The Enchanted Arrival
Passage into West Africa in the Travel Writings of
Blaise Cendrars, André Gide, and Graham Greene

A FAVORITE CONVENTION in travel writing is the portrayal of the traveller's arrival in a foreign country or culture. The first impressions and contacts at the border, the train station, the harbor or the airport are a stock item of modern travel literature. Typically, the scenes of arrival dramatize the traveller's cross-cultural encounters with local people or his or her experience of radical contingency. In terms of narrative organization, the arrival scene can function as another beginning in the story beyond the traveller's initial departure from home. The experience of arrival may also, as we will later see, require the traveller to reflect on his presuppositions concerning the place where he has travelled and make apparent the way in which he or she conceptualizes the meaning of his travel.

As a potential new beginning in a travel narrative, the arrival relates to what James Phelan has defined as a "launch" in his four-part conception of narrative beginnings in fiction. Different from exposition, and the rhetorical transactions of "initiation" or "entrance" that take place between the implied author, the narrator, and the reader, Phelan defines "launch" as "the first set of global instabilities or tensions in the narrative"—the launch thus makes the boundary between the narrative's beginning and the middle (2009, 197–98).\(^1\)

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1. Initiation refers to the initial rhetorical transactions—such as "rules of notice" (Peter J. Rabinowitz) concerning what counts as important in a given narrative—between the implied author and the narrator, on the one hand, and the flesh-and-blood reader and the hypotheti-
Conventionally, the arrival in the destination is a turning point in the nonfiction travel narrative and inaugurates an uncertainty—what will happen here? what will happen next? what is it going to be like?—or may suggest a preliminary conclusion to an uncertainty relating to the traveller’s potentially conflicting expectations of “what it’s like?” that he or she has developed prior to the arrival. In other words, the arrival scenes in travel writing typically serve the function of a “launch,” establishing a new direction for the travel and the narrative, and marking the real beginning of the voyage.

In what follows, I will investigate three scenes of arrival in sub-Saharan West Africa in travel writing where the travel writer perceives the entryway as the real beginning of the voyage and, at the same time, more or less metaphorically, as a relocation in another world. The examples include Blaise Cendrars’s collection of travel poems entitled *Feuilles de route* (1924–28), André Gide’s travel journals *Voyage au Congo* (1927) and *Le retour du Tchad* (1928) (translated into English as *Travels in the Congo*), and Graham Greene’s travelogue *Journey Without Maps* (1936). All three travel accounts describe the writer-traveller’s arrival in West African port towns by boat—and all of them feature an arrival in Dakar, Senegal—suggesting a set of narrative and cognitive tensions that call for resolution. What interests me especially in their scenes of arrival are the ways in which they foreground the writer’s mental processes and, simultaneously, evoke dense meanings of Africa as a “world” that makes a perfect contrast to the traveller’s point of departure in Europe. My inquiry focuses on the way in which the travel writer portrays the space of arrival, and the people who are involved in that scene, thus creating a kind of symbolism of that space that helps to identify the real beginning of the voyage. These scenes trigger, furthermore, the question of the language and means of description, pointing to the traveller’s necessity to transform geography, space, and the experience of encounter into a description and the temporal structure of narrative. The African world into which these travellers enter requires, for instance, the writer to change the temporal frame of reference in which his or her earlier observations were made and recorded. The use of poetic language is another means by which the writers frame the tensions and instabilities of the arrival scene, and the expectations that are built around it, suggesting that poetic description may better describe the power and complexity of the experience than everyday language.

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2. See Requemora (2002) who has undertaken a similar investigation with regard to the representation of space in French seventeenth-century maritime travel literature.
Cendrars’s Ideal Black Culture

On his first voyage to Brazil in 1924, Blaise Cendrars (1887–1961) had the chance to visit Dakar, where his ocean liner Le Formose made a short stopover on its way to Sao Paolo, Brazil. The port call took place on January 26, about two weeks after Cendrars had left Le Havre, and it remained the writer’s only visit to Africa in his lifetime. Cendrars describes the visit in a series of entries in the first part of his lyrical travel book, Feuilles de route. These texts include a short account of the entry into the port of the town (“Dakar”), where Cendrars relates the sight of a red seawall, blue sky, and a dazzling white beach upon arrival; a poem about visiting the island of Gorée and its House of Slaves near the main port of Dakar (“Gorée”); an entry about listening to a French passenger’s anecdote concerning the making of artificial eggs while he was waiting to disembark (“Œufs artificiels”); and a series of three poems about things that he saw in the town. The longest poem in this series is called “The Mumus” (“Les boubous”), which focuses on the dress and elegance of Senegalese women.

In Cendrars’s career, Feuilles de route represents an important stage in his gradual move away from formally experimental writing and avant-garde aesthetics, such as his early Prose du Transsibérien, towards storytelling and prose genres, resulting in the publication of the biographical novel and international bestseller L’Or (Sutter’s Gold) in 1925, and another novel, Moravagine, in the following year. Cendrars started writing Sutter’s Gold on his return to Europe. This shift in the author’s career is reflected in a number of poems included in Feuilles de route, and also in the entries about the scene of arrival in Dakar. For instance, Cendrars’s discomfort with the notion of poetry, including not just traditional definitions of poetry but also avant-garde aesthetics, is clearly reflected in his ironic take on Apollinaire’s first visual poem, “Lettre-Océan,” just prior to the arrival in Dakar. In Apollinaire’s famous telegraphic message, which was addressed to his brother travelling in Mexico, Apollinaire used diverse typographies and explored the visual contours of the page by placing words in a series of concentric circles radiating outward from

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3. The classification of the texts in this collection as poems is not altogether clear even though they are included in Cendrars’s complete poems (Poésies complètes). The title of the book refers to a road map (feuille de route) in the sense of a military term for directions (marching orders) and Cendrars defines the entries as “ocean letters.” Cendrars’s lyrical travel entries, even though they have the appearance of separate, individually entitled poems, are hardly poetic in the sense that they contain very little metaphoric language and their style is prosaic, often elliptical, and summarizing. For instance, Cendrars systematically describes the contents of his baggage, records impressions of things that he has seen, and collects short anecdotes of encounters en route.
a circular centre.\textsuperscript{4} In contrast, Cendrars’s poem “Lettre-Océan” is a practical telegram message cut up into short lines and written in prose style:

La lettre-océan n’est pas un nouveau genre poétique / C’est un message pratique à tarif régressif et bien meilleur / marché qu’un radio (2001, 204)

The ocean letter is not a new poetic genre / It’s a practical message with a descending rate and a lot cheaper than a / radiogram / (1992, 150)

Cendrars explains that with his ocean letters his intention was not to write poetry. In contrast, an ocean letter forges a close relationship with the travel experience and the real world. The rejection of poetry for the sake of poetic experience somehow translates as being more real and instantaneous:

La lettre-océan n’a pas été inventée pour faire de la / poésie / Mais quand on voyage quand on commerce quand on est / à bord quand on envoie des lettres-océan / On fait de la poésie. (2001, 204)

The ocean letter was not invented for writing poetry / But when you travel when you do business when you’re on board when / you send ocean letters / It’s poetry. (1992, 150)

In lieu of attempting a literary invention, an ocean letter is a testimonial to the openness of the travel experience, which Cendrars sees in its own right as a poetic activity, free from all established forms and genres of literature.

The result was a hybrid genre of lyrical travel writing. In his poems (or ocean letters) about the arrival in Dakar, Cendrars reiterates the desire for open spaces and immediate experience that characterizes an ocean letter. What is apparent in the expression “Negro village” that Cendrars uses in “The Mumus” and in another of the Dakar poems, “Les charognards,” is that it emphasizes the non-European nature of the world being described. In “The Mumus,” Cendrars glorifies the African women he saw and met during the stopover, claiming that they are beyond any point of comparison with women in other continents, and especially in Europe:

Aucune femme au monde ne possède cette distinction cette noblesse cette démarche cette allure ce port cette élégance cette nonchalance

\textsuperscript{4} When the poem was first published in the journal \textit{Les Soirées de Paris} in 1914, it almost had the status of a manifesto due to its radical visual style and collage technique.
No other women in the world possess that distinctiveness that nobility
that bearing that demeanor that carriage that elegance that
nonchalance that refinement that neatness that hygiene that health
that optimism that obliviousness that youthfulness that taste (1992, 152)

The writer then introduces a parade of non-African women who have nothing of the nobility, elegance and optimism that he had seen in Dakar, from the aristocratic English women of Hyde Park mornings and Spanish women on a Sunday evening walk to the most Parisian of the Parisian women. Cendrars celebrates the Senegalese women’s tufts of hair, shiny braids, head ornaments, embroidery, rings, bracelets, tattoos, makeup, painted heels, boubou dresses of different length, belts and charms, heavenly turbans, and impeccable teeth. Re-evoking in this description the idealized black body of l’art nègre, Cendrars further compares the shine of these women’s teeth and their gait to the fine movements of a luxury boat. For Cendrars, the most impressive aspects of these women are the subtle proportions of their bodies and the self-conscious nonchalance of their walk. Curiously, while Cendrars rejects the comparison to any other women who had left an impression on him during his travels, he evokes an analogy with an inanimate object. The comparison with a moving vehicle, a luxury boat, adds to the superiority of the Senegalese women given the writer’s emphasis on his journey out of Europe as a means towards renewed perception, bodily transformation, and fulfilment.

The black body and African dress thus function as important metaphors for the promises of the journey ahead. The portrait presents to us a corporeal image of plenitude, abundance, confidence, optimism, and perfect movement that connote the sense of harmony with one’s body and the surroundings. Furthermore, the Senegalese women’s self-confidence and what seems to Cendrars as their perfect assimilation to their environment anticipate the characteristics that he was later to associate with the “Utopialand” of Brazil on his many travels to South America.

“The Mumus” is simultaneously a continuation and extension of the writer’s earlier “poèmes nègres,” with some important alterations in emphasis. If we look backward in his career, Cendrars’s description of the African woman’s body and dress in Dakar resonates with the mythical vision of the first black human being, the founder of civilization whom Cendrars had conceived of in the production of the “Swedish” ballet La Création du monde (1923) and earlier “poèmes nègres.” As to their exotic primitivism, Cendrars’s first “poèmes
nègres,” “Continent noir” et “Les grands fétiches,” which were written around 1916 (and published in 1922), were not remarkably different from other avant-garde texts of the same period that were engaged with so-called primitive material, including for instance Dadaist “negro” songs and poems that used quasi-African names and sounds to underscore the interruptive and “instinctual” force of the expression. In “The Great Fetishes,” Cendrars describes a series of African fetishes, meaning the statuettes and masks that he had seen in a museum catalogue, probably in the British Museum, including a male figure who “tears his belly / And worships his risen member” (1992, 96) (“déchire son ventre / Et adore son membre dressé”; 2001, 141) and a statuette of a female African that he “likes the best” and that has a “mouth shaped like a funnel” and a “gaze shining like a bugle” (1992, 98) (“une bouche en entonnoir” [. . .] “et le regard astiqué comme un cuivre”; 2001, 143). Similarly to “The Mumus,” the speaker in the poem finds inspiration in direct observation of black bodies that are compared to inanimate objects (funnel, bugle).

The fashion of l’art nègre in early twentieth-century Europe, to which Cendrars contributed with his avant-garde poems and productions, adored African statues and black jazz dancers. The same fascinated perception frames Cendrars’s experience of arrival in Africa but, at the same time, “The Mumus” and the other poems about Dakar in Feuilles de route reflect a fundamental contradiction within Cendrars’s fascination, and often also identification, with black cultures. On the one hand, the African model, from the tradition of folktales that he researched to the image of the perfectly shaped and functioning black body, indicated for Cendrars the possibility to freely invent and mythologize his self, thus suggesting a form of escape not only from modernity and the avant-garde circles of Paris but the limitations of his own self and body. On the other hand, Black people and their cultures represented for Cendrars a common ground for all humanity that was lost and should be rediscovered.

Cendrars’s identification with Black people, as also Judith Trachsel has pointed out, concerned both the identification with the people themselves and all objects that their cultures have produced (1992, 54). The desire for identification runs through his work and profoundly informs Cendrars’s thinking about the origin of language and literature (1992, 55). However, by around the beginning of the 1920s it had become clear to Cendrars that the notion of so-called Negro poetry was no longer a means of revolt as it still was, for instance, for the Dadaists, but instead offered an important means by which to contest and broaden the Western concept of literature from within. Cendrars distanced himself from the exoticizing perspective of l’art nègre and the avant-garde “Negro poems” particularly in his reinterpretation of the
African art of storytelling in the last years of the 1910s and the early 1920s. To the extent that Cendrars underscored, in collecting and interpreting African folktales, spirituality and literature as an ideal and a model for the future, and not only as a civilization that was comparable to ours, he also questioned the ethnocentric gaze on *l’art nègre* that saw so-called primitive art as an incarnation of the original simplicity of expression or of pure instincts.5

The composition of *l’Anthologie nègre* (1921) and two other complementary volumes featuring traditional African stories, published later as *Petits contes nègres pour les enfants des blancs* (1928) and *Comment les blancs sont d’anciens noirs* (1930), reflect the same contradiction between the necessity to construct a vision of an original and mythopoetic Africa, as a part of the poet’s personal mythology and process of self-fashioning, and the writer’s careful attention to “black” literary tradition in its own right. By publishing these anthologies Cendrars promoted the idea of a mythological Africa, an Africa manifesting ancient ways of life, thought, and literature, and the plenitude of language (*plénitude du langage*) that he writes about in his notice to *Anthologie nègre*. At the same time, these anthologies elevate the African art of storytelling to the level of literature, thus allowing the Francophone Occident to read, perhaps for the first time, African stories as literature and not simply as ethnographic documents. Despite the writer’s thematic organization and other manipulation of these materials that were originally collected by missionaries and colonisers, the anthologies pointed out to the readers the inherent value in the African tradition of storytelling, thus suggesting the possibility of transforming European literature from within, not only by appropriating the other but by giving them a voice, albeit a filtered and indirect one.

**Cendrars’s Broken Body Image**

In the three poems that describe Cendrars’s visit to Dakar, and in some earlier entries in *Feuilles de route* where he anticipates the arrival, the writer’s anti-modern, even Europhobic impulses become quite explicit. In “Bijou-Concert,” Cendrars represents the European colonials of Dakar as hopelessly corrupt, as “filthy cows” (*sales vaches*) who are wasting their lives away from home, and explains, in a kind of wishful identification, how he wants to be the poor

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5. Moreover, Cendrars’s conception of “Negro” or black culture is not reducible to the academic notion of the prelogical primitive mentality, based on Lucien Lévy-Bruhl’s pseudo-ethnographic theories. For Cendrars, the Africans were, above all, storytellers and in this role they also necessarily possessed a good sense of causal relations, as was required in storytelling.
African he sees in the street—“I want to be this poor black man I want to be this poor black who stands / in the doorway” (1992, 154) (“je voudrais être ce pauvre nègre je voudrais être ce pauvre nègre qui reste à la porte”; 2001, 208)—and states that he will never set his feet in these “colonial dives” (“beuglant colonial”) again. This was to be so, since Cendrars never returned to Africa. In “En route pour Dakar,” Cendrars writes twice his farewell to Europe, explaining the need to forget Europe and, further, to sleep with and merge with the rest of the world, including its animals and plants:

Adieu Europe que je quitte pour la première fois depuis 1914
Rien ne m’intéresse plus à ton bord plus que les émigrants de l’entrepont
juifs russes basques espagnols portugais et saltimbanques allemands
qui regrettent Paris
Je veux tout oublier ne plus parler tes langues et coucher avec des nègres
et des négresses des indiens et des indiennes des animaux des plantes
Et prendre un bain et vivre dans l’eau
Et prendre un bain et vivre dans le soleil en compagnie d’un gros bananier
Et aimer le gros bourgeon de cette plante (2001, 200)

Goodbye Europe which I leave for the first time since 1914
I am no longer interested in you not even the emigrants in steerage the
Jews Russians Basques
Spaniards Portuguese and German saltimbanques who miss Paris
I want to forget everything no longer speak your languages and sleep
alongside black men and women and Indian men and women
animals and plants
And take a bath and live in the water
And take a bath and live in the sun with a big banana tree
And love the big buds of that plant (1992, 147)

The non-European space, of which the town of Dakar is Cendrars’s first actual point of reference in this journey, promises to the writer a multiform life in the water and the sun, in love with the bud of a banana tree, to the point of “segmenting my own self” or becoming a stone so as to freely fall from the heights. The image of bodily division and transformation included in this fantasy—“To segment my own self / And become hard as a rock” (“Me segmenter moi-même / Et devenir dur comme un caillou”)—is particularly evocative when we consider the fact that Cendrars had lost one of his arms due to a war injury. Cendrars was seriously wounded in the line of fire in Champagne in September 1915 and his right arm was amputated a few months later (in
February 1916). The description of the fullness and optimism of the black body, and the desire to identify with the Africans—a desire that characterizes both the early “Negro poems” and the Dakar poems—may become more understandable in this context, the traveller still suffering from his lost arm and broken body image: “My body is steel” (“mon corps est d’acier”).

Throughout the journey, Cendrars evokes the metaphor of the fragmented body in relation to the myth of Orion, the great blind hunter, who has the ability to heal the body with the help of cosmic forces. According to the myth, Orion was healed from blindness by the rising sun. In an entry entitled “Nuits étoilées,” where Cendrars describes his observations of the sky at night time from the deck of Le Formose, he claims that Orion is his constellation (“sa constellation”; 2001, 211). The same stress on the cure offered by the stars and the sun also explains Cendrars’s admiration for the dawn, of which he writes in the preceding entry (“Couchers de soleil”)—an admiration he thinks is uncommon among travellers in comparison with the love of the tropical sunset. Throughout his journey, and especially on the way from Dakar to Brazil, Cendrars associates the sun, the stars, and the southern hemisphere, with the power of reinvigoration.

Shortly after the entries about the southern sky, Cendrars confirms the importance of the metaphoric blend between a hand and the constellation of Orion in the image of the one-handed Orion: “It’s my star / It’s in the form of a hand / It’s my hand gone up into the sky” (1992, 159) (“C’est mon étoile / Elle a la forme d’une main / C’est ma main montée au ciel”) and further,

Aujourd’hui je l’ai [Orion] au-dessus de ma tête
Le grand mât perce la paume de cette main qui doit souffrir
Comme ma main coupée me fait souffrir percée qu’elle est par un dard continuel (2001, 214)

I have it [Orion] above my head today
The main mast pierces the palm of that hand which must hurt
As my amputated hand hurts me pierced as it is by a continual stabbing pain (1992, 159)

Just like Orion who, after his death is transformed into a constellation, the lost but still painfully felt hand mutates in Cendrars’s poems into a cosmic image.6

6. The poem “Orion” is not the first time that Cendrars evokes the same metaphor, however. He makes use of the Orion myth, for instance, in the unfinished poem “Au cœur du monde,” the first fragment of which was published in 1919, though Cendrars had worked on it earlier in 1917: “Ma main coupée brille au ciel dans la constellation d’Orion” (2001, 303) (“My cut
The metaphor of the astral hand, which would remain a constant theme in Cendrars’s oeuvre, thus contributes to the author’s reinterpretation of his life as a myth (or the mythologization of his life narrative).

Therefore, upon his arrival in Dakar Cendrars contrasts his fragmented body with the idealized body of Black people. At the same time, it is important to note the affinity between the image of the body of plenitude and the experience of open vast spaces, and the power of the southern sun, in sea voyages. The non-European spaces in Cendrars’s travelogue, from Dakar to Rio de Janeiro and Sao Paolo, from the vast ocean to the southern skies, are open spaces where liberty of thought and imagination, and bodily freedom, are constantly affirmed. The sky and ocean of the Great South, like the elegance and perfection that Cendrars finds in Senegalese women, occur as a response to the writer’s almost obsessive need for exotic experiences that might heal his body. After Dakar, Cendrars perceives in “White Suit” (“Complet blanc”), pacing around the deck in the white suit that he had bought in Dakar, how he felt like a king, rich as a billionaire, and free as a man (“Heureux comme un roi / Riche comme un milliardaire / Libre comme un homme”; 2001, 212). At least some of Cendrars’s expectations about the voyage seem to have been met at this point in the journey.

The sense of displacement in travel as a value in itself emerges in the entries immediately following Dakar, suggesting for Cendrars ever-new images and mythical analogies, and freedom of thought. He writes in “Cabin No.6”: “Because tons of things go through my head but don’t get out into the / cabin / I’m living in a breeze the porthole wide open and the fan whirring / Not reading” (1992, 157) (“Car des tas de choses me passent par la tête mais n’entrent pas / dans ma cabine / Je vis dans un courant d’air le hublot grand ouvert et le ventilateur / ronflant / Je ne lis rien”; 2001, 213). Reading and staying inside his cabin are here contrasted with the open spaces of the ocean. In further entries on the way to Brazil, Cendrars suggests that European civilization has lost its contact with myth and nature, as well as with optimism, burdened as it is with the past.

The stopover in Dakar marked for Cendrars the first major creative rupture from what he had started increasingly to see as the stagnation of European civilization. By contrast, the black women in Senegal imply to him the continuity of an ancient mythopoeic civilization, the “heart of the world,” at once representative of the mythological past and the optimistic future. Furthermore, far removed from the concerns of the aesthetes and the avant-

off hand shines in the sky in the constellation of Orion”). For a more comprehensive analysis of bodily metaphors in Feuilles de route see Leroy, 1996, 155–66, and Mikkonen 2009a.
gardes of Paris, the non-European spaces and people, from Dakar on, stand in Cendrars's travelogue for the life-affirming forces of the art of storytelling: the ability of the storyteller to focus on what is important in his life, such as the contingency, immediacy, and dynamism of the experience, or the relationship with the forces of nature, and to transmit tested and mythical knowledge about ways of living from generation to generation. The invention of a new genre of travel writing, the nonpoetic poetry of the ocean letters, reflects the writer's high expectations of rupture with the past.

**Gide’s Lyricism**

In *Travels in the Congo* Gide portrays his journey in West Africa with Marc Allégret, which started on the steamship *Asie* from Bordeaux in July 1925, as a gradual penetration into the continent, comprising a series of scenes of arrival that took him and his companion ever deeper into the interior of the continent. The arrival in coastal Africa, however, in the “French town” of Dakar on the July 26, 1925, was a clear disappointment to Gide. The “dreary,” night-time town, with its narrow and deserted streets, was far detached from his expectations of the exotic (“rien de moins exotique, de plus laid”; 2002, 15; “Impossible to imagine anything less exotic or more ugly”; 1957, 5) even if he enjoyed, as he writes, being among the Negroes. In Dakar, Gide went to a small open-air cinema, and attempted to visit a native village outside the town. However, a lagoon that they could not get around prevented Gide from reaching the village. Here we could speak of a deferred “launch”: the arrival in the destination does not establish a new direction for the journey, at least not immediately, and leaves the traveller in a state of anticipation for the real beginning of the voyage. In contrast, the subsequent stopovers in Conakry, Grand-Bassam, and Libreville along the coast were more promising. This is well reflected in Gide's descriptions of local people and nature. For instance, during the port call in Conakry on the July 29, Gide portrays the young black youth who was his rickshaw puller with a citation from Baudelaire's poem “Parfum exotique,” calling him vigorous and slender (“mince et vigoureux”). A few days later in Libreville Gide draws from Baudelaire's poetic imagery about the happy shores of an “indolent isle” and a distant harbor where sweet, exotic indolence reigns to illustrate the atmosphere of that city. Here are the last five lines of the poem that Gide recalls upon his arrival in West Africa:

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Je vois un port rempli de voiles et de mâts
Encor tout fatigués par la vague marine,
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Figure 1. Map of Ubangi-Shari and Chad, showing André Gide’s route between August 1925 and May 1926 (André Gide. Voyage au Congo suivi de Le retour du Tchad. Carnets de route. © Éditions Gallimard).
Pendant que le parfum des verts tamariniers,
Qui circule dans l'air et mêle la narine,
Se mêle dans mon âme au chant des mariniers. (Baudelaire 1991, 75)

I see a port filled with sails and rigging
Still utterly wearied by the waves of the sea,
While the perfume of the green tamarinds,
That permeates the air, and elates my nostrils,
Is mingled in my soul with the sailors' chanteys.7

Baudelaire’s poem frames the early stages of the journey. Marvelling at the extraordinary silence and sweetness of the air in Conakry, Gide concludes the entry by noting how everything in this town and in its surroundings promised happiness, sensual pleasure and oblivion (“Tout ici semble promettre le Bonheur, la volupté, l’oubli”; 2002, 17). Grand-Bassam, then, confirms for Gide the sense of the exotic, with the sights of laughing and arguing, naked Negros and their “cannibal teeth” (“les nègres nus crient, rient et se querellent en montrant des dents des cannibales”; 2002, 18–19), the strange big trees that astonish the travellers, and the abundant vegetation. All this further suggests to Gide the exciting closeness of the real virgin forest (“l’immense forêt vierge, la vraie”; 2002, 18) that held the full exotic promise of the journey for him. In Libreville, Gide returns to “Parfum exotique,” quoting the lines about the singular trees and the savory fruits (“où la nature donne / Des arbres singuliers et des fruits savoureux”; Gide 2002b, 18), inspired by what he calls the enchanting land. The lyricism that Gide associates with Libreville is marked with a difference however. While emphasizing the exoticism of the experience, Gide simultaneously underscores the famine in the city, thus juxtaposing harsh reality with his expectations of the exotic. He mentions, further, that the food shortage was supposed to be even greater in the interior of the country.

While moving down the African coast, anticipating the real beginning of the voyage, Gide continues to make use of Baudelairean imagery. In Mayumba, in Gabon, during one of the last stopovers before the Asie entered the Congo River, Gide writes about the lyricism of the black rowers of his canoe, focusing on the rhythm of the black men’s singing and the movement of their bodies:

Lyrisme des pagayeurs, au dangereux franchissement de la barre. Les couplets et les refrains de leur chant rythmé se chevauchent. À chaque

The dangerous crossing of the bar was made to the accompaniment of the boatmen’s lyrical chanting. The song and the refrain overlap each other. Every time the boat dips, the boatman uses his bare thigh as leverage for the pole of his paddle. There was a wild beauty in this half-plaintive chant; a joyous play of the muscles; a farouche enthusiasm. (1957, 10)

During the stopover in Mayumba Gide took a walk in the woods, noting the strangeness of the sights and the excitement of not having experienced such a vivid joy in twenty years. In these passages, Gide resorts to his old formula of sensualizing Africa, as manifested for instance in *Paludes* (1895), *Les nourritures terrestres* (1897) and *L’Immoraliste* (1902), in which he projects North Africa as a kind of refuge from the West where he could explore sexual freedoms unburdened by moral and family constraints. In *Paludes*, for instance, the narrator plans to fight the boredom of Paris by leaving for Biskra, Algeria, where Gide and the painter Paul-Albert Laurens had stayed during their nine-month journey in North Africa and Italy in the winter of 1893–94. It was during this journey that Gide had his first homosexual experiences with young Arab men in Sousse, Tunisia.

Many of the experiences after Dakar had a strong rejuvenating effect on the traveller. A desire to see what is not usually seen, and to step off the trodden path, so as to penetrate profoundly into the country, conditions the beginning of his journey:

> Ce que nous voulons, c’est précisément quitter les routes usuelles; c’est voir ce que l’on ne voit pas d’ordinaire, c’est pénétrer profondément, intimément, dans le pays. (2002, 97)

What we want is precisely to leave the beaten track, to see what one does not see ordinarily, to enter profoundly, intimately, into the heart of the country. (1957, 61)

Beyond Dakar, entering the more distant towns, the river, and finally the jungle, the journey seemed to revive for Gide forgotten joys and pleasures. In entering the rivers of the Congo, again inspired by Baudelaire (and this time also Conrad), Gide remarks that
La joie est peut-être aussi vive; mais elle entre en moi moins avant; elle éveille un écho moins retentissant dans mon cœur. Ah! pouvoir ignorer que la vie rétrécit devant moi sa promesse . . . Mon cœur ne bat pas moins fort qu’à vingt ans. (2002, 23)

My joy is perhaps as keen; but it penetrates less deeply; it re-echoes in my heart less soundingly. Oh, if only I could forget that life’s promises are closing in before me! . . . My heart beats as if I were twenty. (1957, 11)

Entering the Congo River held much promise for the traveller. For instance, Gide explains that he rediscovered the joys of a child and a young man in Brazzaville a few days later when he chased unknown insects and caught fine specimens of tailed butterflies by the river. By the Congo River, Gide portrays in his entries the invigorating effects of mere movement (or “lyrisme ambulatoire”; 2002, 186), exquisite bathing, the magnificent trees and forests, the chasing of insects and the observation of butterflies, the vigorous bodies of the Africans, the air, the forces of light and the sun. He also writes about the pleasures of reading and the reading lessons with Adoum, who is one of the carrier boys of his team. We will return to the importance of reading in Gide’s travel in Part 2.

Nevertheless, the writer’s disabilities never cease to haunt him. The sensation of numbness (engourdissement) that Gide had described on several occasions in his Journal prior to the journey becomes associated in the travel journal with the negative forces of apathy, feebleness, and aging. In Cuverville at the end of May 1925 Gide deplored in his Journal, for which Travels in the Congo is a direct continuation, his apathy, lack of concentration, and poor sight. For some of these problems, the journey suggested a possible remedy:

Je ne compte plus que sur le Congo pour m’en sortir. La préparation de ce voyage et l’attente des pays nouveaux a désenchanté le présent; j’éprouve combien il était vrai de dire que le bonheur habite l’instant. Rien ne me paraît plus que provisoire. (1951, 806)

I have given up counting on anything but the Congo to get me out of it [my apathy]. Preparations for this trip and the expectation of new landscapes have disenchanted the present. I am experiencing how true it was to say that happiness lies in the moment. Nothing seems to me anything but provisional now. (1967, 390)
And Gide writes further that

Ma vue a beaucoup faibli ces derniers temps. Les lunettes subviennent à
cette insuffisance. Que le cerveau ne peut-il également en porter! Difficulté
qu’à mon esprit de « mettre au point » l’idée qu’il examine; analogue à celle
de mon œil, aujourd’hui. Les contours restent flous. (1951, 806)

My sight has weakened considerably of late. Spectacles relieve this defi-
ciency. Would that the brain could wear them too! Difficulty my mind has
in “focusing” on the idea it is examining; analogous to my eye’s difficulty
today. The outlines remain fuzzy. (1967, 390)

However, in the beginning of Gide’s travel journal several different versions of
numbness emerge: one that is clearly negative and a continuation of the kind
of apathy that Gide lamented in his Journal—the “torpor” of his aging body
(he was 56), weak sight and apathy of mind—and another that appears to be
a specifically African in nature.

In the first occurrence of the term *engourdissement* in the travel journal, in
an entry for August 30, 1925 in Brazzaville, the sensation of numbness equals
a profound apathy and a sense of physical decline:

Engourdissement, peut-être diminution. La vue baisse; l’oreille durcit,
aussi bien portent-elles moins loin des désirs sans doute plus faibles. L’im-
portant, c’est que cette équation se maintienne entre l’impulsion de l’âme
et l’obéissance du corps. Puissé-je, même alors et vieillissant, maintenir en
moi l’harmonie. Je n’aime pas l’orgueilleux raidissement du stoïque; mais
l’horreur de la mort, de la vieillesse et de tout ce qui ne se peut éviter, me
semble impie. Je voudrais rendre à Dieu quoi qu’il m’advienne, une âme
reconnaissante et ravie. (2002, 32)

I recognize a numbness—perhaps a diminution. Eyes are less keen; ears
duller; and they carry less far desires that are no doubt weaker. The
important thing is that this equation between the urging of the soul and
the obedience of the body should be maintained. Even when growing
old, may I preserve within myself an undiminished harmony! I do not
like the Stoic’s proud stiffening of the lip; but the horror of death, of old
age, of all that cannot be avoided, strikes me as impious. Whatever may
be my fate, I should wish to return to God a grateful and enraptured soul.
(1957, 17)
For Gide, this numbness threatened to destroy all sense of harmony between body and mind. During the journey, Gide keeps evoking the contradiction between an old body, which suffers from the decline of its physical forces, and the joys of a child. At one point in Bangui, Gide portraits this contrast as an interior battle between his reason and intuition: “my reason sometimes tells me that I am perhaps rather too old to plunge into the bush and into a life of adventure—but I do not believe my reason” (1957, 61) (“ma raison me dit parfois que je suis peut-être un peu vieux pour me lancer dans la brousse et dans l’aventure; mais je ne le crois pas”; 2002, 97). At the same time, we must note how Gide’s inner battle against numbness and apathy is reflected in some of his observations about Africans. Contrary to the ideal harmony of body and mind that Gide sought in his travel, the African jungle and the African crowds in forest villages, the two often being interwoven in the description, become marked, as the journey advances, by the writer’s profound uncertainty about whether the battle against apathy and age is really possible.

Beyond the ports of West Africa, and the Congo River, entering the great forests of the interior constitutes the most powerful and final scene of arrival in Gide’s travel journal, marking the frontier between the beginning and the middle of the travel narrative. The African jungle, and some of the African crowds, are for Gide, in his sensualizing and exoticizing vision, Janus-faced, characteristically multiple and mobile. The immense forest and the Africans in forest villages alternatively suggest to the traveller the possibility of invigoration and further numbness. As we can see in his travelogue, the space of “the great virgin forest—the real forest” attracted Gide profoundly and promised to him the escape he so desperately longed for. After Dakar, Gide occasionally gets carried away by a lyricism of the exotic, inspired by Baudelaire. The final threshold of this exoticism was the vast jungles of Africa, and after that there is much less poetry in Gide’s journal. Gide portrays the entrance in the forest as a transforming experience, as in Conrad’s Heart of Darkness, that might allow the traveller to forget all sense of time and place, even himself. Gide’s desire to forge an immediate relation with the jungle is also reflected in his attempts to get rid of the carriers who, nevertheless, made possible his journey through the Congo and Chad in the first place:

Ici la forêt vous enveloppe et se fait plus charmante encore [ . . . ] J’avance dans un état de ravissement et d’exaltation indicibles (sans me douter hélas! que nous ne reverrions rien d’aussi beau). Ah! pouvoir s’arrêter ici,

8. See also Scott (2004, 163) on Gide’s means of description of the African jungle.
The forest closes in here and becomes still more enchanting . . . I cannot describe my rapture and excitement as I walked on (not suspecting, alas, that we should never see anything so beautiful again). Oh! If one could only have stopped! If one could only come back without an escort of porters, who put every wild creature to flight! At times this constant company irks me, exasperates me. Wanting to get a taste of solitude and feel more intimately the closeness of the forest, I quickened my step and began to run, in an attempt to escape, to out-distance the porters. In vain! They all immediately started off at a trot to catch me. (1957, 68–69)

The disturbing presence of the carriers evidently prevents Gide, or so he believed, from enjoying the full excitement of the immense jungle. In this quotation, in the parentheses, Gide also reveals in hindsight that the journey became a disappointment after the arrival in the forest. From this point on, getting closer to the middle of his journey, Gide had to give up the notion of an exotic world—perhaps a product of what Gide calls his lively, imaginary, and ultimately false, idea of the country in the first place—and the sense of numbness takes over. From then on, Gide also turns his attention to the colonial situation. This shift in perspective, marking the end of the new beginnings, turns the travel journal into a testimony of the problems of colonial rule.

Inside the tropical forest the exoticism of the experience soon wore out and Gide started to notice all-too-familiar aspects in his surroundings. Gide points out, for instance, that the forest reminded him of Italy:

Forêt des plus monotones, et très peu exotique d’aspect. Elle ressemblerait à telle forêt italienne, celle d’Albano par exemple, ou de Némi, n’était parfois quelque arbre gigantesque, deux fois plus haut qu’aucun de nos arbres d’Europe. (2002, 114)

The forest is extremely monotonous and hardly at all exotic-looking. It would be like an Italian forest—the one at Albano or the one at Nemi—except that there sometimes appears a gigantic tree (twice as tall as any of our European trees). (1957, 73–74)
As Gide penetrated deeper into the jungle the monotony of the experience became a predominant sensation. He remarks on the “perfect monotony” and the interminable quality of the jungle. He associates the forest with a disagreeable nightmare (2002, 147), shapelessness (“l’informe”) (2002, 184), and “the savage, the embryonic, and the non-existent” (2002, 192) that he desired to leave behind as soon as possible, and uses mythical connotations of an infernal itinerary, comparing the forest to hell or being buried in limbo (2002, 220). The terrifying forest, finally, evokes for Gide the oppressive state of being enveloped, of suffocation, or even, to use Gide’s vocabulary, a form of cannibalism, the fear of being eaten alive.

As to the Africans in the forest villages in these descriptions, Gide often writes about them as members of a large group with an essentially monotonous outlook. The village crowds and the endless jungle are both marked by the absence of individual characteristics. After four months of travel, in December 1925, Gide explains that the “absence of individuality” in the Africans had become equated in his mind with the uniformity of the landscape, “The absence of individuality, of individualization—the impossibility of differentiating” (1957, 137) (“L’absence d’individualité, d’individualisation, l’impossibilité d’arriver à une différenciation”; 2002, 195). Further, he made observations on “the population of children all alike, all equally agreeable, etc.” (1957, 137) (“le peuple d’enfants tous pareils, indifféremment agréables, etc.”; 195), and the “droves of human cattle with the same looks, tastes, customs, possibilities, etc.” (1957, 137) (“bétail humain uniforme d’aspect, de goûts, de mœurs, de possibilités”; 2002, 195). At this point in his journey the fear of being suffocated by the crowds, and of cannibalism becomes frequent. For instance, on the way to Bosoum, upon arriving in the village of Pakori, Gide writes that “the whole population crowds round one, pressing eagerly up to have the joy of shaking the hand one holds out—all shouting and laughing in a kind of lyrical demonstration of affection—almost cannibalism!” (1957, 99) (“tout ce peuple vous enveloppe, s’empresse pour la joie de serrer la main qu’on leur tend [. . .] C’est presque du cannibalisme”; 2002, 148). Soon after, Gide writes that the residents of another village hurried up to welcome them after nightfall, “crowding round us with cannibal-like expressions of joy, and so close as almost to suffocate us” (1957, 130) (“avec des manifestations de can nibales, si serrés contre nous qu’on suffoquait”; 2002, 186).

However, in close proximity with his reports about suffocation and monotony, Gide refers to a different kind of numbness, a delicious sensation that is again reminiscent of the atmosphere in Baudelaire’s “Parfum exotique” and the earlier scenes of arrival. Notably, soon after the passage where Gide describes the most profound apathy of the small villages that seemed to lack
all individuality, he entered another native village that appeared to him to be completely different. Here, as Gide reports, he saw many details that pleased him, such as a group of small hanging granaries, which made these minute settlements look to him like “a Lilliputian village, built on piles” (1957, 158) (“l’aspect d’un village de Lilliput, sur pilotis”; 2002, 221). The atmosphere of this village enhanced for him the

sentiment d’étalement des heures, de lenteur, de paresse et d’engourdissement voluptueux. Une indéfinissable atmosphère de paix, d’oubli, de bonheur. Ces gens sont tous souriants; oui, même les infirmes, les malades. (2002, 221)

sensation of long-drawn-out hours, of slowness, of idleness, of sinking into a delicious dream. The atmosphere is one of peace, forgetfulness, happiness; the people here are all smiling; yes, even the suffering, even the sick. (1957, 158)

The delicious and voluptuous numbness that characterizes Gide’s arrival in this village, and the sense of agreeable laziness and oblivion, thus affirms the exotic quality of Africa that Gide still continued to seek despite the “terrible entanglement of colonial problems” (2002, 30, 112) that he started noticing in Libreville and Brazzaville. This is yet another glimpse of the healthy and robust physicality that Gide associated with “the heart of Africa,” and the young male Africans in particular, and that suggested to him at once spiritual and physical reinvigoration.

Finally, we have to account for the “demonic” motivation of travel that Gide evokes in the beginning of his travel journal and that frames his description of the series of scenes of arrival from Dakar to the jungle. In the first entry in his travel journal, Gide likens the departure for Africa to throwing himself into an abyss without full consciousness or self-control:

Je me suis précipité dans ce voyage comme Curtius dans le gouffre. Il ne me semble déjà plus que précisément je l’aie voulu (encore que depuis des mois ma volonté se soit tendue vers lui); mais plutôt qu’il s’est imposé à moi par une sorte de fatalité inéluctable—comme tous les événements importants de ma vie. Et j’en viens à presque oublier que ce n’est là qu’un « projet de jeunesse réalisé dans l’âge mur » ce voyage au Congo, je n’avais pas vingt ans que déjà je me promettais de le faire; il y a trente-six ans de cela. (2002, 14)
I have plunged into this journey like Curtius into the gulf. I feel already as if I had not so much willed it (though for many months past I have been stringing my will up to it) as had it imposed upon me by a sort of ineluctable fatality—like all the important events of my life. And I come near forgetting that it is nothing but a project made in youth and realized in maturity; I was barely twenty when I first made up my mind to make this journey to the Congo—thirty-six years ago. (1957, 4)

Gide thus claims that the journey was imposed on him as some nearly mythical fatality, just as the legendary Roman hero Marcus Curtius had to sacrifice himself for his people by leaping on horseback into a deep chasm that had opened up in the Roman Forum. It is noteworthy that Gide uses similar images of “le gouffre,” the abyss, to describe the mysterious appeal of Africa, both in the travel journal and his novel *The Counterfeiters*. Africa has a demonic force that fatally pulls Gide's characters Vincent, Lilian, and Alexandre away from the “closed” European spaces, as if through magic, or indeed because of some demonic impulse, which may also enable the traveller to realize his fantasies. A few months into the journey, Gide asks himself about the nature of the forces that pushed him to Africa in the first place: “What demon drove me to Africa? What did I come out to find in this country? I was at peace. I know now. I must speak” (Gide 1957, 72) (“Quel démon m'a poussé en Afrique? Qu'allais-je donc chercher dans ce pays? J'étais tranquille. À présent je sais; je dois parler”; 2002, 113). Later the passage into the abyss of the great jungle becomes the ultimate and decisive response to the mysterious appeal of Africa.

Much later, in his memoir *Ainsi soit-il ou les jeux sont faits* (1952), Gide returned to the expectations that he had had at the time, explaining that his arrival in Black Africa with his companion and male friend Marc Allégret in 1925, and the commencement of their trek on a narrow path into the “mysterious forest,” was one of the moments of his life that he would most like to be able to relive, despite the disillusionment that then followed (1952, 136–37). Reminiscing about the memorable entrance into the “virgin” forest, Gide writes how he and Allégret naively thought that the strangeness and the charm of the experience would only increase as they penetrated deeper into the forest. Little did they know how wrong they were. The continuation of Gide's journey after the entry in the forest is marked, in the retrospective mode of the time of writing, by disillusionment and regret. The post-Dakar scenes of arrival were to remain, in many ways, the high point of his travel experience.
Greene’s Reminder of Darkness

Graham Greene (1904–1991) travelled on a cargo ship from Liverpool to Freetown, Sierra Leone, by way of Madeira and Tenerife, in January 1935, accompanied by his cousin Barbara Greene. The steamship SS David Livingstone of the Elder Dempster line made its first African stopover in Dakar. Greene describes the arrival in the port and his impressions of the town in a fragment (or subchapter) entitled “Dakar” included in the chapter “The Cargo Ship” in Journey Without Maps.

At first, when Greene’s ship had just arrived in the port, he had the impression that the world was “already over-familiar” (2002, 32). The reason for the impression was that the other passengers on board had constantly been talking about the Coast, by which they meant West African coast towns such as Dakar. Upon disembarking, however, Greene was struck by something unexpected: the sight of African men, and especially the behavior of two men, who seemed to spend the whole day by the quay and the ships, without doing “a stroke of work” (2002, 33). These men, as Greene reports, strolled up and down the quay hand-in-hand, sometimes putting arms around each other's necks, and “laughing sleepily together under the blinding vertical glare” (2002, 33). Greene notes twice in this passage how the men’s behavior was not anything “we” could understand, it was not love for instance. The pronoun “we” refers to the few European passengers on their cargo ship, such as himself and his cousin, but likely also to his expected Western readers. The men's behavior suggested to Greene a deeper insight into Africa and the Africans: “They gave to the blinding day, to the first sight of Africa, a sense of warm and sleepy beauty, of enjoyment divorced from activity and the weariness of willing” (2002, 33). Greene, then, associates this image with a citation from Baudelaire’s poem “L’invitation au voyage”—the refrain “There all is order and beauty, / Luxury, peace, and pleasure”9 (“Là, tout n’est qu’ordre et beauté, / Luxe, calme et volupté”). Greene further points out that he found it hard to believe that Baudelaire had never been to Africa and did not know Dakar but just Jeanne Duval (his lover), the “mulatto tart from Le Théâtre du Panthéon” (2002, 33). Evidently, Greene was not aware that Charles Baudelaire made a trip to Mauritius and back around the coast of Africa, including a port call in Cape Town, when the poet was only twenty years old (1841–1842).

Greene's arrival in Dakar triggers in the author’s mind a series of textual sources in a kind of kaleidoscopic reflection. The references complement each other by way of contrast. Besides Baudelaire’s poem about the mys-

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terious charms and sensuous pleasures of distant places, the arrival brings to Greene's mind René Clair's 1931 classic comedy film *Le Million*, with “its happy lyrical absurdity” (2002, 33). Greene writes that Dakar “was the Baudelaire of *L'Invitation au Voyage*, when it was not the René Clair of *Le Million*” (2002, 33). Moreover, Greene evokes in this passage anthropologist Geoffrey Gorer’s travel book *Africa Dances*, and cites from the beginning of Cecil Day-Lewis’s poem “Do not expect again a phoenix hour,” which ends with the line “Sudden the rain of gold and heart's first ease . . .” (2002, 34). Greene contrasts Gorer’s realistic description of the town with Baudelaire on the one hand and Clair’s film on the other. Both Baudelaire’s poem and Clair’s film relate to the “sharp differentiated pictorial quality” (2002, 33–34) of Greene's impressions in Dakar, and the women in the market in particular. Gorer’s arrival in, and notes on, Dakar, or what Greene calls the inanition and hopelessness of life in the town—“He stayed too long,” writes Greene, “and saw too much” (2002, 34)—are far-removed from the light atmosphere of Clair’s comedy where a young Parisian artist, heavily in debt, wins a lottery only to lose his ticket. Day-Lewis’s poem, in turn, seems to complement Greene's impression of the idle men's happiness and lightheartedness. Furthermore, the poem illustrates the idea of wish fulfilment similarly to Baudelaire and René Clair.

In this sequence of references Greene thus plays different contrasting and complementary textual sources against each other to illustrate the complexity of his experience and the movements of his mind upon arrival. Clair’s *Le Million* and the poems, moreover, point out to Greene that something important was “momentarily shining through” or “breaking through” the predominantly poor, harsh, and even depressing West African reality. In other words, this is some more authentic form of life than “as one had been made to live it” (2002, 34). As the *SS David Livingstone* moved ahead and Greene found more evidence of the poverty of the Coast, and continued to discover signs of yellow fever and hopelessness among the people, he realized that his first impression “was not the Coast” (2002, 34). By contrast, he accepted that the first impression was just an impression, and the happiness in the image was related to his limited experience as a traveller, as someone who was merely passing through. Greene ends the scene of his arrival with a grim image, relating how the Captain of his ship shot a hawk that was sitting in the rigging. The dusty body of the bird fell on the deck, “like a reminder of darkness” (2002, 35).

The same words, “reminder of darkness,” that end the arrival scene of the Dakar section start the subsequent fragment entitled “The Shape of Africa,” where Greene parades a series of memories of “darkness” from England and Europe. Greene thus ties the scene of the arrival, and the notion of African darkness, with a series of memories concerning the ambivalent experience
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of the “pleasure of cruelty,” which means for him the simultaneous sensation of happiness and pain. In the beginning of this fragment, in a kind of frame story, Greene relates a memory of a weeping girl whom he had observed near Leicester Square in a bar called the Queen's bar. Greene points out that the girl's tears indicated to him something enviable, that is, the experience of lost love and happiness that was unfamiliar to him at that time. In the frame narrative Greene then embeds other memories from his childhood, and some more recent experiences, including the happiness of a quick impression when his airplane landed safely at night in dark Berlin, while on the ground in the city, “among the swastikas, one saw pain at every yard” (2002, 36). Furthermore, Greene recalls the memory of seeing from a hotel window in Paris in 1924 a man and a woman copulating in the street, “like two people who are supporting and comforting each other in the pain of some sickness” (2002, 36). He also mentions the first thing that he remembered at all. This involved a dead dog that his nurse had placed at the bottom of his pram and that he had perceived with the “admirable objectivity” of a child. Greene also relates how when he was fourteen he realized the pleasure of cruelty and pain. This was because of a girl in his neighborhood to whom he “wanted to do things” (2002, 37). He loitered outside the girl’s door but could not do anything else, or did not know what to do since he was not old enough, but at the same time felt deeply happy about the experience.

The frame narrative of “The Shape of Africa” that embeds these associations, involving various instances of symbolic darkness, explains the title and elaborates the thematic structure of the fragment. The key moment in the memory of the weeping girl in the Queen's bar for Greene was another association: a subtle relationship that his mind forged between the girl and the idea of Africa that dawned on him at that moment. The weeping and drinking girl whom he was watching from the other end of the bar, and around whom a space of empty chairs had been cleared, had made Greene think “for some reason” about Africa as a kind of shape:

not a particular place, but a shape, a strangeness, a wanting to know. The unconscious mind is often sentimental; I have written ‘a shape,’ and the shape, of course, is roughly that of the human heart. (2002, 37)

The Africa of the memory, thus, illustrates both a raw emotional state and the workings of the writer's mind through association. Africa stands, on the one hand, for raw sentimentality that is oblivious to one's surroundings and any sense of embarrassment and shame. The girl, overwhelmed by her emotions, represented to Greene a form of Africa as such an emotional state.
The empty space around the girl further emphasized the raw and unrefined quality of her emotion. On the other hand, the memory displays for Greene an associative and perhaps unconscious logic that builds on connections and similarities between seemingly distinct mental imagery. In other words, the girl's emotional state triggered in Greene's mind an associative process that is further reflected in the structure of the fragment, meaning the logic of a loosely connected series of memories that reveal a deep stratum of experience, relating to powerful feelings of mixed happiness and pain (or “darkness”) in the writer's life.

Dakar and Freetown, however, which inspire these reflections and memories, did not fully evoke for Greene the true, seedy, and unconscious side of Africa that he was looking for. This was due to the dominant European quality of these towns (as we saw above, a similar lack of “authenticity” bothered Gide). Greene soon found the excitements in Freetown to be very English, and those of Dakar very French. Freetown, especially, was for Greene a European town and, as he writes, “everything ugly” in Freetown, such as the stores, the churches, the government offices, and the two hotels, was European (2002, 38). The following train trip through Sierra Leone to the town of Pendembu, in contrast, restored the sense of strangeness, and of Greene's “wanting to know.” This was partly due to the extreme slowness of the train as it climbed up-country but also to the great heat and dampness that Greene had never experienced before, and the sight of naked women at the stations. Furthermore, the arrival in the village of Kailahun, situated on the borders of both French Guinea and Liberia, where Greene was forced to delay his departure, allowed him to evaluate the presence of Western civilization—it was worth very little in his mind, except being a smokescreen for the exploitation of the African people. Greene also points out at this point in the travelogue that the “noble savage” no longer existed, and perhaps had never existed (2002, 61), even if he was able to detect in some of the young people in Kailahun “something lovely, happy and unenslaved” that was perhaps related to it (2002, 61). At Kailahun, and upon entering the Republic of Liberia, as Greene was able to judge in retrospect, his journey was transformed because he had to change his relation to time and maps. This meant, as Greene writes, that in the interior he had to realize how “there was no such thing as time; the best watches couldn't stand the climate” (2002, 65). Instead, Greene learns to let himself “drift with Africa” (2002, 66).

Greene enjoyed the first trek into the Liberian forests before growing tired of the monotony of the landscape. The difference between Gide's and Greene's experiences of the monotony of the West African forest, however, is that Greene continued to see his journey in terms of a kind of self-analysis
that enabled him to study the inner contradictions of his mind, whereas Gide transformed his travel journal, started as a realization of a childhood dream and a youthful fantasy of sexual and physical fulfillment, into a critical commentary on colonialism. Greene writes that

The method of psychoanalysis is to bring the patient back to the idea which he is repressing: a long journey backwards without maps, catching a clue here and a clue there, as I caught the names of the villages from this man and that, until one has to face the general idea, the pain or the memory. (2002, 97)

In this way, the sense of travel by drifting from one village to the next reiterates the unconscious logic of association and emotional complexity that Greene closely associated with his arrival in Dakar. The method of his journey thus echoes the form of self-analysis that is based on the free associations of one’s mind.

**Conclusion**

When these three writers draw attention to the language of their description in the scenes of arrival, for instance by poetic imagery of the exotic (Gide, Greene), or the primitive mentality of *l'art nègre* (Cendrars), and by resorting to other literary sources, films, and personal memories, they highlight the traveller’s desire to mentally relocate himself in a different world. The focus on the style, form, and genre of the writing in these passages further points to the traveller’s necessity to reevaluate his language of description and, subsequently, to reflect critically on his everyday understanding of time, space or what is real and possible. In other words, the arrival in sub-Saharan Africa and the real beginning of the voyage (or the expectation of it) is dramatized in these works as an entrance into another world that requires the traveller to adopt a different mindset. To a significant degree, the three writers evoke similar imagery in reference to their arrivals in West African coastal towns: the mystery and the luxury of the seemingly idle lifestyle, the promise of heightened and unusual sensual pleasures, the bodily splendor and lyricism, and complex entanglements of pain and pleasure. However, not all Gide’s and Greene’s expectations are met upon the arrival. The contradiction between the expectation of a real beginning of the adventure and the actual experience calls for resolution in the narrative that unfolds. Later, in Gide’s and Greene’s travel books, the lyricism of the exotic becomes entangled with the striking
contradictions that the writers found between colonialism and the supposedly authentic forms of living.

In all of these examples, the scenes of arrival portray the traveller’s heightened sensitivity to both his surroundings and the processes of his mind as well as raise new expectations and inaugurate new uncertainties. This heightened state of mind, furthermore, suggests a close connection between the traveler’s inner and outer world. The sense of wonder or disappointment that the travellers associate with their experiences of arrival thus functions as a narrative means by which the text gives the reader access to the African “world” that is experientially, symbolically, logically, and perhaps even ontologically, different from Europe. Moreover, by accentuating the exotic difference of Africa, the scenes of arrival attempt to induce a sense of wonder in the reader, manipulating thus the distinction between actual and fantastic (or ideal) reality, between truthfulness—the travel writer’s role as a witness of a geographical place—and the subjective meanings of the experience of arrival.

David Scott’s formulation, in his *Semiologies of Travel* (2004), about the paradoxical relation in travel writing between a rite of passage to the real (the link with reality) and the ideal, meaning the need to liberate the writer’s and the reader’s imagination, illustrates well the contradiction between referentiality (or accuracy) and the ideal reality that is foregrounded in these examples of arrival:

> Travel writing is a paradox in that it is a rite of passage both to the real—that is, to an epistemic system different from that of the writer and which thus provokes a profound re-assessment of experience and values—and to the ideal—that is, to a world of renewed and heightened meaning. (2004, 5–6)

Traditionally, travel writing proposes a textual model that is both linked to the real and yet, as Scott writes, one that tries to liberate the imagination “through a complex layering of signs” (2004, 5). In my analysis of Cendrars’s, Gide’s, and Greene’s travel writing I have not applied a semiotic theoretical frame but, nevertheless, the analysis points to similar results. The paradox that my examples present is the contrast between the desire to reveal reality as it is and the desire to heighten the sense of reality and, subsequently, find means for describing the experience of such heightened reality. These scenes of arrival function as key moments in the travel narrative, marking the passage between the narrative’s beginning and its middle, and bring the traveller’s mental processes, deeper sense of identity, and the language of description fully to the fore.
Beyond suggesting a change of perspective and indicating the end of the narrative’s beginning, the scene of arrival is also a risky moment in the journey since it opens up new alternatives and uncertainties, introducing the traveller to the unknown of a new beginning. In these examples, the arrival scenes also suggest a new challenge to the writer’s expectations. As these scenes reveal, the experience of arrival may lead to the traveller’s evaluation of the motivation and the consequences of his decision to embark on a journey in the first place. In this sense, fulfilling multiple functions at once, the scenes of arrival act as nodal points in the narrative of the journey, both closing out uncertainties and introducing many new ones, pointing to that which lies ahead.