

## The Worlds of Paul Bowles

By Brian T. Edwards



On the first Sunday in November 1999, Paul Bowles was admitted to the Italian Hospital in Tangier. It was local news—though the writer and composer was born in New York, he had been living in Tangier for more than half a century—but the occurrence rapidly made the international airwaves.

Across the ocean and half a continent away at the University of Notre Dame, where I was teaching at the time, a student told me what had happened. The student had read of Bowles's hospitalization on the CNN website on his way to my office. Even though I had seen Bowles recently in Tangier and had noticed a marked decline in his health, I was still startled.

There in a sterile office tower in northern Indiana, the student's report was incongruous with the image I held of Bowles lying in bed in his cluttered apartment, musty *hanbels* shutting out the intense Moroccan sun. But there was something more: that news of such an intimate event in Tangier might be circulating on the Internet seemed incontrovertible proof that a different era had arrived, one within which Paul Bowles, America's most famous literary expatriate since Gertrude Stein, would necessarily have some different meaning.

Bowles was not yet understandable within the world of the World Wide Web, even though word of his hospitalization spread rapidly via that digital network. The Atlantic crossings one associated with Bowles were by steamship, not on fiber optic cable, and measured in weeks with two dozen suitcases in tow. Only grudgingly did he even travel by air, as he was forced to do for his exceedingly rare trips away from Morocco in his final years. Despite remarkable changes in the way the planet was organized during the 1980s and '90s, on his death Bowles still seemed to belong to the past and a different way of imagining the world. Perhaps it was because of those changes that so many held on to an older image, now in need of revision.

By 1999, Morocco was well into the digital age. Young Moroccans congregated in cybercafés to “surf the net” and to communicate with peers around the world in digital parlors called chatrooms. Several years earlier, fax machines and satellite television had become ubiquitous in Morocco and showed the ways in which new technologies could bridge national boundaries (there are still fewer restrictions on what Moroccan *parabols* will pick up from what U.S. satellites deliver). And by Bowles's death, cellular telephones, perhaps the most profoundly disorienting technology of the digital revolution, one that fundamentally altered the sense of being in the world, had already made major inroads in Morocco.

Bowles wasn't emailing his friends, to be sure, but he did have a television and VCR in his bedroom during the '90s and a fax machine that was in active use. During one of my last visits to him, I noticed a telephone on the floor next to his bed. I almost didn't see it, though, because I had read so often about the day in the 1970s he pulled it out of the wall—an integral part of the legend surrounding the “romantic savage,” as one of his biographers called him. I asked him about the phone. He merely shrugged. Who was he to upset the myth?

After a week and a half in the Italian Hospital, Bowles died. On the other side of the Atlantic, the

legend of his voluntary exile in a mysterious foreign land dominated the obituaries, which stressed his departure, his distance from the center of it all, and exaggerated the exoticism of the place that had captivated him for so long. The major American papers saw in Bowles's long residence in Morocco a renunciation of something about the U.S. and implicitly criticized him for staying away for so long, as if in a prolonged adolescence.

For most Americans thinking about Bowles meant thinking about Morocco. In his new book, *Paul Bowles, Magic & Morocco*, Allen Hibbard writes that for many in the West, Morocco and the name Paul Bowles are inseparable. Bowles himself had played a large part in teaching Americans how to think about Morocco. Americans tended to gravitate to the sinister side of that work. In the lead of his full-page obituary for the *New York Times*, Mel Gussow wrote that Bowles's work "evoked a world of dark Moroccan streets and scorching deserts, a haze of hashish and drug-induced visions." Even for those who hadn't read his books, Bowles was a touchstone for American presence in North Africa, and the point of reference for so many travel accounts and magazine pieces about the country. During his life, and then after it was over, the ways in which Bowles's life in Morocco was portrayed by journalists, interviewers, travel writers, and biographers inadvertently framed the way many Americans who didn't otherwise think about Morocco thought about Morocco. And Americans writing about Bowles tended to filter out the signs of what had changed in Morocco, and what had changed in Bowles's own career. To claim that he wasn't living in the present suggested that Morocco was not living in the present either.

This operated of course in both directions. For many Moroccans, Paul Bowles was a controversial figure. As a literary author with worldwide fame, Bowles's interest in and devoted representation of folk culture, Berber musical forms, and the underbelly of Moroccan society troubled many Moroccan intellectuals. The very themes that drew many American readers to Bowles's work—especially magic, danger, and the primitive—were the themes that frustrated Moroccans, who apparently saw in Bowles's attention a devaluing of the Moroccan nationalist project. In Abdallah Laroui's major work, *Contemporary Arab Ideology*, published in 1967, for example, the Moroccan historian and philosopher criticized Bowles for seizing on "empty time, the degree zero of existence" and finding it in the "absolute silence of the Sahara desert." "He forgets," wrote Laroui, "that the silence exists only for the former New Yorker or Londoner."

The Paul Bowles legend, in its American incarnation, seemed to require that the distant land be cut off from America, and by implication from modernity: a primitive place. Gussow wrote that Bowles "retreated to Tangier and became a collector of Arabian stories and songs, and moved farther away from the worlds of publishing and society toward an unknown destination." Without that distance, both geographic and temporal, the legend couldn't hold up. Gussow's mistaken reference to "Arabian stories" (when he means Arabic-language, or Arab) is a slip that sends him back to the time of the Arabian Nights. It follows that Gussow and the other American obituaries said next to nothing about contemporary Moroccan history itself, despite the importance of it to the Bowles legend. During the fifty years Bowles had lived there, and the nearly seven decades since he had first visited, Tangier and greater Morocco changed as least as much as the rest of the world, if not considerably more so. Tangier had grown from a zone the size of a large town, administered by a group of European nations, to a sprawling city of a million or more pertaining to independent Morocco. Bowles's relationship to Morocco and Moroccans and to his literary career itself changed markedly in response to the changes in his adopted place.

On his death, Moroccan media covered Bowles's passing actively and with a variety of opinions, from those that followed Laroui's lead, to more appreciative responses that saw in his career something of Tangier's own fusion of languages and peoples. Many papers put the story on their front page, and the Moroccan media response to Bowles's death was more varied, more

interesting, than that which appeared in the U.S. media. As the most famous American living in the country, as well as someone who had popularized Morocco among Americans, Bowles's work and the end of his life did not seem unimportant events, relegated only to the literary supplement.

Still, no mention of the intense and varied Moroccan response to the American author made it into the American press. (In October 2000, I did publish an essay in the online culture magazine *FEED* that said as much and sampled some Moroccan reactions.) Then, after the multiple tragedies of September 11, 2001, American writers lamented Bowles's absence, but for mostly retrograde reasons, clinging to his tales of horror and misinterpreting his work as signaling the impossibility of Americans understanding the "Muslim mind." The artistic collaborations and the conversation with Moroccans that Bowles had been engaged in for decades were forgotten in preference for the old tales of shock and awe.

Isn't it time to reconsider the Bowles legend?

### **Spider's Web**

When Anouar Majid invited me to write a profile of Paul Bowles for *Tingis*, I was struck by the intriguing challenge of simultaneously addressing readers in both Morocco and the United States on the topic of a man who had such different meanings in those two contexts.

So I begin with my sense of the disconnect between the Tangier in which Bowles died (a modern and vibrant city) and the Tangier with which Americans tended to associate him (a primitive and decadent wasteland). To be sure, there are many aspects of contemporary Tangier and like most cities of a million or more residents, it has its sinister side. The Internet has not pervaded every aspect of life in Tangier and there are many who are not "connected" to the World Wide Web, and there may be some residents who have neither cell phone nor *parabol*. If I claim that Morocco had entered the digital age during Bowles's final years, however, my point is less to claim a digital Bowles than to reassert the Moroccan present.

As a port city and one of the key crossings of the globe, Tangier has never been disconnected from transnational flows of people, cultures and goods. It is one of the earliest of cosmopolitan cities, and remains deeply so. Tanjawi must be the most linguistically gifted people on earth, and it is common for residents to speak three, four or five languages with real fluency, and to switch rapidly between them. I recall the linguistic thrill of living in Tangier in the mid-1990s, and the roller coaster ride of conversation with friends. My Tanjawi friends had gone to the Spanish Colegio, the American School of Tangier, the Lycée Regnault, or some combination of these. Some had gone on to study at Al Akhawayn University (run in English), others to the state university in Tetouan. Moroccan Arabic, French, Spanish, and English were all in use—on occasion all in the same *sentence*. What's more several spoke Tamazight (Berber) with their parents, and one or two picked up German on the side.

Paul Bowles was in this sense very much a Tanjawi. He published translations from French, Spanish, Moroccan Arabic, and from modern standard Arabic (in the last case with help from the author he was translating). These projects offer keys to understanding something at the center of Bowles's literary project: trying to connect with others, even when it is nearly impossible to do so. For Bowles, the difficulty of communicating had less to do with language or nationality and more to do with existential space between individuals and between the individual and the world itself. But he never ceased trying. He could move between languages easily and produced nearly twenty books in translation—really in collaboration—with Mohammed Mrabet, Mohamed Choukri, Ahmed Yacoubi, and Larbi Layachi. This is the Bowles that we might lament today, an American who worked with Arabs as equals, and who listened to their speech without trying to dictate the conversation.

Americans, that is those whom Mexicans call *estadounidenses*, are a mostly monolingual people. There are obvious exceptions: Latinos and the many diasporas that find themselves in the U.S. Perhaps the exceptions are the rule. In any case, the Bowles legend in America—that he had drifted off to an “unknown destination”—was propagated and maintained by the Anglophone crowd. If you don’t understand what people are saying, you tend not to pay much attention to what is being said, or to let the imagination run wild. Among foreigners who come to Tangier, there is a long history of the latter.

For outsiders, one of the thrills of Tangier is how quickly on crossing the Straits of Gibraltar, on “setting foot on Africa,” foreignness makes itself visible. When Mark Twain visited in 1867, he found it “thoroughly and uncompromisingly foreign—foreign from top to bottom—foreign from centre to circumference—foreign inside and outside and all around—nothing any where about it to dilute its foreignness—nothing to remind us of any other people or any other land under the sun.” Bowles followed in the footsteps of that tradition: he first went to Tangier, in 1931, on the suggestion of Gertrude Stein, as he liked to remind visitors. And Stein, when she arrived in Tangier with Alice Toklas in 1912, came with her friend Henri Matisse’s suggestion for a hotel. Matisse, himself, had in many ways been chasing Delacroix’s Morocco, flashes of light and shadow amid staged fantasies of Oriental exotica. And by their own accounts, all three—Stein, Matisse, and Delacroix—never ventured much beyond the limited framework of their own preconceptions. Stein and Toklas strolled Tangier with their official guide, “a Mohammedan whose name was Mohammed,” according to Toklas, and Matisse would reflect that much of what he saw was already familiar: “I found the landscapes of Morocco just as they had been described in the paintings of Delacroix and in Pierre Loti’s novels.” Looking to capture on canvas something ineffable about Moroccan femininity, Matisse hired a prostitute to come to his hotel and pose. He preferred not to leave the confines of the luxurious Hotel Villa de France.

Given the European style of much of Tangier’s urban design and architecture, and the architectural and cultural affinities with Andalusian Spain to the north, I dare say that the immediate frisson of difference is provoked by the outward signs of Islam: the visibility of covered women, the minarets of Moroccan mosques, and the hauntingly beautiful and audibly inescapable calls to prayer by Tangier’s *muezzins*. Based on the evidence of photographs and paintings over the centuries and to the present, it’s the first in that list that is most immediately thrilling, ironically enough. What is it in the *haik* and *litham* that the foreigner finds so captivating? The Algerian poet and critic Malek Alloula has come up with a compelling interpretation: in the blankness of cloth, the Westerner sees his own ability not to comprehend, and is titillated by the experience of being shut out.

Closed out, as if from a forbidden place, many see mystery and the imagination runs rampant. This was the Tangier that Paul Bowles saw when he visited in August 1931. “If I said that Tangier struck me as a dream city,” he described it later, “I should mean it in the strict sense.” He wrote these words in his memoir *Without Stopping*, written in the early 1970s as his wife languished in a sanatorium across the Strait of Gibraltar in Málaga. It’s a nostalgic book, not surprisingly, but one which hides its feelings and barely mentions Jane Bowles or what she was suffering at the time, a writer of genius reduced to mute silence. After a decade-long decline, she died in 1973.

Jane Bowles was not only perhaps one of the two or three most original and challenging American writers of the 20th century, but she was also a writer who had explored intensely the impossibility of communication across the space separating individuals. She was, not incidentally, Paul’s equal as a linguist—Mohammed Mrabet and Mohamed Choukri both told me that she was superior in Moroccan Arabic to him—though she never produced her own translations.

Paul Bowles’s memoir has deceived his biographers, several of whom rely on it as factual, and

admit as much, without considering its literary debts. It is better appreciated in the context of its two major influences: Gertrude Stein's hoax of an autobiography, *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* (1933), part self-publicity and part love letter to her partner Alice, and a book that by the way includes a paragraph about Paul Bowles himself, then a "young man who first made Gertrude Stein's acquaintance by writing engaging letters from America." Stein went on, in her own ventriloquism of Toklas's voice, to describe the young Bowles: "Gertrude Stein says of him that he is delightful and sensible in summer but neither delightful nor sensible in the winter." And the second influence is *Life with a Few Holes*, the life story by Larbi Layachi that Paul Bowles had translated and published in 1964. In both, there is much more than meets the eye, and the tale of a life conceals much more than it reveals. By the time he wrote *Without Stopping*, Bowles had learned from Layachi something of a trickster discourse; it is perhaps Bowles's most African book. He gave his publishers what they thought they wanted (lots of names of famous Europeans and Americans he had known) and saved the rest for himself. Alone among those who set out to write Bowles's biography, Millicent Dillon recognized the mystery he held so deep. She did not fail to heed it. The book Dillon wrote, called *You Are Not I*, a brilliant anti-biography, is the most perceptive and courageous portrait I have read of the man.

### Doors of Perception

I once remarked to Bowles that he seemed to have organized the way in which many Americans made sense of what they saw around them in Morocco. "Your books have led generations of people here," I told him in 1996. That he knew from the stream of uninvited guests who had been knocking on his door for years. This was February, though, and there weren't many, so we had time to pursue the conversation. I told Bowles how I would occasionally be with American friends in Morocco, friends who had more than passing familiarity with Morocco, spoke Arabic, had spent a year or more in the country working or researching. "And we'll walk around, and all of a sudden they'll turn to me and say, 'This is right out of Paul Bowles.'" Bowles laughed. "Are they blaming you for that? Or are they blaming Tangier for that?"

I told him it was usually an expression of excitement, that they'd found something really intriguing, a real and full experience. And I mentioned that more than once I had heard friends recount an experience in Morocco and say, as means of explanation, "Well, it was totally Sheltering Sky!" Then Bowles really laughed. Because the grammar of the sentence was odd, he checked it: "It - was - Sheltering - Sky?" I confirmed the usage. He considered for a moment, evidently pleased, then asked: "Are they thinking of the book, or the film, I wonder."

When Bernardo Bertolucci made the film version of Bowles's first novel, four decades after its publication, he painted Bowles's tale of marital, psychological, and physical demise on a broad and visually sumptuous canvas. Though Bowles's 1949 novel was set in Algeria, the Italian director shot largely in Morocco, with Tangier standing in for Oran and, according to Bowles, imported Sicilian flies standing in for Saharan ones when the latter did not "behave." Bertolucci's complaint about Moroccan flies is similar to the image of the subjugated Maghrebis that emerges from the film, a film that edits out Bowles's more subtle questions about the contemporary political situation of colonial Algeria after WWII. Bertolucci does incorporate dialogue from the novel relatively accurately, so that which is edited out is most revealing.

One of the more intriguing passages from the novel is completely gone: in it, Port, the American protagonist, discusses the theft of his passport with a French colonial officer named Lieutenant d'Armagnac. The scene is right out of Poe, one of Bowles's favorite authors, in its drawing room ratiocination, two gentlemen solving a mystery by logic in the confines of a small room. Come to think of it, it's not unlike my own relationship with Bowles himself during the last five years of his life. Long, intricate, gentile conversations in a stuffy room. In the scene, the differences between French

attitudes toward colonized Algerians and American ones is brought out, and Bowles's critique of both positions makes clear that he was able to see the serious shortcomings of both positions. But Bertolucci edits this scene out. There's very little politics in his film at all, and in any case, a drawing room scene doesn't work within in his own larger creative decision. Bertolucci recasts *The Sheltering Sky* as an epic. But why?

The key may be found in the long, mostly wordless sequence that comprises the last forty minutes of the film, wherein the female protagonist Kit reacts to the death of her husband Port in an isolated French garrison in the Sahara by hitching a ride with a passing caravan. The sequence, shot on location and stunningly beautiful, depicts a passionate affair between Kit and a Berber tradesman named Belqassim. And though the affair takes place in the novel, here it evokes desert romances more than psychological exploration. And I've long thought it was Bertolucci's private tribute to *The Sheik* and *Lawrence of Arabia*, two pinnacles of filmmaking that saw the romance of desert sands. The silence of the desert could be both a tribute to *The Sheik*, a silent picture, and also a reflection on Bowles's sense of the desert's silence, expressed in his travel essay "Baptism of Solitude" (which Laroui responds to in the quote above). But it also firmly places Bowles's novel in a tradition of "Orientalism," that mingles the representation of exotic otherness and the political domination of colonial holdings. There are other ways of understanding the novel.

Recasting the novel as an epic romance with an exotic backdrop, Bertolucci also removed Bowles's interest in politics and some of the more innovative aspects of his technique. *The Sheltering Sky* is a compelling book, with lots of directions that run out of it, possibilities that he develops in his later work. One of those most important, I think (and argue in *Morocco Bound*, my forthcoming book, which dedicates a chapter to Paul Bowles's work), is a line that brings out the Arabic that Bowles was just beginning to learn and which would profoundly reorient his own career.

Though he had written tales as a boy and published poetry in a major Paris literary review as a teenager, Paul Bowles first gained fame as a composer. In particular, he was known for his incidental music for the stage, collaborating with Tennessee Williams, Orson Welles, Salvador Dalí, and others. Musical composition perhaps always involves collaboration, but Bowles was especially collaborative, bringing together the arts in his compositions, including an opera, a Spanish *zarzuela* and art songs that set words by Gertrude Stein, Jane Bowles, Federico García Lorca and others to music. So successful a composer was he that, for a while, he gave up his ambitions as a writer, or put them on hold. Not until meeting Jane Auer, in 1937, whom he would marry the following year, and with whom he would carry on one of the more idiosyncratic of intimacies, did his literary impulse find its own route. When Jane Bowles asked Paul to read the manuscript of a novel she called "Three Serious Ladies," he plunged into the work and made intensive suggestions for revision. (When she published the book, in 1943, it was called *Two Serious Ladies*, and followed Paul's suggestion to excise a major section and one of the title characters.) Paul later remarked that the experience working with Jane's manuscript affected him profoundly and encouraged him to return to his own writing. It's perhaps not a surprise that there seems to be an intense conversation running through the works of Paul and Jane Bowles, despite their different tone and subjects. Millicent Dillon, in the introduction to her *Portable Paul and Jane Bowles*, hears "alternating voices" in the work that "seem to resonate, picking up aspects of themes and turns of phrase that double back upon one another." That Dillon is compelled to use a metaphor from musical composition to explain this literary and personal relationship is not, of course, incidental, although in *You Are Not I* she expresses frustration trying to reconcile the aspects of Paul Bowles's career: "I am left with the writing and the music as two separate rooms." The key to understanding Bowles's careers as composer and as writer, it seems to me, revolves precisely around the question of collaboration. And it's in Dillon's own figure for his and Jane's long literary conversation.

Collaboration certainly animated Bowles's work with Ahmed Yacoubi, Larbi Layachi and Mohammed Mrabet, Moroccan authors whom Bowles translated. There it reminds us of another musical figure for cooperation across divides: counterpoint. The compositional practice of counterpoint is a rich metaphor for bridging cultural impasses, one that inspired the late Edward Said's brilliant concept of contrapuntal reading and Said's own late project with Daniel Barenboim of bringing together young Israeli and Palestinian musicians. Despite their richness, both conceptually and in practice, the translations are often put to the side of Bowles's career, as if secondary. Bowles himself was a bit modest about them, and misled critics by claiming not to put too much stock in them. But the truth is that once Bowles started working with Moroccan authors, they took up a large part of his time. These books represent a major portion of his output in the last phase of his career. And these books themselves are more than translations, as translations are usually understood. Bowles did not read written Arabic and these authors (with the exception of Choukri) did not write Arabic; they could only author fictions orally in Moroccan Arabic, which is a spoken, not a written language. Yacoubi, Layachi and Mrabet each "told" their stories, novels, and memoirs to Bowles, using a combination of Moroccan Arabic and Spanish, and Bowles then translated the tales into English. There are no originals to compare to the translations; the books appeared first in English. They are best understood as collaborations, since Bowles's presence was necessary not only as translator but also as instigator and editor and audience.

Bowles had the longest professional relationship with Mohammed Mrabet. From 1967 to 1993, Mrabet and Bowles published a dozen books together. Compelling narratives marked by Mrabet's distinct voice. Or is it Bowles's narrative voice portraying Mrabet's voice? Impossible to say, since we read Mrabet's tales in Bowles's rendering. (Soon we will read them in Abdelaziz Jadir's translation into modern standard Arabic, but then again, Mrabet's voice will be at a remove.)

Moroccan and American responses to Bowles diverged especially clearly on the subject of these collaborations. In the *NY Times*, Mel Gussow suggested that Bowles became "a collector of Arabian stories and songs," as if they were curiosities brought back from the Saudi desert. The Maghreb Arabe Presse, however, credited Bowles with bringing attention to the works of several "Moroccan writers." Other Moroccan obituaries credited Bowles for founding a movement called *al-adab at-Tanji*, a compelling phrase I translate as "Tangerian literature." This is far from the Bowles of American legend, and it's the account of the author I think most accurately reflects the last phase of his career. Indeed, it's one that is also most useful for the future.

### **New Guide Books**

Paul Bowles knew that he had become a site to be seen: "in Tangier you have to see Paul Bowles and the Caves of Hercules," went the travelers' advice in the '90s. Indeed if you look at the *Rough Guide*, from the early 1990s (anyway, the last time I bought one), there he is both in the Contexts section as part of the required reading and mentioned in the Tangier chapter as one of the living features of the city. The faux guides of Tangier used to offer to bring young vagabonds up to Bowles's apartment for a few dirhams.

What an intriguing reversal of fortunes. In 1996, Bowles told me that more than sixty years earlier, in the early 1930s, he had gone to check out Biskra, Algeria, expressly because he had read about it in Robert Hichens's 1904 blockbuster *The Garden of Allah*. "I found a copy of it somewhere and read it.," Bowles said. "Then I went to check it out in Biskra, and it was something else. I don't know when the novel was supposed to have taken place, but it must have been a good while before I visited the town. Because it sounded—in the book—it sounded like an authentic village, but when I was there it wasn't at all. It was completely touristic. Hoked-up."

Bowles recalled young Algerian women costumed in traditional garb paid to walk back and forth

through the village carrying water jugs. All because of the novel and the people it had drawn there. "Hichens could have been made the mayor of Biskra," Bowles chuckled. I've never seen mention of Bowles's trip in Hichens's footsteps before. And though he talked about it at length on this one occasion, he never brought it up again. I wonder if Bowles was a bit uncomfortable about it because it gives a different sense of the "authenticity" of his encounter with Algeria and Morocco back in the 1930s.

Whatever the case, there's little doubt that many Americans were drawn to Morocco in much the same way, but this time following in Bowles's footsteps. There's even a book, for which he contributed the foreword, organized on literary trips "following the footsteps of fame."

What sort of footsteps will readers of Bowles's work follow in the 21st century?

I remember meeting a young American dandy in Fez in the summer of 1994 who was indignant that he hadn't been admitted into Bowles's apartment in Tangier when he had knocked repeatedly. (Little did he know that Bowles was then recuperating from a femoral bypass surgery.) The young man mispronounced Bowles's name "bowels." I asked him, innocently enough, if he had read Bowles's novels. "No," the American said, "but I wanted him to sign my books."

Bowles's responsibility for the misperceptions must be kept in check. Many people who criticize him or who follow in his footsteps have read the barest portion of his work. Bowles of course has much to do with the legend. There was a tendency to take him a bit too much at his word and to allow oneself to be persuaded by some of his stage managing. The first thing one noticed on entering his apartment, as so many portraitists wrote, was the stack of weathered old suitcases, left as if he were about to head off again to the Sahara. They never would have held, of course, had he tried to use them again. The suitcases look the same today in the Bowles Room at the Tangier American Legation Museum, which acquired some of them before his death. It's fun to look at the old steamer tags pasted on the cases in a palimpsest of place names and transit companies.

If the Bowles room in the American Legation freezes that moment in time, there are also living responses to Bowles elsewhere in Morocco that are more important for the future—namely, the interest in him and his work by another generation of Moroccan readers, critics and students. Several critical works on Bowles—essays and a couple of monographs—have been published in Morocco, in French, Arabic and English, and students have written Ph.D. theses on Bowles's work. Abdelaziz Jadir in Tangier has translated Bowles into Arabic and also is translating Mrabet's works into modern standard Arabic. Khalid Bekkaoui and Sadik Rddad, directors of the Moroccan Cultural Studies Center at Sidi Mohammed Ben Abdallah University in Fez, organized a conference in March 2004 called "Mrabet/Bowles: Literary and Cultural Encounters" (the proceedings will be published soon) and are engaged in a project of rereleasing Mrabet's work with Paul Bowles in a series of books published in English.

At the conferences and in the classrooms, there are of course diverse opinions about the meanings of Bowles's work in Morocco. And that is the most promising development itself. Bowles's work may live on in new form and be recoded in its new setting and for new times. All literature that is remembered after the death of its author has such afterlives. That's exactly as it should be. My hope is that the dialogue Bowles engaged in with his Moroccan collaborators, however we critics end up making sense of it, will animate scholars on both sides of the ocean and inspire a similarly productive conversation of Americans and Moroccans.

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