exactly what happened. Through the drama of the text he finally realizes that rational meaning is not important; that in fact a precise answer would kill his interest in the subject. The enigma of René Leys the magus inspires wonder in the narrator, who is at once author, reader and spectator. The latter's role is therefore also dynamic; he is in several ways the 'raison d'être' of the text. He provides the initial inspiration, the audience and the motivation for the daring exploits of his hero; he transforms 'action' into art. The novel provides a vivid illustration of the philosophical theory, which we have traced from Schopenhauer and Nietzsche to Jules de Gaultier, that life is a spectacle whose meaning is created by the participation of the spectators. No absolute meaning exists outside the mind of the individual, who creates his own reality through action, and imposes meaning on action through language.

The narrator's words are presented like the outline of a script to René Leys, who transforms them into theatre: '... quel merveilleux metteur en scène! Mieux: quel homme de théâtre! Quel acteur!' Terms of dramatic production are frequently used to describe him: he is 'cet animateur, ce montreur d'ombres'. He either gives a dramatic presentation of other characters, or plays the central role himself: 'Lui aussi, on dirait qu'il joue un rôle, et que son rôle est fini. Quel bon-acteur!' His descriptions of the Forbidden City animate the subject, and recreate detail with vivid intensity. If the narrator suggests an idea he has an extraordinary

1 René Leys, p. 113.  
2 ibid., p. 13.  
3 René Leys, p. 124.  
4 ibid., p. 118.  
5 ibid., p. 126.
power to dramatize its development. As an actor he is a form of double who sacrifices his own identity in order to adopt that of another. He appears as the narrator's double, having complementary qualities. Together they illustrate the role of novelist, which Segalen has split into contrasting faculties: the analytical, ironical role of the narrator, and that of unbridled fantasy played by René Leys.

René Leys has close personal knowledge of China. He reveals the ability to portray another civilization from within, with vivid detail. 'Segalen', the writer, is responsible for the ideas and the craftsmanship. His creative imagination is the source of the narrative. He constantly challenges and ponders over René Leys's words, shaping and interpreting them, discovering in them new directions for his intrigue. The novel is created through a constant dialectic between these two qualities.

Je commence à le connaître comme un jeu d'esprit de moi-même...

C'est brave petit René Leys, j'en arrive presque à deviner ce qu'il va me dire... ce qu'il me dit:

En effet, sa voix change tout à coup...  

As if hypnotized by the narrator, or by the compelling power of his unfinished novel, Leys throws himself into the dazzling roles suggested by 'Segalen'. At the beginning of the novel he seems very young, malleable, and somewhat lacking in personality. He has surprisingly little general knowledge, having never heard of Baudelaire, Marco Polo or Robert Hart, and his grammar is weak. Thus he has not the breadth of vision to create the drama envisaged by the author. However he has: '[une] étonnante facilité à tout comprendre, et peut-être à tout enseigner'. He is, therefore, an ideal medium for the narrator's ideas — a puppet to be manipulated. His writing, like his personality, develops under the influence of 'Segalen', having at first been formless:

C'était gauche et enfantin... L'écriture reste encore indécise, mais avec des barres, un appuyé; des majuscules qui n'existaient certes pas ainsi dessinées, et d'ailleurs, que je reconnais fort bien... je sais à quelle écriture il vient tout juste de les emprunter: à la mienne.

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1 cf. Crawley, op. cit., p. 854.
2 As in the technique analysed by Rank; v. above, p. 130.
3 René Leys, p. 142.
4 ibid., pp. 53, 140, 142, 156.
5 ibid., p. 147.
6 ibid., p. 154.
Lacking strength of character, René Leys is moulded into an ideal hero. The narrator rejects the orphan, son of a commonplace grocer, who seems to have stepped out of a novel by Paul Féval, directing him constantly towards his own ideal heroic adventurer. In the intrigues which lead up to his death we witness the creation of a literary character out of the nondescript material of everyday life. Thus meaning is created by language out of the heterogeneous mass of human experience.

René Leys's natural medium is drama. The theatre is not only a key to the intrigue, but also a reflection on the total meaning of the novel. The young adventurer's membership in a troop of actors offers a possible explanation of his mysterious ability to enter the Forbidden City — an ability which continually puzzles the narrator. By keeping his stratagem a carefully guarded secret, he piques 'Segalen's' curiosity. The latter's entry into the Palace — 'de jour, il est vrai, et très officiellement...1 — lacks this enigmatic quality which transforms experience by stimulating the imagination.

According to René Leys, the theatre offers a means of solving the problems of the intrigue, which seem to 'Segalen' insoluble:

... Mais, si la Police n'y peut rien, si le Régent ne sait rien, si les bombes continuent cependant à pleuvoir, je ne vois vraiment aucune issue.
   — J'en ai trouvé une, poursuit René Leys, debout, et qui a revêtu son allure nette et élancée... Voulez-vous m'accompagner demain au théâtre? On donne demain huit jours une grande pièce ancienne. Vous en verrez l'apothéose. Mais avant elle, un jeu de scène tout moderne... qui vous expliquera...2

René Leys never makes his meaning clear. Various interpretations are suggested by the scene at the theatre which, 'mise en abyme' in a central position, is a representation in miniature of the novel.3 There are analogies with Hamlet in using a play within the structure of the work to illustrate intrigue and murder in the Palace. René Leys may be suggesting that the play is a means of warning the Régent. However this meaning is not apparent. The modern play in fact offers little interest, except for the fact that the main actor is the nephew of Prince Lang, whom 'Segalen' had met

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1 René Leys, p. 101.
2 Ibid., pp. 88-89.
3 The technique, first defined by Gide (Journal, 1880-1892, Paris, Gallimard, Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 1951, p. 41), is a means of undermining naturalist techniques by presenting an autocritical reflection on the narrative.
at Ch’ien Men-wai. To the latter’s surprised comment about his appearance on stage René Leys observes: ‘c’est tout à fait à la mode, pour les Princes qui veulent s’amuser, et y entrer.’ This is possibly the way René Leys, first entered the Palace.

Events off-stage are more absorbing. A web of intrigue is spun over all that happens, including actors and audience, and establishing links with events outside the theatre. In particular there is a close parallel with the episode at Ch’ien Men-wai. Not only the Prince’s nephew but the young gallants who accompanied René Leys and Ségalen that evening and the singing-girls reappear at the theatre, greeting them gaily. According to René Leys they are all members of a vast secret police force where no one knows the exact role of the other. An incident within the auditorium establishes further parallels with Ch’ien Men-wai. There is a sudden scuffle, René Leys immediately darts out, with a magic ability to slip through crowds, and plays some mysterious part in the arrest of an elegant silk-clad figure. Similarly he had rushed out of the hotel at Ch’ien Men-wai at the first sign of a scuffle in the street.

Up to this point the drama lies as much in the audience as on stage. The analogy between actor and spectator is made particularly clear in the case of the singing-girls. With their heavy make-up and brightly coloured gowns they are themselves an important part of the spectacle: ‘C’est beaucoup plus charmant à regarder que la scène, et ce neveu-qui pleurniche-toujours...’ Their artificiality represents an extension of the theatrical from stage to audience and thence into life, thus illustrating the philosophical idea of life as a spectacle in which man is both actor and spectator. This analogy is established by the narrator’s behaviour in staring openly at the singing-girls, ‘avec une insistance toute latine’, finding them more interesting than the stage drama. Their exotic charm has the added appeal of the ‘real’. Like the stories of René Leys, the mysterious police intervention in the audience, and the narrator’s sense of being involved in the machinations of the Secret Police, they offer the promise of adventure.

However the ancient drama which follows brings new interest to the stage:

1 René Leys, p. 110; a theory which is supported by Backhouse & Bland: Annales and Memoire of the Court of Peking, op. cit., pp. 487 & 502-504.
2 René Leys, p. 111.
3 Ibid., loc. cit.
Mais ceci, que René Leys me dit être l’apothéose du vieux drame déroulé huit jours durant, est tout d’un coup possible à contempler: voilà bien des couleurs, des formes, des lueurs et des gestes aux courbes magnanimes... Je ne sais point ce que cela signifie. Je regarde, je regarde... et voici un grand homme tout vêtu de rouge, masqué de rouge, qui, tenant un sabre dans chaque main, s’apprête à lutter terriblement, on ne sait encore contre quoi...

Through this dramatic spectacle other symbolic meanings are presented within the 'mise-en-abyme'. Traditional drama in China is a means of recreating the past by means of costume, ceremonial, customs and language. The description of dramatic techniques parallels Segalen’s effort to recreate visions of the past. The play is a classical example of what European dramatists and producers of that period called ‘total theatre’. Paul Claudel and André-Paul Antoine were among European writers and artists to show great interest in Chinese theatre. Claudel would sit spellbound for hours at a performance without understanding a word. Segalen’s vivid description captures this enchantment, where intellectual meaning is subordinate to emotional effect.

The physical sense of energetic movement is suggested by exaggerated gestures, pirouettes, leaps, rhythmic dancing movements, fencing and mime. The visual sense is conveyed by reference to brilliant colour, strange forms and a subtle use of lighting; the auditory sense by the contrast between the sounds of the orchestra and the silence of the mimed combat. The illusory nature of the performance is made clear by the monstrous masks, or atrociously painted faces, the symbolic costumes of the warriors, suggestions of spirits and magic.

The depiction of this spectacular scene at the heart of the novel is a statement about literary technique, indicating the writer’s rejection of rational analysis for a sensuous, suggestive language.

While ‘Segalen’ is absorbed in the conflict, René Leys is more blasé: ‘Il voyait le spectacle en connaissance. Pour moi je regarde; je regarde éperdument.’ Whereas the experience is for the narrator new, and therefore a source of excitement and fantasy, for René Leys it falls flat. At the moment of crisis, while ‘Segalen’ is totally engrossed in the mime, he starts

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1 René Leys, pp. 111-112.
2 Arlington & Lewisohn, op. cit., p. 274.
4 René Leys, p. 113.
Peu importe ce qui se pense et ce qui se passe là... — Pourtant, derrière ces traits, s'il y avait, par aventure, un drame! Quelle action tendue vers un but! Si cela n'était qu'péripéties ménagées vers... je ne sais quel!
to explain his intention in bringing the writer to the theatre. However the latter finds the drama more absorbing than his stories at this point. The intrigue briefly takes second place to the theatrical performance. This detail calls attention to the symbolic value of the spectacle.

René Leys is purely concerned with technical details. Similarly in the novel he is a 'producer' or an 'actor', more occupied with the quality of his performance than with meanings and ideas:

Je reconnais en René Leys le parfait habitude de théâtre: le drame qui se joue n'est rien: qu'il s'agisse de l'Hamlet humain de Shakespeare ou de l'autre si mignonement travesti par Ambroise, qu'il s'agisse du grand dieu Brahma dans Lakané-Léo Délibes, ou de la grande soupe en famille de Louine, monologue du Peuple Souverain — le parfait habitude de théâtre néglige ces nuances dans le dessin du livret, pour s'en tenir au fond: la verité de la grosse chanteuse, la port de voix du ténor, écoulé escamotant une 'attaque' difficile...¹

The actor must be prepared to throw himself into a part without quibbling about the style or the subject-matter of his lines. René Leys would dismiss as 'nuances' differences between Shakespeare's Hamlet and Ambroise's parody of this tragedy, being more concerned with technical questions. He would be equally prepared to perform in Délibes' Lakané, which represents the epitome of Romanticism² and superficial exoticism, or in Charpentier's Louine, which has been described as 'l'aboutissement de l'influence naturaliste sur la musique française'.³ The narrator as novelist is concerned with the quality of the writing, as he shows in satirical references: 'mignonement', 'soupe en famille', 'Peuple Souverain'. Whereas René Leys plays his part without question, 'Segalen' is critical of the text. There is a vast gulf, he suggests, between Hamlet and nineteenth-century Romantic or Naturalist drama.

The theatrical quality of the characters extends beyond the confines of this scene. The China Segalen discovered in 1909 had an illusory quality which he develops in his novel. The heavy make-up of the Manchu lady described in his Lettres de Chine⁴ becomes a means of illustrating the artificiality of his subject:

¹ René Leys, p. 114.
³ ibid., p. 280. However the Libretto for Louine was written by Segalen's friend Saint-Pol-Roux, who was in general opposed to naturalism (Antoine, op. cit., p. 50).
⁴ v. above, p. 294.
... un visage que... je mets en vedette dans mon portrait: c'est une lune ovale, fardée de blanc, dégagée de longs yeux bridés comme il s'impose, tamponnée aux deux pommettes d'admirables dix-guises d'un rouge carminé du dernier fatal...  

The 'star' of the narrator's theatrical text, she is the model of feminine allure. Like the other female characters, she is a doll, a silent puppet who smiles enticingly but cannot communicate with the narrator. She represents a caricature of the man's exotic heroine.

Since women's parts were played by men on the Chinese stage, René Leys occasionally appears as a 'double' of Mrs Wang: 'Déjà il était costumé et, véritablement, fort bien costumé en princesse mandchoue...' He plays a similar role in the text, providing occasion for the narrator's erotic dreams and desires.

When René Leys describes his scenes in the Palace, he himself appears as an actor: 'Je revins encore habillé en mandarin de quatrième classe, assis près de sa chaise...' At other times the narrator sees him — or imagines he does — in a European bowler-hat, or disguised as a member of the palace guard. A 'knight' in the uncertain light of dawn, he returns home to change his clothes and his role. In the harsh light of day he travels by the more prosaic Chinese mule and cart.

At first he seems uneasy in the role of lover suggested by the narrator. His descriptions of love affairs are mingled with financial calculations which 'Segalen' finds distasteful. However gradually he seems to mature and to fit more easily into the part:

Et pourtant, aucun doute: il aime et est aimé. Ce n'est plus seulement ses majuscules qui se redisent et prennent tourner virile. Mais son air d'enfant aventurieux s'est changé en un contentement rassigé, très satisfait de soi-même...

Serait-ce... Et tout d'un coup ce scrupule me prend: l'impératrice aurait-elle été pour lui non seulement une amante après quelque autre, mais... qui sait... l'initiatrice? l'initiatrice?

Again the scene becomes an occasion for fantasizing. Ironically the narrator reverses the conventional sexual roles, commenting with a novelist's enthusiasm for the logical development of the intrigue. 'C'est parfait.' The term 'Révélatrice' has a satirical sense which contrasts with its usual

1 René Leys, p. 61. 2 Ibid., p. 190. 3 Ibid., p. 152. 4 Ibid., p. 161.
connotations in Segalen's fiction. The narrator's naive absorption in his young friend's adventures represents the power of literary illusion. The latter's mood of self-confidence suggests that he is more comfortable in his role as literary hero, outplaying all earlier versions of the 'exotic adventurer'. Marco Polo, for example, had had the opportunity to write 'la Grande Bible d'Exotisme'; yet his narrative had hardly lived up to the promise of its title, *Diversités et Merveilles du Monde.* Through René Leys the narrator — and ultimately the author — aspires to write this great exotic novel. Thus he attacks shallower conceptions of its connotations in order to open the subject to deeper reflection.

Meanwhile life outside the private world of René Leys and his friends is becoming more dramatic, distracting the narrator's attention. Stories of Palace intrigue are beginning to resemble the sheer fantasies of stage-plays, in contrast with the challenge of 'real' danger outside. At this point the author produces a variation on the earlier scene at the theatre: René Leys offers the narrator a dramatic spectacle in his own home to celebrate his birthday. The drama is thus moved one stage further from the theatre out into the everyday world. Inevitably, the second experience has lost the freshness of novelty: 'Cette fois, je sais bien...'. 'Segalen' now plays the role René Leys had played earlier, admiring the professional skill of the actors, applauding at the correct moments; and yet:

Quand il me rejoint... fier et satisfait, je devrais tout d'abord le complimenter... mais un je n'ai, sais quoi m'a déplu, m'a déconcerté... Pourquoi lui cacher ce que je pense? Je le lui dis: quelque chose de cabotin, de très mauvais côté, surtout en Chine, m'a déplu en lui.

It is not René Leys' technical skill which disconcerts 'Segalen', but perhaps a sudden association of his theatrical presentation — 'nouvelle organisation policière, sans doute' — with his stories of adventures in the Palace. In China the artificiality of the drama is made clear by the presence on stage of technicians — 'coolies, machinistes', and all the necessary properties. No effort is made to change the scenery behind closed curtains. The contrast with 'Chinese' attitudes implies a lack of authenticity in René Leys: something deceitful or 'counterfeit', as if he has not admitted the element of fantasy in his stories.

1 *ibid.*, p. 162. 2 René Leys, p. 141. 3 *ibid.*, p. 187. 4 *ibid.*, p. 188. 5 *ibid.*, p. 103.
Rene Leys appears to be unconscious of the impending crisis. No longer a teacher, he is entirely occupied with his acting profession, frequently appearing in the streets in various disguises with his group of actors. He dismisses the narrator's fears with a reassuring, 'authoritative' word.

When the enemy arrives, Segalen expects a dramatic scene in the classical manner he has witnessed at the theatre:

... Il y aura bataille antique et moderne; avec grands cris et visages terribles, et aussi mausers à magasins. Malgré toute la fidelité que je leur porte, les Mandchous se sont battus. Alors vient le sac du Palais.

The narrator's 'fidelity' to the Manchu regime cannot countermand his fidelity to historical accuracy. His text will remain true to the major events of the period. However, with the classical drama fresh in his mind he imagines masked or hideously painted warriors. The 'real' event is less spectacular: an abdication order signed by the Regent, without conflict or bloodshed. Instead of making a last heroic stand to defend the Emperor, Rene Leys settles down for the evening indoors. No magic passwords arrive, no silken handkerchiefs or signs from the Palace. The dramatic play seems to have reached a mundane conclusion. The decor of Palace, Imperial City and Empire collapses, and the narrator-spectator, thoroughly disillusioned, prepares to leave the scene: 'Je n'en arrive à douter de mon désir d'y avoir jamais désiré entrer!'

In order to revive the dramatic life of the narrative, Rene Leys plays his final act. It seems at first to the narrator merely another fantasy, totally unrelated to reality: 'Oh! la belle histoire! une de plus à toutes celles qu'il m'a déjà si bien contées...?' However, since this action is indisputably 'real', Rene Leys places the seal of authenticity on all his actions. They are, the narrator now realizes, authentic if seen from a certain perspective. We have identified this 'Chinese' perspective with that of Taoist philosophy, and ultimately with the field of aesthetics, which lies outside distinctions between truth and falsehood, reality and the imagination. Rene Leys has, therefore, played his role with consistency to the last detail.

1 Rene Leys, p. 218.
2 ibid., p. 228.
3 ibid., p. 231.
4 v. above, p. 320.
As he reflects on the script, the narrator becomes aware of his own part in the drama. His words have had a hallucinatory power over the young actor, who has thrown himself wholeheartedly into his role. Thus René Leys has identified closely with 'Segalen's hero, the Emperor, as well as with 'Segalen' himself. We have observed the manner in which these roles coalesce through a play on Chinese metaphysical emblems and protocol. Analogies are also established on a psychological level between the characters. René Leys, like Kuang-hsü, is young and abandoned, without a friend to help him. He is accused of homosexuality; a tyrannical parent tries to suppress his personal life, causing mental strain which leads to fainting fits. The parallels between René Leys and the Emperor are frequently pointed out in the novel:

René Leys aima profondément, d'une jeune amitié cet Empereur jeune et solitaire, cet abandonné...
Et lui-même guérit très jeune et dût dès qu'on ne le voyait plus en pleine action physique.\(^3\)

The similarity between the characters of René Leys and Kuang-hsü leads to a logical conclusion in the enigmatic death of René Leys — a death which the author prefigures early in the novel when describing that of the Emperor:

'... J'oubliais — sans un ami auprès de Lui! — René Leys est bien venu à dire là ce qui n'avait pas été dit.\(^4\) At the conclusion the narrator puzzles over this strange analogy. Was it the power of suggestion which led to René Leys's death, — the strange power of language to influence the chain of events, — or was he, like Kuang-hsü perhaps, poisoned by the Empress-Dowager, who wished to be rid of him, or to punish him? The parallels between the two characters suggest this possibility.

Verification of René Leys's claims is not feasible. The very attempt would destroy the magic of his fantasies, and would, the writer realizes, question the autonomy of art:

... fidèle à lui-même, — et je m'en aperçois tout d'un coup, — je devrais d'abord me souvenu de sa parole: 'l'autre, l'Empereur, est mort sans un ami auprès de lui... — J'étais son ami' — n'a
\ter dit avec un profond accent René Leys...

— J'étais son ami, — devrais-je dire avec le même accent, le même regret fidèle, — sans plus chercher de quoi se composait exactement notre amitié...\(^5\)

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1 v. above, p. 297.
2 In this there is an analogy with the personal life of the author.
3 René Leys, p. 55. 4 ibid., loc. cit. 5 ibid., p. 239.
Friendship may be seen as a form of doubling, an association of mutual minds and spirits. We have seen that Segalen prized his friends, seeing in them a reflection of the self. In the closing lines of the novel the narrator accepts René Leys in this role, associating him with the Emperor as a manifestation of the inner self, revealed through writing. Thus René Leys, the grocer's son, Professor of Political Economy, is transformed into the animator of a fantastic shadow-play. The flickering images of Kuang-hsu, the Regent, the Empress-Dowager, Manchu nobles and princesses which we glimpse against the background of Peking are revealed as figments of the author's imagination, which develop their own momentum through the dynamic collaboration of writer and producer. Author, actor and spectator each play their role in the creation of the text as theatre. In the words of Philippe Sollers,

Le livre n'est rien d'autre que le passage du monde au théâtre, l'apparition théâtrale du monde comme texte.

1 Crawley, op. cit., p. 854.
2 v. above, p. 295.
Music was for Segalen a great source of pleasure. In his writing he sought to capture the sensations experienced through the arts — the lapidary art of the stele, the fantasy of Taoist painting, the fleeting music of the song in his Odes: "Non point affichés sur des pierres; — et la peinture même est trop lourde pour les illustrer." During his period of collaboration with Debussy he developed a lightness of touch characteristic of the composer. The qualities of simplicity, fugacity and suggestion, introduced by Debussy into twentieth-century music, together with his interest in exoticism, attracted Segalen's attention. His was a kindred spirit, delighting in Debussy's attitude to his art as "Une chose libre, qui est partout, qui n'est rien d'étriqué, qui n'est pas "sur le papier surtout"." Exoticism for Segalen demanded a similar technique, opening the text to the imagination.

Since he had tried his hand at musical composition, it is not surprising that Segalen should apply some of these techniques to his literary composition. In the late nineteenth century music seemed to offer a means of escaping from the positivist traditions which had enchainèd literature and painting. Mallarmé's ambition to write a great work 'qui n'a que faire de

3 v. above, pp. 146 ff.
4 C. Debussy, Segalen's record of a conversation with the composer, 8 October 1907, Segalen et Debussy, op. cit., p. 75.
5 A. Joly-Segalen, Introduction, ibid., p. 10.
6 André Gide (La Symphonie pastorale) and more particularly Michel Butor (Répertoire II, Paris, Editions de Minuit, 1964, p. 92) and Claude Lévi-Strauss (Mythologiques I, op. cit., pp. 26 ff.) have also applied technical theories of musical composition to their writing.
7 Lehmann, op. cit., p. 149.
Musical terms appear in Segalen's notes on the novel, for example at a point where the narrator is wavering between enthusiasm and doubt:

"... remplacer le ton d'ironie oscillante par: franche et grosse mauvaise humeur... puis par des retours confiants, affectueux, admiratifs. Ces deux mouvements, juxtaposés auparavant dans la même phrase, étant ici séparés par des ondulations de chapitres."

The text is seen in terms of a 'double movement', an oscillation which begins within the sentence, and gradually gathers momentum and power, developing the two contrasting moods, or tones, in greater detail.

In the exposition of René Leys, the first voice, which is that of the narrator, presents the subject of the novel, which is the Emperor. The narrator is concerned with the problem of entering the Palace, in order to do research for an exotic novel about the Emperor. His problem is primarily one of method; it is introduced by the key sentence, 'Je ne saurai donc rien de plus...'. The countersubject, introduced by the second voice, is factual and practical. The voice of René Leys the grocer's son, introduces the theme of materialism. In contrast with the tone of doubt, this theme is characterized by dogmatic precision. The third voice, that of Mr Wang, returns to the subject, which he presents in a comical tone; Jarignoux then repeats the countersubject, also in a comical tone.

Subject and countersubject are set in counterpoint during the first ride of the two horsemen near the Palace, and their return to the grocery. The exposition closes with the announcement of the hero's name: 'C'est bien cela. Mon Professeur se nomme René Leys.' The simple statement, seeming to reinforce the countersubject, includes a hidden reference to the subject through the implications of the name 'Leys'. As the son of Mr Leys the grocer, René Leys presents the countersubject; however as the magnus he changes pitch and identifies with the narrator, creating variations on the theme of the subject.

After this short exposition, there is a long development of subject and countersubject, where the author introduces new ideas, varies the intensity and pace of his narrative, and contrasts the timbre of the different voices. We hear only the four voices of the exposition, which speak for the other characters in the novel. Mrs Wang does not speak; the narrator communicates with her by gestures and glances. Since 'Segalen' understands very little of the various dialects spoken by the Chinese characters, Mr Wang and René Leys...
Musical terms appear in Segalen's notes on the novel, for example at a point where the narrator is wavering between enthusiasm and doubt:

... remplacer le ton d'ironie oscillante par: franche et grosse mauvaise humeur... puis par des retours confiants, affectueux, admiratifs. Ces deux mouvements, juxtaposés auparavant dans la même phrase, étaient ici séparés par des ondulations de chapitres.¹

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¹ Unpublished notes.
become his interpreters. The former translates for his wife; the latter translates fragments of his conversation with his friends, just as he relates snatches of conversation from within the Palace. The rest is filled in by the narrator, whose desire to understand this unknown world leads him to invent explanations and sequences. In a series of 'episodes' describing René Leys's remarkable adventures the subject dominates the narration, up to a point where it suddenly tails off: 'Or, aujourd'hui, — est-ce d’aujourd’hui seulement? — je doute de quelque chose... c'est-à-dire, d’un seul coup, — de tout.' In symmetry with the end of the exposition, the development closes with the Chinese name of René Leys.2

In the exposition the narration gradually increases in pace and intensity up to a certain point which forms the central 'plateau' of the development: the crisis — the abdication of the Emperor — leads to anticlimax and a fall in rhythm and intensity. The rhythm of the composition is in harmony with the narrator's tone. Thus the first entries in the 'diary' are spaced out, suggesting a slow, hesitant movement. A month passes between each entry. In the month of May the diary takes form in a series of drawn-out reflections on the words of René Leys. The narrative expands in the summer months, gathering pace as the narrator's doubts begin to intrude upon his reflections. There is a growing conflict between question and answer, up to the first crisis. After the abdication the movement slows down, to speed up again at the second crisis, the discovery of René Leys's death. The voices do not blend, but continue their constant interrogation.

In the coda, or conclusion, the narrator interprets the composition anew. Having reread his manuscript he finds a clue to the enigma. The voice of René Leys re-introduces the subject, with a subtle pitch which captures the suggestion of fleeting exoticism and mystery. The composition, which opens on a gloomy note, closes on a different note, but with the same phrase, suggesting the circular nature of the structure. As with any work of art, the reader gains greater understanding and appreciation of its complexity through rereading and relating the various elements of its form. Reading a novel, like listening to music, is a creative activity.

The various movements of the composition are unified by recurring 'motives' or 'themes', which mark the points of arrival and departure, and which establish a complex pattern of imitation and variation. Among the

1 René Leys, p. 214.  
2 v. above, p. 296.
brass instruments, the resounding of the Great Bell is a leitmotiv in the structure, where it announces the theme of the Emperor, the subject of the composition. The sound of the bell is particularly apt for the expression of the imperial theme, as it was regarded by the Chinese as 'une musique princière, et critère de l'harmonie universelle'.

We have noted the symbolic function of the bell in both *Le Fils du Ciel* and *René Leys*. Its dull reverberations suggest communication with the nether world, and the evocation of the Emperor's spirit.

It tolls three times, marking distinct stages in the novel. The narrator hears it on the first evening that René Leys spends with 'Segalen', when the former recalls the death of Kuang-hsü, and states that he was the Emperor's 'friend'. Thus it announces a key theme. It tolls again at the centre of the novel, as 'Segalen' and René Leys stretch out in their chairs to talk of the Palace:

... De nouveau, nous baignons dans le silence tiède de la nuit, et sa voix changeée prend le timbre de fer d'une certaine cloche que je sais, rouvre une certaine porte que j'ai déjà franchie grâce à lui...

Il dit comme en écho de mes paroles:

The voice of René Leys is associated with the echoes of the bell, suggesting his role in the intrigue as a hollow instrument of the narrator, and a means of communication with the world of the imagination.

The third and last time that the bell is heard, it signals the last of René Leys's stories. The narrator is awaiting the sound of the third watch to know whether René Leys has lied to him or not:

J'attends... le message à travers l'air froid de la Grande Cloche qui sonnera peut-être sa dernière battue, cette nuit...

Mieux que le battement de la Cloche de Fer, j'écoute le tintement de garde de ma sonnette... l'arrivée du léger mouchoir de soie jaune... avant le coup de la Troisième veille."

When the Emperor reigns no longer, the symbolic bell rings no more. In counterpoint to its sepulchral tone, the tinkling of the doorbell has a lighter, satirical tone. It represents the themes of the anti-novel: silk

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1 *Dictionnaire des Symboles*, op. cit., v. II, pp. 53-55.

2 v. above, pp. 273 & 300.

3 *René Leys*, pp. 120-121.

4 *ibid.*, p. 222.
handkerchiefs, nocturnal rendez-vous, theatrical disguises. The music of drums and gongs is a variation on this musical tone.

As in Le Fils du Ciel, Kuang-hsü is described as particularly sensitive to sound, like André and Orpheus in Segalen's earlier fiction:

... il aimait à écouter tout ce qu'on effleure: un gong que l'on touche sans frapper: il en pâmit! Il fallait le soutenir. Il demandait à voix basse qu'on le touchât de nouveau. Et quand le gong avait fini de vibrer, il écoutait jusqu'au bout du silence et pleurait alors à sanglots... Je l'ai vu regarder sans rien dire une peau de tambour... 1

The refined hero who has exceptionally acute powers of hearing contrasts with the general public whose auditory sense is dulled. Underlying this comparison, with its overtones of the decadent period, is an analogy with the cultivated reader who appreciates the subtle flavour of exoticism. The idea of listening 'jusqu'au bout du silence' is a paradoxical reference to the role played by silence in music, which corresponds with the blank space on a page of writing - a 'creative void'. It recalls Mallarmé's quest for a 'silent music' in poetry, 2 a term referring to the power of that which is not stated.

Segalen introduces the imperial theme at dusk or at dawn, symbolic moments when that which seemed clear becomes veiled in mystery. The narrator confides his secret ambition to René Leys at the 'moment crépusculaire' when time seems to stop:

Les fossés du Palais sont pleins jusqu'aux lèvres, comme une vasque abreuvée de pluies, d'une eau dense, nourrie de limons et de sèves; d'une eau couleur de plomb, sans rides, et qui porte lourdement, - lique embaumant ses profondeurs, - des cernes de larges feuillées rondes d'un vert doux: les lotus du Palais vont éclore... Sans une ride dans cette eau les pavillons aux toits jaunes mirinent; et je vois la denture renversée de leurs crâneaux à deux marches... L'eau porte sans crier tout ce poids immobile et tout ce moment crépusculaire d'une densité qui me pèse... 3

The narrator's prosaic tone is transformed into poetry as he considers the Palace. In this lyrical overture images are introduced which recur in the composition like leitmotives. The water is dense and heavy; like the

1 René Leys, p. 54; cf. above, pp. 149 & 152.
3 René Leys, pp. 32-33.
Great Bell it is the colour of lead. Later a reference to 'l'eau sourde dans ma vasque de porcelaine'\(^1\) takes up this comparison. The adjective establishes a link with the sound of the bell, which is 'sourd et noble'.\(^2\) The rolling of the bell echoes in the countryside; the Palace is reflected in the water. In each case solid reality is transmuted into an intangible image, with qualities of movement, change and doubling. The mirrored reflection reveals the inevitable deformation involved in representing an object. The water is calm and motionless, carrying the weight of the Palace which seems fragile and illusory. It nourishes the lotus flowers which are about to bloom, and which later are half-open in the narrator's courtyard.

For Buddhists the lotus symbolizes the power of regeneration: the universe unfolding from the formless primordial waters.\(^3\) More particularly it represents the world of the imagination which is gradually revealed in the novel. The comparison of the dull water with lacquer, on which are outlined the lotus with its large round leaves and the curved palace roofs, conveys a specifically Chinese tone to the scene, which has the quality of a painting.

The moment when René Leys comes to stay with 'Segalen' recaptures the magic of this still moment of reflection. After dining 'sous le carré du cîel crépusculaire', 'Segalen' contemplates the stars, listening to a hawker's cry in the street.\(^4\) As the lotus begins to flower, René Leys's stories also blossom. 'Segalen' s lotus is in a porcelain basin which recalls those at René Leys's house, scorned by the grocer: 'ces deux vasques de porcelaine, exilées, déposées comme une ordure à la porte d'entrée...'.\(^5\) These basins are, however, empty.

The lotus situated in the middle of 'Segalen' s courtyard occupies the centre, seen by Tabis as a point of synthesis reconciling time and space. Similarly the life of the imagination has a timeless, eternal quality. The Chinese emblem of the square (the courtyard) represents space, while the circle (the sky) represents time. In the dusk these geometrical outlines

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1 René Leys, p. 47.  
2 Ibid., p. 54.  
3 Dictionnaire des Symboles, op. cit., v. III, p. 141.  
4 René Leys, p. 47.  
5 Ibid., p. 35.
become blurred, suggesting that the world of solid phenomena is disintegrating into a shadowy world of illusion. The hypnotic effect of the narrator's dream is like a Taoist trance in which by dint of concentrating on a single point the sage was reputed to free the spirit from the bonds of the flesh. Similarly the writer recaptures the spirit of reality, or his imaginative interpretation of that reality. The lotus in the basin is associated with the image of the fish, symbol of fertility and the instinctive movement of the unconscious mind: "Je regarde mon lotus dans la grande vasque où devraient en bonne coutume nager des poissons compliqués..." Later the movements of René Leys are compared with the weightless, effortless grace of the fish:

Il a, dans tous ses mouvements, en milieu chinois, l'aisance d'un poisson cyprin qui aurait vécu dix ans dans le même — ou la même — vase, et qui n'a plus besoin de ses gros yeux ni de sa quadruple queue pour pâtrire, voir et se conduire.

Play on the word 'vase' relates again to the lotus, symbol of purity arising out of the mud of primordial waters. Free movement in water represents René Leys's ability to mix with Chinese society simply and spontaneously through his competence in language, music and theatre. Like the fish he seems to act instinctively, with an extraordinary sensitivity to matters outside the narrator's powers of perception.

The movement of the fugue is closely related to the seasons, and to associated elements of changing light. The diary form calls attention to the movement of time. The narrator opens his diary on the last day of February to announce his intention of abandoning his project. Then he hesitates: 'C'est tout. Abandonner la partie? Je m'accorde une chance dernière de pénétrer dans le "Dedans".' This last chance provides the material for the composition. Symbolically winter is finishing, spring arrives, the season of new life and hope. The second entry is dated 30 March, over a month later: "Segalen" then presents his second teacher, Mr Wang. The novel begins very slowly, leaving almost empty the months of March and April, the germination period of the novel. The first revelations begin in mid-May, when the narrator can move out of his house into the courtyard:

1 *Religión des Chinois*, op. cit., p. 128.
3 *René Leys*, p. 62.
4 *ibid.*, pp. 169-170.
5 *Dictionnaire des Symboles*, op. cit., v. III, p. 141.
6 *René Leys*, p. 13.
... Comme le Printemps se gonfle tout d'un coup jusqu'à l'Été, j'habite, et pour longtemps, la plus grande de mes œuvres intérieures.

The 'plotting' of the novel takes place outside, under the sky — as if there were a link between the heavens and the 'Son of Heaven', centre of interest in the novel.

The narrator's notes are not regular. Gaps between entries are paralleled by gaps within the narrative. The movement is uncertain, broken by hesitations and points of suspension, indicating reflection and doubt.

Rien non plus, chez moi, sauf deux lettres, déjà transcrites... Et cet énigmatique reçu 'de la première nuit d'amour au palais' — qu'il croyait perdu... sans que je l'eusse détrôné.

These hesitations are closely related to the problems of a writer looking for a word ('un peu... provincial?') or trying to analyse his character's feelings ('...beaucoup de réticences (timidité peut-être?)... — oui...').

After the first large gaps in the diary, the movement of the narration gradually speeds up. There are no entries for the month of April, six long entries in mid-May (9th to 14th), followed by another gap until mid-June, the centre of the novel. The heat of summer is accompanied by threatening storms, associated with the mounting excitement and tension of the 'development', and followed by sudden relapse:

— Comme s'il tenait à se justifier ce soir, voici qu'il m'arrive de bonne heure... Ou bien est-ce la pluie qui m'annonce et l'orage qui va crever?

In contrast with the few long, thoughtful entries of the first half of the novel (eight within four months), those in the second half become shorter and more tense. In the season of autumn the narrator writes more often in his diary than in all the other seasons together. The three seasons form three distinct parts of approximately the same length (the final one is slightly longer).

Change in seasons corresponds with a change in the voices of the composition. At the end of winter the narrator's tone is cold and disillusioned; in spring he becomes more hopeful, while the voices of the countersubject gradually add variation to the subject. Interest builds up.

1 René Zeyde, p. 46. 2 ibid., p. 235.
3 ibid., p. 188. 4 ibid., p. 39. 5 ibid., p. 92.
until by the beginning of the summer 'Segalen' observes that he is 'progressing', with his studies. The account of René Leys's erotic adventures introduces a passionate note which alternates with the more monotonous counterpoint.

In autumn René Leys seems to mature. He is at the height of his glory, appearing to enjoy the fruits of his adventures. However as the season advances towards winter we feel the cold threat of approaching death:

... Il s'enfonce dans l'aube grise. Manifestement, le ciel hésite entre le grand hiver que je he connais pas encore et le plein été qui se clôt. Il se prépare doucement cet automne prolongé, seule saison bien assise entre les trois autres, qui éclate comme des cataclysmes, en explosions de vent, de chaleur ou de froid, ou procèdent par grands assauts de poussière de caléfaction, ou de glace...

The autumn is presented as the point of hesitation between summer and winter, between illusion and disillusion. This oscillation is marked by short entries in the diary like stretto in a fugue, which chase and overlap each other in ever-increasing speed and intensity. The opening lines of the episode in the crisis indicate this tone of urgency: 'Fait divers, dans le Journal Pékinois...'; 'Il faut absolument que je le voie...'; 'Pourtant, il m'arrive,...'; 'Oh! du nouveau enf--...'. The note form of the entries and the short, staccato sentences suggest dramatic development, contrasting with compound sentences which build up an air of expectation:

— Je n'ai pas eu même le temps de courir chercher, René Leys: une ruée de gens en fête dans la rue des Légations m'apprend 'qu'il arrive' — 'qu'il sera là dans dix minutes'; que l'on s'attend à des troubles; et que l'on ne sait pas si tout Pei-king ne va pas brûler cette nuit.

Repetition of the pattern of clauses is part of the musical movement of the prose leading up to the crisis. The countersubject gains power as the autumn fades, and the narrator's belief in René Leys also begins to fade. The latter seems impossible to pin down:

... où est-il? Certainement point au klie paternel! Non plus à son Ecbin... II n'est même pas à Ta'ien-men-wai; — du nom dans les plus honorables maisons connues de lui et moi... (j'en arrive). Il est peut-être au Palais? Dans le Palais? Sous le Palais? Nulle part? Évaporé? Subtilisé comme un mige qui en a dit assez, et dont les jours sont clos?

René Leys, pp. 172-173.
2 ibid., p. 186.
3 ibid.; p. 190.
4 ibid., p. 199.
5 Ibid., p. 203.
6 ibid., p. 206.
7 ibid., pp. 196-197.
Short, abrupt sentences alternate more and more frequently with the long passages of debate and reflection, as the countersubject gains intensity and speed. In the final encounter with René Leys, 'Segalen' insists that they go out into the cold moonlight, "pluie éblouissante dans le ciel lucide du Pêking d’hiver." The icy, penetrating light of the winter sky symbolizes the destructive force of knowledge.

It is associated in the text with the narrator's lucid interrogation of René Leys: "Cette lumière, fouille les reins..." However this piercing scrutiny cannot penetrate the darkness of René Leys's eyes, deep wells representing the exoticism of the inner being. Next time the narrator sees René Leys, his body is cold, like the approaching winter. However by his death he has ensured that his name will live on through the text, as the seasons continue their eternal cycle.

The conflict between subject and countersubject—the Emperor and the forces of republicanism—which lends to the text a fugue-like movement of variation and contrast is essentially a question of language. The language of the imperial subject is subtle, mysterious and exotic; that of the countersubject is logical and practical. The dichotomy between these tendencies is found not only between characters but also within each character. The voice of the narrator changes from subject to countersubject, as does that of René Leys. 'Segalen' is torn between his romantic ideas and a naturalistic desire for proof, just as René Leys is torn between family and Emperor. The members of the Imperial family and the other characters each have their prosaic and their imaginative aspects. The names of certain monuments reveal this dichotomy: "Prospect-Hill" (or more symbolically in French, "La Montagne de La Contemplation"), the point at which the narrator's dream starts to unfold, is generally known to Europeans, we are told, as 'Coal Hill.' The doubling of roles and characters becomes apparent in the game of chess; it is part of a general pattern where each image or event evokes the opposite, as each move on the chessboard is countered by another.

The dinner with Mr and Mrs Wang at Segalen's house is followed by a variation on this theme at their house; the evening at Ch'ien Men-wai contrasts with that at the Palace; the narrator's entry into the Palace officially by day, which he traces on the map, contrasts with René Leys's

1 René Leys, p. 224.
2 V. above, p. 123.
3 René Leys, p. 224.
4 Ibid., p. 31; as in Alphonse Favier's Peking: Histoire et Description; Paris & Lille: Dalpé, De Brouwer et Cie, 1902, p. 280.
mysterious entries by night, on deeper levels. The map, in its flatness, precision and clarity, contrasts with the fuller dimensions of the city described by René Leys. Underground tunnels are associated with wells and towers in a play with perspective characteristic of Segalen, where everything is turned upside-down, or looked at from the other side: 'Tout peut se tourner bout, pour bout: rien ne sera change.' The tendency to reverse conventional patterns of thought or vision has a vertiginous effect, like 'Vertige des mots — Vin des Hauteurs' which intoxicates the reader and draws him into a world of fantasy.

Finally the countersubject is subdued by the death of the prosaic René Leys, while the enigmatic hero survives. Segalen had written in his notes on Maurice Roy, 'Mon Ami Jardin Mystérieux', 'Non point que mon ami soit mort... Mais c'est tout comme...'. René Leys's death is symbolic, representing the author's transformation of the ordinary person into an autonomous literary character. The closing lines of the novel associate the first and second person with the subject: 'J'étais son ami, — devrais-je dire avec le même accent...'. 'The light, suggestive imperial tone finally dominates. The conflict leads to the triumph of the subject, transformed by a new understanding of its meaning. The dominant tone remains one of mystery and uncertainty, leaving the novel open to the imagination, and inviting the reader to further reflection. Thus the richness of the composition lies in itself a source of exoticism, developing the plurality of the text.

1 'Peintures magiques', Œtudes, Peintures, Équipes, op. cit., p. 187.
2 Thibet, op. cit., p. 58.
4 René Leys, p. 259.
CONCLUSION

Victor Segalen's distinctiveness lies in his ability to combine the study of other civilizations with a critical interest in the functions of language and a total dedication to his craft. Through its play on illusion, his fiction reveals the subjectivity of human perception. The provocative quality of his prose seeks to awaken the reader's awareness of the manner in which our lives are governed by the spoken or written word. Exoticism is for Segalen a means of illustrating the elements of fantasy in life. The exploration of the other leads to a reflection on the relativity of customs and beliefs, and an aesthetic appreciation of diversity.

The term 'exoticism' thus acquires new significance in Segalen's work. Traditional exotic literature often carries overtones of paternalism or sensationalism. The genre has been discredited, especially in English, because of a tendency to exaggerate superficial details which will shock or fascinate the reader. Through a satirical attack on the intolerant and the facile, Segalen leaves his work open to the reader for critical reflection. Having isolated the essential quality of the exotic—the element of surprise—he develops this feature into a studied literary technique. His work is a synthesis of features characteristic of different schools: naturalistic methods of observation and documentation blend with a romantic imagination and ironical self-criticism. Erudition exists side by side with fantasy: satirical humour tempers his passionate verve.

In his earlier work, the balance is less evenly distributed. In *Les Immémoriaux*, where his enthusiasm to depict Tahitian culture combines with a rebellion against European dogmatism, he is less successful in realizing a true artistic detachment. However, the novel is a remarkable blend of erudition and imaginative vision. The technique of narration from a totally different world view, which grows out of eighteenth-century writings such as *Lettres Persanes*, develops a new dimension in literature. The direct presentation of a Tahitian perspective is a dramatic literary device which sets up conflicts and doubts in the reader, asking him to consider this different world with the fresh vision of a child.

This initial work set the course for Segalen's fiction. The quest for the other led him further afield. Defining exoticism as 'le pouvoir de
Concevoir autre, he applied the term in the broadest possible sense to anything outside the habitual field of experience: to other times, places, civilizations, attitudes, to the other sex, to nature, to sensory perception. The contemplation of that which is other is a means of breaking out of fixed ways of thinking — notre "tonalité mentale" coutumière. During the interlude in Paris in 1904–8, he saw this quality in Debussy's music. The short story 'Dans un Monde Sonore' illustrates the originality and subtlety of this concept.

China was a catalyst which inspired a burst of literary activity. The short stories or essays 'La Tête', 'Le Grand Fleuve', 'Le Siège de l'Ame', each unique in tone, bear witness to the depth and power of Segalen's first experience of a continent which symbolized for him the diverse. His poetry, particularly Stèles, has won him recent recognition as one of the great French writers of the century. His Feuilles have received less attention than they deserve. I have referred briefly in this study to their remarkable exploitation of the power of writing to create and dispel illusion. They illustrate Segalen's ability to translate his vivid experience of Taoist philosophy and art into universal terms. Moreover, I have made only fleeting references to works such as Equipee, which is, together with Segalen's drama and poetry, outside the scope of this study of his fiction.

The novels have been our major point of concern. Les Immémoriaux has daunted readers by plunging them into an unfamiliar setting of Tahitian mythology and customs. Le Fils du Ciel, published in 1975, has not received much attention from critics. It too presents initial difficulties to the uninitiated reader. Segalen would make no apologies for the problems posed by his writing. He directed his work towards a strictly limited audience:

... des voyageurs-né; des exotos. Ceux-là reconnaîtront, sous la trahison froide ou sèche des phrases et des mots, ces inoubliables sursauts donnés par des moments tels que j'ai dit: le moment d'exotisme. Pour eux, j'ai cet espoir, que la saveur ensuite sera plus grande et plus anisée et la liberté de son jeu démesurée; et c'est pour ceux-là que j'écris.

Language is a 'betrayal', a transformation of the subject into something other — a new reality with its own distinct power over our lives. The 'ideal' reader has a critical sense of this quality of writing, and exploits

1 Essai sur l'Exotisme, p. 19.
2 ibid., p. 20.
3 ibid., p. 24.
its treachery as a source of enrichment. The term 'jeu' recurs more and more frequently in Segalen's notes on literature, suggesting a 'free play' of ideas, a constant debate between contrasting attitudes:

Même en philosophie, le sujet, la signification des idées, ont une importance moindre que leur enchaînement, l'allure avec laquelle elles engrenent et se déroulent, bref, que leur jeu. Ce qui est proprement philosophique, n'est que jeu d'idées, comme ce qui est profondément pictural n'est que splendeur de lignes et de couleurs. La trame des idées est, en philosophie, l'égal des pâtes orchestrales ou picturales.

Theme is less important than is form, which inevitably shapes the movement of the writing. The writer is presented as an autonomous artist, like a painter or a composer, conscious of the particular qualities of his medium. Meaning is dictated, Segalen suggests, by the interplay of words and ideas, rather than by some message external to the text. Asian philosophical systems appeared to be a particularly suitable medium for presenting this detached literary attitude. The mystical genius of the East is represented as one of tolerance, allowing thought to expand and develop freely without the constraints of European logic:

... les Hindous, par un jeu, des rouges et un mode "expansif" qui s'est imposé à moi, m'ont appris à laisser vivre et s'étendre la pensée. 1 La pensée in this case refers, not to conscious intellectual thought, but to the free flow of ideas and associations — more specifically, to the dynamic interplay of language — within the precise limits of a chosen literary form. The contemplation of a subject from different aspects is the essence of Segalen's mature writing: '... pourquoi, par une de ces transpositions artificieuses, — la trame même de mon art, — ne le raconterais-je pas à l'envers...?'

Commenting to Henry Manceron in 1913 about the change in his attitude towards literary expression, he redefined the concept as a 'jeu d'idées strictement philosophique'. 2 He saw literature as a juxtaposition of words suggesting ideas and attitudes, while the author remained uncommitted, both creator and reader of his text. Whereas in Les Immémoriaux he had set out to create a seemingly 'objective' portrait of another culture, through the stratagem of a Tahitian narrator, it becomes progressively more apparent that

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1 Essai sur l'Exotisme, p. 41.  
2 ibid., p. 32.  
his characters represent conflicting attitudes in a debate on the subject of 'reality'.

The virulent manner in which he attacks humanity, in the mass — a characteristic of the 'Belle Epoque' — is a rejection of conventional representations of the world which limit and reduce its 'reality'. In order to taste the full savour of sensation, man must be a creator — both spectator and actor — discovering his potential through the inspiration of the inner self. The artist is a king or emperor: not, however, a prisoner of his people or his historic situation, like the Son of Heaven, but an autonomous figure who creates his own empire of aesthetic pleasure through 'le plein jeu de facultés purement humaines'. In his earlier fiction the Artist represents this Nietzschean power. In his later work it takes a more elusive form: a fleeting sense of something infinitely precious and strange; the subtle pleasure of the literary game.

We have traced an evolution in Segalen's concept of exoticism from a desire to present the ideas and attitudes of another people towards a cultivation of literature as 'jeu libre des mots et des sens'. Words themselves were for Segalen a source of exoticism: 'J'ai tenté que tout mot soit double, et retentisse profondément,' Segalen wrote of his Stèles. Similarly in his fiction there is, as we have seen, a constant play on meaning. René Léya, a novel which Segalen claimed was written as a game, epitomizes his later attitude towards exoticism — a conflict between two sides, in which each word, each event has its double, and fulfills a role in the development. The 'complicated game' of René Léya is one of Segalen's most polished achievements. Its light, ironical style captures to perfection the art of conflict and suggestion which Segalen saw as the essence of literary freedom.

The year after writing René Léya, Segalen presented the debate on reality in a more philosophical form in Équipée. As he noted on the closing page of

2 e.g. Le Combat pour la Sol, and Thibet; v. above, pp. 176-177.
4 Unpublished letter to Henry Manceron, 23 September 1914; quoted by Bouillier,
p. 39.
5 Unpublished letter to Jean Lartigue, 27 December 1914.
this manuscript, up to 'ten years of the imaginary'. Its final pages create a fitting crown for his whole achievement. The pleasures of the 'real' — sensuous and vivid experience — are weighed against those of the imaginary — 'je puis, je pense'. Two beasts in a seal of the Han dynasty represent the opposed elements: the tiger, 'toujours sûr de lui'; the dragon, 'L'Imaginaire dans son style discret'. Mythological emblems of the West and the East, they may be taken to represent conflicting attitudes towards literature: a 'realistic' style, which confidently assumes the accuracy of the senses; or a more subtle flight in fantasy. Between these opposing forces lies the object of dispute, which may be interpreted as 'the synthesis of these qualities in writing.'

Its clear, circular form, that of the classical ocarina within a circle, contrasts with its indefinite meaning. Various interpretations suggest themselves: a Chinese coin, Chinese emblems of heaven and earth, alchemy; 'l'équivalence de tout, l'impossible, l'absolu? Tout est permis...'. Erudite meanings are juxtaposed with ironical references to mercantile transactions. The complex symbol represents Segalen's ideal of a language which is difficult to interpret, suggestive of the mystery of personal identity, which must remain indefinable:

... indiscernible, échappant à tout empire, et unissant ces contradictions dont tout ceci n'est qu'épisodes de combat. Je ne puis savoir à qui me diriger. Si c'est défini, un scrupule, je sais bien, me prendrait: si il y a un autre que je viens de le dire...; et, de nouveau, je suis d'un exotisme universel et victorieux m'arrête...

Naming or defining a being alters it, which must of necessity remain 'other', distant from its observer, as elusive and strange as a double. The writer cannot claim to 'represent' reality. By defining he limits the meaning of his text, and kills its mystery.

The difficulty of Segalen's writing is an essential feature of his exoticism. The conventional usage of words is rejected in favour of arresting forms of expression with etymological, cultural, historical and literary associations. Only in Réné Levy and in 'Dans un Monde Sonore' are concessions made to the reader's taste for intrigue and eroticism. Elsewhere a loftier concept of literature prevails. However the writer's impassioned

1 Équipes, op. cit., p. 237.  
2 ibid., p. 239.  
3 ibid., p. 240.
demand for independent judgment, freedom of ideas and aesthetic values is always tempered in his fiction by an ironical self-criticism and satirical humour.

Segalen brings unique qualities to literature: erudition combined with detachment; an autocritical reflection on language; a philosophical play on ideas in which the illusionism of human perception is projected with a characteristic French irony and lightness of touch. These qualities have become widely valued only long after his death. The time for fuller recognition of Victor Segalen's fiction has come.
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