

The Body in Gender Discourse The Fragmentary Space of the Feminine

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*“Ici, sur terre, nous portons le Nom de notre père,
et dans l’au-delà, nous portons le Nom de notre mère”*
— Moroccan Proverb

In his book, *Bringing Out Barthes*, D.A. Miller criticizes Barthes' analysis of "Sarrasine" in *S/Z* by compelling Barthes to definitively prove the existence of the "gay material," the "homosexual thematics," within Balzac's text. Recognizing what he calls Barthes' *discretion* or "disappearing act," Miller argues that current reception of Barthes' work makes the "social symbolic space allotted to gay men as impossible, impassable" (pp.3-15). Chronicling current politics of the body, pornography, AIDS, and his own life, Miller evidences the Barthesian neuter as a mode of repressing the "gay male gender bind" through Barthes' language play ("pseudo-linguistics") whereby the "male [gay] experience" is not defined through a barred access to the "feminine," but instead is understood as the blurring of the "double-binding" of the masculine and the feminine whereby "meaning and sex become the object of a free play." Barthes' neuter, according to Miller, does not demonstrate a lack of gender, a *genderless* subject, but instead embodies the "male experience of such deprivation," a maneuver which discretely elides the homosexual body. For Miller this move despecifies the gay experience, cloaking the gay moment in binaried *heterosexual* paradigms of active/passive, Miller terms Barthes' "paradise of indeterminacy" (pp.14-16). Miller rejects the elision of the discrete, gay specificity within Barthes' texts, whereby through the release of the "double-binding exigency," the neuter obfuscates the "specificity of women" thus retaining the trace of "a man's barred access to 'femininity'" (p. 15). In other words, sex, gender, and sexuality seem to impose ontological limits upon each other, whereby a theatre of gender conceals certain "secrets," experiences, and desires in order to *discretely* maintain the "Open Secret."

Miller's project presents us with a *sex-gender-sexuality* paradigm in which the "gender aporia" of masculine/feminine preserves the double-bindings of current social discourse which is likewise reflected in contingent physical and social inscriptions: homosexual/heterosexual, private/public, knowledge/passion, same/different, and secrecy/disclosure. In recent discussions of sex, gender, and sexuality, the issue of sex has been relegated to the chromosomal or the reproductive (Foucault), *gender* to the behavioral, and *sexuality* to the behavioral *in relation to* the chromosomal, or as physical conduct relates to the sexed body.¹ Yet, Sedgwick posits that indeed we might locate the sexual as

¹ See Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's text, *Epistemology of the Closet*, in which she discusses the various analyses of biological versus cultural construction of sex, gender, and sexuality.

a far more radical position of social construction that had previously been assessed to gender:

But to the extent that, as Freud argued and Foucault assumed, the distinctively sexual nature of human sexuality has to do precisely with its excess over or potential difference from the bare choreographies of procreation, "sexuality" might be the very opposite of what we originally referred to as (chromosomal-based) sex: it could occupy, instead, even more than "gender" the polar position of the relational, the social/symbolic, the constructed, the variable, the representational (p. 29).

Through this analysis of sexuality, the Barthesian neuter could be viewed as the possibility for the relativistic positions of sexuality and gender to move and shift, thus redefining one another in the process. Sexuality would either reaffirm the discursive constructions of sex and gender through a "normative" performance (i.e. heterosexuality), or undermine these constructions through a "transgressive" act (i.e. homosexuality). For example, heterosexual practices *often* underscore the man's identity as "man" and the woman's identity as "woman", and likewise the man's relation to the "masculine" and the woman's relation to the "feminine." Yet, the popular reading of two men, for instance, engaging in a homosexual act would necessarily call into question their "masculinity" and in many cultures their identity as "men." Likewise, sexuality would reciprocally be affected by any subversion of gender ("*He acts very feminine...Could he be gay?*") or sex (for instance, transsexuals who "confuse" these binaries altogether); hence the equally indefinite construction/performance of sexuality. It is this indeterminate structure, the fluidity *between* the denominations of "gender and sexuality" and "sex and sexuality," which I find neglected within current readings of gender that attempt to fix sex and gender as static entities *upon which* arguments and constructions of sexuality are then based. Also, more recent inquiries into feminism attempt to conflate gender and sexuality into one cohesive unit, thus losing the affectual relationship between the two.² I would argue that between the binaries of gender, masculine/feminine, and of sexuality, homosexual/heterosexual, lies a plethora of unspculated possibilities—a plurality of identities upon which there is neither a formulaic pattern of signifying *one* gender based on a *certain* sexuality (and vice versa), nor a device for inscribing *one* identity, sexual or gender-specific, since in as much as sexuality is linked to gender, it is also linked to race or class. However, many attempts to explain the dichotomies of gender or sexuality usually end up reinforcing these paradigms without carefully examining their interfarious symbolic orders within Western culture.

To view sexuality within a purely dualistic rationale is to subsume any investigation of sex or gender *within the matrix of sexuality* since both sex and gender are discursively conceived as "givens"—they are already established, assumed, and "known." Thus, sexuality has historically fallen prey to these double binds, correlatively positioned as a constituent of sex and gender. Yet, much recent fiction and film has attempted to turn the tables on this "gender bind" through fantastic and real possibilities of sexualities which are played out through a concealed, unknown, hermaphroditic, or altered sex and

² See Gayle Rubin's article entitled "Thinking Sex" in *Pleasure and Danger: Exploring Female Sexuality*. Ed. Carole S. Vance. London: Pandora, 1989.

through various tactics which shift gender roles or confuse the double binding of masculine/feminine through androgynous identity. Through the blurring of gender and/or sex, the relationship that sexuality shares with these two reference points, although often oblique, is none the less challenged and decentered from the homo/hetero dichotomy. While theorists such as Irigaray and Sedgwick are quick to point out that it is often the heterosexual matrix which serves as the basis for male homosocial and homosexual bonds, the identity of homosexuality is none the less played out through these static binaries of masculine/feminine whereby the homosexual and homosocial moments are surrendered to the functions of gender and the needs/desires of men, what Irigaray terms "hom(m)o-sexual monopoly" (p. 169-172).

Current narratives that play with traditional notions of sex and gender do not, in fact, conclusively bind sex and gender to sexuality, but rather they open up possibilities, offering new currents for examining the vincula maintaining the encoded margins of sex, gender, sexuality through the heterosexist-based discourse of masculine/feminine, active/passive, public/private, and concealment/disclosure. Through the displacement of gender and/or sex, these dichotomies are emasculated—they lose the mummifying power of preserving the symbolic structures of sexuality. We can no longer rely on these "safe havens" of binaries to speak of sexuality through traditional object-choice discourse when the "object" (or subject) is cross-gendered, transsexual, or androgynous. More so, this paradigm becomes much more complex when the object-choice extends into the autoerotic/alloerotic, or when object-choice is completely disregarded for other themes such as: noncommercial/commercial, public/private, etcetera.³ Reciprocally, bisexuality would upset the binarisms inherent within sex and gender, as often we hear the critiques leveled at those who disrupt the purity of either homosexual or heterosexual desire. It seems to me that we need to examine the manners in which these binaried social structures are discursively utilized to interpret sex, gender, and sexuality (as well as the definitional links between each) and furthermore, to scrutinize the modes of symbolic representation which form these stayed and carefully situated bases of analysis. Through an inquiry of the symbolic and the discursive, can we unearth the relational positions which reveal *not* the virtual identities of sex, gender, and sexuality, but rather the "knowledge," the construction of these spaces, which reinforces both the static binaries of identity and the interstitial dimensions which coextensively legitimate and which forms the empirical and epistemological architecture of identity.

By uncovering the traces of identity-formation we can then begin to look at sexuality as a fluid structure, as a *bi-sexual* (or poly-sexual) space informed by *both* the physical and the social. Likewise, the double-bindings of gender and sex can be viewed as less inertly positioned to sexuality, as less determined by and determinant of sexuality. This notion of the bi-sexual, then, would reflect Barthes' notion of the neuter in such a way that we are not denied the ingrained dichotomies of sex, gender, and sexuality (not that we could ever do away with such binaries or histories thereof), but that the differences not accounted for by these dichotomies may be explored and understood as alternative, creative, and subjective spheres of being. In her introduction to *Sexuality in the Field of Vision*, Jacqueline Rose proposes that "[t]o understand subjectivity, sexual difference and fantasy in a way which neither entrenches the terms nor denies them still seems to me to be a crucial task for today" (p. 23). Taking up Rose's challenge, I intend to

³ Again, see Rubin's "Thinking Sex."

evoke the various "paradises of indeterminacy" which, contrary to Miller's assertion, do not bar access to heterosexist paradigms of active/passive, homo/hetero, and masculine/feminine, but engage these dichotomies through the credible and fantastic, the real and the imaginary, by playing into a decisive critique of these very binarisms, thus revealing their limitations within current Western feminist and queer theories.

As Miller solicits that we develop and use a language that does not bind gender to sexuality, I would polemicize his initiative and suggest that we examine *not* what Barthes' analysis fails to state about a particular homosexual thematics, but instead that we view *how* Barthes' space of a *langage/corps poétique* generates a language for renaming, reinvoking, and even "encoding" identities. In an age when traditional methods of naming are being challenged, when human rights of persons previously thought perverse are being vindicated, when ideas of race and nation are being reformulated, and when sexual and religious boundaries are constantly being subverted, I find that a diatribe aimed at writers—past and present—who fail to validate a particular ideology of gender, neglectful of the very histories and cultures in which these narratives are being produced. For gender discourse, as Butler points out, evidences a dilemma in *representation* inasmuch as identity is plural and fragmented. Likewise, the challenge of signification lies *not* in confronting an encroaching masculine, for instance, which deteriorates or marginalizes the feminine, but rests in understanding the persistent, discursive drive to consolidate the voices of opposition under a homogenizing narrative which suffuses the spaces of particularity with the markings of a larger, uniform voice. Rather than derogate the Cartesian influences within discourse, perhaps we ought to shift our focus to *culturally specific* readings which reevaluate the position of gender, sex, and sexuality and which likewise render visible the markings of a cultural *métissage* in which the polarity of language and the body are reenacted in order to evoke performances that subvert the dichotomies of sex and gender while retaining the cultural materials for reading these bodies.

Khatibi's *Maghreb pluriel* advances the notion of the *bi-langue*, a domain in which Western and non-Western discourses interact, review and recast the traditionally dichotomized notions of gender, sexuality, language, and culture without reformulating a new, stagnant identity. Khatibi's *bi-langue* evidences the process of decolonization of the Maghreb through a perpetual analysis and consideration of both Western and non-Western texts. The *bi-langue* presupposes the fluid space of destruction, reflection, and recreation in which writers and critics of both the "East" and the "West" must interact and participate critically in constructing a polyphony of language, systems of thought, and alterities. In this process of cultural reinscription, sex and gender are at once separate and unified, at once hierarchized and confused: "Égalité certes dissymétrique entre les deux sexes, mais symétrique sur le plan du système et de la théorie, dans la mesure où le cercle de l'échange réalise le cercle métaphysique, et inversement" (p. 174). Khatibi sets out to subvert the hegemonic practices of linguistic and cultural domination by advocating "poetic language" as a force through which one can welcome the foreign, or the other, that, according to Khatibi, inhabits every language, every nation, every culture, every subjectivity, and every body.

Through writing—both literature and the body—Khatibi exposes his system of the "intersémiotique" as that which bridges the *sémiotique graphique*, writing on the body, with the semiotics of literature. In *La blessure du nom propre*, Khatibi identifies the fragmentary systems of the erotic and of *tatouage* and reveals a "*corps doxologique*," a

body marked by the traces of desire, language, and violence where:

L'officiant prend son corps pour le corps de l'autre. Que cette illusion soit divine pour lui, nous lui accordons cela, mais en sachant qu'une telle appropriation du corps risque de faire disparaître Dieu. Là se loge la fêlure du désir. Là aussi notre différence avec le récitant: entre le souffle divin et la pourriture du désir, nous choisissons le rire hilare... qui, *lui*, sait" (p. 31).

For to write the *corps doxologique* and reveal corporeal desire is to subvert both the religious lexicon of *haram*, the illicit, and the authoritarian dialectic of language (pp. 36-38). And Khatibi goes further to suggest, both in his theoretical writings and fiction, a corporeal space of sexual ambiguity, and at times of subjectivity, wherein the "plaisirs androgynes" are realized with the *corps doxologique*—a body that is imbued with the codes of desire, rhetoric, and poetry, whose signification relies on its immersion in the imaginary and its breaking with social, religious, and gender codes.

Utilizing Abdelkebir Khatibi's *Le Livre du Sang*, I will analyze the roles of sex, gender, and sexuality as socially⁴ inscribed onto the body through the various determining categories of: active/passive, secrecy/disclosure, purity/impurity, tattooed/un-tattooed, visible/invisible, identification/repulsion (or identification/repudiation), and abject⁵/sacred. In this text, the body becomes the field of play, of creation, whereby performance determines and often alters the traditional identities of gender and sexuality (and sometimes of sex). As Judith Butler establishes a distinction between gender as *identity* and as *performance*,⁶ I shall take up her demarcation of these two manifestations by examining the correlative relationships that sex, gender, and sexuality share, both as cultural, legal, and biological *identities* and as individually created, consciousness-forming, self-realizing *performances*. Ultimately, the performance of a sex, of a gender, or of a sexuality, as evidenced within these texts, causes a rupture between the clearly distinct Cartesian models of identity which society—Western and non-Western—abstrusely maintains and hence forces us to question the heterosexist condition of "being"⁷ purely masculine or feminine, straight or gay, and even man or woman.

In her book, *Unmarked*, Peggy Phelan examines the current discourse of *knowing* sexual difference—a discourse she claims synchronously stabilizes "difference" while repressing the "sexual" as a means for securing, reproducing, and *marking* self-identity. Phelan writes: "[C]ultural representation seeks both to conceal and reveal a real that will "prove" that sexual difference is a real difference" (p. 4). Thus, in the tradition of Irigaray and Jardine among others, representing sexual difference for Phelan becomes a process of

⁴ Implicit within my use of the social as the terrain for my analysis is, of course, the biological. However, I do not explicitly name biology as an independent epistemological construct of sexuality since I maintain that the biological is contingent upon, or rather, it is a physical construction of the social. Thus, any discussion of biological sex would necessarily embrace the social *and* biological rather than purely rely on the chromosomal or reproductive features.

⁵ I take this term from Kristeva's *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* (1982).

⁶ See Butler's *Gender Trouble* — especially the chapter entitled "Subversive Bodily Acts."

⁷ My use of the word "being" is meant both in a Heidegerian way and also as "being" relates to performance.

securing a hiatus between the “real and the representational”:

Representation functions to make gender, and sexual difference more generally, secure and securely singular—which is to say, masculine. (She ghosts him.) Representation tries to overlook the discontinuity between subjectivity and the gendered, sexual body, and attempts to suture the gap between subjectivity and the Real (p. 172).

Representing sexual difference preserves the impossibility of representing the woman and hence marks her as Other, as *unmarked*. Reworking the contradictory narratives of representation from both “identity politics” of the Left which emphasize visibility and the psychoanalytic/deconstructionist critiques which doubt the power of visibility, Phelan contends that the unmarked occupies a position of indeterminacy which maintains a certain power over the visible since it eludes fetishization, surveillance, reduction, or possession.⁸

It is this sphere of the unmarked that I wish to examine in terms of sex, gender, and sexuality, and their interrelated significations, for the power of their invisibility mystifies the traditional methods of naming, of marking a body with a *specific* identity in the same fashion that Barthes’ neuter evades specificity and determinacy. The unmarked makes lucid the *impossibility* of “knowing” certain sexualities, and thus reveals the aporia of representing static identities that are not empirically included or “established” within current discourse, no matter how hard both the Right and the Left work at attempting to bridge the space between “subjectivity and the Real.” Thus, in order to extricate the bonds binding subjectivity to the sexed, gendered, and sexual body, we must scrutinize the limits of difference by interrogating the very designation of “sexual difference”—how sexual difference functions both to maintain a “singular” identity of the body as well as to efface subjectivity, assigning subjectivity a “ghost” which is contingent upon and subordinate to a heterosexist identity. By freeing the body from a static relation to sex, gender, and sexuality, we might begin to view sexual difference not as a process of assimilation and adaptation, but as a space of heterogeneity and creativity.

I should add here that what I am attempting to do is *not* to efface sexual difference in favor of a universal sexual androgyny,⁹ but instead I wish to inform the slippage between the visible and the invisible of difference and to disclose how the body is a vector traversed and policed by standards of the visible—a visible which is inherently male-centered and heterosexist.¹⁰ Furthermore, I do not propose that examining the synapses between subjectivity and the body would consequently open up the field for everyone to realize a “happy sexuality” where all signification floats between identity and performance. I do, however, intend this space of the unmarked, of a bi-sexuality of sorts,

⁸ Although Phelan limits her argument to visual representation, I am borrowing from her performative theory and transposing it to the linguistic sphere since what I am examining within literary texts is the representation of visibility/invisibility as related to sexual difference and the inscription onto the body that sexual difference attempts to make singularly whole, monolithic, or same.

⁹ Although androgyny is one of the many marginalized, unmarked sexual identities.

¹⁰ See De Lauretis (pp. 1-26) where she examines the movement between gender as ideological representation and what this representation elides.

to offer the opportunity, the *possibility*, for such signification. Also, by discussing this body of the invisible, I necessarily reveal the unmarked—that is, I transiently *mark the unmarked*—in order to widen the scope of difference and expose the necessarily disparate, contradictory, and heteronomous possibilities of the difference *within difference*. By making this move towards a theory of sexual heterogeneity, we might recognize the weaknesses and the misinformative nature of the bonds which maintain the *connections between and identities of sex, gender, and sexuality* through falsely constructing the body as *pure identity* rather than letting the body speak and perform itself.

Abdelkébir Khatibi's *Le Livre du Sang* imparts a notion of sexuality which demonstrates performance of the biological and the spiritual—a sexuality which in Islam, to quote Abdelwahab Bouhdiba, is “diversity in unity” (1985, p. 12). The unmarked of Khatibi's text is Muthna, a figure of indeterminate or amorphous sex and sexuality—Muthna's gender is constructed by the many narrators whose interpretations at various moments attempt to designate Muthna as woman, man, beauty, spirit, chaste, carnal, real, imaginary. Yet, the absolute impossibility for any of the voices to “know” or to define Muthna, frees her body from the oppressive forces of identifying it, naming it, and then, possessing it. Khatibi's text offers us a reading of Islamic ideology of the somatic, gender, sexuality, and spirituality which *ostensibly* attempts to segregate man from woman, to differentiate masculinity from femininity, and to codify the sacred from the impure act. As Islam, contrary to Christianity, makes no division between mind and body, the spiritual from the biological,¹¹ Khatibi sets out to explore the potential for a fluidity of identity, of individual consciousness, within the physical-spiritual world on earth which would allow the antipathetic dichotomies of male/female, masculine/feminine, and natural/unnatural to enjoy the same interactive freedom that Islam allows the physical and the spiritual.¹² He takes these dichotomies and demonstrates the qualities that each embodies in mirroring and in performing its other, radically rethinking and repositioning Koranic and Hadithic tenets. Ultimately, Khatibi excises the limitations that Islam *seemingly* imposes on sexuality by examining the performative signs within each segregated, differentiated milieu while exposing the “cross-performative,” creative moments that necessarily emerge from certain constricting structures. Khatibi bestows many Islamic beliefs of textual (Koranic) and somatic plurality within his work, thus reflecting exponentially the possible readings of Islam, Moroccan culture, and the socio-somatic spheres of intertextuality¹³. If

¹¹ For a more profound argument on this subject, see Bouhdiba's *Sexuality and Islam*. However, for the best illustration of the interrelationship of sexuality and spirituality in literature, see Nafzâwi's *La Prairie parfumée* (1976).

¹² This is not to say that Islam condones the *mélange* of masculine and feminine, for there are strict prohibitions both in the *Q'oran* and various Haddiths forbidding certain acts and dress by men, and others for women. Yet, there is an absolute fluidity within these texts and other Islamic tenets through which the spirit and the body are interconnected, thus evincing a space of social and physical ambiguity. Tunisian sociologist, Traki Zannad writes: “En Islam, c'est le corps qui est le lieu d'élection. L'Islam se porte dans l'âme mais aussi dans le corps du musulman, le corps en mouvement, celui qui va vers la prière l'action, vers la vie!...Tout en soulignant que le corps n'est pas seulement sexe, sexualité. La sexualité demeure le carrefour de plusieurs plans de représentations parmi lesquels le social” (pp. 16-65).

¹³ Jean-Michel Hirt, in his book *Le miroir du Prophète*, focuses on the polyvalence of visibility/invisibility and Islamic doxa, stating: “[L]’image visible ne vaut que par son reflet lisible dans l’invisible miroir que le Coran constitue... Le texte coranique rend cette image énigmatique en jouant par rapport à elle le rôle d'un miroir qui la fait passer du plan visuel au plan textuel. Ce miroir a en effet le pouvoir de décomposer l'image initiale en rendant invisible Jésus et visible l'instrument du supplice avec sa victime. Là où l'œil voit ou non, le Coran propose une autre vision qui supprime l'alternative: l'œil voit et ne voit pas, comme un miroir qui par son angle de réflexion de la scène montre autre chose que ce qui en serait

nothing else, Khatibi's narrative argues against the steadfast heterosexist identity of the body and seeks to impart the space of play, of performance, and of consciousness between the sex, gender, and sexual divisions of "difference" wherein the body represents both the various identities of gender and sexuality and simultaneously their social and religious contradictions. Or, as Barthes writes: "[C]e qu'il propose, paradoxalement, c'est de retrouver en même temps l'identité et la différence" (cited as "un texte intitulé" on the jacket of *Le Livre du Sang*).

In Arabic, Muthna signifies *effeminate*, *hermaphrodite*, and *androgyny*. Muthna is an apparition in whom each voice, each narrator, views him/herself. The narrators, like Muthna, remained unmarked—the use of the plural "nous" pervades any naming, any categorization, for the voices are polyphonic, each sounding, overlapping the next. Identity forms within their narratives and in the spaces of silence—the identity of androgyny, hermaphroditism, and effeminacy is the space of interaction with this apparition, it is the expanse of self-creation, of freedom. The story begins in the Garden of Refuge where a voice addresses Muthna: "Enfant inoubliable, avance vers nous en souriant. Avance avec la même complicité secrète...Enfant inoubliable, nous te demandons définitivement la nécessaire loi du silence—avant ton égorgement" (pp. 13-14). The voice demands of Muthna to keep this "law of silence" which precipitates a sacrifice of the body—a silence which is both the construction and ultimate destruction of Muthna. Her body is a slate upon which the voices attempt to inscribe Muthna's identity and desires *in order to* confer their own. Muthna is the "enfant inoubliable" whose beauty is consecrated by each singular narrative—"une étrange beauté nous invite à briser notre parole"—her beauty and silence invite the narratives contained within this story. Her silence sustains her life leaving the space of identity-formation open to be created by the narrators who, reflecting themselves in her, can often find no line between their body, their desire, their death, and hers: "Quand le silence nous découpe, est-ce de toi ou de nous que frémiront les vêpres de sang?"

The Maître summons the apparition of Muthna through a contemplative trance-like state, a type of mental ablution from desolation and carnal desire, whereby secrecy secures the space for both the body and language and whereby the disclosure of the secret would necessarily destroy the nostalgia of paradise. The Maître recalls his first vision of Muthna in one of the primary social scenes of absolute sexual division, the *hammam*. Within this male sphere, the narrator recalls the Maître's encounter of seeing Muthna naked, immobile, encompassed within the vapor, head turned away. To the Maître, Muthna is a man—he addresses her as such. Beauty embraces the vapor and each fragment of steam reflects the other (l'autre)—"comme un jeu de miroirs embués." The *hammam* is a homosocial space where the darkness conceals the secret acts and the "entretiens secrets," and where the Maître invites Muthna to their "Asile des inconsolés," a secret country which is part desert and partially irrigated. More so, the *hammam* is the place of purification where Muslims go to purify their bodies — it is, according to Bouhdiba, "la médiation nécessaire entre la jouissance sexuelle où le Musulman devient

frontalement visible. Cette ubiquité de la vision qui traduit le point de vue de Dieu confère au Coran toute sa puissance spéculaire" (pp. 49-50).

impur et se perd la “*h'açâna*”¹⁴ et le moment où il fait sa prière, lit le Coran pour récupérer cette “*h'açâna*” (1964, p. 11). Yet, the division of the sexes within the space of the *hammam* does not, in fact, prevent “impure” thoughts or acts—this space works as a dialectic of the spiritual and the impure whereby the acts taking place within the walls must remain ever so secret. In the Asile, Muthna joins the voices where she is the “fiancé à langue secrète,” she penetrates the stone walls of the Asile—Muthna becomes the physical trace for the repatriation of the dead, of the gods, and of lovers within an earthly paradise: “Ce sera le chant, puis l’incantation convulsive, puis le silence, puis le passage, puis l’errance, puis l’éclair, puis l’annonce, puis l’unisson, puis la rupture, puis la transmutation, puis la séparation des éléments et des formes, puis le ruissellement de ton corps” (p. 18). Muthna manifests the “ruse démoniaque” against Islam in which the physical and the spiritual come together in an earthly paradise, where between the barren and moist lands there is a spiritual-physical sphere for “les amants éperdus.”

The disclosure of the secret, the unveiling of Muthna, depends on her voice, her performance. Yet, she refuses to be marked, she shifts between Feminine and Masculine, her movement illuminates “la Figure de l’Androgyne” (p. 21). Her silence permits the transferential inscription of desire—the markings which the narrators impose on her body, on her person, are clearly reflections of *their own* desire. For some Muthna is a man, a woman, a young boy, a masculine woman, and for others a feminine man: “Notre ange n’est-il pas semblable à jeune adolescente masculine?” (p. 52). This is reminiscent of Al-Hassan Ibn Dhakwam who writes: “Do not sit next to the sons of the rich noble: they have faces like those of virgins and they are even more tempting than women” (Bouhdiba, 1985, p. 32) or of the *fiqh* which warns against the temptation of pretty boys.¹⁵ As Androgyny, Muthna can never be both man and woman, both masculine and feminine, but her identity depends on temporality, the shifting of voices, of positions, of narratives which weave a heteroglossic fabric of consciousness. Muthna embodies the possibility for both an amorphous and static identity wherein the subject may either remain unmarked or retain the traces of cultural identity. The marking of Muthna is, however, a marking of the speaking voice, a linking between the subjective desire and the body that each envisions, that each creates, for whom Muthna is but a fantasy, a space of indeterminate desire and possibility.

Muthna absorbs the scope of invisibility throughout this text—she is invisible as the Hermaphrodite, unnameable as Androgyny. She is only visible as realized by a desire which attempts ultimately to name her, precipitating her death. She is double, “puisqu’on ne vit VISIBLEMENT qu’une seule fois” (p. 68). When one tries to make Muthna visible, the speakers are forced to acknowledge their own subjectivity, the speaker wants to be unmarked, and the voice says: “[J]e voulais...parure de toutes les femmes qui m’adoraient

¹⁴ *H'açâna* (حسنة) refers to an individual's "security" or position of spiritual and physical immunity against the many dangers that the social world presents each person. The physical ablutions before prayer serve to cleanse the individual of both physical and spiritual ills, making him invulnerable until he engages in the subsequent act of impurity.

¹⁵ Michel Foucault discusses the physical beauty and temptation of boys in *The Use of Pleasure: The History of Sexuality, Volume 2* in the historical context of Western Civilization. Although he locates his analysis within Greek philosophical and medical practice of the Fourth Century B.C., I mention this study of the sexual status of boys within Western culture simply to communicate that the “temptation” of young boys is an integral part of sexuality in Western culture as well as is the Arabo-Muslim World since notions of active/passive are maintained through the relations that older men have with younger boys. Also, as chronicled by Westermarck in his study of ritual in Morocco, in the northern mountains of Morocco a young boy cannot properly learn the Koran “unless a scribe commits paedasty with him” (p. 198).

et de tous les hommes qui m'embrassaient...Alors prend-moi comme tu veux, mais prends-moi. Prends! Ne suis-je pas à portée de main!" (p. 54). Muthna's lovers encounter their sexuality, gender, and sex within the indefinite space of her body, under the darkening night, in the Cimmerian corners of candle-lit rooms, and "dans le vide et...la torsion [du] corps coupé, mutilé de part et d'autre par une ligne invisible" (p. 63). They attempt to make known her sex, hence inscribing their own. They constantly foretell of her inevitable "égorgement," the moment when "le chant lumineux" will reveal the truth. For Muthna's beauty is the only substantial sign which marks her body, the only *named* object of desire. Her beauty, however, is also her death, her "maladie fatale" (p. 56) which refuses a sexed or gendered designation. Just before Muthna is *égorgée*, a voice demands her visibility, it demands her to name her sex, her identity: "Il faut choisir le mot mortel pour tout détruire, avec la brièveté d'un coup de couteau... Recule, qui que tu sois! Recule! Es-tu femme? Es-tu homme? Ou bien l'Androgyne EST-il vraiment? Qui tu sois, déclare ton sexe!" (pp. 156-157). She says nothing. Then, the narrator adds: "Où es-tu encore VISIBLE?" (p. 161) for Muthna can only be visible through death—the *specific* identity cannot breathe in time but can only exist in a deteriorated state. To make Muthna visible is to kill her: "Qui prononce le nom de Muthna une fois, une seule fois, est déjà ensorcelé par l'enchantement du Mythe. Je te nomme, je te tue. Je te nomme, tu tombes" (p. 62). For Khatibi demonstrates that to name, to render visible, marks the end, the death, of indeterminacy and of *certain* kinds of sexual splendor.

Like the visible and invisible, purity and impurity engage the sexed and gendered body. In order to disclose Muthna, the Maître must penetrate her, he must be able to see her as (or make her) pure. She is examined with the equal scrutiny that one undertakes in making ablutions: "pure, sans crachat, sans maladie aucune, sans excréments" (p. 132). Through the performance of sex, the symbolic gestures of purification become overwhelmed by the vision the narrator has of Muthna's double role as man/woman, active/passive: "[C]oup à coup réveillée dans le battement de tes veines, coup à coup envahie par la vision obsédante de son frère" (p. 132). Yet, she also penetrates the Maître spiritually, physically, and mentally casting a "shadow" of femininity onto his body, social identity, and spiritual wholeness while synchronously reconstructing, reshaping these identities.¹⁶ Muthna has now opened the Asile to "une secrète transfiguration du Mal...tout en coïtant dans l'ordre des choses vouées à la corruption érotique" (p. 133). She takes the Mal, what is regarded as impure—her body—and proceeds towards *jouissance*, towards a field of play where the markings of purity and impurity, the confines of masculine and feminine, and the antagonistic divisions of heterosexual and homosexual love have no alliances to cultural paradigms of good and evil. The voice questions the purity of the Maître who lies in the arms of Muthna, he is revolted by the freedom she offers with her body, and he wonders exactly to whom she offers it. The beauty that all have granted her is shattered by the sexual acts she undertakes. The Maître asks "N'ai-je pas—pour toi—confondu le Mal et le Bien?" (p. 136). As interrelated constituents of her identity, Muthna's body, gender, and sexuality threaten to disrupt the traditional parallels drawn

¹⁶ The passive sexual role of homo- or heterosexual acts is commonly understood within the West and other non-Western cultures as an effeminization of the person being "penetrated". Yet, in the Arabo-Muslim world, the fact of being penetrated (including homosexual activity) is not necessarily deemed as "evil" since passing on *baraka* (good fortune) is often a healing process or spiritual endeavor for the individual and often the community. For an excellent discussion on this subject see Westermarck. Likewise, Crapanzano details how sick, impotent, or "inadequate"-feeling men are equated to *being* or *acting like* women. Treating the legend of a Moroccan marabout, Sidi 'Ali, Crapanzano discusses the various endowments of *baraka* as related to male identity and the desire for female characteristics.

between: femininity, passivity, beauty, and woman; between masculinity, activity, reason, and man; between heterosexuality, procreation, sacred, and social order; and between homosexuality (among other forms of sexuality), death, impurity, and chaos. Maintaining the borders between the above models, the antagonistic vigor between purity and impurity constructs the drive towards a homogeneous identity that unconditionally bridges the subjective and the Real by simply barring access to the other. It is only through Muthna that we can escape this paradox.

In the section entitled “Nuit de l’erreur,” Muthna escapes a Carnival and sleeps with her brother. This is the only time where she speaks, but only to equally imagined and mythical figures. She then address Yaqout¹⁷ and discusses her virginity:

Ai-je oublié la mienne? Ma virginité étoilée! Dans le sang radiée....C’était bien le ciel qui tombai sur moi. Mais Lui, qui était-il?(*Elle compte sur ses doigts.*) Mon père? (*Rieuse*) Non...il était déjà mort. Un oncle ivre et débauché? Un esclave de ma mère? Un fou? Un prince? Un poète errant?...Pour que tu résistes à tous les amants, à tous les bordels ouverts, tu dois construire pour ton image une autre image qui, elle, doit glorifier le Mal. Image qui te sépare en deux, de haut en bas...éclairant ta détresse. Oui, le Mal est une pensée angélique...Et la Beauté, infiniment belle, infiniment dévastatrice, n’est-elle pas...la clarté du Mal! (pp. 117-118).

Muthna refuses a inert position within the paradigms of good and evil, pure and impure, and instead creates her own identity by performing it, working within the heterosexual structure in order to subvert it. Unlike the Maître, Muthna does not simply confuse good and evil but instead she demonstrates cultural “norms” by emphasizing them, even perverting them, taking them to their “extremes.” For instance, sleeping with her brother could be viewed as a natural extension of *cousinage*—Muthna ingests the cultural practice of absolute endogamy which perpetuates the life of a tribe and she takes it through its “extreme” form, evincing the taboo of incest which is considered equal to murder: “Cet acte sans loi a la force d’un meurtre, d’un meurtre qui renaît de sa propre infamie” (p. 119). Likewise, Muthna as male, would pose an equally accursed threat to the religious and social order since homosexuality is viewed as “evil” as incest and other sexually “perverse” acts.¹⁸ Muthna demonstrates that which is not natural, the “surnaturelle” of ecstasy: her body as male and female, her gender as masculine and feminine, and her sexuality as beyond the law—neither purely heterosexual or homosexual, evading the castigation of cultural taboos and Koranic prohibitions. Thus, Muthna takes the religious, cultural, and physical designations forcing all to see the perversity of such divisions within her world and the inevitability of such acts, for the “Nuit de l’Erreur” is the “cris qui reviennent” (p. 119).

Ultimately, Muthna is the embodiment of the abject whereby, as Kristeva

¹⁷ Yaqout (d. 626/1229), also spelled Yâqût, is famous for his geographical dictionary, the *Mu’jam al-Buldân*, in which he discusses al-Waqwâq, a fictional island created by Ibn Tufail in *The Journey of the Soul*. On this island Ibn Tufail establishes a type of sexual utopia where women grow on trees and where a male couple, Asal and Hai, spend their days dreaming of this place in which they may live together. Although the paradise of al-Waqwâq is a recurrent theme within Islamic texts, this specific story excludes women from the overall vision.

¹⁸ See *The Elementary structures of Kinship*, Lévi-Strauss contends that the incest tabou is the most general form of prohibition to which most other prohibitions are linked (pp. 468-198).

contends: "Abjection accompanies all religious structurings and reappears, to be worked out in a new guise, at the time of their collapse...each one determining a specific form of the sacred...It takes on the form of the *exclusion* of a substance (nutritive or linked to sexuality), the execution of which coincides with the sacred since it sets it up" (p. 17). Muthna is taboo incarnate: she is aware of her sexual ambiguity and the threat she poses to those around her, those who desire her, those who are possessed by her: "Je suis toi" (p. 32). "La beauté du Mal" upsets the order of the those surrounding Muthna—especially of the Maître whose sensual thoughts threaten to prevent him from his prayers. One voice acknowledges that the Masculine and Feminine are not complementary, but instead inhabit an aporetic space—the same voice summons Muthna to return to the Asile for consecration. The abject is confronted by the sacred¹⁹—those surrounding Muthna attempt to bless her through marking her body both metaphorically and literally: "Par la circoncision, n'avons-nous pas offert notre prépuce devant l'autel paternel? Par l'adoration de la Beauté—loi de notre secte—n'avons-nous pas voué notre chair à la transfiguration?" (p. 146). Those surrounding her cannot accept the double-nature of her body, of her gender, and sexuality—they cannot accept the secretions of the body without purification: "Baigne-toi, Muthna, baigne-toi dans la circulation de votre sperme. Tu tomberas" (p. 66). For the abject embodies a defilement of the body which is almost always met by the sacred remedy. *However, the abject is not always a willing convert to the sacred.* The sperm, the shit, the saliva, and finally, the blood²⁰ all compose the abject within Muthna as physical, cultural, and religious symbols. Abjection is "a repulsive gift that the Other, having become *alter ego*, drops so that "I" does not disappear in it but finds, in that sublime alienation, a forfeited existence" (Kristeva, p. 9). The narrators have created or perhaps imagined Muthna and thus are left either to purify their bodies or are themselves to remain abject.

"[W]hen I seek (myself), lose (myself), or experience *jouissance*—then "I" is *heterogeneous*. Discomfort, unease, dizziness stemming from an ambiguity that, through the violence of a revolt *against*, demarcates a space out of which signs and objects arise" (Kristeva, p. 10). The sign of the revolt, of the repudiation, of Muthna's body and subjectivity is necessarily a repudiation of the self—a denial of *jouissance*, an attempt to snuff out that which is Other, that which possesses another. Muthna possesses these narrators: they enter a trance which frees them from the constraints of the sacred—they enter into the space of creating their bodies or, as storytellers, speaking and writing their bodies. The Transe du Même is a forbidden state of *jouissance* in which one perpetually orbits the "ordre implacable du Mal" within which memory of the past and the past's imminent repetition into the future coalesce the knowledge of the *malheur* of the divisions of masculine and feminine, male and female, the loved and the lover, and "livre et sang d'ou coulera encore et toujours notre séparation infinie...transformés dans la Mort...c'est-à-dire assassinés à la naissance" (pp143-144). The Transe du Même embodies the possibility of rebirth—it takes what is conceived as misfortune and turns it into creation:

¹⁹ Moncet Gouga writes: "Ainsi le sacré envolt peu à peu l'espace de la vie profane jusqu'à envelopper toute la sexualité de l'individu dans un tissu brodé d'interdits et de tabous...La sacralisation de l'acte sexuel commence en fait par la sacralisation du corps de la femme." (pp. 49-64).

²⁰ Boudhiba states: "Whatever emerges from the human body, gas, liquid or solid, is perceived by the fiqh as impure. What we have here is the universal horror at the sight of any rottenness, putrefaction or defecation. The body's excreta are all impure and disgusting: gas, menstrual blood, urine, faecal matter, sperm, blood, pus" (p. 45).

“Alors tu connaîtras...l’irradiation du vide et la joie immense de la Transe” (p. 145). The Maître, in love with Muthna, soon becomes nauseated by his abjection—he must purify himself from the defilement he perceives within Muthna and within himself. The Échanson, Muthna’s brother, awakens from his trance and vomits his blood, her blood, his abjection. Unable to move, he is forced to look into a mirror:

Beau miroir, je suis brisé! Veux-tu m’initier à l’art du Simulacre? Peut-être as-tu pris forme humaine pour t’admirer toi-même. Suis-je un rêve? Dois-je mourir, me regardant mourir?... Telle est la pensée funèbre... dans l’inceste. Quand le vertige d’un malade appelle la mort, elle ne vient pas toujours selon la cérémonie attendue. Le malade se réveille et s’endort, attendant encore son exécution (pp. 116-117).

Like entering and withdrawing from a trance, the Muthna's double awakens and falls asleep, awaiting its execution. The Échanson, becoming dizzy, confused, soon abandons the mirror as he realizes his image of Muthna is of “un ange déchu” (p. 117). Analogous to sanguine relations and procreation, the act of incest, like Muthna’s body, confuses and blurs the divisions of natural and unnatural, of the “malade” and the pure. The Échanson can no longer look into the mirror.

Likewise, the Maître, the figure most confused and most possessed by Muthna, weaves in and out of abjection and the drive for the sacred. He wants to be dominated by her, by his desire: he exposes his jugular vein to her, he wishes to be restrained by her, to be penetrated by her, and finally, when descending into his tomb, he supplicates her to provide him with a last thought. Yet, he also repudiates her: she confuses Good and Evil, she keeps him from directing his energy toward God, and she embodies, for him, a living death—“[C]haque fois je te pénètre dans la mort vive” (p. 142). Despite the fact that the Maître addresses Muthna as masculine, as male, he finds within her, within himself, a dialectic of masculine and feminine, of active and passive, and ultimately the uncertainty of her “true” identity. Yet, the echoing of the “malheur” throughout his narrative results in his abjection of Muthna, his refusal of “l’Amant mystique” for the Maître has lost his senses according to the one narrator—he has entered into absolute chaos. For as Fatima Mernissi confirms that Islamic doctrine and thought conjoins women with chaos (*fitna*), the amorphous body and identity of Muthna is similarly equated with *fitna*. For the absolute danger that she poses is not merely a corporeal, gendered, or sexual chaos, but what these entanglements of identity threaten: the flow of men’s energy toward God and the male-dominated social order. The Maître believes that Muthna must be “consommé par le dieu qui l’a élu, dans le même rite d’absorption” (p. 146) in order for her to be made sacred; hence the purification of his body, the “exorcism” of his memory.²¹

Purification is ritual—it is the struggle against death, against the “misfortunes” of the body, or as one voice states “[un] peur d’être abject” (p. 145). Muthna is viewed as death, a malheur of the body and the spirit. Thus, as the Prince instructs the Fou who finds a sheep, “[é]gorgez la Mort et vous vivrez éternellement” (p. 151), Muthna will also

²¹ In *La mémoire tatouée* (1971), Khatibi declares: “[L]a mémoire est le refuge troublé et obligé de toute interrogation qui tente d’exorciser l’identité.”

be ritually slaughtered like a mouton for the *Aid el Kebir*.²² The Transe must be put to its end: "Il faut choisir le mot mortel pour tout détruire, avec la brièveté d'un coup de couteau" (pp. 156-157). Words are the manner of Muthna's death—the words she must utter to "declare" her sex, the words which attempt to rupture the Transe eternally. Muthna is slaughtered by "les Fidèles", her blood flowing on the mosaic tiles, she is purified through ceremony.²³ The narrator, however, merges with Muthna's voice and one identity is momentarily indistinguishable: "Quoi puis-je arrêter l'écoulement du sang? Regarde, mon amour: ma tête se détache de ma nuque" (p. 158). Then the voice shifts again: "Enfant inoubliable, mort assassiné, tu marches maintenant dans l'Au-delà...L'Au-delà n'est pas séparable de la vie terrestre; en survolant tout paradis et tout enfer, il advient dans la Transe du Même" (p. 158). Through death then, Muthna is freed—the life beyond breathes with the Transe du Même that was suffocated for her on earth, but more importantly for those creating her, envisioning and writing her, writing themselves.

The voice, now repentant, wants to follow her and asks where she is, "Où es-tu encore VISIBLE? Où te joindre désormais? Je t'ai fait partir—et tu es partie—pour en finir" (p. 161). The narrator envisions a return of Muthna to earth when she will not speak through "une voix inhumaine", but will address all humans in a voice that might be heard. Muthna is then envisioned as Orpheus:

Orphée mon divin maître, laisse le Livre du Sang tomber goutte à goutte sur chacun de mes mots—à déchirer mes tempes et mes veines. ...Orphée, accorde-moi le Signe, le grand Signe qui éclate à l'horizon, le signe de l'Androgyne ailé. Aimer un androgyne n'est-ce pas défailir à tout! Quelle force d'amour faut-il pour supporter un beauté inexplicable? (p. 162)

The narrator, attempting to make clear, "explicable", the tragedy of Muthna's life and death, her amorphous identity, finally realizes his own Transe du Même: "Suis-je un homme? Suis-je une femme?" (p. 163). The voices speak the Livre du Sang where words and Transe become indistinguishable from one another—as indeterminate as the body and desire. The attempt to extinguish their desire results in the end of their vision, the death of Muthna, hence the decline of their trances. The expulsion of the abject from their bodies, the blood from Muthna's body, forces them to view the abjection, the hatred, within themselves, for themselves, thus uncovering the source of their abjection which "is huddled outside the paths of desire" (Kristeva, p. 11).

The body is a locus of symbols from which we are born into being, through which we are forced to identify. Muthna is the other for those experiencing and surviving her, carrying the symbolic force of the somatic, retaining the abject nature of Muthna's body. As Kristeva states, abjection is "an Other who precedes and possesses me, and through such possession *causes me to be*" (Kristeva, p. 10, italics mine). The memory of Muthna, therefore, is the trace em-bodied through the performance of identity in the Transe du

²² Literally, the *Great Feast*, which celebrates God's command to Brahim (Abraham) to sacrifice his son, Ismael, as a test of Brahim's faith in God, which marks the beginning of Islam. The Great Feast celebrates Brahim's act of faith in which every year, on the Muslim calendar, traditionally the oldest male of the family (or today, any male member who is pure) sacrifices a sheep in the family's house or courtyard. Ironically, this scene in the Koran is similar to the story of Isaac in the Old Testament. Khatibi also plays with the *doublure* of religious motifs and imagery in this text.

²³ Kristeva writes: "The various means of *purifying* the abject — the various catharses — make up the history of religions, and end up with that catharsis par excellence called art..." (p. 17).

Même and the writing of *Le Livre du Sang*. For Abdelhaï Diouri reminds us of the intimate relation between écriture and Transe:

L'écriture alors, de par la frénésie ou la ferreur qui lui donnent le jour, et par delà le travail d'ascèse sur elle retranscrit le corps, est une pratique qui participe et procède de la transe. La relation entre transe et écriture pourrait n'être qu'un jeu réciproque de métaphores. La transe est une écriture du corps dans le corps et hors de lui, écriture gigantesque, hiéroglyphique, à la dimension de l'homme qui l'exécute dans l'espace; par ailleurs n'écrit-on pas comme on danse? (pp. 5-6)

As the voices are addressing us, the reader, they are simultaneously—and more directly—addressing Muthna. She is the “tu” to whom the narrators speak. Giving her the name Muthna indicates androgyny and moreover, the effeminate—the feminine that would otherwise be inaccessible to these speakers without their dreams of her body, of her movement. Through their creation of Muthna, they enter a trance reflecting and creating their own bodies, language, and desire.²⁴ Her silence does not give them this language, but lets them discover and create their own language and perform their subjectivity. Thus, Muthna’s silence is not a position of weakness, but a state of strength through which she empowers the narrators by disseminating the potential of desire which they, in turn, realize, experience and then attempt to make *oubliable*, to cleanse, and to distance from themselves. Just as forgetting or losing memory of this “enfant inoubliable” is impossible, Muthna is consigned to the Paradise beyond and likened to a black-eyed *hûrî* who will there fulfill the earthly lacks of desire as do the *hûrîs* in the Koran²⁵ and the women in Ibn al-Wardî’s conception of the island paradise of al-Wâqwaq.²⁶ Muthna is envisioned moving through Paradise shrouded in white linen. Here, she sustains the fluid nature of her identity and of the narrator’s desire, inasmuch as white, in the Moroccan sub-Sahara region, is the color advocated for *only* men to wear *except* when a woman is mourning her husband. Only then does she wear the white clothes of her spouse for four months and ten days following his death.²⁷ The final vision of Muthna is one of a man and of a woman in mourning with no spouse to mourn. For whom could she be mourning then? She is the recreation, the re-embodiment of both the cultural and religious constructions and contradictions of man and woman, masculine and feminine, mind and body, and birth and death. Muthna brings the cultural taboos of her sex, gender, sexuality, and even

²⁴ See Aïssa Ouitis’ book entitled *Possession, magie, et prophétie en Algérie* in which she discusses the symbolic language of trances which confers men’s access to the feminine, ultimately pointing out that the “conduites de possession constituent bien un langage symbolique, signifiant des contradictions sociales” (p. 153).

²⁵ In the section of Koran entitled “That Which is Coming,” the pleasures of the *hûrîs* and young boys await the multitudes who “shall reclie on jewelled couches face to face, and there shall wait on them immortal youths with bowls and ewers and a cup of purest wine (that will neither pain their heads nor take away their reason); with fruits of their own choice and flesh and fowls that they relish. And thier shall be the dark-eyed houris, chaste as hidden pearls: a guerdon for their deeds” (p. 379).

²⁶ For a complete explication of his interpretation of al -Wâqwaq, see Fedwa Malti-Douglas’ *Woman’s Body, Woman’s Word: Gender and Discourse in Arabo-Islamic Writing*

²⁷ The popular explanation of this mourning period is to ensure that the widow is not pregnant by her deceased husband so that if she is to marry after this time has passed, literally *four menstrual cycles and ten days*, it shall be known who is the father of the child.

cross-dressing, to Paradise forging an earthly, adjoining space for dreaming, writing, and jouissance.²⁸

Hossain Bendheim asserts that the prohibition of the maternal language within Islam suspends the desire for such language within the after-life where there shall be a complete union of the body with “la mère retrouvée” (p. 198). The *Transe du Même* could be viewed as the dialogic space between the earthly and the heavenly as well as between male and female, masculine and feminine, the real and the imaginary, and the various practices of eroticism and desire. Through subversive acts then, one may realize subjectivity by having access to the feminine and marginal sexual practices that had been previously elided or made abject as *fitna*. Simply put, it is *not* sexuality, but *women* and the *feminine* which become the locus of attack and degradation, in both Islamic and Western culture, wherein a man's access to femininity as a subjective identity and *not* an object of conquest, threatens the social order as much as—if not more than—the woman's body alone.²⁹ Khatibi's text offers the possibility of accessing a language of the feminine through the *Transe du Même*, the dance of jouissance, in which the performative action of self-creation is necessarily indeterminate, unrepresentable, unmarked. Clearly, an underlying danger of *Le Livre du Sang* is Khatibi's refusal to expand this liberation of gender outside a poetic space whereby we might view the feminine within the mirror, rather than projecting the feminine (or Woman) as an abject identity that must be repressed, or even viewing the feminine as a fleeting textual apotheosis of freedom. Khatibi's notion of gender begins and ends where all traces of difference and subjectivity are absorbed within the *jouissance* of language, thus recreating a different type of paradise for his poetic space of the feminine “ideal”. Yet, Cuban writer, Severo Sarduy, establishes that the emancipation of identity from the strict dichotomies of sex, gender, and sexuality *necessitates a performative* exploration of forbidden territory and a “*véritable subversion du corps*” (emphasis mine, p. 88). Perhaps, it is at this juncture—of the poetic and the real—that we can look to other cultures and other bodies in forging a language emancipated from the undertow of binaries.

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²⁸ In *La Blessure du nom propre* (1974), Khatibi analyzes the language of Nafzâwi, author of *La Prairie parfumée* (also entitled *Le Jardin parfumé*), asserting that the rhetorical force of his language serves to mirror both the reality of earth and the dream of paradise in creating an eroticism that is a movement towards God, dreaming, writing, and desire: “Rêver, c’est, comme il est dit, parler le désir de l’autre. L’être rêvant est le mouvement même de ce partage, de cette fissure. En se dévoilant la nuit, le corps s’angélise, se transporte dans la vapeur euphorique qui sanctifie même l’inceste: Nafzâwi fait miroiter un paradis incestueux à propos du mot *ar-ham*. Et en même temps que ce dévoilement du corps se construit dans le rêve, celui-ci, à son tour, donde le texte. Coïter, rêver, écrire sont liés au même mouvement: le transport rhétorique et la vapeur mystique” (pp. 173).

²⁹ Fatima Mernissi also comes to a similar conclusion about the woman's body in *Beyond the Veil*, stating of woman's identity in the world: “The irony is that Muslim and European theories come to the same conclusion: women are destructive to the social order—for Iman Ghazali because they are active, for Freud because they are not” (p. 44).

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