

GIACOMETTI IN FEZ

Giacometti in Fez? 'I do not even know whether that native of the little Swiss village of La Stampa ever ventured to Fez' declared Tahar Ben Jelloun, the celebrated maghrebin writer.¹ Yet his *Alberto Giacometti*, written in Tangiers in 1990 evokes this very possibility. Giacometti's sculptures stalk through the Fez medina; walk across the sands, haunt the face of Samuel Beckett in Tangiers.² Ben Jelloun's is the most complex of hommages: at once to Giacometti himself, to Jean Genet's *L'Atelier d'Alberto Giacometti*, 1957-8, and to the power of memory and metamorphosis which turn sculpture and painting into literature and politics.³ Transcending the long tradition of the French *beau-livre*, he gives Giacometti's work an urgency which is utterly contemporary.

In the Fez Medina, there is a street so narrow that it is called "the street for one man." It is the way into the labyrinth; it is long and dark. The walls of the houses seem to touch overhead...the windows, too, face one another and provide views of the life going on in the houses opposite....

The street is anchored in my mind like a living memory. I often talk about it, even if it is really without significance.

When I first saw Giacometti's statues, I knew that they had been made tall and thin in order to go up that street and even to walk past one another without difficulty. It even seemed that I had met them when a child...

Fez, where Ben Jelloun was born in 1944, is an all-abiding presence for the writer : a knot of language and traditions linked to physical spaces and sensual memories and the more violent, tragic pain linked to home: the *mal du pays*.⁴ ('How should I love this town which nailed me to the earth and for so long veiled my gaze? How should I forget the tyranny of its blind love, its heavy, prolonged silences, its tormented absences?')⁵ Giacometti in Fez: a vision which proclaims the inalienable right to individual imagination, to the *lecture*, the reading which completes the work of art - the work of another - fusing experience with remembrance, literary as well as personal.

Alberto Giacometti & Tahar Ben Jelloun continues the well-established tradition of the French *essai* on art.⁶ It was a strangely-designed publication of 1991, where familiar works and little-known plaster sculptures compete in their stasis and fragility with strength and the displacements of the text.⁷ Imaginative displacement is a trope both of content - from Paris to Fez - and of form, for the text enacts an appropriation, a usurpation, even: Ben Jelloun 'inhabits' Genet's voice, his direct and lucid style. Giacometti serves as a medium here, just as, together with Rembrandt, he served Genet and Genet himself served Jacques Derrida, that Algerian writer, whose *Glas*, incorporating Genet's writing on Rembrandt, became the literary event of 1974: the year Tahar Ben Jelloun arrived in Paris.

Derrida took on Genet's *Ce qui reste d'un Rembrandt* and stripped the writer of his visuality, his sexuality, his Catholicism, pitting him against Hegel. The double-column structure of *Glas* became a twin-pillared, almost pandemonic structural edifice,

whose aim was literally to break, to shatter the decorum of the *essai*.⁸ The title, *Glas*, a tolling bell, was revelatory: Derrida came in part to bury Genet, not to praise him.⁹ Ben Jelloun, on the contrary, writes almost as a *captif amoureux*, a prisoner of love: Genet's passion for the other, the humiliated, the oppressed – *le nègre* – chimes with his own.¹⁰ His homage is a literary feat, whose aim is to complement and extend Genet's *Atelier* essay (in itself the tribute to a long relationship with Giacometti, complicated by a literary struggle with Jean-Paul Sartre. *A mise-en-abyme*.¹¹) Ben Jelloun's filial text must nonetheless assume adulthood; a text of shifting sands, it is grey with mourning. Before Derrida himself espoused the tropes of mourning or the spectre, Ben Jelloun shoulders the metaphysical burden of two deaths, that of Giacometti whom he never met, and that of Genet, the man he loved. Simultaneously, these dead voices are resurrected for new publics, while Ben Jelloun's text extends Giacometti's questioning of the individual subject beyond Stampa and Fez, to arenas of immigrant and post-colonial identity. Claiming place, claiming voice, it is about immigration, language, representation, the eschatology of the creative act: a celebration of the dead and an affirmation for the living.

The destabilising power of displacement in space is enhanced by the destabilised moment of writing. Rhetorical strategies create presence through absence, positive through negative: 'I do not know whether Giacometti ever thought of living in the desert... I do not know whether Giacometti ever read Cervantes...' I do not know if Tahar Ben Jelloun visited *Magiciens de la Terre*, the Pompidou Centre exhibition, so problematically timed as part of the 1989 French bicentennial celebrations which preceded by one year the writing of *Alberto Giacometti*. In the *Magiciens* catalogue, the cultural theorist Homi Bhaba cited French textual strategies of exoticism, from Montesquieu's Turks, Barthes' Japan, Kristeva's China to Lyotard's 'pagans', focussing finally, after an emblematic discussion of Franz Fanon, on contemporary writers.¹² At that moment of Cold war collapse, of aggressive empires confronting globalisation (Russian and even Chinese artists made their first appearance in this show as *magiciens*, along with so many from Africa or of African origin) Bhaba argued that 'cultural difference gravitates around the ambivalence of cultural authority', that destabilisation is a strategy of liberation. 'Conflict often opposes narrative time, mythic or theological, of traditionalism ... with the fluctuating time, strategically *décalé* - out of joint - of the formulation of a historic politics of negotiation. We understand through Fanon that the time of liberation is that of cultural incertitude, and above all a floating of significations and representations..... The production of meaning requires a passage through a third space, which represents at once the conditions of discourse and institutional strategy.'¹³

Giacometti as *magicien*? The idea was persuasive.¹⁴ And Ben Jelloun's *Alberto Giacometti* must be situated within a contemporary debate that embraced, for example, Tzvetan Todorov's *Nous et les Autres. La réflexion française sur la diversité humaine* of 1989 and Emmanuel Levinas's *Le temps de l'autre*, also of 1991 - far divorced, one might have thought, from the appearance of Giacometti's writings, edited by Jacques Dupin and Michel Leiris in 1990. Yet this conjunction precisely bears upon Ben Jelloun's timeliness.¹⁵

'I write so that I may no longer have to have a face...' he proclaims. *Alberto Giacometti* relates back to Tahar Ben Jelloun's lived experiences, his autobiographical novels, and his earlier work on immigration and solitude, culminating in the controversial *Hospitalité française*, first published in 1984.¹⁶ From the outset he had displaced his own experiences in Paris via an engagement with the plight of maghrebin immigrants. He came to pursue doctoral studies in psychology in 1971; in 1974, Genet praised his work on French radio; their friendship began, strengthened by Genet's deep love of North Africa.¹⁷ *La plus haute des solitudes. Misère affective et sexuelle d'émigrés nord-africains*, based on Ben Jelloun's thesis, was published in 1977. Rather than a statistics-based analysis, he opted for the strategy of the *témoignage*, an engagement with the interiority of others. Commonplace racism, he argued, has perpetuated stereotypes of sexual violence - perversity, rape, crime, - while simultaneously the immigrants, exploited for their labour force are denied the right to tenderness and desire. The Arab, caught between factory and dream, surviving silently in the shanty towns and tower blocks of Gennevilliers, Aubervilliers, Argenteuil... is refused access even to the local putes: *Non, pas de putains pour les Nor'af* ('No whores for the North-Africans')... In the same year, 1977, Ben Jelloun's publically defended Genet, who controversially supported Red Brigade terrorism: the relationship continued to the end of Genet's life in 1986. *Alberto Giacometti*, appearing in 1990, then again in 2006 is thus a living monument and testimony.¹⁸

The bronze dog, so long, so thin, hugged the walls, as one says, with its rigid, endless horizontality: while a thread-like man walked by, his head reaching beyond the strongly-lit terraces.

... I did not understand how bronze could convey life in the eyes, life in a rich, that is to say complex simplicity...

As the reader is drawn into the labyrinth, the unfamiliar spaces of the medina, the voice of Jean Genet seems to resonate through Ben Jelloun's text:

'...Those bronze or plaster figures possessed an inaccessible singularity, emerging as they had from the night of extreme solitude on their way to join the frozen territory of the dead ...

I saw myself as a cat, a dog, a tiny head on the end of a stem.

(Giacometti to Genet: *'It's me. One day I saw myself in the road, like that. I as the dog.*)

... I got lost. I was cold. The street became dark.....My hands touched the legs, the back, the fingers of an almost human metal

(Genet: *'I can't help touching the statues. I turn my eyes away and my hand continues its discoveries alone: the neck the head, the nape, the shoulders... the sensations which flood the tips of my fingers....'*)

... I knew that a sense of eternity had descended on that street and covered those creatures with a huge shroud of silence...'

(`Men under the shroud of silence' - *Hommes sous le linceul de silence* - was an early poem by Ben Jelloun, rent with the conflict between the immigrants' humiliating present in Paris and their past in Morocco, ending *Assasine en toi l'Arabe... 'Kill the Arab in you!*¹⁹)

Ben Jelloun moves forward to `inhabit' Giacometti's own text of 1952, `Un aveugle avance sa main dans la nuit' - `A blind man stretches out his hand, in the night'.²⁰ `It was so dark that I had to move forward with my hands outstretched, like a blind man...'. Subsequently he recalls Giacometti's sculptures: `a gaze lives at the top of a stem that looks like a body detached from everything...'. But then Jean Genet's crucial proposition - the relationship between beauty and the wound - is quoted directly in Ben Jelloun's text:

*...beauty has no other origin than the wound, singular, different for each person, hidden or visible, which each man keeps within himself...Giacometti's art seems (to me) to want to discover this secret wound in every being and indeed every thing...'*²¹

Ben Jelloun: *'They all come from the same abyss, a singular wound, absolute, total and utterly uncompromising...'*

Brusquely we leave the streets of Fez - and Giacometti's atelier. Ben Jelloun moves from the grey or gilded statues to `creatures of flesh and blood modelled on them', notably Samuel Beckett striding along a Tangiers beach in winter `Was it he or one of Giacometti's statues that had wandered off? ...A statue that had rebelled and escaped from the studio?' Beckett as a statue has `escaped, striding through infinite time, a precious solitude in its gaze'²²

`Ever since', Ben Jelloun continues, `whether in am in the metro or in a train, in the medina at Fez or at Marrakesh, I am on the lookout for other Giacometti statues that might have living bodies, searing memories, distraught faces'. He now names Genet, quoting him on the wound, and moves to Giacometti's discovery of the absurdity of death, the interchangeability of the dead with the living, of life with dream and the decision to `live in the temporary'.²³

Only occasionally hinting at the literary stakes at play, Ben Jelloun's text becomes most flagrantly both homage and an appropriation *Idétournement* with his transposition of Genet's well-known epiphany in a train. In the second part of the *Atelier* text, Genet tells of an encounter almost four years previously with an *épouvantable petit vieux* a `frightful little old man' in his compartment; his realisation of the profound equality, indeed the interchangeability of each human being transfigured his life. It has been argued that it was this encounter which transformed Genet from a literary dandy under the aegis of Jean Cocteau to the homeless, tramp-like existential figure for whom Giacometti was a beacon...Genet's experience finds its way into the *L'Atelier* text, then

subsequently into his writing on Rembrandt.²⁴ And so, from *petit vieux* to Arab, with Ben Jelloun:

Each face is a memory, an adventure. These banalities came to my mind as I looked at an immigrant worker, an Arab, sitting opposite me in the métro. That man had suffered. His face was deeply lined, dug, furrowed from top to bottom with wrinkles. From time to time he tried to hide his eyes which were wet with tears. He was not crying, but an immense sadness had had overtaken that tired face.... I am sure that that thin face, with a few day's beard, had been sculpted by Giacometti.. the colour of that skin was grey, a grey that is not neutral. It could only be a Giacometti grey.... The wound could be read on his grey face. A hand had shaped that face in which pain had taken up residence, with a note of decrepitude, bordering on nobility, and extremely human beauty very close to eternity., the man was sometimes dead, sometimes alive. A space had been dug around him emphasising his pain and nakedness..... the worst kind of behaviour is that dictated by appearance, which is sometimes unjust, brutal, pitiless. One seeks excuses for the appearance that disturbs us. It is a struggle within ourselves.

'...What wound, Ben Jelloun continues, was conveyed by the gaze of the the Arab immigrant in the métro?'

One would have to speak of wounds and classify them in order: exile, forced or voluntary, is one. Separation from the land and his own people is another. The almost daily confrontation with a hostile environment or in any case one that is not very welcoming is a source of humiliation. Another wound. Solitude, metaphysical and physical, is also a difficult reality to bear.

The immigrant is universal. His condition is not exceptional..... '

Ben Jelloun describes the prophet Mohammed as the first immigrant of the land of Islam, forced to leave Mecca and take refuge in Medina ('We are now in 1990, in 1416 in the era of the Hegira. "Hyjra" means emigration') and reverts to Giacometti: 'Giacometti may have sculpted beings born of those brutalities.'... He quotes the sculptor : 'I paint and carve in order to bite into reality, to defend myself, to feed myself, to grow in order to defend myself better, to attack better, to seize, to advance as far as possible in every direction, I order to defend myself against hunger, cold, death, to be as free as possible.'²⁵

Giacometti's *Ecrits*, published in 1990, totally corroborate Ben Jelloun's supposition that the sculptor, too, experienced the split identity of the immigrant. Giacometti initially exhibited with the Swiss-Italians or Italians of the School of Paris, keeping to familiar cultural and linguistic circles.²⁶ His Montparnasse of the 1920s was not always a scene of picturesque festivities, but could also be grey, lonely, alienating. Giacometti already two years in Paris, one day in 1924 for example, sitting with a drink, like any other stranger, scrawling in Italian on a scrap of paper: 'I'm here in a café, the Dome café in Montparnasse...I'm bored, I'm in a bad mood, I can feel a weight in my stomach..... I'm waiting for a woman who's not at all pretty and not intelligent.... I'll finish up by going, after midnight, to my hotel..... I'll be alone.. and a new day will be finished. A new grey day... I've met lots of people, I've heard so much nonsense, so

many imbecilities. An infinite confusion reigns over almost everyone, and almost everyone, or in fact all are hanging suspended over a void, their feet touch no base, their looks are aimless.²⁷

Giacometti's *ennui* - including his sexual self-disgust - mirrors precisely Ben Jelloun's own experience. On arriving in Paris (the date September 11th 1971 is noted in many texts) he, too, encountered a sea of walls and faces. Instinctively drawn to the almost invisible immigrants, he observed 'They stood out with their clothes, grey or sombre, and their way of wearing them; they covered themselves with these outfits to disappear, to forget themselves in the throng.... They were obsessed with fear, the fear of awakening anger or hatred, obsessed with being in order... Paris was first of all this greyness on these knotted faces, these used bodies, these looks of distress. In Morocco I wasn't aware of this. Emigrants were far away.....²⁸ And he is filled with self-disgust, when, in the metro, he sees a young girl and cannot remember whether or not he has had sex with her: 'Since that testing experience I write the story of the double - thus I'm inhabited by someone else...²⁹

The silence of the *immigré* hides the otherness of interior speech. Giacometti wrote in 1924 in Italian, his native tongue - just as Picasso would continually write for himself in Spanish, arguably his only space of privacy.³⁰ It is with an inadvertant French arrogance, that Michel Leiris, prefacing Giacometti's *Ecrits*, says they are 'written in that French language one must regard as the mould of his thought as a grown man (*d'homme fait*) rather than the Italian dialect of his original canton of the Grisons.'³¹

For the question of the mother-tongue is at stake. Giacometti's mother is present throughout his oeuvre: the mother with whom he spent time every summer, to whom he talked, in Italian, every evening on the telephone.³² For Ben Jelloun the issue of *la francophonie* is always present: his father feared that French would win over Arabic; his mother could neither read nor write; as with Giacometti, his mother-tongue remained his language for his mother. For Genet, dispossessed, the French language was a sovereign possession. For Ben Jelloun it bespeaks the issue of assimilation, the 'doubling' that spelt his initiation into literature, into adolescence and sexuality: he was fascinated with the Surrealist writing that Giacometti also espoused.³³ Leaving Fez and leaving the language that had served him as both poet and as a public scribe for others - (see *L'écrivain public*, 1983) was the ultimate betrayal. Yet, declared Jelloun: 'From the outset I invited myself to the feast of the French language'.³⁴ While fellow maghrebin writer, Heidi Bouraqui has spoken of the 'curse of *francophonie*' of *la francophonie à l'estomac* - 'francophonie in the stomach - that's where it hurts' Ben Jelloun has insisted upon the intelligence and humour of the French/Arabic linguistic cohabitation, *métissage* as the weaving together of two tissues, two colours that compose an embrace of infinite love.³⁵ Thus Ben Jelloun's ventriloquism, his 'doubling', in *Tahar Ben Jelloun /Alberto Giacometti* is at once a plea for the voiceless immigrant and a demonstrative 'passing' as the French writer who assumes Genet's mantle - with a *florilège* of references to Leiris, Dupin, Antonin Artaud, René Char, J. M. Le Clézio and others.³⁶ As with Genet, the act of betrayal and the act of love become one.³⁷

Paradoxically, Giacometti's own 'passing', his assimilation within modernism, had required his renunciation of the Swiss-Italian painters' group and the espousing of the avant-garde's topical engagement with 'primitive' African art. Jazz beat the rhythm of 1920's Paris; Giacometti, the man from the Alpine snows, the child once fascinated by Siberia and its *isbas*, produced Cycladic, then African-looking sculptures that became part of this *tumulte noir*.³⁸ He wrote in 1932:

*Negro and oceanic fetishes. What value should we give them in relation to Revolution and Religion? As idols, to what extent do we accept them, as works of art or simply as documents of a certain culture. What value should we give then to this culture? Idolatry and sexuality and Fear. What relationships for us between Fear, Sexuality, Fetishism (death)? ...*³⁹

The later 1930s witnessed a turn from Surrealism towards existentialism, with Jean-Paul Sartre's *L'Imaginaire*, 1936 and *La Nausée* 1938, and Giacometti's turn towards a phenomenological realism in his paintings. Their intimations of unease were horrifically corroborated. A violent climate of racism would finally entail the entire destruction of the School of Paris, as its members, along with so many other Jews and *méteques*, faced deportation and death.⁴⁰

A *punctum* in Bell Jelloun's text is his description at one point of the well known photograph of a child, 'future victim of the Nazis, who, like the adults, raises his hands in the air and waits. That look is as famous as the Second World War....'⁴¹ How should the tragedy of the twentieth century be expressed? 'I don't know whether Giacometti tried to be the witness of his time. In my opinion he was fully so and was also the witness of an even wider humanity, more wounded in everyday life.'

Surely Giacometti's ultimate importance is that, more powerfully than any other visual artist of his generation, he responded to the second World War. The destruction of his work and his silence marked its duration: a profound caesura in Western civilisation. His complete change of style seemed to offer some adequate symbolic expression of its significance. He abandoned the Surrealist scenarios whose sexual violence nonetheless contained suggestions of narrative and the picaresque. He largely abandoned the 'Africanisation' that had curiously signposted a transnational modernism.⁴² He then developed figures with a greater historical transversality, whose immemorial silhouettes bestride time and space. The man of Eyzies and the man of Altamira encounter the 'fleshless martyrs of Buchenwald' - as Sartre suggested in 1948, conflating the beginning and the end of human history.⁴³ Signs of the unspeakable, spectres at home in desert sands or snows, Giacometti's sculptures are deeply solitary, pervaded with the violence of their immanent extinction.

Postscript I. Paris, June 2006. Ghost visit to the studio

‘My visit to this place charged with so much absence never happened, perhaps, I imagine it, I doubt it, then once again I see certain images.’⁴⁴

Negation of the negation... In June, 2006, Tahar Ben Jelloun wrote *Visite fantôme à l’atelier* which accompanies the reedition of his *Alberto Giacometti*: a smaller, exquisitely-produced volume, newly titled, illustrations selected and positioned with the greatest care. Again a superbly contemplative text haunted by other literary presences, yet where Diego is evoked, just out of sight, preparing the plaster for Giacometti’s moulds.⁴⁵ We are brought even closer again to Genet’s reflections, not only through the studio theme itself but by two Herbert Matter photographs: the dark aerial view of the studio, whitened with plaster dust and sculptures like a sepulchre. The vision with which Genet’s 1958 *Atelier* began, follows Ben Jelloun’s final exhortation: ‘to plunge once again into this place as sombre as a dense forest flung against the night of all times.’⁴⁶

The studio in 2006: 46 bis, rue Hyppolyte Maindron, abandoned in part, no plaque or sign, part-inhabited almost by ghosts, tenderly photographed in colour by Catherine Hélie. The studio itself is lived in by Michel Bourbon, who in 1972 was given the task of removing the walls, inscribed by Giacometti with so many drawings, painted, scratched messages, telephone numbers, traces of a life. A woman rents the room that was once the domestic space of Annette, Alberto and Diego, ‘Everywhere the walls are grey, fatigued, they bear the colour of mourning, the colour of nothing’⁴⁷ Giacometti’s presence is still palpable; just as he haunted the sunlight and shadow of the Fez Medina, his ghost seems withdrawn into his own creative space, a space synonymous with absence ‘a sort of cavern, a cave, an attic *grenier* or simply a hole filled with shadows’⁴⁸

Postscript II. Paris, 4 May, 2007

... *Little by little we’ve seen and heard intellectuals calling for France to stop feeling responsible for her colonial past and its consequences... We’ve seen a France consider immigration as a wound, a burden, without recognising the positive contribution to its economy and its culture, to consider the children of these populations as citizens of a second zone, the unrecognized French, the bastards of the republic, as though they had no papers, no rights.....*⁴⁹

Giacometti continues to be part of Ben Jelloun’s imaginary present.⁵⁰ The unresolved questions in his writing on the artist flare up again as issues of immigration, racial and republican identity trouble today’s France, the new France of Nicolas Sarkozy.

*The other France still exists. We wish it good courage.*⁵¹

NOTES

¹ *Die Familie Giacometti, Das Tal, die Welt*, Stadische Kunsthalle, Mannheim, 2000, offers the best vision of the 'alpine' Giacometti and his family's artistic response to the landscape.

² *Alberto Giacometti & Tahar Ben Jelloun* Paris, Editions Flohic, series *Musées Secrets* Secret Museums; 1991, unpaginated (quotations will not therefore be given additional references). Large format, 80 pages with 38 full colour illustrations. English version by Alan Sheridan, the distinguished translator of Foucault, Lacan, Perceval etc.

³ Genet's text, 'L'Atelier d'Alberto Giacometti' for the June 1957 exhibition, illustrated with Giacometti's drawings, (*Derrière le Miroir*, 98, Paris, Galerie Maeght) is not identical with *L'Atelier d'Alberto Giacometti*, with photographs by Ernest Scheidegger, Paris, Marc Barbezat, l'Arbalète, 1958-1963, used, I believe, by Ben Jelloun and unpaginated (quotations will not therefore have additional references). See also 'The Studio of Alberto Giacometti', translated by R. Howard, in *The Selected Writings of Jean Genet*, ed. Edmund White, Ecco Press, 1993). Significantly for my text, Genet's *Les Nègres* was also published in 1958 by Barbezat. Thierry Dufrêne's *Giacometti, Portrait de Jean Genet. Le scribe captif*, Paris, Adam Biro, 1991, offers an extensive discussion of the relationship from 1954-1957 and after.

⁴ See Tahar Ben Jelloun 'Medina' ('The medina is a tired heart/a bent body lashed by the winds/ a face full of holes...' in *Medinas, Morocco's hidden cities*, photographs by Jean-Marc Tingaud, and calligraphy by Lassad Métoni, Paris, Assouline, 1998.

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⁵ Tahar Ben Jelloun, *L'Ecrivain public*, Paris, Seuil, 1983, p. 41.

⁶ See anon., 'Writers on artists', *Art Book News*, winter 1991-2, pp.6-8, with *Alberto Giacometti* cover story and extracts from *Georges de la Tour & Pascal Quignard, Goya & Paul Nizon*, all Flohic Editions, commissioned by Catherine Flohic. *El Greco & Fernando Arrabal* was also published by this time, and the review anticipates further titles, Paul West on James Ensor, Manuel Vazquez Montalban on Gauguin and Antonino Tabucchi on Velazquez. Each title, it is claimed, was translated into five languages and simultaneously published in twenty countries.

⁷ The plasters, first studied by the French sculptor Alain Kirili (*Art in America*, January-February, 1979; *Albert Giacometti, Plâtres peints*, Maeght catalogue, no 22, Paris, June-July, 1984) will be shown at the Centre Georges Pompidou retrospective, 2007-8.

⁸ The Giacometti relationship figures significantly in my 'Rembrandt, Genet, Derrida' essay, *Portraiture*, Joanna Woodall ed., Manchester University Press, 1996, pp. 203-216.

⁹ See 'Une lettre de Jean Genet' in the Derrida number of *Les Lettres Françaises*, 1429, March 1972, while Derrida was working on *Glas*.

¹⁰ For the extensive literature on Genet and 'otherness', see, for example, Hédi Khélil, *Jean Genet: Arabes, noirs et palestiniens dans son oeuvre*, L'Harmattan, 2005. Of course I refer to Genet's last book, *Un captif amoureux*, Gallimard, 1986 (*Prisoner of Love*, tr. Barbara Bray, London Picador, 1989)

¹¹ For Sartre and Genet see my article 'Under the Sign of Sartre' in 'The search for the absolute' *Paris Post War, Art and existentialism, 1945-1954*, Tate Gallery, 199, pp. 36-39.

¹² Fanon, who has hitherto received astonishingly little attention in France is celebrated in *Les Temps Modernes*, 635-6, November 2005-January 2006.

¹³ See Homi Bhaba, 'Hybridité, hétérogénéité et culture contemporaine', *Magiciens de la Terre*, Paris, Editions du Centre Georges Pompidou, 1989, pp. 24, 25, I retranslate, with the author's permission (no published English version).

¹⁴ See Julien Bosc, 'Les sculpteurs et leurs génies', *L'homme*, 151, 1999, pp. 75-100, an 'ethno-esthetic' project comparing Giacometti as a western artist with Typhepté Palé, a Lobi sculptor from the Gagoua region. Thanks to Germain Viatte for this reference.

¹⁵ Michel Leiris and Jacques Dupin eds., Alberto Giacometti, *Ecrits*, Paris, Hermann, 1990.

¹⁶ *L'Hospitalité française, Racism et immigration maghrébine*, Paris, Seuil, 1984. Ben Jelloun won the Prix Goncourt with *La nuit sacrée*, 1987; *Le racisme expliquée à ma fille*, 1997 (*Racism explained to my daughter*) is, however, his most widely translated book, with its Genet-inspired climax (p. 60-1): 'Know that each face is a miracle. It is unique... What do beauty or ugliness matter... This is corroborated by the public (p. 83): 'no more or less beautiful than any other human' (M. Bancal, Le Chesnay, my translation).

¹⁷ Genet had learned Arabic during his military service; from 1967-9 he made many visits to Morocco and Tunisia and spent time in Tangiers with the writer Mohamed Choukri; for details see Mohammed Choukri, *Jean Genet et Tennessee Williams à Tangier*, Le pain nu, 1981; Jean-Bernard Moraly, *Jean Genet. La vie écrite*, Paris, La Différence, 1988 and Edmund White's classic *Genet*, London, Chatto and Windus, 1993.

¹⁸ See Ben Jelloun, 'Jean Genet chez les Palestiniens', *Le Monde diplomatique*, 244, July 1974, p. 44; 'Pour Jean Genet' *Le Monde*, 24 Sept 1977 p. 11 (following Genet's 'Violence et brutalité', *Le Monde*, 2 sept 1977, the preface for *Textes des prisonniers de la Fraction armée rouge*, Maspero, 1978); 'Un entretien avec Jean Genet: Immigrés' *Le Monde*, 23 October 1979, (as 'Genet on immigrants' *Guardian Weekly*, 6 April, 1980); 'L'Homme ébloui', *Le Monde*, 20 April 1986 (obituary), and, for example, 'Jean Genet: sur sa tombe, 20 ans après sa disparition', *Le Monde* 2, no 13, 15 April, 2006, pp. 38-9.

¹⁹ *Hommes sous linceul de silence*, Ben Jelloun's first poetry collection (Casablanca, 1971) took its title from Fanon's 'Lettre à un français': 'Le silence conjugué de 800,000 français, ce silence ignorant, ce silence innocent / Et 9,000,000 d'hommes sous le linceul du silence.'

²⁰ Giacometti, 'Un aveugle avance sa main dans la nuit', (*XX siècle*, 2, January, 1952, p. 72) in *Ecrits*, p. 64. Jelloun writes with no critical apparatus, never citing or dating his sources. I sense an aural memory of Giacometti in the title of his tragic novel about the Tazmamart prison, Morocco, *Cette aveuglante absence de lumière*, Paris, Seuil, 2001

²¹ There is a mistake in the English translation here, with *visible* wrongly rendered as 'invisible', which I have rectified.

²² The presence of Ben Jelloun and his magrebin contemporaries in the 'literary Tangiers' of Beckett, Paul Bowles, William Burroughs, Genet, should be recalled here - there are circles within circles: Beckett was given Mohammed Choukri's memoir of *Genet in Tangiers* by the author.

²³ See Giacometti: 'All the living were dead, and this vision was often repeated, in the metro in the street, in the restaurant, in front of my friends' ('Le Rêve le Sphinx et la mort de T', *Labrynthe*, 22-23, December 1946, pp. 12-13, in *Ecrits*, p.30), the death of 'T' and his traumatic memories of the death of van M in the Tyrol become strangely linked through time and space.

²⁴ Edmund White dates the train episode to around 1953, see White, *Genet*, op. cit., pp. 460-464.

²⁵ Quoted by Ben Jelloun, this passage comes from Giacometti, 'Ma réalité', *XX siècle*, 9, June, 1957, p. 35 in *Ecrits*, p. 77.

²⁶ From 1927-9 he figured in such a group promoted by Mario Tozzi. He exhibited in 1928 for example in *Les artistes italiens de Paris*, and in 1929 as sole sculptor in *Un groupe d'italiens à Paris* at the Galerie Zak with Brignoni, Campigli, De Chirico, De Pisis, Paresce, Savinio, Severini and Tozzi. See Casimiro Di Crescenzo, 'Giacometti e L'Italia', www.archimagazine.com/bgiacometti.htm

²⁷ Giacometti, *Ecrits*, pp. 108-9. His translation of this text from Italian into the French given here is not dated. See also the cacaphonic 'Lulu, Lulu'... (*Ecrits*, pp. 146-9 c. 1933, a transcription of conversational fragments - staged in a brothel - and again a piece rewritten by the artist, so reminiscent of Rimbaud's 'phonetic' 'Notes in English', 1874. Giacometti's transcriptions of laughter and whistles and the quasi-glossolalic - preserved as compositional devices as late as the 1952 piece 'Un aveugle avance sa main ...' seem essential to his conception of an aural, 'blind' space.

²⁸ Tahar Ben Jelloun, *L'Ecrivain public*, op. cit., pp. 124 and 126 (my translation).

²⁹ Ibid., p. 127.

³⁰ See Kathleen Brunner, *Picasso Rewriting Picasso*, London, Black Dog, 2004.

³¹ Michel Leiris, 'Giacometti oral et écrit, *Ecrits*, op. cit., p. ix.

³² Jacques Dupin confirms these evening calls, see 'Une écriture sans fin', *ibid.*, p. xviii.

³³ See Ben Jelloun, 'On ne parle pas le francophone', (*Le Monde diplomatique*, French and German editions May, 2007); contribution to *Pour une littérature-monde*, Gallimard, 2007; *chronique* posted 5 May 2007 on www.taharbenjelloun.org; he remarks that Kafka, Cioran, Beckett or Ionesco are not treated as the *écrivain métèque, l'écrivain pas souche...*

³⁴ Ben Jelloun, *French Hospitality, Racism and North African Immigrants*, Columbia University Press, 1999, tr. Barbara Bray, p. 15.

³⁵ Heidi Bouraqui, 'Les enjeux actuels de la francophonie', University of Westminster, 4 July, 2003; compare Ben Jelloun 'On ne parle pas le francophone' above.

³⁶ Many of these references are already present in Jacques Dupin and Michel Leiris, *Alberto Giacometti*, Maeght éditeur, 1978; Ben Jelloun also refers to James Lord and to the voice of Billie Holiday ('the voice of a very old memory... that of slaves loaded into old boats').

³⁷ See Ben Jelloun on Genet in *La soudure fraternelle*, Arles, Arléa, 1994, pp. 57-8: 'Jean Genet had no sense of friendship. He believed more in betrayal than in faithfulness. He believed in love and passed days in discussion...'

³⁸ Jody Blake's *Le tumulte noir. Modernist art and Popular entertainment in Jazz-age Paris, 1900-1930*, (Pennsylvania State University Press, 2003) rewrites Paris's early 'isms' to the sound of these rhythms. Snow and sand, cold and heat mingle with Giacometti's Siberian fantasies in 'Hier sables mouvants', *Le Surréalisme au service de la Révolution*, 5, 15, mai, 1933, pp. 44-45, (*Ecrits*, pp. 7-9).

³⁹ See Giacometti, *Ecrits*, p. 133, c 1932, my translation.

⁴⁰ See Hersch Fenster, *Undzere farpainikte Kinstler*, (Our artist martyrs) 1951, material expanded in Nadine Nieszawer et al., *Peintres juifs de Paris, 1905-1939*, 2000. See also and *Montparnasse deporté*, Musée du Montparnasse, May-Oct, 2005.

⁴¹ The photograph taken in 1943 was of the seven-year-old Tsvi Nussbaum who survived Belsen-Belsen and escaped to the United States.

⁴² Evidently, some African, Etruscan and Egyptian influences live on in *The Nose, Head on Stem*, and the *Chariot* sculptures (1947-50 and after)... This extensively-studied topic is best summarised in the generic comparative illustrations offered by Reinhold Hohl in *Alberto Giacometti*, New York, Abrams, 1971, see pp.291, 295.

⁴³ See Jean-Paul Sartre, 'The Search for the Absolute', preface, Pierre Matisse Gallery, 1948 p. 2-22.

⁴⁴ Tahar Ben Jelloun, *Giacometti. La Rue d'un seul suivi de Visite fantôme de l'atelier*, Paris, Gallimard, 2006, p. 97.

⁴⁵ Here Leiris and Beckett who figure again, are joined by the poet of the Renaissance, Jean-Baptiste Chassignet, the contemporary Jean-Pierre Dupray and William Faulkner...

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 98.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 78

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹ Tahar Ben Jelloun, 'Pourquoi Sarkozy a été élu', *Chroniques*, posted May 4th, 2007, www.taharbenjelloun.org

⁵⁰ See his obituary for Driss Chraïbi, whose writing 'was always marked with a ferocious riony, a devastating humour and a dry style that was as stripped away (*dépouillé*) as a Giacometti statue.' *Chroniques*, posted April 4th, 2007 www.taharbenjelloun.org

⁵¹ 'Pourquoi Sarkozy a été élu', *op.cit.*