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THE DEVELOPMENT THROUGH PLAY OF THE
POET'S PERSONALITY IN KATEB YACINE'S
NEDJMA (1956), LE CERCLE DES REPRESAILLES
(1959) AND LE POLYGONE ETOILE (1966)

by

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ABSTRACT


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The present study, taking an eclectic approach to characterization in Kateb Yacine's major works, reveals play to be a unifying principle. Characterization constitutes an essential facet of Kateb's quest for identity with respect to modern Algeria: his characters represent the nation in microcosm. The same four male protagonists, first introduced in NEDJMA, appear and reappear throughout the later works.

Kateb's narratives—NEDJMA (1956) and LE POLYGONE ETOILE (1966)—and collection of plays—LE CERCLE DES REPRESAILLES (1959)—have heretofore been studied with emphasis on the tragic. Our approach traces the function of play in the evolution of the characters' personalities toward an adulthood marked by verbal creativity. The characters' verbal creativity reflects an aspect of their creator's poet identity.

Drawing upon ideas from the seminal thinkers, Erik H. Erikson and Johan Huizinga, we examine the function of play in the evolution of the personality at four stages. At each stage—early childhood, school age, adolescence, and adulthood—the characters, through participation in forms of play, deal with situations of conflict or alienation. Our approach to early childhood makes use of Erikson's descriptions of infantile stages during which the individuals deal with the onset of consciousness that is marked by a feeling of dividedness. This primal pain may be viewed as a universal paradigm for the alienation experienced among races, nations and
other polarized entities. Kateb's characters develop play behavior that both serves to reconcile their experience of dividedness and contributes to the formation of their identities. The elementary mimicry and contests of infancy are cultivated during subsequent stages into more sophisticated forms of play. For these stages our study makes use of Huizinga's descriptions of play. In Homo Ludens, play is held to have provided the basis for all cultures; in the present study, play functions to form the basis of individual personalities. Following Huizinga's categorization, Kateb's characters' play is agonistic or representational, or at times, a combined form of both.

Kateb's school age characters demonstrate a growing consciousness of inner contradictions, social inequities and antagonisms. Accordingly, each develops various play activities which restore a sense of order and identity. Rachid's solitary childhood illustrates the effect of the absence of play. At the end of this stage, Lakhdar and Mustapha experience a violent rite of passage into adolescence and early adulthood. However, the play spirit is an integral part of this experience.

When the characters' personalities have barely progressed beyond the schoolboy stage, they are faced with adult responsibilities. In response, they further develop their play behavior to fulfill needs and desires. Agonistic and representational play are developed into intricate play-forms in order to serve their quest for Nedjma.

Entering adulthood, the characters meet with failure to dominate Nedjma, and by implication, the impossibility of overpowering anyone else. The relatively irresponsible play of earlier stages is here channeled into creativity. The role that play assumes during this stage is suggested by Kateb's adult characters who resemble the age-old literary figure of the trickster. The trickster figures embody the bivalent play spirit that is
both destructive and creative. Kateb's characters demonstrate creativity that is especially verbal, for the figure that influences them most, Si Mokhtar, channels a trickster-like playfulness into creative eloquence.

It is not only at the level of his characterization that Kateb Yacine reveals play to be the determining factor in the formation of identity. His style is permeated with the playful manipulation of language, revealing a master poet whose quest to master the French language in its highest, poetic forms has succeeded in representing his individual sensibilities, the collective quest of his people and universal human realities.
To Sully, Elenora, Anna Margaret, Joseph C., Ellen Margaret and all the friends and colleagues without whose enduring material and emotional support my work might have never come to completion.
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INTRODUCTION

Kateb Yacine's unclassifiable narratives and poetic theater form, in the author's words, parts of a single work: "Je suis l'homme d'un seul livre."¹ To the uninitiated reader, Kateb's writings appear incoherent and his professed unity, ambiguous. Moreover, since a major portion of his literary production—short pieces such as newspaper articles, lectures, poems, vignettes and short dramas—first saw the light of day in literary journals or other periodicals, any overview becomes difficult. This output has been continuous since 1947, although it dwindled to almost nothing in the late sixties.² The present study concerns itself with the first three of four volumes published in France by the Editions du Seuil, *Nedjma* ("Roman," 1956), *Le Cercle des représailles* ("Théâtre," 1959) and *Le Polygone étoilé* (no genre classification, 1966). These volumes represent revisions and reorganization of much of what first appeared in periodicals.

*Nedjma*, Kateb Yacine's masterpiece, is called a "roman," but in actuality it is an amalgam of prose poetry, verse, and theater as well as narrative prose and dialogue. Basically, Nedjma concerns the lives of four young male Algerians: Lakhdar, Mustapha, Rachid and Mourad, and their relationship with Nedjma, a female character whose name means "star" in Arabic. She eludes all who try to capture her. The book is marked more by Nedjma's absence than her presence, but she is the center of attraction around which everything revolves.
In addition to embodying the essence of the female for the Algerian mind, she may be considered a symbol for the Algerian nation. A central concern is the mystery of Nedjma's birth, for her mother was a beautiful Marseillaise of Jewish origin who had been sequentially abducted by four lovers in rapid succession. The last two were friends, Si Mokhtar and Rachid's father. After a night in which the three of them had been in a cave in Constantine, Rachid's father was found in the cave, dead from a gunshot wound, under circumstances never elucidated. Also among the Marseillaise's lovers were the fathers of both Mourad and Lakhdar and Kamel, Nedjma's husband (their mothers were indigenous Algerian women). Kamel was actually the natural son of Si Mokhtar, who in all likelihood also fathered Nedjma. The theme of incest turns around the equivocal circumstances of Nedjma's birth. Further, Nedjma's relationships with men repeat the polyandrous pattern of her mother's life. She is abducted several times as was her mother; however, it is never certain that Nedjma has sexual relations with any of her suitors. For Kateb, history often repeats itself and yet moves forward as well. The book opens and closes with the same sentence: "Lakhdar s'est échappé de sa cellule," referring to the second time that Lakhdar has been in jail. However, if history repeats itself, the words convey an opening to the future, in the fact that Lakhdar escapes each time.

Nedjma and Lakhdar are the central characters of the volume of theater, Le Cercle des représailles (1959). Kateb called the volume a trilogy; however, upon examination, the trilogy is found to encompass two full-length tragedies, a farce and a dramatic poem, all of which contain a certain unity of theme and characters. They appear to be strange hybrids of Greek tragedy, German expressionism, French symbolist drama, Brecht and melodrama. Le Cadavre encerclé recounts the eternal struggle
of the Algerian people, symbolized by Lakhdar, for their liberation. Lakhdar dies and is reborn three times during the play. Les Ancêtres redoublent de férocity begins with a rebirth, the prison break of men organizing the revolution in their cell. It ends in the enemy's pursuit and sacrifice of an army of women led by Nedjma as "la Femme Sauvage," her apparent death and that of two of her suitors. La Poudre d'intelligence is the farcical interlude that features Nuage de fumée, a peasant who, through his wily, yet usually accidentally inspired tricks, rises to power within a Sultan's oppressive reign. The dramatic monologue at the volume's conclusion, Le Vautour, consists of the voice of a vulture, incarnating both Lakhdar and the Ancestor, speaking in darkness to Nedjma, la Femme Sauvage. The obscure poetry can be read on several levels, as for instance love poetry or a meditation on the fate of Algeria. In this drama, boundaries between the living and dead are erased, a concept that is foreign to the occidental mind.

Themes from the first two volumes, especially Nedjma, re-appear in more abstract and obscure terms in Le Polygone étoilé (1966). The book has a dual setting, both in historical time and geographical place. Most scenes take place either during the war for independence in a detention camp in Algeria or after Independence at various work sites or bars frequented by Algerian emigrant workers in France. Lacking the coherent structure of Nedjma, its succession of episodes takes the form of prose poem, verse, drama, dialogue and newspaper release. It contains themes characteristic of Kateb's previous works, among them imprisonment, insanity, the struggle for survival, obsession with Nedjma, the ancestors and the search for one's origins and identity.

The apparent incoherence of Kateb Yacine's writings can be resolved when one closely and diligently examines his writings that center
upon Nedjma and Algeria. In the three volumes studied, the author records specific moments in the development of personality in his characters and implicitly in that of their nation. The characters form a composite being—in Le Polygone étoilé, "nous," and in Le Cadavre encerclé this "nous" is also "la plénitude d'un masculin pluriel" (p. 19). Such characterization is a major ingredient of Kateb's effort to create an identity for "l'Algérie nouvelle," the Algeria that sought and won its independence after a hundred and thirty years of French colonization. Algeria as Kateb depicts it emerges as a collectivity of peoples, engaged in the process of creating their own identity from their previous status as a non-nation. On a symbolic level, Kateb's characters represent the developing nation. This study, from its occidental viewpoint, analyzes the works through a chronological bias, examining the growth of this collective personality through four stages in human development, from birth to adult maturity. For the purpose of this study we assume the structure of Nedjma, Le Polygone étoilé and Le Cercle des représailles to form a mosaic whole. More or less the same four principal male protagonists appear throughout, while at certain times Lakhdar and Mustapha could be interchangeable, as well as other characters.

Before discussing our methodology, we would like to review the most significant studies done to date of Kateb Yacine's writings. Where relevant, we will indicate bounds between their research and our own. We include Eric Sellin, Bernard Aresu, Jean Déjeux and Jacqueline Arnaud.

Eric Sellin interprets Kateb's unique style and thematics as logical products of his dual North African and French heritage, to which Kateb's cosmopolitanism adds universal appeal. For Sellin, Kateb's treatment of time is based upon

...an amalgam of [his] Arabo-Oriental cultural patrimony; assimilation of the scientific-philosophical discoveries of Einstein, the surrealists, the existentialists, and others; and an awareness of the stylistic innovations of the experimental "nouveau roman" of the 1950's and, perhaps, the novels of William Faulkner...what he seems to provide in his overall work is a definition of life force marked by what we might call a regional mentality.

In "The Algerian Novel of French Expression," Sellin discusses both the grounding of Kateb's narrative structures in geometrical figures—the star and polygon—and in the linguaontology of the Arabic mind in contact with French. These geometric figures may not accurately reflect the structure of Nadjma, as Sellin offers; he affirms more positively that "the general tone of the novel is radial." All of Kateb's works are "exteriorizations of the Arabic mind with its polarity and repetition contained within the cartouche of the infinite, expressed to the fullest degree possible in French." With unqualified admiration for Kateb's literary genius, Sellin basically examines the literary philosophical and cultural structures that give shape to Kateb's creations.

Bernard Aresu, in his dissertation, "The Fiction of Kateb Yacine—A Study in Afro-Occidentalism," and in several articles on Kateb Yacine's dramas and fiction, has interpreted Kateb's esthetics as a product of both the Arabo-Maghrebian Weltanschauung and modern occidental literary traditions. He recently presented a paper establishing similarities between the conception of time and themes in Kateb and William Faulkner. For Aresu, lyricism replaces plot. Narrative "clusters"—the ancestors, the motif of abduction and the symbolic evolution of the characters Lakhdar
and Nedjma--give coherence to Nedjma. He explores the narrative structure of Nedjma with respect to the repetition and convergence patterns of the arabesque, star and polygon, and underlines the unity inherent in Kateb's fascination for the number four. Aresu deals with the role of the unconscious in Kateb's literary creation and the resulting presence of myths as narrative structures proper to Kateb's vision of birth, destruction and rebirth of the Algerian nation.

Within the realm of African francophone literature, Jean Déjeux has done for the Maghreb what Lilyan Kesteloot has done for sub-Saharan writers, that is, acted as a superb groundbreaker, bibliographer and literary historian. While Déjeux gives an overview of Kateb's works (based on a course given in 1970 at the Centre Culturel Français d'Alger), in Littérature Maghrébine d'expression française (Sherbrooke, Canada: CELEF, Editions Naaman, 1973), his most enlightening article to date on Kateb Yacine is "Les Structures de l'imaginaire dans l'oeuvre de Kateb Yacine," Revue de l'Occident Musulman et de la Méditerranée 13-14 (1973), pp.267-292. Déjeux explores the fertile imagination of Kateb, a poet above all. Starting from Kateb's biography, Déjeux provides a wealth of research tools in exposing possible ethnological sources for Kateb's poetic themes: ancient Berber traditions such as tribal promiscuity to ensure the harvest, incestuous couples, the ogress and wild woman, the ancestor and totem animals, especially birds of prey. He also organizes Kateb's themes into universal archetypes, in a "psychologie des profondeurs." Less successfully, he attempts to link Kateb's personal life with conflicts and cathartic ritual present in his works. Déjeux perhaps incurs a risk in assuming that Kateb's characters accurately reflect the author's life. His meaning remains unclear when he refers to Le Cercle des représailles as a "psychodrame thérapeutique" for Kateb's personal life.
In accordance with certain concepts to be put forward in this thesis, however, Déjeux acknowledges Kateb's "humeur ludique":

Il n'y a pas de ligne droite dans le monde d'un chat, écrit Kateb dans Le Polygone. . . , et le labyrinthe, s'il signifie bien ici la poursuite interminable et haletante du désir de retrouver Nedjma, entraîne aussi dans l'ambiance ludique de l'égarement.12

He also refers to the author's play or games ("jeu"), which Déjeux sees as perverse. He states that Kateb was beaten at his own game, as his "explosion poétique"—the excessive fragmentation of his writing—resulted in the necessity of a major editing in order to publish his work:

L'auteur, enfin, pris tout naturellement à son propre jeu, a continué à jouer tant avec le mythe imaginé et avec Nedjma métamorphosée qu'avec le lecteur. Les manuscrits ont certes subi un brassage: il a fallu couper, reprendre, laisser tomber, ajouter et transformer. Mais Kateb a en outre pris un malin plaisir à brouiller les pistes, à tricher et à déjouer les poursuivants.13

We will agree that Kateb plays with his reader at times, but unlike Déjeux, we believe that play is an essential feature in Kateb's writings. In many cases, and here we credit Jacqueline Arnaud with this astute conclusion, Kateb's intentional obscurity was a necessary step toward clandestinity, given the times during which he published in France and the message that he desired to convey.14 While we feel that Kateb's literary play echoes the behavior of the characters he created, the emphasis of our present study lies in the role of play in the development of the characters' personalities.

Jacqueline Arnaud, who has just completed her Doctorat d'Etat on Kateb Yacine (in 1978—we have not seen it), has published several perceptive articles on the poet. The first in the series offers the most substantial thought, "Kateb, ou la corde tranchée," Lettres Nouvelles (March–April 1967), pp. 32–54. While concentrating on Le Polygone étoilé, the article neatly presents the underlying themes of all of
Kateb's works. Themes discussed by Arnaud include "la génération sacrifiée"—the characters alienated from their mothers and mother country—"le mythe de Nedjma"—which ideally supplied a route back to the mother image, but was an absurd, ambivalent goal—and "les Ancêtres"—the necessity to search for male models beyond the characters' collaborationist fathers, in order to return to the ancient Algerian tribal identity.\(^{15}\) Arnaud defends Kateb from criticism on the fragmented appearance of *Le Polygone étoilé* by stating that many sections of the work had previously appeared as lectures, newspaper articles or works to be read on the radio and intended to stir the imagination of illiterate countrymen.

In the portion of "Kateb, ou la corde tranchée" that is most relevant to our present study, Arnaud discusses the "mythe de l'Éternelle insurrection" among men who insist on their freedom, and then examines Kateb's use of polyvalent symbols that evince his participation in the collective imagination of the Maghreb. Like Césaire, Kateb prepares a great collective catharsis by bringing up ancient popular forces.\(^{16}\)

Our present study begins where Déjeux and Arnaud left the problem of play in Kateb's works. The existing interpretations emphasize the tragic aspects and only minimally acknowledge Kateb's playful side. Most dismiss the laughter as satirical, compensational or cathartic. We feel that there is a coherent approach to the works in which the comic can be shown to occupy as integral a place as the tragic. Quite distinct from any literary tradition of comic relief or catharsis, a playful attitude, either on the narrator's or characters' part, seems to be present, even at the most tragic moments.

While others may emphasize narrative structures, the products of Kateb's imagination or themes in order to find a coherence in Kateb's
baroque writings, we feel another approach to be equally useful. Within Kateb's characterization, which takes the major protagonists from birth to adulthood, we will show that the playful side of human nature provides the growth mechanism of the personality and identity. We present four basic stages in the characters' physical and mental growth. From the multiplicity of episodes, occurring often in apparently irrational order, and revealed by multiple narrative voices, dialogues, memories and dreams, we will reconstruct chronologies of the characters' experiences. While their identities sometimes merge, we discover that for the most part, the personality of each male protagonist evolves toward an adulthood featuring creativity.

In our examination of the characters' evolution into creative adults, we made an eclectic use of ideas from two seminal works on human nature. One is by a Freudian psychoanalyst who surpassed Freud in his special views on the importance of the social and historical environment during the infantile stages, Erik H. Erikson in *Childhood and Society* (Second Edition, New York: W.W. Norton and Co., 1963 – first published in 1950). The other study, treating human culture historically, was made by Johan Huizinga in *Homo Ludens* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1950, 1955 – first edition published in German in 1944). Relevance to personality development in Kateb's characters can be found in two parts of *Childhood and Society*. These include Erikson's discussion of infantile stages and the effects of culture shock on the children of two North American tribes. With respect to Huizinga's *Homo Ludens*, we found that in the light of his broad definition of play, which in his view is eminently irrational, as well as the basis of all creativity and culture, Kateb's irrational and playful nature could be better understood.
In *Childhood and Society*, Erikson proposes theories and illustrates models in the development of the personality with attention to the individual organism and self, the self and kin, and the individual's role in widening social circles, all viewed in the perspective of history. In the tribes he observed, Erikson saw the values of the culture instinctively determining methods of child training to best prepare the individual for the role he was to play in society. He studied these phenomena during an historical era when the traditional culture's values were losing their relevance, as a result of contact with the technologically advanced civilization of whites.

For example, Kateb's character Lakhdar, as an infant, was swaddled in a manner similar to Erikson's Sioux babies. Accordingly, the suppressed movement of his arms and legs later resulted in a tough, aggressive child prepared to survive the rigors of his environment. Brought up with similar traditional practices to prepare them for a relatively primitive culture, Kateb's characters enter a technological world and suffer alienation from both old and new worlds.

Erikson explained racial stereotyping such as the Indian's supposed listlessness by saying that such unacceptable behavior resulted from child training methods and goals being out of phase with the occupations available when a child would reach maturity. Illustrations of Algerian victims of such racial, if not racist, stereotyping are found in Kateb's works. The clash of traditional nomadic and post-conquest sedentary patterns proved cause for emotional trauma among Algerians. Out of their traumas, Kateb's characters exploit the resource of play, both for therapeutic reasons and for affirming their identities. Erikson calls play "re-creation" for the adult: "a periodical stepping out from those forms of defined limitation which are his social reality." He sees play
as an instrument of growth: "...child's play is the infantile form of the human ability to deal with experience by creating model situations and to master reality by experiment and planning." Opposing the popular judgment of play as "mere child's play," however, Erikson demonstrates from clinical experience that play has the serious function of providing a child with working tools for healing wounds to the ego and for progressing in personality growth.

In their school years, Kateb's characters become painfully aware of alienation from their family members and from other children, particularly Europeans. Rather than despair or become totally involved in combat, Kateb's characters maintain a playful attitude, or take themselves less than totally seriously. Through acting out their problems, performing a mimetic sort of play, they succeed in reconciling many of the incongruities they sense. Mustapha's participation in competitive play is reflected in his need to do what is necessary to be best in school and to be an ideal son, for example. By engaging in play as an activity that does not serve any purpose outside itself, Kateb's characters fulfill one of the conditions of play described by Johan Huizinga. For Huizinga play is meaningful, yet it escapes rational definition. He did, however, describe it through its characteristics:

...play is a voluntary activity or occupation executed within certain fixed limits of time and place, according to rules freely accepted but absolutely binding, having its aim in itself and accompanied by a feeling of tension, joy and the consciousness that it is "different" from "ordinary life."

We will demonstrate that most of the behavior of Kateb's child characters did indeed occur as voluntary activities in a time and place outside the bounds of everyday life, with the feeling of being "different," and following certain rules, always accompanied by tension, its relief and a feeling of mirth.
The principal thesis of Huizinga's work is the power of play to transform culture. We feel it is feasible to transpose his ideas on the role of play in social groupings to its role in cultivating the individual personality. After all, a widely accepted concept holds that Kateb's individual characters represent an entire population. Huizinga's presentation of poetry—in its broad sense as literature—as being grounded in play, helped us to present a view of Kateb's writing that underlies his characterization: Kateb plays with language and with his reader just as his characters play.

Huizinga discussed higher forms of play (often involving two opposing groups) as falling into two categories, agonistic and representational. At each stage of personality growth, we will find Kateb's characters participating in both. Huizinga states, "A play community generally tends to become permanent even after the game is over...play promotes the formation of social groupings..." Kateb's children bolster their sense of identity through collective play, from representation and combative war games to more civilized sports.  

The highest form of competitive play for Huizinga is the quest. The quest can be for a sense of honor and worth, as it is in Kateb's characters' overall search for their identities. This leitmotif of Kateb's works is concretely signaled by images of the characters progressing down a path of some sort, be it roads or corridors.

The group play of Kateb's youths becomes more complex during adolescence, and their forms of play become accordingly more complicated. Between the group playfulness of youth and the individual assumption of adult responsibility, Kateb's adolescents alternate in allegiance to group and exclusive concern for self. Rivalries compete with solidarities. Agonistic play is manifested in rivalries for Nedjma on an individual
basis; the group of Kateb's adolescents defines itself in opposition to French colonialists and to those Algerians who sympathize with the French. During this transitional stage, however, the characters engage in representational play in a variety of experimental forms. Nedjma herself performs dazzlingly as she plays at manipulating her suitors.

Within the question of representational play, we will observe a link between the characters acting out a role and using their imagination in order to fantasize reality as other than it actually is. Kateb's characters engage in fantasy often, especially with regard to Nedjma. Huizinga links imaginative play to the creation of poetry or literature.23 Spurred on by their competitive spirit and fed by their taste for representational play, Kateb's characters develop their imaginations. Their identities as creators or poets begin to take shape.

The most interesting grown-ups depicted by Kateb embody the play spirit and resemble the trickster figure.24 While Huizinga does not use the term "trickster," he does discuss the thulr of Old Norse literature. The thulr resembles the trickster of ancient literary tradition in his dual nature—he is destructive, possessed and amoral, while at the same time he benefits society and brings it positive values. The thulr particularly represents the facet of the trickster acting through verbal creativity, in the manner of a cult orator or archaic poet. Si Mokhtar's ability to speak eloquently on tribal tradition in addition to speaking nonsensically, with or without conscious intent, places him in the trickster lineage.

Kateb's characters take Si Mokhtar or others resembling him as their mentors; their play abilities thus take similar directions, both absurd and constructive, both elements requisite to creativity. In their own way they become creators and poets.
The mechanism of play that influences the growth of Kateb's characters' identities appears in the stylistic features of the texts. As they proceed toward their adult creator personalities, they approach the vocation of the individual who has created them through words put on paper. Their play grows from the play of his own imagination, and Kateb's manner of writing demands a reader who will play with him in order to gain an understanding of his message. Such play can also only take place once one works long and hard at becoming familiar with his complicated set of rules. Therefore, without further ado, we now proceed to examine the results of the work that we have done in order to clarify the role of play in Kateb Yacine's characterization and quest for identity.
CHAPTER I. BIRTH AND EARLY CHILDHOOD

In this chapter, we will examine the presentation of the birth and early childhood of four male protagonists as they appear in *Nedjma*, *Le Cercle des représailles* and *Le Polygone étoilé*. We will look at the texts concerning this stage of development and use certain of Erik Erikson's concepts as expressed in *Childhood and Society* in order to shed light on patterns of events in the individual and social experiences of the infant characters. For Kateb Yacine's characters, early childhood, far from being a totally paradisiacal state, is marked by the loss of a paradisiacal situation. The main body of this chapter examines the figurative language, ranging from simple images to complex metaphors, used to describe birth and infancy. The chapter's last part discusses the passage that opens *Le Polygone étoilé*. In one of its interpretive possibilities, this passage resembles an enigma or extended metaphor representing the stage of birth and early childhood. We discover the beginnings of the play-behavior in the infants in this text as well as in specific instances.

Kateb's preoccupation with the "chers visages de l'enfance" has been explained as the desire to return to a lost unity, or "vert paradis." Though at times Kateb does depict childhood in this ideal light, his vision of early childhood emphasizes the non-paradisiacal. For each of the four male protagonists of *Nedjma*, Kateb records parallel events occurring at the individual, socio-cultural and historical level. Each reveals a
specific reaction to his growing consciousness of separation from a state of grace or security. Traditional childrearing practices tend to have a bearing on the growth of the personality. The historical context in which the characters are depicted is a society disturbed by the colonial situation.

In our view, Kateb's special attention to children reflects both an interest in the beginnings of his characters' personalities and a discovery of the principle of play in their behavior. This play underlies all poetry, in its general sense as literary creation. "Every metaphor is a play on words," Johan Huizinga has stated.28 While discovering the principle of play in the behavior of his infant characters, the adult poet or narrator also plays with words in forming metaphors in the descriptions of birth and infancy.

We first examine descriptions of the infants from the viewpoint of the individual. While initially we categorize the texts as either psychological, sociological or literary, it soon becomes apparent that this classification reflects convenience and degree only. The realism of psychological and sociological description is for Kateb Yacine actually inseparable from figurative, or literary descriptions of the infantile experience. Nevertheless, we retain this classification by degree only, and discuss the infants first from an individual psychological point of view, then in their social contexts, and finally in their poetic manifestations.

Mourad's infancy is evoked only in the statement that he was born. However, the birth environment was marked by his father's erratic behavior:
...la mère de Mourad, paysanne pauvre, nommée Zohra, rencontrée par Sidi Ahmed au cours d'une équipée dans les Aurès, est ravie à quatorze ans... un an après naît Mourad; fêtant la naissance, Sidi Ahmed prend le mors aux dents, s'enivre, faillit battre l'accouchée, qui, à son gré, pleure trop, et il disparaît... (Nedjma, p. 77).

When his father disappears, Mourad is given to his father's sterile sister, Lella Fatma, to be raised in the city of Bône. Pregnant with Lakhdar, his mother Zohra remarries. The only other detail supplied on Mourad's early childhood is the fact that at age six he had a fever, during the wake for his father, killed in a bus accident (Nedjma, p. 78). Mourad is soon joined by Lella Fatma's second foster child, Nedjma. The text contains no specific discussion of Mourad's infantile relationship with Nedjma.

The few details on Mustapha's early childhood are given only from the infant's point of view. The narrator of Nedjma reports that "Les premiers souvenirs de Mustapha se rapportent à une cour dont les dalles disjointes retiennent toutes sortes de végétations" (Nedjma, p. 213). The adjective "disjointes" belongs to a large lexicon of words denoting separation and dispersion which form a leitmotif in Kateb's writings. 29

The theme of alienation often characterizes the literature of decolonization, and is the subject of Isaac Yétiv's study on the Algerian novel from 1952 to 1956. 30

Rachid, who nursed at the breasts of three women, was raised among numerous siblings:

Le dernier-né, Rachid, ne devait pas connaître longtemps ses neuf demi-frères et demi-sœurs; il avait têté à trois poitrines: les seins blancs d'Aïcha, ceux de la seconde épouse, et les globes noirs que lui tendait, en riant de toutes ses dents, la troisième épouse, la négresse de Touggourt dont des secondes noces (bénies par Aïcha, la plus jeune des quatre veuves qui ne devait jamais se remarier) furent célébrées l'année où Rachid franchit le seuil de l'école. (Nedjma, p. 156).

In his memory, infancy appeared as a time of gregarious pleasure: "l'époque
où il pouvait vivre avec les insectes" (p. 166). Associating babies and animal life serves to evoke the innocence and anxiety-free state of consciousness shared by young children and non-human creatures. The murder of Rachid's father deprived him not only of a father but also of his extended, polygamous family. The family's final dispersion coincided with yet another painful separation for the young child, who, upon entering school, left the infantile paradise of home.

One particular perception which Rachid made as an infant, however, will be exploited as a symbol by Kateb. Because Rachid's cradle was an enclosed wooden box with tiny windows for air (p. 167), the experience of enclosed space and the feeling for the contrast of light and darkness therefore became primal or first and essential experiences for him. The sight of the black woman flashing her teeth while laughing became a meaningful perception and a vivid memory for the child who had lived the daily contrast of the cradle's darkness and the outer light. Such an experience of contrast belongs to the many polar opposites which an infant learns during the first few months of life. 31

Lakhdar was born a year after his brother Mourad to a repudiated mother who married his stepfather during Lakhdar's infancy: "Aux secondes noces de sa mère, Lakhdar tette [sic] encore" (Nedjma, p. 193). He enjoyed what Erikson calls the "paradise of orality" 32 while living in a giant gourd hung from the rafters of the simple family dwelling owned by his step-grandfather, in a room shared with his mother and stepfather. The narrative records, apparently through Lakhdar's subjectivity, certain basic infant sensations: "baisers dans la sue; senteurs des cendres, du linge sec, du lait de femme" (Nedjma, p. 193). Erikson's "incorporative mode," the label which he gives to the social modality of the earliest infantile pre-genital stage, is characterized by "getting," the almost passive reception of food and sensory stimuli. Lakhdar's infant sensations correspond to this mode.
Lakhdar next manifests the second Eriksonian social mode of the oral zone, that which Erikson calls "active prehension." Characteristic actions during this stage include "taking" and biting. Lakhdar no longer passively receives sensations and nourishment, his will has developed along with his body. Now capable of modifying his environment and demanding actively, he jerks his swaddling loose: "[il] défait par emballées le bandeau dont Zohra persiste à l'entourer" (Nedjma, p. 194).

The availability of milk from other mothers resembles a situation that Erikson observed in one of the Sioux tribes, where surplus milk was community property. Lakhdar "essaie la mère des autres" (Nedjma, p. 194). As Erikson states, "This paradise of the practically unlimited privilege of the mother's breast also had a forbidden fruit. To be permitted to suckle, the infant had to learn not to bite the breast." Lakhdar's weaning was not a catastrophic one. He succeeded in the lesson to avoid biting: "il ne mord pas le sein une seule fois!" (Nedjma, p. 194). The consciousness of a paradise which will be lost appears implicit in this association between an ideal place and his mother's breast: the open spaces where he forces Zohra to breastfeed him are called "les royaumes de la prairie" (Nedjma, p. 194). "Royaumes" also evokes Lakhdar's growing powers with respect to his mother.

We will now consider the sociological viewpoint in Kateb's descriptions of the infantile stage. The emphasis here rests on the child's parents and social environment in general. Mustapha's case exemplifies the tensions felt within a sedentary family situated in an urban milieu. His life had begun in the close ties of an extended family occupying a four-room apartment in Guelma. His immediate society was comprised of four couples as well as "le passif de la tribu (veuves, grand'mères,
chômeurs, infirmes)" *Nedjma*, p. 213). The word "passif" denotes, in addition to meaning passive or inactive, a sum of debts or liabilities. The "unproductive" members of the tribe are a burden to the household head within the crowded, post-colonial urban environment. In the pre-colonial, pre-urban family situation, the collectivity absorbed and nurtured, and perhaps found a productive role for these individuals. The ideas of "passif" as liability and debt had become a reality in the capitalistic colonial framework.

Mustapha's father, Mohamed Gharib, had gone into personal debt after his own wedding, and while his wife Ouarda "mange du pain sec (elle allaite Mustapha)," Maître Gharib "se nourrit de vin à crédit" *Nedjma*, p. 213). Mustapha's father, an alcoholic inattentive to his wife's needs, nevertheless indulged his son:

...il est habillé à la française, bourré de lainages, gavé de friandises; certain soir, l'oukil se montre si affectueux, que l'enfant gâté est prié d'uriner dans une boîte de sucre: Maître Gharib est un noble, c'est-à-dire un naïf; il espère, par ces fanfaronnades, préserver son fils des marques de la misère trop connue... *(Nedjma*, pp. 213-214).

This comic passage suggests the rather fatuous manner in which Maître Gharib concerned himself with appearances, and treated his son like an object of display for his neighbors more than as his own flesh and blood. Indeed, the majority of information on Mustapha's childhood is written in the third person, and not from the child's viewpoint. The child Mustapha's only first person comment confirms his father's tendency to reify his son, for it implies that Mustapha had come to conceive of himself as an object of exchange. He suggests that his coming into the world prompted the loss of a mirrored wardrobe, broken by his father in a fit of anger:
Mustapha both feared and respected his father, who held the prestigious position of "oukil"--lawyer--in the Moslem community. Maître Charib also enjoyed a certain status in the French community. Despite prestige enjoyed in both societies, however, he was alienated from both because of his dual allegiance. One might attribute his alcoholism and his aloofness from wife and children to this isolation.

Mustapha was alienated from his two sisters, of whom practically nothing is told. The texts of Kateb remain silent on the upbringing of female children or the intimate details of the lives of women, consonant with the tradition of keeping women veiled when among strangers, and confined within the house walls. Certain details of Nedjma's early childhood are supplied, but these remain abstract and vague due to her usually allegorical presence.

A special verbal relationship between Mustapha and his mother did exist, however, and appears in an episode described at the end of Le Polygone étoilé:


Mustapha's mother's poetic and theatrical talents, which belonged to Kateb's own mother, would influence the child's later vocation.

This idyllic relationship in Mustapha's early childhood ended when his father sent him into "la gueule du loup," a popular expression which
Kateb often uses to describe the French school, if not French cultural immersion in general. "Ainsi se refermera le piège des Temps Modernes sur mes frères racines" (Le Polygone..., p. 181). The intimate relationship with his mother had put him in direct contact with the repository of traditional values. She instilled in him a feeling for nature and the blood of the ancestors as well as a sense of poetry and drama.

In this culture, the absence of a father is significant to such an extent that the fatherless child is called "orphelin," and three of the protagonists of Nedjma and Nedjma's son Ali (Le Cercle des représailles) become orphans in this way early in their lives. While Mustapha has a father, he becomes an orphan through alienation, and does lose his father when he is twenty. Maître Gharib's personality problems could be explained by Fanonian psychoanalysis, which would hold that he drank heavily and beat his wife due to guilt felt from his close association with French colonialists. From the infant's point of view, being fatherless becomes a problem when the child becomes aware of differences between the sexes. In Algerian society the early years are dominated by the mother, who, while she may be confined there, completely dominates life in the home. In this light may be seen a partial explanation for the extraordinary mythology which Kateb's writings build up around the feminine.

Rachid originally had four mothers at the same time, three breast-feeding him; at about age one, Mourad was adopted by his aunt, Lella Fatma. Only Lakhdar and Mustapha, who later become active in social situations, had relatively normal early childhoods. But even they grow up within atmospheres of tension: before Lakhdar was born, his fifteen-year-old mother had already been abandoned and repudiated by her husband, and remarried at her parents' bidding; during Mustapha's seventh day on earth
his father broke his mother's arm. In *Le Cadavre encerclé*, Lakhdar—
while dying, having been stabbed in the back by his stepfather—laments
the absence of his real father:

Parmi tous les absents que rien n'excuse, un seul
me pèse encore :
Mon père dont on rapporta le corps dans une
couverture
Alors que j'attendais de lui la fin d'un conte
et d'un rêve confondus.  

(*Le Cadavre encerclé*, p. 66).

These "normal" childhood settings underline the reality that an Algerian
child growing up between the world wars had little chance to experience
optimum security and harmony in the social relations into which he
entered.

A long passage in *Le Cadavre encerclé* describes one of the ways
in which an indigenous Algerian father might be lured from his family.
Kateb embodies the temptations to leave in a seductively beautiful and
intelligent woman, who, at one level, symbolizes French civilization. 38
While dying, Lakhdar, in the style of a story, tells of this creature
and her effect on Algerian men and on himself as an infant:

Un jour il s'était enfoncé dans les tavernes, en compagnie
d'ivrognes et d'assassins. Ils étaient tous à la recherche
d'une étrangère très belle et très instruite, si belle et si
réservée que déjà les amis de mon père s'étaient battus jusqu'à
l'aurore pour se frayer un passage dans la foule et la
rejoindre, dans le superbe hôtel où son amant la recevait.
Mon père était dévoré par la colère et le dépit, sur les traces
de cette femme que l'on suivait respectueusement dans les
noces... Ce jour-là il fut cruellement blessé au visage par
un rasoir qu'un vieil homme lui jeta d'une fenêtre, alors qu'il
guettait l'indifférente courtisane, et il jetait à la barbe de
ses amis des gerbes de sang épais et brûlant. Et moi non plus,
je ne pouvais m'empêcher de jeter des cris atroces, rien que
pour me soulager de la honte et des passions sans fin de mon
père, car je venais de naître, et je créais soir et matin, comme
pour désigner l'homme infâme qui me prenait dans ses bras pour
m'exhiber devant l'objet de son dépit et de sa haine: cette
étrangère qui ne manquait pas de paraître à sa fenêtre aux heures
tardives où je hurlais de sommeil, du fond de la passion paternelle...
Enfin, elle descendit d'un pas alerte, l'étrangère en personne,
avec son visage impur et ses gestes que la foule observait comme un rite, la femme au parfum inconnu qui m'entoura de ses bras, tandis que je humais le plus lourd et le plus beau de ses seins (il me semblait qu'elle en avait d'autres, puisque mon humble mère n'en avait que deux) et que mon père cloué devant l'étrangère qui me caressait en souriant et d'autres gens qui s'arrêttaient à ce singulier tableau, se plongeait dans un silence qui m'emplissait de remords et de jalousie, moi l'enfant de six ans si gravement atteint par la passion paternelle, moi qui fus le plus violent rival de mon père alors que je n'avais pas toutes mes dents, moi qui ne voulus jamais admettre que l'étrangère avait disparu, que mon père avait été emporté dans une couverture, alors que je jouais avec Nedjma dans la rue, Nedjma la fille de l'étrangère que mon père avait enlevée.

(Le Cadavre encerclé, pp. 66-67).

This rivalry with his stepfather first develops in Lakhdar's infancy, when he vied for the use of wool blankets on the floor (Nedjma, p. 193). The dying Lakhdar telescopes his life memories that center upon feelings related to the absence of his real father from his childhood. Lakhdar shared his father's unbridled passion for the Frenchwoman along with a sense of guilt for having abandoned his own people in following her. In his delirium, Lakhdar recalls how the six-year-old had magnified the woman into an almost extraterrestrial being, a process that will occur in the minds of the young protagonists with respect to Nedjma, her daughter.

These individual and social realities are expressed in poetic terms, from an image evoking something more than a simple sensation to a complex of images forming an extended metaphor. On occasion, the images reach the status of symbols from the collective unconscious, or in Kateb's words, "l'intime rêverie de la horde" (Nedjma, p. 169). It soon becomes apparent that Kateb is first and foremost a poet, and not a psychologist or sociologist. Indeed, in his very culture occurs a specific instance of the poetization of reality. According to Pierre Bourdieu, families of Arabo-berber Algerians, in order to preserve a sense of cohesion in social
structures that tend to weaken during times of hardship, often consider themselves as belonging to one of a small number of tribes. In many instances, the family claims as a common ancestor one who is purely fictitious, the eponymic ancestor. Most of Kateb's characters belong to a tribe claiming one Keblout as the eponymic ancestor. According to Bourdieu, a nineteenth century explorer reported that every shepherd claimed to descend from the Beni-Hilal, a militant tribe arriving in the second wave of the Arab invasion of the Maghreb. The sense of cohesion is centered on the name of the tribe more than on social relationships among families within the tribe; thus it is the power of the word, the foundation of poetry, which gives the people unity and dignity.

Bourdieu further describes the opposing tendency:

A la tendance à s'identifier fait sans cesse contrepoids la tendance à s'opposer et à affirmer la différence. Le nom, qui constitue le meilleur signe de l'unité, se propose aussi comme le meilleur moyen de proclamer cette différence par laquelle le groupe entend fonder son identité originale. . . .\footnote{40}

The author's affirmation of identity for himself and his people as a cohesive entity, differing from the identities of others and other nations, reflects the tradition of the family's way of bolstering its own identity. In a separately published version of the childhood of Lakhdar as he appears in \textit{Nedjma}, "L'Ancêtre et le têtard," Kateb demonstrates his awareness of the process of literary creation: "A nous, de romancer l'indicible, l'éther sans odeur des temps immatériels, pourtant les plus sensibles."\footnote{41} Many writers join Kateb in projecting upon the earliest years' experiences imagined to approach eternity, and for Kateb, childhood holds keys to life's meaning and to the identity of his people and himself.

The figurative language which Kateb Yacine chooses for evoking infancy and childhood reveal how the poet plays with words. In the text just quoted, "L'Ancêtre et le têtard," the young boy is called "le
savoureux têtard," "têtard" meaning both "tadpole" and, in popular slang, "child;" his grandfather is the "ancêtre." Kateb's imagery contains a bestiary—in a distant relationship with black African folklore such as that transliterated by Birago Diop—which becomes the vehicle for more complex levels of meaning. The tadpole is one of his favorite creatures. Its nature provides an image that suggests both original innocence and metamorphosis. The young Mustapha, who would become a writer, describes his idyllic existence prior to the French school:

. . . .je n'étais encore qu'un têtard, heureux dans sa rivièrè, et des accents nocturnes de sa gent batracienne, bref ne doutant de rien ni de personne.  

(Le Polygone., p. 180)

The tiny creature in a watery matrix dynamically evokes not only the innocence and well-being of infancy, but also the imminent mutations through which the developing individual must pass. Originally swimming in weightlessness, it must inevitably crawl to the gravity of dry land, to become an awkward, unsightly toad. For the Algerian child of the era in question, such a metaphor is valid, for entering adulthood meant a rude change from childhood innocence into a world of racism, unemployment, hunger and want. With respect to the thesis of this study, the development and metamorphosis of personality, the image of a metamorphic animal is particularly apt.

The tadpole metaphor is supplanted by one using a fish as its vehicle. Kateb demonstrates his creative skill with words by renewing the cliché, "heureux comme un poisson dans l'eau," by elaborating upon it with more concrete images. Mustapha's memory of childhood's end shows the evolution in the image of the swimming creature:

Et j'aurais pu m'en tenir là, ne rien savoir de plus, en docte personnage, ou en barde local, mais égal à lui-même, heureux comme un poisson, dans un étang peut-être sombre, mais où tout lui sourit. Hélas, il me fallut obéir au destin torrentiel de ces truites fameuses qui finissent tôt ou tard dans l'aquarium ou dans la poêle.

(Le Polygone., p. 180).
The images, "étang" and "sombre," and the phrase "égal à lui-même" suggest stasis and unconsciousness, both womblike qualities. Because he had left the home pond, Mustapha's fate was less secure—"l'aquarium ou la poêle."
This reflection on the fish's possible fate parallels the stages of natural evolution for the tadpole from water to land. 42

Other figurative language comes into play for describing the termination of a paradisical epoch in early childhood, employing not only animal imagery, but also light, mineral and vegetable images. This lengthy meditation, induced by the use of hashish, illustrates Rachid's associations with the idyllic state of his infancy. His experience with the polar opposites of light and darkness underline his consciousness of passing from one world to another:

Rachid retrouvait la vieille impression d'avoir voyage sous terre, ou peut-être plus loin, à travers les savanes de plénitude et d'inconscience, à l'époque où il pouvait vivre avec les insectes, l'eau du bassin, les pierres, les ombres du dehors, lorsque sa pensée s'élevait à peine de la simplicité animale... De son enfance, il n'avait jamais pu saisir que des bribes de plus en plus minces, disparates, intenses : éclairs du paradis ravagé par la déflagration des heures, chapelet de bombes retardataires que le ciel tenait suspendues sur la joie toujours clandestine, réduite à se réfugier dans les tréfonds de l'être le plus frêle, l'enfant toujours juché à son soupirail, toujours curieux de l'éblouissement suivi par la morsure de l'ombre, la peur de rester prisonnier du monde, alors que d'autres univers pleuvaient nuit et jour sur Rachid, qu'il fût endormi dans le bercail en bois de peuplier, avec les petites fenêtres pour respirer, ou bien qu'il fût ses premiers pas sous l'averse...

(Nedjma, pp. 166–167).

Unconsciousness or minimal levels of consciousness are associated with the paradisical state, as that of water, insects, stones, shadows. Prenatal and infantile existence are placed in harmony with these inanimate objects and lower life forms. Such a harmony with insect life is implicitly contradicted in two episodes of Nedjma, however, when Rachid as an adult confronts a roach and a spider. The "adult" reaction that Rachid
displays is to project his learned feelings of fear or disgust upon these creatures. 43

Among the few sensations of childhood which were still vivid in Rachid's memory, the image of lightning flashes conveys the intensity and brevity of childhood paradise. These are contrasted with the excessive, numbing repetition in the element of time ("heures"), expressed in the image (though it is a cliché) of the string of bombs ("chapelet de bombes"). 44 The lightning bolt's light is obliterated by the consuming fire of time, and the pure infant joy is preserved only in the furthest reaches of the psyche, where it is called simply, "l'enfant." From this vantage point, the unearthly child watches the succession of light and darkness which punctuate time on earth. The pure, innocent child is a part of other spheres of existence, as expressed in: "d'autres univers pleuvaients nuit et jour sur Rachid."

For each character, the location of his birthplace—with its particular geographic, ethnographic and historical situation—holds meaning for his personality. On one hand, his birthplace appears to predetermine the nature of his personality, according to the logic of Islamic fatalism. On the other hand, from a more scientific viewpoint, the birth environment influences the infant's personality. Kateb exploits both points of view in giving each character a symbolic geography of birthplace. The mental health and personality of each character depends on the degree to which the catastrophic events of the conquest have affected his place of birth.

Rachid, who grows up to be the most disturbed, had been born in the old city of Constantine, more specifically, on the border between the ghetto and the old city. To further heighten the catastrophic element in Rachid's symbolic geography, his home was located on the site of one
of the most devastating battles of the French conquest, the hill called
the Koudia. Nearby stood an arsenal and civil prison, architectural
instruments of repression (Nedjma, p. 154). Constantine was not only the
site of a bloody siege of the French conquest, but had been a goal of
numerous foreign invasions over thousands of years. Rachid's house was
situated on a dead-end street, the impasse being a recurrent symbol for
Kateb, evoking, in one sense, the impossibility of true emancipation
from external domination. Rachid's spirit seemed defeated even before his
birth:

...vers cinq ou six ans, il se souvenait d'avoir adopté la
sombre vivacité d'un mur de terre sèche qu'il enlaçait, à qui
furent adressés ses monologues d'orphelin. Le mur faisait
partie de l'impasse; il fallait, afin de l'atteindre, ramper
dans la canicule, et se redresser tout en pleurs--mais le mur
était là.

(Nedjma, p. 168).

When his seven half-brothers and half-sisters had been dispersed, Rachid's
childhood games were reduced to fantasy projected on the walls of the
impasse. For this post-paradisical Rachid, the wall at the end of the
impasse provided an objective correlative or a screen upon which his fan-
tasies were projected in the attempt to regain what was lost. Paradoxically,
the apparent dead-end of Rachid's life, perhaps a symbol for the fact that
Algeria has been perpetually invaded and conquered, implies a challenge
to fight against the solitude; for Algeria, its very existence had depended
upon collective resistance against an invader. Nevertheless, for Rachid,
school submerged the spirit that had buoyed the child's bizarre communion
with the wall:

...courir après les lézards sur les genoux et les paumes,
sans désespérer de les rattraper... Mais au fil des années,
les toiles immondes des illusions crevait devant l'enfant;
il n'avait plus d'animal que les dégradations quotidiennes,
les sommeils de renard, et l'oubli... Il émergeait, incognito
et sévère : l'école était plus triste, plus pauvre que le mur.
Rachid allait en ville, à présent, et la ville était moins
vaste que le mur; l'enfance était perdue.

(Nedjma, p. 168).
Lost with childhood are the innocence and spontaneity associated with animals, leaving only cynicism and sluggishness. The oxymoron in the image "sommeils de renard"—the fox the last animal one expects to catch napping—evokes Rachid's strange contradiction in behavior. He became even more withdrawn as he entered school and the society of other children. Among all the characters, Rachid became the least adapted to society. In *Nedjma* he concluded his existence in a fondouk (an inn, often with a room reserved for hashish smokers) overlooking his place of birth and the scene of his father's murder, where he attempts to recapture "le Rachid paradisiaque et frêle, perdu à la fleur de l'âge" (*Nedjma*, p. 167).

The proximity of both his birthplace and the fondouk to the grotto where his father was murdered adds still another dimension to Rachid's symbolic geography. All are located on the gorges of the Rhummel, a usually dry river that cuts deep canyons through the town of Constantine. All three are enclosed spaces, hiding places for this lost soul, the cave forever concealing a father whom Rachid never knew. As he smokes hashish, he looks down from his surrogate womb into the cavity of the earth that received his father's body; he senses his adult existence as cyclical and illusory:

> Et Rachid contemplait le fleuve au fond du gouffre : le Rhummel qui ne coule pas plus de quelques semaines l'an, dissipé dans le roc, sans lac ni embouchure, pseudo-torrent vaincu par les énigmes du terrain, de même que Rachid, fils unique né à contretemps d'un père assassiné avant sa naissance; c'était le père qui portait le fusil de chasse, et ce fut son corps qui fut retrouvé dans la grotte; là mère de Rachid accoucha peu après la levée du corps, n'ayant jamais compté les heures ni les jours, car elle était la quatrième épouse, accablée de soucis, surprise autant par sa grossesse que son veuvage, si bien que Rachid, perdant sa mère vingt ans plus tard, devait ne rien savoir encore des deux morts qui le laissaient devant le gouffre—l'homme et l'oued confrontés par l'abîme.  

(*Nedjma*, pp. 177-178).

Rachid's birth, on a fatalistic level, appears to have compensated for
his father's death in an almost gratuitous fashion—his mother surprised equally by her pregnancy and widowhood—but he had never come to know either father or mother and had never learned to feel a continuity with his past. He had found himself in the ultimate impasse:

...Rachid, qui n'ôte plus ses lunettes noires, n'espère plus quitter Constantine ni même le fondouk; les rides, les cheveux en broussaille, les lèvres sèches, le torse maigre et bombé, les jambes courtes font songer à une statuette de cendre, à un incinéré vivant qui n'a pu échapper au feu que pour être emporté de fleuve en fleuve, au port où il ne croyait pas rejoindre sa veuve d'une nuit, ni le fantôme bienveillant qui l'attendait sur le quai, ni Lakhdar ni Mourad; tous projetés comme les étincelles d'un seul et même brasier, mais le Rachid sévré de sa passion, parlant à l'écrivain, n'a plus la moindre consistance, et ses propos s'effritent bien loin des pensées premières dont il n'est plus que le réceptacle éboulé, le coeur et le visage en cendres, dévorés par une trop vive flambée de temps.

(my emphasis, Nedjma, p. 181).

An experience analogous to the expulsion from the childhood paradise of orality had occurred in the failure of his idyll with Nedjma ("sévré de sa passion") and his retreat into the fondouk, a living death where even his "pensées premières," or childhood zest for life, remained beyond the grasp of his own words.

Mustapha's infant geography reflects a pattern of sociological behavior induced by the French presence. Families which had become sedentary and had come to live in cities even before the French came, were forced to become nomadic again by the difficult economic situation created by the systematic economic discrimination of the French. While he had been born in a sizeable town, Guelma, Mustapha and his mother were first separated from his father and then joined him in a less populated region, where Mustapha grew up among peasants and eventually met Lakhdar.

Being a city dweller like Rachid from birth, Mourad was therefore more likely to experience the clash of cultures. One of the first places seized by the French, Bône (now Annaba), he calls "le golfe d'où partent
nos richesses, par où se consomme notre ruine" (Nedjma, p. 184). Because his father's sense of responsibility was dissipated in pursuit of a Frenchwoman, Mourad was not raised by his parents. He grew up in a district of Bône called "Beauséjour." Though this is a cliché in place names, it may be interpreted as an ironic choice: though Mourad shared the roof with Nedjma, she was forbidden fruit. Because the district was cut off from the city by the trolley line, it was isolated from normal relations with the outside world, consonant with the paradise that its name evokes.

While Mourad and Lakhdar were brothers born a year apart, their early environments differed radically, and they developed into different men. Young Mourad's geography was urban, while Lakhdar's was rural; Mourad lived in the seaport of Bône, while Lakhdar lived inland, in hills among olive groves and flocks; Mourad lived in Beauséjour, in the "villa Nedjma," while Lakhdar lived in an anonymous family dwelling. Mourad's personality is hardly developed in the text, perhaps because it is overshadowed by the presence of Nedjma. (It may be pointed out here that Nedjma is half French, suggesting that the French presence symbolized in her had the effect of repressing maturation of the personality.)

Great significance may be ascribed to Lakhdar's birthplace. Because the Aurès is an isolated, mountainous region which held little commercial value to the colonizer, it was one of the last populous regions which the French tried to dominate. Because its inhabitants were tough, nomadic peoples, they succeeded in resisting domination for many years. Even after conquest, French influence remained minimal. Therefore Lakhdar could be raised in an atmosphere which was to a great extent untouched by the French presence. Lakhdar nonetheless becomes in Kateb's mythology, particularly in *Le Cercle des représentailles*, an active revolutionary.
Lakhdar's active attitude toward the world, developed in this geographical atmosphere, continues to be evident whenever the character appears, whether in Nedjma, where Lakhdar the schoolboy initiates pranks, activities with the opposite sex or political action, or as an adolescent, when he actively seeks work. In Le Polygone étoilé, Lakhdar the emigrant worker looks for employment in France, while in the plays, he is a revolutionary activist until his final, symbolic role as the predator-vulture. If perhaps he is not the only male protagonist to engage in sexual intercourse with Nedjma, Lakhdar alone begets her a child, Ali, who in turn manifests liveliness and an active attitude, carrying on the revolutionary tradition in his blood.

Lakhdar, because he does embody many positive personality traits, is described with the most elaborate figurative language of all the infant male protagonists. While the name "Lakhdar" is generally associated with peasants, in Arabic it means "the green and fruitful." In Kateb's literary world, and especially in a land where growing things represent the conquest of the desert, the color green carries positive connotations. The psychological and sociological observations on Lakhdar are given hyperbolic and sometimes mythical proportions. Certain terms characterize him as a child god or hero. His childhood shares a number of common features with the prophet Mohammed's, although any conscious design thereto on Kateb's part would be unlikely. Among these parallels: both had mothers who were poor, young widows; both spent their early years in an isolated, mountainous region, tending flocks (Mohammed had later said, "Every prophet was in his youth a shepherd"); finally, Mohammed's grandfather took charge of his upbringing after his mother's early death, while young Lakhdar's first mentor was his stepgrandfather.
Details relevant to a child hero continue. Lakhdar's infant furnishings, "la citrouille géante" and "une peau de mouton d'une étendue incommensurable" (my emphasis, *Nedjma*, p. 193), may be described in gargantuan terms only because they were huge from the infant's point of view; however, their hyperbolic dimensions also suggest that the baby was extraordinary. These objects taken directly from nature contained him as had his mother's womb. Yet Lakhdar possessed great energies which he directed toward transgressing these limits. In his giant gourd cradle, he was suspended from the rafters just as his forces were held in suspension:

Il se révolte; il invente une abjecte façon de pleurer, défait par embardées le bandeau dont Zohra persiste à l'entourer, comme un noble égyptien; Lakhdar se voit puissant et paralysé.


Lakhdar's native energy was held captive, not by external circumstances such as an environment made unfavorable by the French presence, but by natural practices followed by his people. Because he was constrained, these forces grew stronger within him until such time as they would prove useful.48

At the same time, Lakhdar demonstrates behavior which will be common to all of the protagonists: "il invente une abjecte façon de pleurer." Like all children at the stage where they are confined to their backs and cradles, Lakhdar develops the art of pretence, in order to fulfill his desires. This theatrical art, seen here only in its rudimentary form, becomes a predominant mode of behavior for Kateb's older children. It prevails in its ultimate form, manifested by the adult's or writer's creation of dramatic works (in the latter we refer to Kateb's almost exclusive espousal of the theater as his genre of expression in the 1970's).

Other metaphors concerning Lakhdar as a child god describe the passage from the stage of constraint, "prison," to autonomy, "les royaumes
de la prairie," and remind us of a smiling, playful narrator poet. When Lakhdar was allowed outside the family abode, he experienced liberation from the previous constraining spaces, and began to exercise his personality with respect to other members of his society. Again, as in Rachid's case, early childhood sensations of pleasure are associated with the un-trammelled lower consciousness of non-human creatures:

. . .à la belle saison, les insectes le tirent de sa prison, à quatre pattes; il franchit tête baissée le rideau qui sert de porte. . .s'ouvrent les royaumes de la prairie où il force Zohra à l'allaiter. . .

(Nedjma, p. 194).

The word "royaumes" suggests his feelings of dominion over nature and his mother and reinforces the metaphorical image of the child god. He still moved within the paradise of orality, but at this stage was learning not to bite the mother's breast. His subsequent development is described in telegraphic style, but combines a stark realism with archetypical traits characteristic of a young hero's initiations:

A la longue, Lakhdar est enlevé de ferme en ferme. Battu. Délivré du moindre lingot de galette. La peau ouverte à chaque haie. Frotté aux troncs. Comblé d'os énormes destinés à lui consolider la mâchoire; il marche secrètement; se remet à ramper; ne se refuse aucune singeries; s'assagit par défaut d'éducation; à force de combats, pourvu d'une tunique de toile bleu, il est sevré. . .

(Nedjma, p. 194).

The series of initiations through which the young hero passes include kidnapping, beating, fasting, mutilation—all may represent everyday childhood experiences described in heroic terms. The word "destiné" reveals that there is a teleological purpose behind the rigors of child training. The bones given him in order to harden his jaws represent the practice of preparing the child to be strong enough to withstand the hardships of adult life.

During the course of these initiatory experiences, it becomes evident that Lakhdar had learned to play roles, "ne se refuse aucune
singerie," and played the baby when secretly he knew how to walk. He accepted the norm for the behavior expected of him--"s'assagir"--but only "par défaut d'éducation." At the conclusion of this series of tests, the hero earned a blue tunic and was weaned apparently for the realistic reason that he had become too aggressive for his mother: "à force de combats... il est sévré; de ce jour, la mère complice corrige dur; Sidi Tahar s'en tient aux actes de tendresse virile; il donne au petit des pièces de monnaie et lui tâte publiquement les testicules" (Nedjma, p. 194).

For Lakhdar, a radical separation from his mother occurred at this time, and she joined the side of the adversary, the stepfather. Stages in a Maghrebian male child's youth are articulated by the moments of weaning and circumcision, the latter a latent threat in the gesture of Sidi Tahar. Such belittling is not appropriate for a child god.

Initiation rituals coincide with childrearing practices, and conform as well to Erikson's theory that early childhood education in a primitive culture automatically prepares a child for coping with the values of that culture. The value of combativeness in a culture that to a great extent is defined in opposition to other cultures, tribes or groups, is cultivated in the developing child. For example, Lakhdar was conditioned (swaddling, beatings, being given bones to chew on, etc.) in a manner not totally unlike the way a prizefighter is trained for an important bout, and accordingly, he will be prepared to overcome difficult challenges to his existence in later life.

The elder family members, commonly referred to by Kateb Yacine as "les ancêtres," assume responsibility for much of the education of young children. The grandfather as mentor and the young Lakhdar as pupil form a relationship which is at the same time a literary topos and a cultural reality. Lakhdar was guided through nature by his stepgrandfather
Mahmoud, who not only instructed him but also provided him with fine accoutrements:

Le troupeau de grand-père vaut à Lakhdar, au beau milieu de sa coqueluche, trois robes, ainsi qu'un pantalon et une chemise pour les fêtes; Lakhdar contemplera désormais à dos d'âne le pays; il reçoit encore un bonnet de laine, des sandales en peau de chevreau, une canne taillée dans un olivier sauvage. . .

(Nedjma, p. 197).

The human detail of the coqueluche (whooping cough) breaks the mood created by the procession of tribute to the young god, perched on an ass. Some intention of smiling irony can be detected here and in the phrase, "lâchant ses quatre bras à travers les mottes, le bonze à la poitrine encore blanche gravit les fosses couvertes de corbeaux" (Nedjma, p. 194). A "bonze" denotes an oriental monk and a pretentious individual at the same time. Kateb's bonze of such tender age shows a zest for life, his "four" arms flaying evoking both his speed and the pose of an eastern god with arms dancing. His white chest contrasts with the black, crow-covered ditches, juxtaposing images of innocent life and inevitable death.

Lakhdar's grandfather is described in almost magical terms, the youth seeing his reddish beard backlit by dazzling sunlight—and "l'ancêtre" introduces "le têtard" to life's wonders on an excursion atop a donkey. Thus the ancestor preserved the continuity of life's mysteries for the young: "ils parcourrent les champs, à la recherche de lieux profonds et frais" (Nedjma, p. 195). The lessons which Grand-père Mahmoud teaches are conducted in a playful magical manner; nature is erotically deflowered after a sort of magic carpet ride; the voices of workers are transformed into otherworldly music: "ils atterrissent dans un taillis qu'ils ne déflorent que pour sa fraîcheur, pour le repos de l'ancêtre et de la bête; ils écoutent chanter les travailleurs d'un autre monde" (Nedjma, p. 195).
Lakhdar had already manifested an appetite for learning life's mysteries when he lay in his giant gourd cradle. He reached toward the spaces above him, "l'inaccessible espace auquel Lakhdar aspire" (Nedjma, p. 193), and especially toward a box in which his mother kept precious objects: "seul objet de pèlerinage, un coffre (trop haut) où la mère engouffre les objets: un jour Lakhdar voit flamber la lampe sur le coffre, si haut!" (Nedjma, p. 193). The same feeling of smallness with respect to the height of things in a room will be echoed in a song which Mourad will hear from his prison cell: "Mère le mur est haut!" (Nedjma, p. 40). The goal of the quest, which lay beyond Lakhdar's reach, is not the nirvana of the "savanes de plénitude et d'inconscience," (Nedjma, p. 166), but rather a collection of earthly delights, or matériel for the sorceress, those objects that his mother kept in her chest: "Dans son coffre de mariée, la mère agite de charmants objets; pot plein de girofles mortes, collier de verre massif jaune et bleu; l'encensoir sert à noyer la poudre du Soudan, pour les sourcils" (Nedjma, p. 195).

If poetry, according to Huizinga, is an interrogation of the world through figurative language, Lakhdar's reaching out towards the "charming objects" in Zohra's hope chest we may consider as the infant's manner of questioning his world. The mysteries of life suggested by the objects populate many poetic passages in Kateb Yacine's works. By his desire to grasp these objects, the infant Lakhdar figuratively demonstrates the interrogative attitude of the poet that is latent in him.

The four pages that open Le Polygone étoilé (pp. 7-10) actually name no characters, but speak of a collective "ils" and their adversaries. Neither party receives a specific designation, the former called "prisonniers," "les nouveaux venus," "les barbares" or "les Barbares,"
the latter termed "leurs gardiens," "des êtres rigides, de haute taille," "la tribu nourricière" and "on." Baffling when first encountered, the passage bears formal similarities with a complex riddle, or enigma. Certain signals, however, suggest a description of birth and early childhood. Unlike the normal nurturing attitude of the parents toward their young, however, here there is an uneasy adversary relationship between the two groups.

Kateb had already published the first eighteen pages of Le Polygone étoilé in a 1957 prose piece in Les Temps Modernes, but in Le Polygone étoilé, published in 1966, he omitted the first eight sentences of the earlier version. These sentences would have reduced the interpretative possibilities of the passage. In the early version, the protagonists appear to be detainees of the French during the Algerian war. The last sentence of the sequence that was later omitted, signals that amid the adversity of their detention, the prisoners' collective memories were about to hark back to the sensations of early childhood: "Ils revenaient aux clairs pressentiments de l'enfance." Their childhood experience provided them, as it were, with a structure which permitted them to better understand their imprisonment. However, the reader who has only the text of the 1966 novel before him lacks this knowledge and must play a more active role in order to discover meaning in the passage.

While the reader is not explicitly challenged to guess the specific meaning for the succession of abstract images and sobriquets for the actors in the drama, concrete images are presented only as detached details which must be supplemented by the reader's imagination. One can therefore read the drama on one level as depicting birth and early childhood.
"Ils étaient tombés dans un grand cri...", Le Polygone étoilé begins—a fall accompanied by a scream represents birth. We seem to be already at the stage in which Erikson's sense of inner dividedness enters the consciousness. In the Polygone... passage, this stage is described with such intensity that there can be no mention of nostalgia for a lost paradise. Essentially, the experience described involves human relationships, specifically an adversary relationship, the imprisoned versus the imprisoning. Out of this power struggle grows the infant's awareness of social relationships.

While most of the passage emphasizes birth and early childhood, the last part expands this experience into patterns of later life and ultimately connects death with birth in the theme of the eternal return: 53

. . .ils partiraient comme ils étaient venus, raidis et endormis dans leurs cages en bois, grains de poussière chus du rayonnement céleste, dépôsés sur la route où d'autres chutes, d'autres rencontres leur étaient réservées. . .

(Le Polygone étoilé, p. 9).

Here is the only allusion to a paradisiacal state, "rayonnement céleste," an image of cosmic unity from which birth in this text is a falling and a separation. What follows the fall, "rencontres," evokes encounters that these individuals will have made with others, who like themselves, have fallen from cosmic unity—the experience of life in terms of social contacts. The plurality of "chutes" and "rencontres" suggests that existence may be interpreted as a never-ending alternation of these events. Erikson has stated that falling is a painful part of the infant's process of learning to walk which has lifelong subconscious associations with feelings of failure. 54 One type of failure transferrable from infantile falling may take the form of a failure to communicate. Social contacts are attempts to bridge the gulf between two consciousnesses, and ones that often fail, or succeed only momentarily. Such failure to communicate has been expressed in terms of a "falling" from a state of mutual understanding.
This alternating "on" and "off" of understanding in social relationships is related to another theme of the passage, the birth of consciousness in general. The passage evokes consciousness at both the cosmic and the human level. Cosmic consciousness, though it naturally escapes human conceptions, appears for Kateb to be the pre-human state of the soul that is undivided—unmarked by time (it is "sans mémoire") or any other human categorization—its image is that of the "rayonnement céleste."

This celestial source of great light is the one from which the individual sparks have fallen, as dust, to inhabit each human being born. Cosmic consciousness rapidly declines from birth. When it is regained at death, negative terms are used to describe it. The inverse of traditional images for consciousness, images of darkness describe this inverse side of human consciousness: "dans le vertigineux espace d'une nuit sans lumière, au-delà des étoiles, avec pour tout bagage un manque absolu de mémoire" (Le Polygone étoilé, p. 9, my emphasis). Human consciousness begins in darkness, a fetal darkness bathed in minimal light, but one which is a distant reminder of pre-birth cosmic brilliance, paradoxically itself the opposite of the night beyond the stars after death: "la nuit maternelle... à la lueur des... étoiles" (Le Polygone étoilé, pp. 9-10). The first sentence of the book describes the event of birth, the entry into the earth's gravity; the consciousness as yet unawakened is translated by closed eyes: "Ils étaient tombés dans un grand cri, les yeux fermés." (Le Polygone étoilé, p. 7). The scream ("cri") relates to the cosmic level, as it is an instinctive expression of the forces of life, due to its "grand"—great—amplitude coming from such a small being on human terms. When the babies become aware of light, they discern that large rigid beings regularly pick them up. The training process discourages screaming:
Ils ne firent que crier de moins en moins fort, il est vrai, à chaque fois que s'approchaient les mains qui les avaient attachés. On ne leur fit aucun mal, à proprement parler, mais on les harcelait de gestes protecteurs, sous prétexte qu'on les nourrissait. Ils ne pouvaient d'ailleurs le savoir. 

(Le Polygone étoilé, p. 7).

Given the ambiguity of point of view in the text, the following interpretation is offered: the infant prisoners feel harassed, according to the narrator's viewpoint, and the "Ils" denotes the infants, who were incapable of judging that they were not being harmed, as the adults believed. Their human unconsciousness is also recorded in their feelings of being lost:

... ils étaient rituellement ramenés dans la cage, dont ils ignoraient d'ailleurs la forme et l'emplacement.

(Le Polygone étoilé, p. 8).

This ignorance of locale rests on a physiological factor: infant vision cannot focus during the first moments, "leurs yeux entrouverts ne s'attardaient qu'à contempler le vide..." (Le Polygone étoilé, p. 8). However, concurrent to the loss of the sense of place, the ignorance of their situation sets them apart from other members of their immediate society, namely, the adults. They lose touch with their prior existence and barely begin to acquire the means of communication shared by their immediate culture. Rather than scream, they learn to smile and whimper, via imitation:

... ils apprenaient à sourire dans les larmes; ce que leurs gardiens prenaient pour les prémices du bonheur n'était que la fin d'un cri animal, dont les nouveaux venus ne savaient plus se servir, ne comptant plus sur aucun secours : ils étaient fatigués de crier; à la longue, ils avaient oublié l'incorruptibilité natale, tout entière dans le cri étend; ils en étaient maintenant à sourire et à larmoyer, imitant la tribu nourricière... .

(Le Polygone étoilé, p. 8).

Their vocality, "grand cri," is an expression of their power as well as of their consciousness. As their forces come under the control of the "gardiens," their cry gradually abates. Their cosmic consciousness, "incorruptibilité natale," also fades.
In this complex interaction of consciousnesses and actions, there exist games of pretense or of make-believe which go unappreciated by the spectators, the adults for whom the infants create the illusion. The adults also play a part, perhaps unwittingly, but according to the text, they pretend to take care of the infants, to nourish them—while the babies believe that they are getting themselves fed, or are kept at the limit of powerlessness by an inadequate diet:

Les êtres bizarres qui leur offraient gîte et pitance le faisaient délicatement, mais ils profitaient de leur position de personnages responsables pour imposer aux nouveaux venus d'autres bienfaits: pour les nourrir de promesses, les retinir prisonniers, en échange de quelques gorgées d'eau, dont les protégés tiraient tout juste assez de force pour s'endormir. . .

(Le Polygone étoilé, p. 7).

The contradictions inherent in the various labels for the actors and for their actions—the substitution of the word "pitance" in the normal locution "offrir le gîte et le couvert à quelqu'un," the "but" of "déticatement, mais;" the juxtaposition in the "êtres bizarres" who are also "personnages responsables;" the paradox in "imposer d'autres bienfaits," and the ironic value of these benefits—show that there are basic misunderstandings between the two parties. Such confusion in roles also appears in the practice of colonialist paternalism.

Play-acting, begun in the imitation method of education, becomes a tool for obtaining desired goods:

. . . les regards qui commençaient à luire, à s'aiguiser comme ceux des animaux, charmait assez les gardiens. Désormais les Barbare semblait avoir trouvé la monnaie nécessaire au paiement de leur séjour. Ils passaient de l'affliction à la gaîté, avec une désinvolture de spéculateurs offrant le prix de leur rançon dans les deux plus fortes devises du marché, afin que leur puissance paraît inséparable de leur bonne foi; mais ils ne faisaient que ruser: quand on les délivra de leurs liens, quand on les tira de la cage et qu'on se mit à les promener dans un monde plus vaste, ils restaient des barbares incapables d'aimer autre chose que leur bon plaisir; ce qu'on prenait
The tiny infant compensates for his small physical power in this mental game of play-acting; he holds a considerable power to charm and entertain adults in the manner in which they expect to be entertained. When the infants are released from this reciprocal contract, that is, when they are physically capable of obtaining more of their own needs, they are no longer obligated to play the expected role of happy, loving babies, and regain a degree of their selfish barbarism: "ils restaient des barbares..." At the beginning of the above passage, however, they remain cradle-bound. The emblem for consciousness, the eyes or the look, prefigures the ensuing stage: here the eyes are capable of focusing on objects and persons, a trait demonstrated at the stage that Erikson calls "active prehension"—the eyes act in a manner similar to the hands, grasping and seizing objects around the child. With this coming to new physical powers comes a parallel mental sharpening. The child begins to play an active role in learning:

...ils n'étaient pas si influencables, par ailleurs, qu'ils ne revinssent de temps à autre au silence et à l'impassibilité; leurs yeux commençaient à quêter d'autres nourritures, les liens à se relâcher, leurs crânes à se couvrir d'une végétation qui semblait annoncer quelque poussée de ruse et de défi... (Le Polygone étoilé, p. 8).

The arrival at the stage of active prehension marks the progress from imitation to self-motivation. An age-old yet still vital symbol for rebellion from authority, the lush crop on the previously bare cranium, appears, its active growth prefiguring a future activity involving role-playing (in which wigs and masks are sometimes involved) and defiance of the elders. At this stage the description makes the first explicit reference to intellect, in the word "idée":

Nul ne peut dire comment les inconnus conçurent la première idée, si elle dériva de telle ou telle sensation subitement grandie, ou si le comportement nouveau des barbares, leur ressemblance avec les gardiens, n'étaient qu'état de grâce passager... 

(Le Polygone étoilé, p. 8).

Even the human capacity for thought may be relegated to the domain of imitation ("leur ressemblance avec les gardiens") if not to pure materialism ("sensation subitement grandie").

What distinguishes this passage on birth and early childhood is its abstract, almost philosophical point of view. That it involves the reader in an implicit dialogue in which he must attempt to unravel the enigma makes it a text in process, just as the protagonists' personalities are described in terms of their growth processes. And like the infants with their spellbinding antics, the obscurity of images holds the reader's attention captive. As the infants' awareness is awakened, the reader's understanding of the text deepens. In comparison with the descriptions of characters in *Nedjma* who have names, this anonymous collectivity of infants has much in common. The common traits are transformed into broader images, as for example, in *Nedjma* the specific device of swaddling Lakhdar in order to toughen him and provoke him into resisting becomes abstracted in the opening passage of *Le Polygone étoilé* into terms normally used for involuntary restraint of adults, "ligotés" and "liens" (pp. 7 and 8, respectively). *Le Polygone étoilé* places more emphasis on inborn rather than acquired forces, on an *élan vital* that has an almost metaphysical origin, and which is preserved in spite of training.

For the enigmatic passage, other levels of meaning may be posited, such as seeing the polarized actors as colonizer and colonized. The passage can be taken not only on the specific level of French vs. Algerian *autotochtones*, but also within the larger context of the wealthy and
powerful versus the poor and anonymous Algerians of independent Algeria, which has retained much of the power structure of colonialist France. In addition to the cycle of birth, life, death, rebirth, etc., another cycle of eternal returns could also be conjectured as the eternally recurring oppression/revolution/reconstruction cycle of a Marxist interpretation. In the passage, the "nouveaux venus" must, as they mature, become ancestors in turn, and the keepers and perhaps oppressors of the next generation.

The eternal return does not necessarily indicate an infernal circle. It expresses hope for transcendance, in an apocalypse in which each being would have perfectly equal power. The ideal play or game, then would be one in which adversaries are partners playing by identical, perfectly understood rules, for a prize bringing equal good to everyone:

. . . l'unique promesse . . . de ce trésor interdit, qu'ils cherchaient, loin de toute espérance, mais certains de le retrouver à la dernière étape, au sprint impitoyable éliminant tous les coureurs et grossissant la prime, certains de ne pas emporter le trésor, mais de s'endormir à ligne d'arrivée commune [sic], s'endormir une fois pour toutes, le corps défaillant dans l'attente du grand retour en force où chaque poussière produira pleinement son effet. . . (my emphasis, Le Polygone étoilé, p. 9).

On the biological level, the treasure can be found not only within the mystery of death ("s'endormir une fois pour toutes"), but also on a more spiritual level. It could connote the death of the self-serving ego in favor of the collective élan vital within which all would share the power of the "grand retour en force." This quest may be partially explained by the imprint on the infant's subconscious mind of the desire to regain the paradise of orality. In adolescence this desire evolves into fantasies surrounding Nedjma (a name that, we recall, means "star" in Arabic), who in one sense symbolizes the perfection that the protagonists
feel they lack but must strive to attain, "Nedjma, l'invivable consomption du zénith" (Nedjma, p. 67), "l'irrésistible forme de la vierge aux abois, mon sang et mon pays" (Nedjma, p. 175), "perpétuellement en fuite" (Nedjma, p. 247).

The enigma structure of the passage exemplifies a continuing practice of mystification that appears throughout Kateb Yacine's writings that treat Nedjma and Algeria. Rather than dismiss the occasional apparent formlessness of Kateb's writings as lack of a conscious effort of the artist's part to give structural unity to his writing, one may see his posturings as a form of play. Mystifications, according to Huizinga in Homo Ludens, characterize the play behavior which pervades poetic creation and which lies at the base of all culture. In the creative effort to form a definition of a new culture or personality for the new Algeria, Kateb Yacine plays with his reader by capturing his attention with mystifications. The birth text of Le Polygone étoilé becomes a linguistic playing field where writer and reader create their "scores" of meanings; their relationship is mirrored in the agonistic relationship between infants and adults.
CHAPTER II. SCHOOL AGE: PLAY AND RE-CREATION

This chapter examines the role of play in the development of the personality during school years, approximately age six through sixteen. In Kateb's characters, two experiences of disjuncture occur at each end of this stage: the entry into school with its loss of closeness to the mother, and at the other end, the abrupt, premature end of school. The end of early childhood accompanies the sense of inner dividedness and separation from the comfortable continuum of the mother-child relationship. School age brings on the multiplication of social contacts outside the relatively secure circle of immediate family.

All of Kateb Yacine's principal characters, even Lakhdar in his rural background, even the female, Nedjma, attend school through age fifteen or sixteen. In this increased contact with the world outside of the family, the young characters discover, just as they had found earlier, that they are smaller and less powerful than their elders and that a different culture exists, one appearing more powerful than their families'. The children now find the need to adjust not only to the disproportion in size with their elders, but also to the differences between traditional culture and the technologically advanced, colonizer culture of France. The level at which they feel the most involved in the intercultural turbulence is at that of language. Language intertwines with culture; it is perhaps ironic that these characters are made known to us through the language of the dominator.
Nedjma and Le Polygone étoilé contain the principal texts on school age development, just as they do with respect to birth and early childhood. This stage displays the proliferation of social interrelationships; unlike the first stage treatment, these experiences are surrounded by few symbols and myths. However, the characters develop their capacities for engaging in play. We feel that play, in all its aspects, provides a structure having essential meaning within Kateb Yacine's literary universe.

An example by omission illustrates the importance of play at this stage of personality growth. The lack of play marks the least socially adjusted of the four principal male protagonists in Nedjma, Rachid, during his childhood years. We recall that during early childhood he was deprived of his once numerous half-siblings. Through the juxtaposition of memories and present reality, the adult Rachid confronts the contradictory feelings of happy gregariousness and loneliness:

Et Rachid avait commencé à détester le lieu de désertion et de tristesse qu'il héritait d'un père assassiné à la force de l'âge. ...

(Nedjma, p. 156-157).

Rachid's only playmate is the empty wall of the impasse; however, by way of compensation, he becomes the character who has the richest dream life. He deals with his conflicts in a solitary manner, and in crowds remains aloof. His reticence characterizes him as an adult. He may in fact suffer from a mild form of aphasia due to the intensity of internalized conflicts. In one scene during young adulthood, his tongue loosens as a result of a malarial delirium ("la crise de paludisme," Nedjma, pp. 96-103). The role which he fulfills in adult life, that of "déserteur," underlines the psychological destiny of one who never learned playfulness with his fellow men—to live in the desert, with only thoughts and fantasies as playmates.
On the other hand, Mustapha and Lakhdar, childhood friends and playmates, engage in a variety of play activities which generally belong to two categories, competition and make-believe. In contrast with Rachid, these two characters demonstrate social adaptability. The texts devoted to this stage of personality growth deal almost exclusively with Mustapha and Lakhdar. We look first at a long monologue in which Mustapha demonstrates the play of his conflicting thoughts (Nadjma, pp. 208-212). In such thought-play Mustapha creates a non-violent alternative to the explosion into violence or combat of tensions which remain suppressed or repressed. These tensions arise from injustices, which may be otherwise considered as the violation of the rules of fair play, whether the injustices are those of the schoolyard or those suffered by the people subjected to colonization. The experiences of such injustices result in an emotional crisis from which the personality derives a temporary sense of destruction. Creative activities restore the personality to a sense of well-being, and may include word play, song and music, or newly learned patterns of behavior. In the cases of Mustapha and Lakhdar, the end of this period is marked by a violent rite of passage.

Mustapha's monologue fulfills Huizinga's definition of play in that it is an (mental) activity which is separated from everyday events, removed to the special place of Mustapha's psyche, and occurring outside the bounds of ordinary time restrictions. His thought play is both agonistic and representational. Conflicting feelings compete; Mustapha affirms himself in several roles. He plays the superior student, yet a degree of self-doubt competes in this role; he feels that he has betrayed his origins, represented by his mother's superstitions and language. While his father belongs to traditional Algeria for the most part, Maître
Gharib has, on the other hand, been responsible for sending Mustapha to the French school with the mission of mastering the French language. Mustapha has intense, ambivalent feelings toward his father, feelings seen at play in his monologue. Simultaneously, he displays both fear and admiration of his father, and self-satisfaction and guilt toward his family and peers.

As the opening statements of Mustapha demonstrate, the elements of tension and movement which characterize all play are present in the self-contradiction and sudden changes of subject:

Quatre rides croisent sur son front les parallèles de la dernière saignée; père somnambule en son alacrité, on peut me poser n’importe quelle question sur le participe. C’est le coiffeur qui saigne mon père.

(Nedjma, p. 208).

Mustapha dismisses the fear that his father may die by affirming his expertise in French grammar, which had been demanded by his father. In this thought the child assumes that an unwritten contract exists—if he fulfills the wishes of his father, Maître Gharib will go on living and providing support for the family.

Mustapha apparently demonstrates imitative behavior in using the word "ça" as a personal pronoun (normal in popular language): the term is sometimes derogatory in intent, yet one detects no conscious malice in the child:

Cette fois, Père se fait tailler la nuque; la prochaine fois ce sera le front; environ une saignée par mois; ce que c’est que d’être trop costaud! Ça tombe dans l’alcoolisme, et ça fait des enfants chétifs.

(my emphasis, Nedjma, p. 209).

It is possible that he is innocently repeating disdainful remarks which he overheard in conversations by Europeans. They might use "ça"—usually denoting an inanimate object—with reference to Algerian natives.
Mustapha continues the train of thought regarding Arabs making pitiful babies; he sees that his own case contradicts the cliché:

Moi, en naissant, j'étais obèse. Les touristes me prenaient dans leurs bras. «On ne dirait pas un bébé arabe! Qu'il est beau!» Mais je n'ai pas tardé à devenir comme ma mère, maigre, maigre comme un clou; ça me sert dans les bagarres; y a que Lakhdar qui soit aussi maigre que moi; nous, au moins, on a des os et des nerfs! On peut courir. On a des poings durs comme des pierres.

(Nedjma, p. 209).

The label "arabe," which in French colonialist presuppositions contradicts the reality of a fat, healthy baby, reveals that Mustapha is to some extent conscious of racism. He affirms that in growing up his body became thin like his mother's. Her side of the family, it must be recalled, is the one which is the least altered by the superstratum of French civilization. Mustapha, become skinny, feels a kinship with other underweight natives; he then boasts of his ability to defend himself, a useful talent within the environment of racism. With Lakhdar, Mustapha draws his energies from the sun of Africa which saps the strength of some persons:

...y en a qui sont abrutis par le soleil; Lakhdar et moi, ça nous donne envie de courir, comme les vaches au moment du Tikouk...  

(Nedjma, p. 209).

Though strong enough to fight, Mustapha reveals a tenderness which his culture pressures him to hide:

Père dort. C'est la saignée qui l'a esquinté. Je voudrais l'embrasser quand il dort, tranquillement, sans que les filles me voient. C'est malheureux d'avoir deux sœurs, et un seul père... Il dort... Mère dort par terre avec les deux filles; j'aime pas voir des filles ronfler, à plus forte raison quand c'est des sœurs. Le prophète a raison. Faut pas mêler les femmes et les hommes. Par contre, je me sens plein de remords, de sympathie et de courage devant le rude corps détendu de Maître Mohamed Gharib : c'est mon père, et moi seul connais ses secrets...

(Nedjma, p. 209, 211).

A sense of the difference in sexes develops during these years. The young male feels alienated from young females, and he conceals any
feelings which might be called feminine, or pejoratively, effeminate,
such as being able to kiss his father openly in the presence of his sis-
ters ("Je voudrais l'embrasser sans que les filles me voient.").

The monologue continues:

. . . .Lakhdar m'attend à la rivière; lui, au moins, il a pas
de père; c'est son grand-père qui commande; Lakhâr était
berger avant de venir à l'école; il a l'habitude de sortir au
soleil; et puis il a pas de père; il en a un qu'on appelle
Si Tahar, mais c'est pas un vrai; le père de Lakhâr est mort;
Lakhâr l'a jamais vu; il est né seul avec sa mère Zohra, une
gentille femme qui s'est mariée avec ce salaud de Si Tahar. Le
père de Lakhâr est mort; mon père, à moi, roupille; y a un
Parisien dans notre classe; «papa roupille»; c'est lui qui
nous fait vivre. . .

(Nedjma, p. 209).

This group of thoughts exposes almost in counterpoint preoccupations
with his father's death and with his best friend Lakhâr. Immediately
following an expression of extreme affection for his father, Mustapha
appears to envy Lakhâr's fatherlessness--"lui, au moins," as if it is
a burden to have such a father. He easily calls Lakhâr's stepfather
"salaud," but for his father he feels ambivalently--respect and sympathy
despite his father's weaknesses. Whether the phrase "il est né seul"
suggests to Mustapha that a father may not be necessary for a child to be
born, or that there is something special about his friend Lakhâr appear-
ing to have been born without a father, Mustapha's emphasis on the manner
of Lakhâr's birth suggests that Mustapha compares himself unfavorably with
Lakhâr. Later one learns that they compete in and out of school, where
Lakhâr, though his clothes are not as nice as Mustapha's, teaches
Mustapha how to smoke:

Un brave homme. Pourquoi je respire pas plus vite? Si on
respire pas, on meurt: le père de Lakhâr... Allez, respire!
pas comme lui. Sur moi il a jamais levé sa canne. Une fois
seulement. Le paquet de «Bastos» que j'avisais glissé dans mes
chaussettes pour le passer à Lakhâr. Moi je fume pas bien.
Lakhdar il avale. Père a ouvert la porte au moment où je relevais mes chaussettes sur le paquet. Un seul coup de canne. A peine si ça m'a frôlé. Je me suis mis à pleurer. Je gonflais mon chagrin comme un pneu percé : y avait pas de quoi pleurer. Mais le papa est aussi sensible que violent. Il m'a donné dix francs et un baiser. Père m'a félicité pour la composition française.

(Nedjma, p. 211).

Mustapha's ambivalent feelings may be seen as a trait inherited from his father. Maître Gharib follows punishment with reward and is "aussi sensible que violent." The passage begins with the obsession with the possible death of his father which again might indicate a secret wish that his father would die. The child must cope with both the punitive and the loving sides of his father, and Mustapha tries to see only the latter by minimizing the importance of the beating. However, his success in French as a school subject results from the pressure placed upon him by his father. Praise from his father is therefore not given freely, but rather given in fulfillment of the contract between dominator and dominated. His mother's behavior toward the vehement husband follows quite the same pattern: after he hits her, cracking a bone in her leg, she forgives him simply and prepares a "couscous monstre, fermement dressée sur son tibia meurtri" (Nedjma, p. 211), as her husband buys her the dress which she had wanted at the onset of the quarrel.

One of the principal conflicts within Mustapha involves the contradictions inherent in his social status: he is Arabic yet not Arabic. Because his father is a lawyer, the French distinguish between him and other indigenous Algerians. Despite a degree of participation in the French community, Maître Gharib's family retains much of traditional culture. They adopt French customs to a very limited extent. While Maître Gharib cultivates the French gift of alcohol, he continues to observe such a traditional ritual as the sacrifice of a chicken for the
family's consumption. Mustapha appears embarrassed that such a rite is still practiced, particularly at this stage where he has learned that such rituals are not practiced by Europeans. This embarrassment comes to the fore in a scene where the French schoolmistress calls at his home in order to accompany him to Sétif for an important examination:

Ma mère a conjuré le mauvais sort en nous jetant un seau d'eau dans les talons; l'institutrice avait ses bas mouillés. Mon père sentait l'eau de Cologne. Je suis parti en maudissant la famille et j'ai réussi!  

(Nedjma, p. 212).  

While Mustapha expected evil to befall him for having cursed his family, success comes to him instead. His assumptions about justice are upset along with his sense of security. Inevitably, however, it is during childhood that one learns injustice.

For Mustapha the privilege of attending school with French children marks the loss of a magical relationship with his mother, already discussed in Chapter I. At the conclusion of Le Polygone étoilé, the reminiscing Mustapha describes the conflict more explicitly:

Ma mère soupirait; et lorsque je me plongeais dans mes nouvelles études, que je faisais, seul, mes devoirs, je la voyais errer, ainsi qu'une âme en peine. Adieu notre théâtre intime et enfantin, adieu le quotidien complot ourdi contre mon père, pour répliquer, en vers, à ses pointes satiriques... Et le drame se nouait.  

(Le Polygone étoilé, p. 181).  

The word "drame" underlines the conflict of emotions which constitutes the Algerian youth's consciousness in this era. Théâtre is a more innocent term than drame, and Mustapha leaves the childish theater with his mother for another role--that of the Algerian educated in the French system. He abandons traditional language and beliefs for the new organization of his land by the French. He succeeds brilliantly in the French school (after using the word "tibia" in the monologue, Mustapha explains: "je suis premier en sciences naturelles," Nedjma, p. 210), and indeed
reaches the goal set by his father: "La langue française domine. Il te faudra la dominer. . ." (Le Polygone étoilé, p. 180). He transfers the love for his mother to the schoolmistress: "Mlle Dubac./Cliquetis du nom idéal" (Nedjma, p. 204). The character's innocent, unqualified admiration of a name—one which denotes the slang for "baccalauréat," symbol of a French education—conceals a certain degree of irony, for beneath the unruffled surface of the ideal student a battle rages. Mustapha's desire to succeed in the French school goes so far as to betray his own self-respect—as can be seen from his uneasiness at roll call: the "malheur de s'appeler Mustapha" (Nedjma, p. 205).

He develops a nuanced awareness of the gulf between himself and European children, which manifests itself in an act of rebellion against the role which he plays so well—that of the superior student. On a Moslem feast (the prophet Mohammed's birthday—le Mouloud) he alone of all the Moslem students attends school because it is the day of a science test ("C'est jour de composition." Nedjma, p. 220). He explains to his teacher why he turns in a blank page:

«...Cher Maître je ne remettrai pas la copie...c'est aujourd'hui le Mouloud... Nos fêtes ne sont pas prévues dans vos calendriers. Les camarades ont bien fait de ne pas venir... J'étais sûr d'être premier à la composition... Je suis un faux frère!... J'aime les sciences naturelles. Lakhdar ne l'entend pas de cette oreille. Je suis venu seul. Je remettrai feuille blanche... Je suis venu seulement pour connaître le sujet... Pour éprouver l'impression solennelle de la composition. J'aime les sciences naturelles. Je remettrai feuille blanche.»

1Anniversaire du prophète Mohamed. (Nedjma, p. 221).

In Mustapha the love of knowledge struggles with the love for his people, but he succeeds in repressing the emotions involved in this inner conflict and in expressing himself in an extremely civil, pacific manner. Nevertheless, in response to this polite protest, the professor sends Mustapha to the principal's office.
Mustapha's rebel spirit had surfaced in a previously written essay which is read aloud by the principal. In it Mustapha first exposes the guilt which he feels because he is an Algerian with exceptional privileges: "...nous sommes quelques collégiens, entourés de méfiance." He finds grounds for ironic self-criticism in Tacitus' translation of Agricola, which describes the colonized Bretons:

«Les Bretons vivaient en sauvages, toujours prêts à la guerre; pour les accoutumer, par les plaisirs, au repos et à la tranquillité, il (Agricola) les exhorta en particulier; il fit instruire les enfants des chefs et leur insinua qu'il préférait, aux talents acquis des Gaulois, l'esprit naturel des Bretons, de sorte que ces peuples, dédaignant naguère la langue des Romains, se piquèrent de la parler avec grâce; notre costume fut même mis à l'honneur, et la toge devint à la mode; insensiblement, on se laissa aller aux séductions de nos vices; on rechercha nos portiques, nos bains, nos festins élégants; et ces hommes sansexpérience appelaient civilisation ce qui faisait partie de leur servitude... Voilà ce qu'on lit dans Tacite. Voilà comment nous, descendants des Numides, subissons à présent la colonisation des Gaulois!»

(Nedjma, p. 222).

Mustapha has found in Roman history a parallel with the pacifist-oriented policies of a Bugeaud and the success they had had in domesticating the native populations. While such may be true more in Mustapha's case than in that of the majority of his countrymen, even today it is tempting to sense more of a rapport between Algerians and Bretons than between Bretons and French persons with little regional pride.

Mustapha expresses anger at the situation in which he finds himself, for despite his privileges, he will ultimately remain in a degraded social position:

On sait bien qu'un Musulman incorporé dans l'aviation balaye les mégots des pilotes, et s'il est officier, même sorti de Polytechnique, il n'atteint au grade de colonel que pour ficher ses compatriotes au bureau de recrutement...

(Nedjma, p. 222).

Ambivalent feelings toward tradition, toward his father, his country and foremost, himself—all these conflicts are not sufficiently worked
out in the play of Mustapha's thoughts or in the feeble protest in his school test. Certain expressions in his monologue demonstrate infantile language: "Pourquoi i respire pas plus vite?... Y a pas comme lui," suggesting that Mustapha's emotions win over his rational mind, evidenced by his expertise in French grammar. We take Mustapha's warring emotions to be exemplary, if not symbolic of those felt by educated Algerian youth in the era between the two World Wars.

Strong feelings, particularly contradictory ones, are capable of commanding powerful energies. When repressed, they may ultimately grow too strong for the repressing mechanism and result in a violent show of emotions or force. In all the works of Kateb Yacine recurs the image of an explosion or violent outbreak of such forces, that had been contained up to their breaking point. 62 This image can take the form of the most violent form of play, or combat between two parties. The tendency toward combativeness was first noticed, in baby Lakhdar of Nedjma and in the opening passage of Le Polygone étoilé, in the form of infantile rage expressed at the teething stage, and the struggle against swaddling clothes. From the relatively secure spot of his prison cell, the adolescent Mustapha of Le Cadavre encerclé recalls childhood combativeness and places it in the perspective of the adversary relationship with the colonizer:

Dès l'enfance nous avons su qu'il faudrait les battre. 
Dès que nous avons pu courir, nous avons pris la fronde et le maquis.

(Le Cadavre encerclé, p. 49)

A nervous, elliptical style traces the evolution of Rachid's aggressivity.

...la timidité s'était muée en abattement, puis en furie sportive, enfin en combativité pure et simple.

(Nedjma, p. 157).

His inwardness ("timidité") and depression ("abattement ") turn outward;
his display of energies evolves from the controlled enthusiasm of
games ("furie sportive") to unbound aggressivity ("combativité").

The text describes violent play, bordering on seriousness, in
several lights. Rachid's childhood aggressivity had been repressed, for
the most part, during his playless childhood spent in the impasse. While
under the influence of hashish, Rachid at age thirty recounts a story
which can be taken as symbolic of the violent emotions within Rachid.
Two brothers, neighbors during his childhood, often broke into combat.
The two brothers, "se battaient souvent," "se tendaient des embuscades,
"ne cessaient de se menacer, de se chercher querelle, et finalement de
se battre," "ont effrayé tout le quartier," "se sont battus pour l'argent."
(Nedjma, pp. 164-165). Telling the story with obvious pleasure, Rachid
reveals a preoccupation with their ability to express conflict openly:

. . . ils se sont mis à se disputer comme s'ils devaient
rester l'un et l'autre sur le carreau. Ils se sont pris
de loin, à coup de cailloux, dans le couloir du bordel,
ils se sont pris! À la «Rose de Blida» encore! L'un
des plus fréquentés. Aïssa n'avait qu'un trou au front, et
le sang lui descendait dans les narines. Bozambo avait
plusieurs trous sur le crâne, au visage, mais il ne
saignait plus beaucoup. Il fonçait, les yeux fermés. Il
ramassait des vieux morceaux de tuile qu'il avait en
rénéré, et il envoyait les morceaux à toute volée, juste
le temps de viser, et les coups partaient d'eux-mêmes
comme d'une arme à répétition. . . Les deux frères
zigzaguaient comme des taons.

(Nedjma, p. 165).

The evening after one such bloody fight, Rachid's mother had ordered him
to stay at home, but he escapes over the wall and encounters the two
brothers playing cards, "pas loin de l'endroit où ils s'étaient livré
bataille, ne cherchant pas à tricher, mais prêts à se prendre à la gorge
si la moindre occasion se présentait" (Nedjma, p. 166). "Civilized" play,
a card game, precariously supplants combat.

An image similar in content, that of a truce concealing the poten-
tial outbreak of conflict, occurs later in Nedjma, after a raid on school-
children by peasant children excluded from school, "élèves" versus "petits barbares." The text states of the uneasy truce, ". . . la guerre peut, d'une minute à l'autre, recommencer" (Nedjma, p. 208). We have already cited (our p. 57) one such image among the many found in Kateb Yacine's works, where Mustapha writes, "Les Bretons vivaient en sauvages, toujours prêts à la guerre. . . . " (Nedjma, p. 222).

A number of images translate the concept of energies kept under restraint, from the life symbol of the fish living in the artificial environment of a glass bowl to the Sultan's infant being raised beneath a crystal cupola:

CORYPHEE : Tu dépériras, prince, tu étouffes dans le cristal. 
La terre, la forêt, voilà tout ce que désire le mauvais prince...

(La Poudre d'intelligence, p. 117)

While this image has other levels of meaning, it does suggest that the Sultan's son beneath the crystal represents Ali's alter ego. Ali is called an "orphelin vagabond," and in other works is identified as Lakhdar's son. He has inherited Lakhdar's rebel spirit and yet is a young boy. Ali breaks the crystal to free the prince, just as he earlier frees the totem animal for his tribe, the vulture, from the bonds in which the bird had staged a "magnificent revolt" and whose violent physical outbursts alternate with certain moments of quiet, as if he were storing up enough rageful energy for the next outburst. Ali describes the situation:

ALI: . . . Il n'y a pas si longtemps, ma mère m'a offert un petit vautour capturé vivant, et qu'on avait ficelé dans une outre, après avoir fixé à son jarret une longue entrave. Il avait donc assez de champ... Pendant que j'essayais de l'attacher à un arbre, il fit un tel tapage et se démena si bien qu'il serait mort étranglé si je n'avais lâché la corde. Mais il fallut ensuite le délivrer tout à fait, car il ne touchait pas à la viande ni à l'eau, et sa colère dura toute la journée. Il s'arrêtait un instant, à bout de forces, indigné, abasourdi comme dans un mauvais rêve, et revenait presque aussitôt à sa magnifique révolte. "Il va mourir, disait ma mère, et il ne touchera pas à la pitance." Evidemment, je
libéré l'oiseau et je le vis se perdre dans le crépuscule, non sans regrets...

(Le Poudre d'intelligence, pp. 113-114).

If they remain repressed, the inner tensions expressed in this group of images may do damage to the personality. However, when channeled into creative forms of social interaction which characterize play, they can impart a sense of well-being and a positive sense of one's identity. In this light, the recurrence of images from the sport of boxing can be seen to suggest the positive contribution of organized physical competition to personality growth. In this activity the dramatic aspect of play joins with the agonistic, for in the milieu of the third world or oppressed minority boxing has provided a traditional avenue taken by the talented in order to escape poverty, as well as a source for popular heroes. Boxing also exemplifies a pure, physical form of competition. Among examples of this recurring image: "On dresse un ring de fortune. Toute l'armée, pèle-mêle, se bat à coups de poing" (Nedjma, p. 219); "... l'argent il le tient, et même il le brandit, bien serré dans sa paume, ainsi qu'un poing américain..." (Le Polygone étoilé, p. 110); "Ils recevaient le vent au gosier, à l'estomac, et baissait la garde ainsi que des pugilistes magnanimes, encaissant les paquets de mer chaude" (Le Polygone étoilé, p. 46). Examples proliferate. In Kateb's plays, certain scenes are separated by "coups de gong." These could be taken as coming from the type of bell which signals the end of boxing rounds.

Inner tensions channeled into a physical contact sport may alternatively energize the "sport" of speaking or writing when a critical threshold is reached. A passage in Le Polygone étoilé marks such a threshold reached by certain emigrant workers. The laborers at work in France are presented as engaging in poetic pursuits, "les deux voix
scandant toujours, à coup de pelle dans le mortier déjà durci..." (my emphasis, p. 59). Their work chant shows the imminent eruption of words which will have an effect:

Un Algérien
prolétarien
qui souffre et qui dit rien...
Mais maintenant, on va dire quelque chose!
(p. 59).

Kateb Yacine's characters all experience defeat and injustice from an early age, as they participate, wittingly or not, in various contests within the social structure. Huizinga affirms the affinity between law and play in that to a great extent, "the actual practice of law, in other words of lawsuit, properly resembles a contest whatever the ideal foundation of the law may be." We relate with this Erikson's theory of personal inner dividedness, by expanding it to the larger social realm in which divisions and contests among individuals and groups exist. The ultimate loser, when he senses that the rules of the contest were violated by the winner, experiences injustice.

Mustapha recognizes the injustice done his father, who, despite courage and merit, received no rank in the French army (he had served during World War I) because the French rules did not apply equally to Arabs. During the school child sequence in *Nedjma* (pp. 202-236) Mustapha gazes at newly discovered feminine charms—"...ne cesse d'admirer les blouses propres, les collerettes, les nattes... Elles ont une sublime façon de se moucher. Quelle délicatesse!" (p. 216). While he is so occupied, three schoolboys ambush him and he receives two large scratches on his nose. When his father comes to fetch him after school and asks who is responsible, Mustapha does not know. He is embarrassed by his father's bouffant trousers and fez. The European schoolboys jokingly
accuse one another, and Maître Gharib grabs Albert Giovanni, the largest, and accompanies him home. Mustapha's indignant father cannot hear Mustapha's protests of the lack of evidence. Albert's father offers to give his son a whipping, but Maître Gharib hopes the boys will make their own peace and besides, the Giovanni then offer the oukil a perhaps anticipated anisette.

To trace the social interplay in this passage in which Mustapha bears the brunt of injustice, we see him first spying on the schoolgirls, in an innocent state of infatuation with their neatness, and perhaps making other esthetic considerations. The narrator sees the girls in an altogether different light. His ironic attitude is unmistakable, concerning the action of a redhead who runs into Mustapha:

. . . une rouquine heurte Mustapha, une joue fraîche lui effleure le front; la boulevrasante haleine de confiture achève d'attendrir Mustapha.

(Nedjma, p. 216).

The word "rouquine" is a popular language term, while the "boulevrasante haleine de confiture," has a definite hyperbolic mock-heroic ring to it. The ambush of European boys finally destroys Mustapha's ecstatic state. This jolt could be likened to the infant's passage from a paradisiacal state into the knowledge of divisiveness and conflict. Mustapha has been so involved in gazing that he does not know who actually scratched him, and, "placide," has no wish for revenge. His father, significantly a lawyer by profession, seeks retribution. Mustapha, with lucid childlike eyes, sees that evidence is lacking, though he is unconcerned with vengeance. Mustapha also sees the emptiness of his father's gesture toward seeing justice done, for soon, the matter is forgotten. As his father states of Mustapha and Albert, "Ils vont faire la paix" (Nedjma, p. 217).
The children indeed make their peace in Mr. Giovanni's garden, which in play-therapy, according to Erikson, provides them with a safe ground on which to play out dangerous situations. In their war-game, a certain symbolic retribution is observed in that Mustapha plays the general and it is Albert who propels the general's wheelbarrow.

When the subject of Lakhdar and his band of peasant boys arises, Albert says that his father would never allow Lakhdar in his garden.

--Pas de voyous, pas d'Arabes dans le jardin, dit Papa. (Nedjma, p. 218).

Mustapha, says Albert, is different, since his father is a lawyer. Embarrassed, Mustapha favors the solution of taking the maneuvers elsewhere, and invites Lakhdar to join their army.

When Lakhdar loses Mr. Giovanni's baionnette and refuses to call Mustapha "mon général," a boxing ring is improvised and "Toute l'armée, pèle-mêle, se bat à coups de poing" (Nedjma, p. 219). A transformation in social structure occurs when, out of this playful chaotic combat, Mustapha, though the winner, abdicates his role and rank as general, and "Les armes sont délaissées pour le sport" (Nedjma, p. 219). Lakhdar and Mustapha become "organisateurs de jeux, arbitres et chefs de la bande, qui s'ouvre à un petit groupe de bergers" (Nedjma, p. 219). Democratization accompanies purely competitive play rather than play imitating war or battles.

In this transcendence we see a yearning in Kateb Yacine for the abandonment of violent conflict, for non-violent, sportsmanlike processes for working out differences.

The two leaders fight two more times and show equal strength, while in scholastic achievement Lakhdar is not far behind. Cooperation accompanies competition with regard to girls—as Lakhdar kisses the"porteuse
d'eau," Dhebbia, in Maître Gharib's study, Mustapha keeps watch (Nedjma, p. 219). While Mustapha's and Lakhdar's precocious interest in girls relates to their individual development, or to their sense of identity as other-than-female, it is also a primary relationship with a member of another social group. With school age characters, Kateb Yacine devotes more attention, however, to larger group interaction, such as the rivalry between Lakhdar's and Mustapha's gangs, than to relationships between individuals.

War is in the air at the time in which the Nedjma characters are attending school. To play at war—and in one instance, real trenches from World War I are used (Le Polygone étoilé, p. 113)—makes the youths feel for a moment that they become the adults, their dominators. Seen from the outside, Islamic society is a society of men—women remain within the framework of the family—therefore, games of make-believe might be restricted to male actors only. Few games for girls are described; one of them is a type of hopscotch:

Un grand calme règne dans le groupe des filles.  
Elles jouent à la marelle avec des boîtes de cirage.  

(Nedjma, p. 216).

Play provides relief from an acute affective crisis, as several sequences in Kateb's works reveal. Mustapha's schoolmistress reprimands him for daydreaming (such an escape had been prompted by a blow to his ego when he had read a text poorly):

---Mustapha, tu ne suis pas!   
Alors, y a que moi?   
Chute d'un ange.   
Récéation.  

(Nedjma, p. 205).

Because Mustapha is usually an exemplary student, the Miltonian phrase,
"Chute d'un ange." He silently reacts to the reproach by thinking that he cannot be alone in not listening. Nevertheless he suffers a blow to the ego; the image of a fall appears in other scenes in Kateb Yacine's writings where a protagonist suffers a defeat. Subsequent to the fall, however, the character always picks himself up immediately, whether in a literal or figurative way. The latter can involve having a pleasant fantasy. Here the narration states that recess, significantly called "Récération," follows the fall immediately. The regenerative power of play will soothe Mustapha's hurt ego.

Mustapha does engage in a typical boyish prank during recess, although he joins Lakhdar only hesitantly in doing so. Even a prank on the schoolmistress engages their creativity. In the drawing lesson later that day, creativity is used in creating props for a game which is a primitive form of Monopoly.

Two further examples illustrate the structure of a "fall" followed by a compensation mechanism. Following the repression of May 8, 1945 and the execution of two fugitives at the village gate, Mustapha eavesdrops on the group of French persons who are guarding or observing the sun-exposed bodies. Listening from the elevated position of a "talus" or mound of earth, Mustapha's spirit goes through a descent as their conversation denigrates his race:

F...: Qu'est-ce qu'ils peuvent puer!
(....)
Mme N...: ... Ceux-là quand ils sont vivants, ils puent déjà la crasse. A plus forte raison quand ils sont morts...
B...: Ils croient que l'armée est faite pour les chiens.
F...: Cette fois, ils ont compris.
N...: Tu crois? Moi je te dis qu'ils recommenceront.
On n'a pas su les prendre.
Mme N...: Mon Dieu, si la France ne s'en occupe pas, ce n'est pas nous qui pourrons nous défendre!
F...: La France est pourrie. Qu'on nous arme, et qu'on nous laisse faire. Pas besoin de loi ici. Ils ne connaissent que la force. Il leur faut un Hitler.
Mme F..., caressant R...: Et dire qu'ils vont à l'école avec toi, mon petit! Bien sûr, maintenant ils savent tout...
R...: Oh! ça va changer! Avant on avait peur. Ils sont nombreux dans ma classe; on n'est que cinq Français, sans compter les Italiens et les Juifs.
Mme F...: Attention, mon petit, ils sont sauvages!
Mme N...: Si vous saviez ce que j'ai pleuré pour ces innocents. Si j'avais un fils, je serais folle! (Nedjma, p. 230).

Mustapha is so stunned by this verbal disparagement of his people that he emerges from a blackout to find himself "au beau milieu de la route, pressant le pas sans plus de précautions" (Nedjma, p. 230). This violent descent into reality precipitates his escape into a dreamlike or unconscious state.

As an aside in the description of the villa where Nedjma lives, children play at kicking a deflated ball while a passing cyclist skids ("dérâpe") and falls from his bike. The cruel laughter of children which would normally be the reaction to such an accident is absent because the children are completely absorbed in their play:

...sur la route, les enfants sans souliers n'arrêtent pas de bouter leur ballon percé... Paradoxe d'enfants, solennelle sauvagerie! Un cycliste dérâpe et se relève, ravi de la distraction des joueurs en herbe; du moment qu'ils jouent ils ne songeront pas à se moquer du cycliste écorché; mais le ballon pouffe en dévalant le talus, et c'est l'objet qui consume tout le comique de la chute... (Nedjma, p. 66).

Here Kateb Yacine concurs with Erikson in opposition to the idea of "mere child's play,"67 affirming the serious nature of their game: "Paradoxe d'enfants, solennelle sauvagerie!"

Corresponding to the historical reality of the events which occurred on the day of victory over Germany in Europe, May 8, 1945, the demonstrations by Algerians and subsequent repressions, the period marked the end of school age for the two characters and their baptism via prison and
torture into their awareness of being adults. Mustapha and Lakhdar, the characters whose schoolboy stage is depicted at length by Kateb, participate in a common experience which resembles the rite of passage between youth and adulthood.

Though he began in a mood of play, his participation in the protest march led Mustapha to feel one with the crowd and thus acquire a sense of tremendous power. The two boys began merely by marching with a passing banner—"Aucun passant ne résiste aux banderoles" (Nedjma, p. 227)—but are then carried along in the mass enthusiasm, stimulated by the songs of children:

De nos montagnes s'élève
La voix des hommes libres.  
(Nedjma, p. 227).

Mustapha's ego merges into the crowd, envisioned as one invincible giant centipede made of moving human parts:

Mustapha se voit au coeur d'un mille-pattes inattaquable.
On peut, fort de tant de moustaches, de pieds cornus, toiser les colons, la police, la basse-cour qui prend la fuite.  
(Nedjma, p. 227).

Nothing less than machine guns are required to stem the massing movement of humanity.

The children's war games of the past are thus supplanted by a real violent confrontation. Mustapha, however, is only beginning his passage to adulthood, and continues to see the combat through a child's eyes:

Le rêve d'enfance est réalisé: Mustapha est à côté du chauffeur; un gendarme musulman est monté à côté de lui:
--Mettez-vous près de la portière, a souri le gendarme.
Mustapha est ravi.
Il ne voit pas que la coiffure du gendarme est trouée d'une balle. Il est dangereux de se pencher
à la portière, dit le chauffeur... (Nedjma, pp. 228-229).

Mustapha had had a dream: "Et les places dans l'autocar. Quand je serai grand, je monterai devant" (Nedjma, p. 205). The dream's realization signals Mustapha's passage from youth to adulthood. However, he remains childish to the extent that despite the seriousness of the situation before him, he does not notice the bullet hole left in the gendarme's headdress. He also seems to disregard the warning given him verbally by this guide from the adult world, "Il est dangereux de se pencher à la portière." Italics setting apart these words support their symbolic value.

The merging of the ego with the mass consciousness marks part of this rite of passage: Mustapha's realization that he must be grown up (since he can ride at the front of the bus) comes only after his feeling of solidarity with the protesting crowd. In Le Cadavre encerclé, Nedjma gives an account of how the Lakhdar of this play exited from childhood:

NEDJMA: Il est temps de dire ce qui arriva lorsque Lakhdar sortait de l'enfance; il lui semblait alors être destiné à vivre dans un pays étranger que je ne nommerai pas... Ce fut plusieurs années après avoir mûri l'idée de son départ que toutes ces choses lui arrivèrent. Son père vivait dans un café, jour et nuit. Lakhdar se souvenait de l'y avoir accompagné, lorsque des temps de sécheresse laissèrent les hommes sans travail. Les ouvriers, les paysans, les petits fonctionnaires et même l'avocat ne quittaient pas le café. Ils buvaient peu ou beaucoup. Ils jouaient aux cartes ou aux dominos. Ainsi passaient les mauvais jours. L'avocat lisait des journaux, en se frottant les yeux; les autres renversaient la tête pour réfléchir. Le père de Lakhdar voulait passer inaperçu. «Les journaux sont comme les formules des sorciers, disait-il, tout le monde ne peut le déchiffrer...» Un matin, la police fit plusieurs rafles dans la rue. Chacun courut se réfugier dans les cafés, les boutiques, les bains, et jusqu'à la gare... Et Lakhdar entra au café...

(Le Cadavre encerclé, p. 43).

The text describes the traditional Algerian phenomenon of the café which provides a milieu where men of differing social status gather and feel a
certain sense of community and solidarity. Historically, such gathering places provided centers of resistance for the organization of the Algerian revolution. Lakhdar had been to the café as a child, accompanying his father. Nedjma describes Lakhdar's entry into adulthood as coinciding with this entry into the café, which comes at a time when the village had been the victim of aggression.

During the scene in the café, the young men carry on a lively discussion with older men who have made concessions to the French colonialist system. The older men use commonly accepted meanings, while the young men play with the language in order to expose French repression. In reply to the lawyer who reminds the youth that breaking the law will come to no good, Lakhdar uses the phrase "inscrit au barreau" (enrolled at the bar) to protest the system of justice:

LAKHDAR: Bravo, maître, vous avez dû connaître beaucoup de juges. Vous en parlez sagement.
L'A VOCAT (modeste): Il y a vingt ans que je suis inscrit au barreau...
LAKHDAR: Je pense à cet homme qu'on vient de condamner. Lui aussi est inscrit au barreau pour vingt ans, mais de l'autre côté du prétoire... Comprenez-vous, maître, comprenez-vous?
L'A VOCAT (perdu): Oui, j'ai connu beaucoup de juges.
LAKHDAR: Vous les avez connus d'homme à homme?
L'A VOCAT: Certes, depuis vingt ans que je suis inscrit...
LAKHDAR: Donc leur loi n'est pas inaccessible... Il suffit de s'inscrire au barreau. Vous me donnez envie de le faire.
L'A VOCAT (agacé): Il est bien tard, jeune homme, pour finir vos études...
LAKHDAR: Approchez, approchez tous! Tout le monde peut ici s'inscrire au barreau. Mais ce sera de l'autre côté du prétoire, car la loi va changer de camp. Maître, votre condamnation sera légère...
UN OUVRIER: Pour une fois qu'il paie à boire!

(Le Cadavre encerclé, pp. 45-46).

When Lakhdar hints that revolutionaries will attain power even if they must do so behind bars, Mustapha brings out the more revolutionary meaning of the word *cellules*:
Leurs cellules ne sont pas les nôtres: elles ne suffiront jamais à isoler nos prisonniers.

(Le Cadavre encerclé, p. 47).

Cells of the revolution serve to unite individuals in a collective movement, whether they are meeting outside or within prison walls. The young men now dominate the dominator's tongue and can exploit the language to contest situations expressed in the normal and conservative use of words. As orators they have the potential to generate enthusiasm for revolution.

Lakhdar at this stage of his rite of passage, learns that he has such talents. Although he has been educated, he still has the talent to win over the peasants by humor:


(Nedjma, p. 54).

In playing the role of the fool or jester, Lakhdar forgets his infantile self and helps the peasant forget about his hunger for a moment. The fool's absurd posturings translate the essentially serious meaning of the situation, that of the chaos in the colonialist world for the Algerian peasant.

In the May 8 incidents described in Nedjma, Lakhdar, like Mustapha, is picked up for questioning and taken to prison. When he arrives in the prison cell to find Mustapha, he also finds Si Khelifa, the barber, who was a mentor for a group of young men including these two. At his shop the youths had learned:

... à pénétrer les secrets du village, à fumer, à apprécier les jeunes filles et à leur envoyer des
missives. A soixante ans, le coiffeur jouait avec nous aux dominos, partageait nos distractions depuis les plus enfantines, répondait à toutes nos questions. Les bourgeois de X... haïssaient le coiffeur.

(Nedjma, p. 231).

Mustapha continues in praise of Si Khelifa. Due to the secrets which he shares with the youths, Si Khelifa could be considered a shaman figure. In order to capture the youths' imagination, he uses the media of play and games. In addition, the painter Tayeb, also confronted in prison, provides the youths with an example of one who can play his way through life. Avoiding regular work, he lives off strangers and friends and espouses play: "Ses nuits se passaient régulièrement en farouches parties de dominos. . . ." His tongue is sharp when he plays on words: "On craignait trop, en l'interrogeant, de s'attirer ses quolibets" (Nedjma, p. 234).

At the coiffeur's Lakhdar has learned to play the mandolin and has composed, "aidé d'un mendiant aveugle, des chansons satiriques dédiées aux <<grosses têtes>>" (Nedjma, p. 231). Songs and the playing of music belong to the realm of play in that they are without functional intent. They follow certain patterns or rules and are removed from events of everyday life, especially in that normal verbal communication is spoken, not sung. It may be objected that Lakhdar's songs function through informing and inspiring his companions into the revolutionary spirit and actions. As is the case at hand, however, play itself often involves serious work. The "quolibets" (quips) of the painter and the satire in Lakhdar's songs create a game in which action demands reaction. This gateway to response may result in knitting human relationships into more active communication, or in furthering the socialization of the young, encouraging them to assume ever-widening spheres of responsibility.
For Kateb Yacine's characters, play then can be seen as physical or mental activity which can liberate the individual from a situation of restraint (which may be characterized by the psychological paralysis felt when as in Mustapha's case, conflicting emotions clash within). On the social level, play contributes to the working out of differences through collective action, or actions inciting reactions; increased responsiveness brings on increased understanding. Through word or language play, Mustapha's monologue accomplished relief from the variety of tensions within him; the children's games, helping them to learn to use their developing physical organisms, reinforced systems of fair play and the acceptance of others as of themselves. As a background to the playground, however, the historical reality of conflict between two civilizations remained a constant, providing a constant source of tensions to be played out. The sport of boxing and imitative war games represent agonistic and representational play, respectively, which the youths created in order to cope with tensions.

After their arrests during the May 8th repressions, and during the initiatory process which one can consider to be their torture, Lakhdar and Mustapha each encounter an adult character who by his nature, illustrates the creative value of play. Both Si Khelifa, the "coiffeur" (barber, hairdresser) and Tayeb the "peintre" (painter), pursue occupations which are concerned with esthetics more than with function. The play era comes to a close when Lakhdar and Mustapha are arrested and tortured in prison. (Mourad had dropped out of school prematurely when Nedjma married Kamel; Rachid had been excluded from school for his political activities). The male protagonists of *Nedjma* now face the adult world of work or unemployment. Lakhdar's and Mustapha's violent initiations into the adult world, however, gave them a view of the role which play could have in their lives.
Dans la vie, et surtout dans la guerre, avec le peuple ou face à l'ennemi, nous devons jouer tous les rôles.

-Les Ancêtres redoublent de férocité, p. 127.

CHAPTER III. ADOLESCENCE AND EARLY ADULTHOOD

In this chapter we will discuss the new role which play assumes at the stage of adolescence and early adulthood. Representational play, a cultural phenomenon for Islamic society, greatly influences the way in which the characters perceive of themselves and others. They consciously use representational play to gain power over adversaries. At times, however, the characters are presented as unconsciously participating in a drama that occurs beyond their control.

The second form taken by play at this stage, the contest and quest, coincides with many of the characters' actions, from the hunt to the pilgrimage. We will discuss at length the meeting between each male protagonist and the quest goal, Nedjma, in order to explore the use of play within these relationships. Finally, we discuss Nedjma's participation in play.

Close to the age of puberty, all four of the Nedjma protagonists find themselves outside of the protective circle of the family. Their studies halted, with little or no chance of returning to school, they face a situation analogous to that of their separation from their mother's protection, at the time they entered school. Once again they find themselves without their former affiliations and identities. They must now
seek work, a quest presenting them with formidable obstacles, as historically there was rampant unemployment and hunger. During the time between youth and maturity, the characters engage in what Huizinga calls the higher forms of play, or "the orderly activity of a group or two opposed groups." He discusses two aspects of this advanced form of play, both of which will be shown to be instrumental in the development of the personality of Kateb Yacine's young adults:

The function of play in the higher forms which concern us here can largely be derived from the two basic aspects under which we meet it: as a contest for something or a representation of something. The two can unite in such a way that the game "represents" a contest, or else becomes a contest for the best representation of something.

In order to recreate for himself a sense of worth and meaning, each developing character engages in a personal quest for identity and participates in a group activity which demonstrates the characteristics of play, both in the narrative works and the more politically inspired dramas. During this passage from youth to adulthood, Kateb Yacine's characters assume a multitude of roles, or engage in the representational form of play. At times they test these roles against their true selves: often their participation in theater provides a means of escaping the dire realities of the everyday world. On a more positive side of the evasive function, their play sometimes assumes the high form of the quest. Representational activities are undertaken in a quest for individual identities, for at this stage of life the sense of personal worth depends to a great extent on the impression one attempts to make on others. Accompanying the quest for individual worth is the group's need for honor and glory, in this case, the group of young indigenous Algerians contesting the honor of French colonialists, and affirming their own worth.

Rather than describe these quest activities in a literal or single manner, the text groups them beneath a variety of play-forms whose stakes
are the same, *Nedjma* or *la Femme Sauvage*, the one and the same feminine figure who is flesh and blood as well as symbol. As a flesh and blood figure, Nedjma reveals herself a master actress and plays with her suitors through poses and roles she assumes. Nedjma would like to have used her talents in order to escape the traditional woman's role, but her fate was to be forced into marriage. Subsequent to the unhappy marriage, she concentrates most of her play activities into escaping the situation, rather than in freely exercised play.

The point where Kateb Yacine's characters realize that they can no longer depend on their families for their sustenance comes at the abrupt end of their schooling. For all four male characters of *Nedjma* no secure relationship waits in the wings to supplant the loss of the family structure as might be the case had they been able to marry, in more prosperous and harmonious times. Instead, at this time of historical and personal discontinuity each stands alone to face the realities of colonialist Algeria. Neither Lakhdar nor Mustapha can return to school because of their political arrests. Mustapha finds the ultimate disintegration of his family when he returns home after his brief imprisonment to find his father too ill to leave his bed and his mother gone insane, not only from the fear of her absent son's execution but also from grief due to the loss of many family members in the May 8th repression.

After taking his father to the hospital and his mother and two sisters to live with an uncle farmer, the fifteen-year-old Mustapha expresses the need to anchor his sense of identity in these words:

> Du travail et du pain.  
> Tels sont mes rêves de jeunesse.  
> J'irai dans un port.  

*(Nedjma, p. 237).*
The port to which Mustapha decides to go represents both a harbor—security—and a point of departure—adventure. The post-Nedjma Lakhdar, as revealed in *Le Cadavre encerclé* ("A peine adolescent, il est parti pour la France...," p. 57) and in *Le Polygone étoilé*, goes to France seeking work. Mourad already lives in this port city of eastern Algeria, Bône (present day Annaba), toward which the other three young protagonists all converge. It is in Bône that their adult personality will begin to develop. Had the characters been living at some other period of Algerian history, they might have experienced no great discontinuity between their youth and adulthood, and probably would have been assimilated into the colonialist order as had, to one degree or another, most of their parents. The colonialist era of history, at least with respect to Africa, was about to reach a turning point, with colonized peoples attaining a high enough level of political consciousness to rebel against colonialist paternalism. This turning point may have arrived somewhat prematurely in the life cycle of Kateb Yacine's young characters for them to act effectively as adults, yet they precociously espoused the nationalist cause while still dealing with crises in their personal identities.

Finding themselves face to face with even more powerful parental figures—the colonialist paternalists and the henchmen of their system—the young men and women carry their adolescent rebellion a step further and assume roles of active revolutionaries, especially in the plays, which are more politicized than the narratives. Rebellion in Kateb Yacine may be best described as the use of representational play as a means of escaping from restrictive situations. In its most basic expression, representational play is fantasy. Rachid, in *Nedjma*, appears to use fantasy to compensate for his inability to bring about active changes, a process which for him began in childhood, and continues into adulthood.
Rachid, however, has at one time attempted to overcome his passive, solitary childhood, marked by the heritage of a father killed before his birth. His father worked as a teacher at a medersa, a school which taught Arabic; he was fired for supporting a student committee which sympathized with the Congrès musulman (probably one held in Algiers in June 1936, a short-lived display of unity in the Algerian nationalist movement). As if challenged by the example of his father, Rachid prepared the entrance examination to the medersa in a record eight months' time (instead of the usual three to four years of preparatory study) and "reconstitua le comité soutenu par son père" (Nedjma, p. 157). His scholarship required him to wear a fez and bouffant trousers, but it only allowed him to survive on a diet of chickpeas. Though elected president to a committee which the government had recognized as legal, Rachid was pressured by the government officials and the Cadi (Moslem judge) to concentrate on his studies. In an act of rebellion, similar to the one described in abstract terms in the opening passage of Le Polygone étoilé, "quelque poussée de ruse et de défi..." (p. 8), Rachid "ne peut qu'échouer à l'examen de passage" (Nedjma, p. 157) in resistance to the pressure exerted upon him by those in power. He enjoys but ephemeral success in society and politics, and his subsequent enlistment into the army abruptly ends in his desertion. The attempt to "play" once again in society proves equally abortive at the conclusion of Nedjma, where all that remains of Rachid is a skeleton smoking hashish, living in his fantasies.

When they leave the schoolboy world of play behind, certain characters face the fear of execution, the real and figurative torture of prison and the struggle against starvation. Lakhdar prepares, like an actor rehearsing lines, the role which he will play in order to remain loyal to fellow rebels during his torture:
Dans l'attente de la torture, il s'était préparé...
Il ne nierait pas sa présence à la manifestation. Il ne
dirait pas un mot du vieux revolver qu'il avait enterré
devant la rivière. Comme planche de salut, il avait prévu,
si la torture devenait insupportable, de prononcer des noms
de collégiens pro-français dont l'enquête révélerait d'ailleurs
l'innocence.

(Nedjma, p. 59).

It might be tempting to ascribe a frequency of theatrical images
in the text to the surviving hegemony of the theater from the French
seventeenth century, transplanted into Kateb's French education in Algeria.
In a similar vein, historical tradition records that a precipitating
cause of the Algerian conquest by the French was a melodramatic gesture,
the French Consul being struck by the Turkish dey Hûssein. However, the
underlying causes for the theatrical mode which abounds in Kateb's charac-
ter descriptions are both more personal and universal. They first, that
sense of inner dividedness first experienced at the weaning stage and
which refuses to go away causes the characters to feel as though they are
other than themselves, actors wearing masks. Roles are also consciously
utilized in order to endow disinhernited individuals with power sufficient
to carry out revolutionary acts.

Writing on the theater in Islamic cultures, Jean Duvignaud con-
vincingly attributes the lack of a traditional theater to the intense
theatricalization of everyday social life. In that their performance
or their role as spectator occupies more importance than introspection,
or self-revelation, Kateb Yacine's characters accurately reflect this
thesis. For instance, the relation between Si Mokhtar and Rachid is
introduced through a narrator, apparently Mourad, representing the
vantage point of the spectator-natives of Bône who are an attentive
audience to the comings and goings of the bizarre couple. Rachid and Si
Mokhtar attract the curiosity of their public by the unusual dispropor-
tion of their ages: "ils n'auraient peut-être intrigué personne sans leur flagrante disproportion d'âge" (my emphasis, on the rapport between actor and public, the former holding the latter spellbound, Nedjma, p. 91).

Further, those who observe them react to Rachid's remarkable mutism, to the point of calling it insolent: "mutisme outrecuidant," while in contrast, Si Mokhtar is a "beau parleur" (Nedjma, p. 92). In addition to having their attention on Si Mokhtar and Rachid, and thus resembling a theatrical audience, the spectators judge their acting ability. The two also wear costumes, or dress in an extraordinary manner, Rachid always in dark glasses and an "accoutrement mi-civil, mi-militaire," and Si Mokhtar "s'affublant d'un fez égyptien trop haut pour sa taille et trop vif pour son âge" (Nedjma, p. 91).

In Les Ancêtres redoublent de férocié, after their escape from prison, Mustapha and Hassan don masks and military uniforms for the dual purpose of taking revenge on Tahar and finding Nedjma. Tahar, lakhdar's collaborator stepfather—"potiche—Président d'une confrérie loyale à la Mère Patrie" (Les Ancêtres redoublent de férocié, p. 127), is easily deceived and seduced by their appearance and promise of support in the elections. When they drop their masks he provides them with the information which they seek, concerning Nedjma's whereabouts.

On the social level, representational play provides a means of cheating the boss at the work-game:

Ne serait-ce pas, là-bas, la silhouette du contremaitre? Charles est roi dans l'art de travailler au moment voulu.

(Le Polygone étoilé, p. 56).

Charles, the French worker, regards the boss as an adversary in the same way as do the Algerian emigrant workers, and gains the upper hand by the artful timing of his work.
On the work site—"le chantier"—described in *Nedjma*, the four male protagonists begin dramatic representation in order to appear to go back to working silently as the foreman tiptoes up, trying to overhear their conversation. Monsieur Ernest, the "contremaître," engages in dramatic play himself, and "feint d'ignorer toute la mise en scène" (*Nedjma*, p. 48). But this double theater succeeds only in widening the gap between workers and foreman. M. Ernest strikes Lakhdar's head with a meterstick when Lakhdar murmurs what M. Ernest takes to be a sarcastic reply to the baiting question, "Alors, je suis un imbécile?" After bringing him his lunch, M. Ernest's daughter Suzy becomes aware of the incident and heightens the tension felt by her father by commenting on the situation. By her presence she also makes her father think that the workers have lascivious designs on her, which is probably not far from true. Dramatically, M. Ernest throws the meterstick into the trench with Lakhdar. Lakhdar grabs the foreman by the throat and strikes, "...lui ouvre l'arcade sourcilière" (opens a wound over his eyebrow). The atmosphere of a boxing match is evoked by the spectators whose smiles seem to say, "match nul!" (*Nedjma*, p. 50).

Lakhdar thus responded to the second and more symbolic provocation while he had contained his rage during the lunch break, when only M. Ernest had eaten anything. The recurrent image, discussed previously, of forces kept under pressure exploding, is illustrated by Lakhdar's repression of anger and the ensuing violence. As M. Ernest recovers from the fight, the narrator compares the work site to a stage: "le soleil éclaire à présent le chantier ainsi qu'un décor de théâtre surgi de la plus navrante banalité" (*Nedjma*, p. 51). For an instant the banality of the work site, not only for the workers but also for the foreman, projects a transcending illusion as does the theater.
A reference to stage décor in the life of the Algerian emigrant worker in France evokes the tensions of the colonialist and even the post-colonialist situation. Lakhdar, personifying the emigrant worker, goes from French town to town in search of stable employment, at the beginning of *Le Polygone étoilé*, only to find that success impossible: work available to emigrants is incommensurate with the skills which they possess. First the gaze of Frenchmen casts all Algerians into the same abject role. When Lakhdar is injured working, these Frenchmen see no cause for concern:

Ça fait rien
c'est un Algérien
qui travaille beaucoup
et qui mange rien.

(Le Polygone étoilé, p. 59).

The passage in question mentions the theatrical term for "stage set," or "décor," and then describes the scene in the telegraphic style of stage directions:

Une longue échelle contre le mur, une corde,
un tas de mortier durci. Toujours le même décor.

(Le Polygone étoilé, p. 59).

The scene conjures up the drama of a recurring nightmare, with symbolic props. The ladder evokes not only a device which joins two levels or worlds, natural and supernatural, but it also, as in other scenes where Lakhdar has a painful fall from a ladder, suggests an instrument of torture. The "corde"—rope—evokes whipping or hanging. The French foreman, "l'entrepreneur," gives the signal for work, and thereby bids the drama to begin. At the end of the passage, the ladder begins to shake, suggesting an infernal cycle of falls from the ladder:

--C'est l'heure, dit l'entrepreneur, et
l'échelle se mit à trembler.

(Le Polygone étoilé, p. 59).
The image of the ladder as a dramatic prop suggesting torture or a difficult trial recurs in the scene where Rachid furtively accompanies Si Mokhtar up the gangplank of the pilgrimage ship. The text explicitly designates the gangplank as a ladder: "la passerelle—une échelle à vrai dire, une longue échelle tremblant et mouillée." Rachid slips on the gangplank and catches himself, mindful of policemen watching him (Nedjma, p. 115). Likewise, the terrace of Nedjma's villa can be reached only by rickety steps whose ladder-like nature is emphasized by the words: "où l'on grimpe par un escalier ver moulu, pas plus solide qu'une échelle" (Nedjma, p. 65).

In Le Polygone étoilé poetry on exile and emigration contain these lines which are structurally similar to a situation expressed in terms of fate and drama:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Pour l'instant} & \quad \text{Comme toujours} \\
\text{C'était le souk finissant} & \quad \text{Sous la fûrulle} \\
\end{align*}
\]

\text{Le Polygone étoilé, p. 35}.

The imagery in these lines evokes the traditional weekly market, a colorful, communal and theatrical event. It appears that in the past, the poet had learned that his delight in this would be terminated by a spanking; in any case, the fall from joy in such an image provides a child-view metaphor for the tragedy of exile and emigration, which has been the destiny and drama of a great number of Algerians. This theatrical twist of destiny contrasts with the structure of fall followed by creative play, already discussed in Chapter II. The latter sequence emphasizes individual human capacity for transcending a tragic event; the former emphasizes the collective tragic destiny as a theater where individuals resemble puppets.

As their ancestors exert a very real power over their lives, the young characters of Nedjma sometimes appear as actors in a drama written by their forebears. The four sons play the same script of parallel passions
for one woman as had their fathers. The male protagonists of *Nedjma* belong to the traditional Keblout tribe whose eponymic ancestor legend held to be a vagabond and exile, and such was the fate of the young men. Mohammed the Prophet was an exile as well, though the implication that they could be related to this famous figure was probably far from Kateb's conscious intent. 74 Within the phrase denoting the phenomenon of historical heritage or fate, "ce plancher d'exil" (*Le Polygone étoilé*, p. 35), the word "plancher," while meaning "floor," also suggests "les planches," "boards," or figuratively, "the stage."

The cultural need to identify one's otherwise banal existence with a drama or thick plot underlies the collective passions of Constantine's inhabitants for detective novels. Constantine is "la ville où l'on dévore le plus de romans policiers, sans comparaison possible avec une autre ville au monde" (*Nedjma*, p. 170). Though these are journalistic clichés, they do underline the human need for drama and excitement: articles discussing Mourad's murder of Monsieur Ricard use the terms "sur les lieux de la tragédie," "théâtre du crime" (*Nedjma*, p. 171).

Feeling their vitality sapped within these predetermined scripts which represent one aspect of fate, Kateb Yacine's young characters attempt various avenues of escape. Evasion can have negative connotations, as in a flight from responsibility, but it can also provide creations of positive value, such as the rich literature written in prisons which springs from the mental evasion of the imagination. 75

Theatrical escapism in *Nedjma* gives rise to a certain descriptive style which one could call a kind of voyeurism. This voyeurism or spectator sport activity consists of describing strangers, such as Lakhdar arriving in Bône as described by Mourad. Similar in style to the appearance of Si Mokhtar and Rachid as seen by Bône inhabitants, Mourad's
description of Lakhdar's first two days in the city resembles stage
directions describing a character's costume and actions. Mourad conjec-
tures from Lakhdar's clothing and general poverty that he is a student.
The narrator takes up Mourad's discussion with an omniscient point of
view which again can be taken to reflect the collective eyes of the Bônois.
The style of description is theatrical in its economy of words and con-
creteness, its attention to detail of dress, physical appearance and
gesture:

Après avoir payé, il bredouille devant le garçon en blouse
blanche, aux cheveux blancs, et s'éloigne précipitamment,
pour ne plus voir les dix francs de pourboire qu'il a laissé;
plus d'un passant s'exaspère, croit buter sur la fixité de
ces prunelles de veau évadé, et donne du coude au vagabond
sans réaction, qui ne se rend vraisemblablement pas compte
qu'il tourne en rond. . .

(Nedjma, p. 73).

In this passage, however, theatrical style does not monopolize, as Mourad's
speculation gives way to the narrator's certainty which itself returns to
speculation:

. . . peut-être le voyageur doit-il à ses origines paysannes
cet oeil rapproché de l'oreille comme celui d'un taureau; à
moins qu'il ne doive la bizarrerie de son visage à un accident,
à une querelle, ainsi les boxeurs quand ils se font ouvrir
les arcades et gonfler les yeux. . .

(my emphasis, Nedjma, pp. 73-74).

The conjunctions denote suspension of judgment as does the subjunctive
mood of the second verb form of "devoir." This ambiguity, often culti-
vated in Kateb Yacine's works, involves the reader in the dramatic
situation, inviting him to make his own judgment. At the beginning of the
dramatic monologue, Le Vautour, spoken entirely on a dark stage by the
vulture, the stage directions leave it up to the spectator to "provide
his own visual setting as he chooses or refuses to open himself to his
own interior theater" (my translation and emphasis from the following):
Dit dans le noir par le vautour, dont l'image n'est plus qu'un signe dans l'espace, le poème dramatique, terrain d'envol à la proue de l'œuvre, élève pour finir toute action dans le souffle. Les gestes et le décor sont dans le spectateur. Liberté entière lui est donnée de prendre ses distances, et même, s'il ne veut pas s'ouvrir à son propre théâtre intérieur, de s'anéantir dans ce refus.

(Le Vautour, entire citation italicized, p. 157).

Kateb Yacine thus offers the metaphor of a drama for the mental activity going on within his public. 76

Yet another mention of the theater follows the pattern described in Chapter II, the fall followed by play. Rachid, "fallen" into unemployment, tries his hand at the dramatic arts:

Rachid, tombé en chômage, s'adonnait à l'art dramatique.

(Nedjma, p. 158).

While this is a light, ironic use of the term "dramatic arts," the playful reference to a form of play is unquestionable. Rachid, with Si Mokhtar's record player and assistance, makes a prostitute into a star for his "troupe naissante" (budding theater group). His actress reverts to prostitution, however, and Rachid's brief sally into the theater ends. Having already joined and deserted the army, having failed in the theater ("guéri du théâtre," Nedjma, p. 159), he was at the point of emigrating to France. Instead, he met Nedjma, who was to monopolize his fantasies for the rest of his days.

Role-playing serves the protagonists of Nedjma and Le Polygone étoilé in their search for work or in other dealings within systems more powerful than themselves. A bundle of letters soliciting a job which was returned to the group of four protagonists in Nedjma reflects the ridiculous posturings which they would assume via letter hoping that they would find a job:
...un paquet de leurs lettres renvoyées ou restées en souffrance; Rachid les relisait furtivement, dans l'espoir de posséder tôt ou tard une arme à feu:
"Monsieur le Directeur de l'École du Bâtiment,
"J'ai l'honneur...
"J'ose ajouter que j'ai une instruction qui se borne à plus de douze ans d'études...
"Comptant sur votre large esprit d'équité...
"Monsieur le Directeur des Docks et Silos,
"...Ma conduite a toujours été... Famille honorable...
Malgré mon jeune âge...
"Monsieur le Directeur de l'A.A.T.,
"...un emploi dans vos services comme comptable, secrétaire, réceptionnaire ou guichetier.
"...soutien d'une famille de quatre personnes...
"...le directeur de l'institut Pasteur m'a fait parvenir votre lettre par laquelle vous lui proposiez la vente de vos yeux..."

(my emphasis, Nedjma, p. 248).

The metaphor which suggests that Rachid considers the playing of these roles as potential "firearms" ("armes à feu") underlines the power which one can acquire in playing roles.

Rachid dresses in sailor's clothes and becomes a pseudocrewman of the ship on which he and Si Mokhtar travel towards Mecca. Giant projectors, in reality used to spot potential stowaways, dramatically light their boarding of the ship, as if on the stage of a theater. Their decision to "jouer le grand jeu," meaning to use their acting ability to the fullest in order to be convincing (figuratively, to throw all of oneself into the pursuit of a goal), underlines the sense of drama in their departure. Together with this theatrical terminology, the word used to describe what they feared most, to be "démasqué" (unmasked), demonstrates their total involvement in representational play as a means of making the pilgrimage toward Mecca together.

Si Mokhtar, normally a man of dubious moral fiber, has assumed the role of "Cheikh en partance" (Nedjma, p. 112), that of the religious leader undertaking the pilgrimage to Mecca as a representative of persons unable to make the trip themselves.
Lakhdar, in *Le Polygone étoilé*, states that he became manager of a barber shop practically by virtue of miming the professional way with combs:

J'en arrivai, par jeu presque, à manier ses peignes. 
Il me confia la boutique.  

(*Le Polygone étoilé*, p. 37).

A more subtle mechanism through which the protagonists occupy roles foreign to their nature is the portrayal of native Algerians, usually in metaphors bestowed upon them by non-Algerians, ones which cast them into roles as animals. In many instances, the animal-men are confined within chains or in cages:

...face à l'abreuvoir deux hommes enchaînés. Leurs bras pendaient, fixés par des menottes, aux anneaux où les gendarmes attachaient d'habitude leurs chevaux.  

(*Nedjma*, p. 233);

Comme un oiseau menacé au fond de sa cage, le forgeron...  

(*Nedjma*, p. 235);

A présent, il se savait capturé, comme le rossignol et les canaris...et il ne lui venait plus à l'idée d'en sortir.  

(*Nedjma*, p. 169);

...les habitants des mares...sautillent dans cette cage d'enfants gâtés, avec les hirondelles aux chastes épaules que la mère de Lakhdar masse à l'huile d'olive chaque printemps...  

(*Nedjma*, p. 208).

Though in most cases, the metaphors come from the narrator, "Face de Ramadhan n'était qu'un babouin solitaire" (*Le Polygone étoilé*, p. 75), it is implicit that the frame of mind which brings about this category of figure of speech derives directly from the linguistic racism inculcated by the colonizers. During a friendly exchange of words after his release from prison, Lakhdar points out the otherwise benevolent prison
guard's incurable racism and asks: "Qu'est-ce que vous avez tous, en France, à considérer l'Algérie comme un zoo?" (Nedjma, p. 62).

Kateb Yacine's characters or narrators often choose to describe their actions in terms of the hunt. While it would appear that hunting originated from the necessity to survive, Huizinga states that it tended, "in archaic society, to take on the play form."78 In a passage from Nedjma, however, hunting, having become a leisure activity in the twentieth century, is seen as a diminution of the great mythical use of guns and other arms in "la guerre sainte." The last holy war had been the struggle against the French conquest exemplified by Abd el-Kader. Rachid expresses this viewpoint while reviewing his father's life, describing the hunting of animals in which his father participated as a "futile carnage," compared to the glories of the holy war. Mourad's great-grandfather had fought under the flags of Abd el-Kader (Nedjma, p. 77), but Rachid's father was born too late:

...mon père étant alors sur le Rocher de Constantine une sorte de centaure toujours à l'affût, caracolant en éternelles parties de chasse, comme si le sort, en le faisant naître peu après 1830, l'avait condamné à ce futile carnage, lui dont l'intrépide existence eût été couverte de gloire s'il avait pu tourner son fusil contre l'envahisseur, au lieu d'éteindre sa haine à la poursuite des sangliers et des chacals. (Nedjma, p. 101).

The narrator emphasizes that Rachid's father had been born after 1830, and thus after the noble fighting of Abd el-Kader. Ironically, he is killed by his own hunting rifle. While his and other protagonists' fathers suffered this fate, Rachid and other sons had to face the upshot of their fathers' lives as a heritage or fate, symbolically represented in the heroine of problematical birth whom they were compelled to hunt.
While their fathers, closer to nature, had hunted game, the young men were to be further removed from the use of guns in a holy war. As a result of colonialization's aftermath of increased urbanization, they were to hunt this femme fatale, discovered in a city.

The text often describes Nedjma as hunted prey, "comme un oiseau rare qui les eût fatalement poussées à la bagarre, s'ils n'avaient abandonné la partie" (Nedjma, p. 242). The hunt for Nedjma, "la vierge aux abois, mon sang et mon pays" (Nedjma, pp. 175-176), takes on a higher form of play, the contest and the quest. In addition to being a hunt, the pursuit of Nedjma includes intense competition. Also, Nedjma stands for the elusive identity of the Algerian nation.

Comparing Nedjma and L'Emploi du temps, Bernard Dort describes the pursuit of Nedjma as this quest for the reality of Algeria. However, he does so without emphasizing the significance of the quest as a means to achieving a sense of individual, group and even national identity. The rivals for the prize and prey see themselves not only as hunters, but also as hounds:

... ils avaient tous une vengeance en tête, se cédant poliment le pas les une les autres, chiens expérimentés calculant avec leur raison complémentaire de meute que la victime est trop frêle, qu'elle ne supporte pas l'hallali, se succédant auprès d'elle, la voyant déchoir et se consolant ainsi de la perdre.

(my emphasis, Nedjma, p. 188).

To conquer the free-spirited woman, proving impossible for each, nevertheless would represent success in a test of personal worth and manhood. Arnaud calls this test a stage of initiation into manhood: "L'épreuve de la rupture avec Nedjma... est une étape de l'initiation virile."

In one of Rachid's long Nedjma monologues, he uses terms similar to those describing the pursuit of Nedjma as a quest in order to evoke
the quest for national identity through the glorious past of two cities. The two "villes-mères" (Nedjma, p. 174), Bône (Hippone in ancient times) and Constantine (similarly, Cirta), once great cities of Numidia and now newly expanding major cities in the French colony, have only their ruins to speak for their past greatness. Rachid's imagination evokes a quest for rebirth, but he knows that the past is inextricably lost, the quest is as futile as the quest for Nedjma:

... la gloire et la déchéance auront fondé l'éternité des ruines sur les bons des villes nouvelles, plus vivantes mais coupées de leur histoire, privées du charme de l'enfance au profit de leur spectre ennobli, comme les fiancées défuntes qu'on fixe aux murs font pâlir leur vivantes répliques; ce qui a disparu fleurit au détriment de tout ce qui va naître... Constantine et Bône, les deux cités qui dominaient l'ancienne Numidie aujourd'hui réduite en département français... Deux âmes en lutte pour la puissance abdiquée des Numides. Constantine luttant pour Cirta et Bône pour Hippone comme si l'enjeu du passé, figé dans une partie apparemment perdue, constituait l'unique épreuve pour les champions à venir... (my emphasis, Nedjma, p. 175).

The spirit of the contest lodges within the ruins of the glorious past, and can be tapped only by the descendants of the champions of this past glory. The reasoning continues:

... il suffit de remettre en avant les Ancêtres pour découvrir la phase triomphale, la clé de la victoire refusée à Jugurtha, le germe indestructible de la nation écartelée entre deux continents, de la Sublime Porte à l'Arc de Triomphe, la vieille Numidie où se succèdent les descendants Romains, la Numidie dont les cavaliers ne sont jamais revenus de l'abattoir, pas plus que ne sont revenus les corsaires qui barraient la route à Charles-Quint... Ni les Numides ni les Barbaresques n'ont enfanté en paix dans leur patrie. Ils nous la laissent vierge dans un désert ennemi, tandis que se succèdent les colonisateurs, les prétendants sans titre et sans amour...

(Nedjma, p. 175).

Drawing a parallel between the conquerors' quests to subdue Numidia and his personal quest to captivate Nedjma, Rachid emphasizes that the challenge or match into which the pretenders repeatedly entered, they
repeatedly lost: "il me faillait tenter toujours la même partie trop de
fois perdue, afin d'assumer la fin du désastre, de perdre ma Salambô et
d'abandonner à mon tour la partie..." (Nedjma, p. 176). The difficulty
of the challenge imparts glory to the contestant, although he remains
unaware of the terrible aspects of the prize: "Je ne savais pas non plus
qu'elle était ma mauvaise étoile, la Salambô qui allait donner un sens
au supplice..." (Nedjma, p. 176).

The obscure opening passage of the beginning of Le Polygone étoilé
makes a reference to the forbidden prize, the goal or treasure hunt and
foot race:

...l'unique promesse--contemplée sans convoitise--de
cet trésor interdit qu'ils cherchaient, loin de toute
espérance, mais certains de le retrouver à la dernière
étape, au sprint impitoyable éliminant tous les coureurs
et grossissant la prime, certains de ne pas emporter le
trésor, mais de s'endormir à [sic] ligne d'arrivée
commune...

(Le Polygone étoilé, p. 9).
The general terms of the prize and race leave an opening for interpreting
the contest for Nedjma and for Algeria's identity as the quest for a mean-
ing of life, and a race whose finish line can only be death.

The plays refer to the same parallel passions of rivals for
Nedjma's impossible favor as do the narratives. Lakhdar in Le Cadavre
encerclé has been in love with Nedjma, who here plays the role of a fellow
militant in the revolutionary struggle. At the opening of the play, how-
ever, it appears that Lakhdar had decided that he could not divide his
attentions between the revolution and Nedjma, for he has been shot in a
raid in which Nedjma had begged him not to participate. Lakhdar, lying
in a heap of persons who have been shot down with him, experiences a
mystical union with his people's cause, in the collective experience of
suffering and death. In comparison, the union of the couple loses its
meaning. A second woman, Marguerite, the French colonel's daughter, enters Lakhdar's life by rescuing him. Lakhdar had had reservations about Nedjma because she allowed many rivals to her favors, while Nedjma had known no rivals until Marguerite became involved in Lakhdar's life.

Having shot Marguerite's father, Hassan suggests to Nedjma the possibility that she might be jealous of Marguerite. Nedjma replies that because of Marguerite's involvement in their cause, despite the killing of her father, the rivalry between Lakhdar and Mustapha has been forgotten:

HASSEAN: Tu as tort de la détester. Ce n'est qu'une étrangère, simple fille dépaysée, désœuvrée, réduite à la vie de caserne, étouffée par l'esprit de caste auprès d'un père sans pitié. Sa solitude l'a jetée parmi nous comme une somnambule. Elle passe à la jeunesse comme on passe à l'ennemi, marchant sur son propre sang, sans connaître ceux dont elle choisit le camp, tirée de sa réclusion par un de ces coups de sort...

NEDJMA (maussade): Peu m'importe.

HASSEAN: N'es-tu pas jalouse?

NEDJMA: Allons, tu es un âne, avec ton revolver... N'as-tu pas remarqué? Devant moi, Lakhdar et Mustapha se haïssaient. Face à cette Française, leur amitié s'est renouée.

HASSEAN: Ainsi la jalousie d'amour cède à la fraternité des armes. (Le Cadavre encerclé, pp. 42-43).

The addition of one feminine player has balanced the tensions of play at the sexual level that existed when Nedjma provided the sole target. Consequently, the revolutionary quest will run more smoothly—the quest for collective identity prevails with the seeking of individual gain forgotten.

Nevertheless, the first half of Les Ancêtres redoublent de férocité centers on Mustapha and Hassan's quest for Nedjma. They had set out after Lakhdar's death at the end of Le Cadavre encerclé. Their goal:
"le ravin de la femme sauvage," where in this personification Nedjma prepares a feminine army to attack the enemy, since, as the choir of women states:

Nous sommes seules  
Les hommes sont en guerre  
Tous à la guerre, ou en prison ou en exil!  

(Le Polygone étoilé, p. 132).

Though the play for Nedjma may appear to be antagonistic, the game ultimately unites the protagonists, who transcend the goal of personal gain for the revolutionary cause. In the playing they are able to forget themselves. These lines from Le Polygone étoilé sum up Nedjma's paradoxical divisive and unifying nature:

Une seule femme nous occupe  
Et son absence nous réunit  
Et sa présence nous divise.

(Le Polygone étoilé, p. 147).

The same passage also compares the contest with both a boxing match and a pilgrimage, an antagonistic struggle and a mystical journey:

«Même en nous séparant à la sortie du village, nous avions tous les deux dans l'idée ce pèlerinage calamiteux, mais nous avions besoin d'une pause dos à dos comme des boxeurs, nous ne supportions plus le corps à corps, accrochés, prêts aux coups bas et aux coups de tête, alors Rachid a mis fin à ce match amical, tel un arbitre écoeuré, il a dit, nous laissant le champ libre: Je vais à Constantine. Et moi j'ai agi comme un fils de putain en répliquant à Rachid: Je t'accompagne jusqu'à Bône. Oui, je voulais déjà devancer Mustapha, tout en ayant l'air de baisser la garde, mais en prononçant le mot Bône; le lieu de championnat, je l'avais provoqué, rejeté dans les cordes, sachant qu'il reviendrait à la charge, qu'il attendait la fin du round pour savoir s'il avait bien encaissé, me laissait prendre l'avantage et feignait l'abandon, m'embrassait, me regardait partir le poing levé dans les talons de l'arbitre--notre public grouillant au fond de nous, dans une rumeur lointaine de tribune décontenancée--sans douter de la remontée prochaine sur le ring.»

(Le Polygone étoilé, p. 147).

In Nedjma five terse lines serve to evoke the same scene as the above.
As was the case in early childhood descriptions, once again Le Polygone étoilé waxes poetic. In the text quoted above Kateb develops the simile of boxers into an extended metaphor. Lakhdar analyzes his and Mustapha's moves in terms of two boxers, Rachid serving as referee. A psychological description forms the conclusion, as Lakhdar refers to the psyche as "notre public grouillant au fond de nous," the multiplicity of voices which make up the personality.

In addition to depicting the agonistic form of play which is the athletic challenge of the boxing match, Le Polygone étoilé text presents the high form of the contest, the quest which is a pilgrimage. The text equates the boxing match with a "pèlerinage calamiteux." Many of Kateb's characters undertake pilgrimages, and none of them come to completion. In Les Ancêtres redoublent de férociété Hassan and Mustapha make a pilgrimage to the dwelling place of "la femme sauvage." Nedjma, Lella Fatma, a fortune teller and other women leave Bône seeking patronage at a marabout's tomb, leaving the villa "chargées de cierges et de pâtisseries qu'elles espéraient faire admettre à un célèbre saint sur sa tombe, dans un douar des environs" (Nedjma, p. 243). Nedjma ends her participation in the pilgrimage early, returning home when she becomes bored.

Si Mokhtar's pilgrimage to Mecca is related to a desire to be the acknowledged father of Nedjma so that he can die knowing that he has a stake in immortality through her. Just as he goes no further than Djedda, the male protagonists on the hunt or quest for Nedjma never attain the goal of their pilgrimage.

A quest for glory, the theatrical arts and the use of mental games or fantasy all converge in the moments when each male protagonist in
**Nedjma** meets the femme fatale for the first time. Each sees the game that he plays in a particular light, according to his unique personality.

Lakhdar comes to Bône with a letter of introduction to his father's sister Lella Fatma, and lives in the same house as his aunt, Nedjma and her husband Kamel. In the scene where Lakhdar meets Nedjma, the rivalry between Mourad and Lakhdar again surfaces. When Mourad discovers Lakhdar outside a window of the villa before Lakhdar has met his aunt, cousin, or brother, he believes him to be an intruder. The laconic sentences describing the scene underline the tension in the air, as before a fight.

Le regard de Mourad se charge.
Il n'avance plus.
Le vagabond ne descend pas de la fenêtre.
Il a ouvert son couteau et ajusté le cran.
Mourad et le voyageur sont nez à nez.  
(Nedjma, p. 85).

The moment of revelation arrives when Mourad questions Lakhdar—Lakhdar speaks first to Nedjma, saying that they are cousins, and that he and "Mourad" have the same father. When they realize they are brothers, Mourad embraces Lakhdar, "malgré leur répulsion commune" (Nedjma, p. 86). Lakhdar only tersely expresses his first mental impressions of Nedjma, as Lella Fatma takes him aside to catch up on family news. But Nedjma has already captured his imagination. "Nedjma paraît sur le seuil. Son regard égaré réflète une joie gamine, curieuse, sans inquiétude" (Nedjma, p. 86). Later in the book, Lakhdar reveals the idealized status with which he endows Nedjma when he first lives in her midst:

Nedjma pousse délicatement la porte, en pyjama; la soie s'accroche à la poitrine déployée; elle borde Lakhdar!

«Une femme pareille a quitté son lit pour moi, » jubile un squelette au tricot sale : Casanova ou Lakhdar?
Le premier salon qu'il connaisse : chambre aux tentures écarlates, cuivres qui auraient leur place à la
Dazzled by his cousin, Lakhdar feels out of place in her extraordinary surroundings. Yet Lakhdar has become "l'amoureux," in the narrator's words; in this scene he demonstrates flirtation, a form of representational play, in his relationship with Nedjma:

—Il est réveillé! Votre déjeuner, monsieur l'agitateur...
Nedjma parle en français. Lakhdar fait jouer ses muscles hors des couvertures, coquetterie qui n'échappe guère à la mutine. Faire sauter ce pantalon de coutil à la dynamite!
—Tu ne racontres pas comment ils t'ont arrêté?
—Paraît que je suis un émeutier.
Aussitôt Lakhdar juge sa réponse présomptueuse; une atroce tactique s'impose à l'amoureux: fermer sa gueule.

(Nedjma, p. 240).

In this playful exchange of words, each actor influences his spectator, for Nedjma's mention of the term "agitateur" in reference to Lakhdar's role in the May 8 demonstrations elicits his show of muscles. Then Lakhdar consciously decides to play the strong, silent type. Nedjma, drawn into his play, does not fail to react. Indeed, the narrator calls her "la mutine," which can carry much the same meaning as the two terms used for Lakhdar, "l'agitateur" and "l'émeutier." Obviously, the linguistic interplay between the two characters' qualifying epithets underlies similarities in their natures and accordingly the potential for serious play between them. This interpretation finds support in the Nedjma material: Lakhdar fathers Nedjma's child.

Mustapha encounters Nedjma just prior to Lakhdar's arrival. After shopping, Nedjma accepts Mustapha's services carrying her packages—-he
works as a "commissionnaire" at the time. Gazing at her on the bus, Mustapha considers Nedjma "l'apparition." The narrator playfully compares his racing heart with an airplane engine:

L'apparition s'étaie, en vacillant, et le commissionnaire pèse sur son siège, comme pour retenir le véhicule; dupe de l'intensité qui fait vibrer sa poitrine à la façon d'un moteur, le commissionnaire craint-il de s'envoler pour atterrir auprès d'elle?

(Nedjma, p. 64).

Rachid shares Mustapha's view, for when he first meets Nedjma, he feels that he must be gazing at an illusion and indeed does project fantasies onto her presence:

... la chimère se mit à me sourire dans sa somptuosité inconnue, avec des formes et dimensions de chimère, semblant personifier la ville d'enfant : l'ancien monde qui m'enchantait comme un fondouk ou une belle pharmacie, utopique univers de sultanes sans sultans, de femmes sans patrie, sans demeure, sans autre demeure du moins que le monde aux tentures sombres des princes et des brigands... son visage, ses riches vêtements, sa chevelure nouée de soie pourpre faisaient à présent un halo ruisselant d'ombre, plein de regards perdus... (my emphasis, Nedjma, pp. 108-109).

Whether from the interdiction coming from Si Mokhtar, Nedjma's presumed father, from his inner block against play, or perhaps from the spell whose power paralyzes him, Rachid limits his actions to the mental sphere. The images which he produces range from comparisons with a marvelous city to the fabulous past of one thousand and one nights, or a dark halo reminiscent of the black Nervalian sun. The polarity of light and dark has already been associated with the personality of Rachid, who as an infant became aware of the play of darkness and light in his enclosed cradle. In Le Cadavre encerclé, Lakhdar evokes the same "ville d'enfant" in terms of the polarity of young and old: "la ville toujours jeune, en fête au bord des ruines" (p. 29). Even the young city engages in play,
and creative forces rise like the phoenix from the ruins of the old city. Lakhdar evidently equates the city with the persons living in it, the ruins with the spirit of the ancestors.

After Rachid had met Nedjma for the first time, the old man Si Mokhtar, the presumed father of Nedjma, sees the spell into which Rachid appears to be cast, and advises him: «Tu as rêvé... Reste tranquille. Si tu la retrouvais, tu serais bafoué, berné, trahi. Reste tranquille.» (Nedjma, p. 110). By insiting on the fact that Rachid's idea of Nedjma is based upon fantasy, the old man underlines the divorce between reality and illusion for Rachid.

Rachid's involvement in the abduction of Nedjma according to Si Mokhtar's plans might appear to contradict his inability to play. He and the old brigand do succeed in capturing the prize, if only temporarily. Nedjma offers herself, a willing trophy, since she has grown unhappy with her husband Kamel. Furthermore, "le rapt n'avait guère fait scandale" (Nedjma, p. 136) because Rachid and Nedjma were more or less from the same family. Si Mokhtar had engineered the kidnapping as part of his dream to restore the wholeness of the decimated and scattered tribe. Settled into the ancestral lands, the trio feels as if the dream were about to come true:

Il faut dire que nous étions tous les trois, enfin! dans la période de repos que nous avions toujours souhaitée, depuis des années de perpétuel exil, de séparation, de dur labeur, ou d'inaction et de débauche; enfin nous retrouvions les derniers hectares de la tribu, la dernière chaumière (nos parents vivaient toujours sous la tente et nous avaient isolés là non sans mépris, nous dont les pères s'étaient laissés tromper par les Français en quittant le Mont des Jumelles pour les cités des conquérants); cependant, on nous avait accueillis, et les liens de sang se renouaient peu à peu... (Nedjma, p. 135).
Rachid, however, demonstrates attitudes consistent with his development. He shows himself incapable of conquering Nedjma through love play or sexually, and of protecting her as his prize. In fact, Nedjma rejects his attempts at charming her by playing the lute, asking him not to play when he first does. She complains that it reminds her of her husband. Just as Rachid the child was limited to fantasizing in the impasse, Rachid's failure to charm Nedjma drives him to confine his need for play to the realm of fantasy.

Chaperoning them on the journey back to the ancestral land, the "Nadhor," Si Mokhtar (accounting for the possibility that they may be brother and sister) had forbidden Rachid to marry Nedjma. Since he cannot possess her physically, Rachid chooses two means of play in order to channel the energies of his passion for Nedjma. Rachid accompanies Si Mokhtar, the former on the lute, the latter on the tam-tam: "...je redoublai de zèle: des notes bêtes et dures me venaient, pareilles aux larmes qui bouillonnaient à la vue de l'amante inaccessible et de son père dont la folie me paraissait de plus en plus évidente..." (Nedjma, p. 136). In addition to the use of music as play, Rachid uses the hallucinogen hashish to escape the logical framework in which he is prohibited from possessing Nedjma, and to substitute for the frustrated physical pleasure, a hallucinogenically induced rapture. Within this experience, similar to the Rimbalidan "dérèglement (ordonné) de tous les sens," Rachid attempts to take possession of Nedjma through a virtuoso description of her. In his mind he "vanquishes," by virtue of superior artistic abilities in depicting her, the black tribal guardian whom he imagines to be his rival.

When their music stops and a thunderstorm passes, Si Mokhtar falls asleep, and Rachid follows Nedjma outside of their hut. While
Nedjma bathes in a copper cauldron, Rachid's poetry captures her charms:

Je contemplais les deux aisselles qui sont pour tout l'été noirceur perlée, vain secret de femme dangereusement découvert : et les seins de Nedjma, en leur ardente poussée, révolution de corps qui s'aiguise sous le soleil masculin, ses seins que rien ne dissimulait, devaient tout leur prestige aux pudiques mouvements des bras, découvrant sous l'épaule cet inextricable, ce rare espace d'herbe en feu dont la vue suffit à troubler, dont l'odeur toujours sublimée contient tout le philtre, tout le secret, toute Nedjma pour qui l'a respirée, pour qui ses bras se sont ouverts.

(Nedjma, p. 137).

Rachid endows even Nedjma's underarm hair with potent, vegetative and magical beauty and implicitly compares the "herbe en feu" of the reddish hair to the weed which he has been smoking and which has unlocked his fantasies around Nedjma. Like the hallucinogenic state, Rachid in his passion for Nedjma can enjoy this moment but for a limited time:

Baigne-toi, Nedjma, je te promets de ne pas céder à la tristesse quand ton charme sera dissous, car il n'est point d'attributs de ta beauté qui ne m'aient rendu l'eau cent fois plus chère; ce n'est pas la fantaisie qui me fait éprouver cette immense affection pour un chaudron. J'aime aveuglément l'objet sans mémoire où se chamaillent les derniers mânes de mes amours. Plaise au ciel que tu sortes lavée de l'encre grise que seule ma nature de lézard imprime injustement dans ta peau! Jamais amant ne fut ainsi acculé jusqu'à désirer la dissolution de tes charmes...86

(Nedjma, p. 139).

Within his monologue which at moments reaches the heights of lyrical poetry, Rachid marks the passage from rational experience to fantasy by describing a fig tree in hallucinatory imagery. He sees it swelling ("grossir") under the effect of the heat, perhaps in an implicit comparison with Nedjma's breasts whose roundness ("révolution de corps") he describes as a function of the masculine sun: ". . . s'aiguise sous le soleil masculin." The text maintains a dreamlike state with images of speculation and uncertainty,87 the words, "il me semblait" appearing twice, with "peut-être. . . voyait-il," and a series of verbs in the
conditional tense. These terms of vagueness evoke the possibilities which Rachid imagines for Nedjma's actions with respect to the black man whom he only believes he sees. Other terms underline lack of certainty: "semblaient," "je faillais attribuer mes alarmes à la pipe de haschich éteinte une fois de plus," "pouvait. . .ne pas être," "'Ou bien. . .
or bien. . .," "un verger trop chargé dont je me sentais obscurément gardien," "une situation indéfinissable" (my emphasis, Nedjma, pp. 136-137).

Aware of play between levels of reality, Rachid realizes that the black man is an imaginary rival. Nevertheless he imagines him to be a rival in a serious manner:

. . .le nègre. . .pouvait s'avérer ne pas être un rival, ni même un esthète capable d'apprécier le tableau. . . Mais comment tirer vengeance d'un rival imaginaire, alors que je me savais plus imaginatif encore que le nègre, moi qui suvais la scène par trois perspectives, alors que ni Nedjma ni le nègre semblaient exister l'un pour l'autre, sauf erreur de ma part...

(Nedjma, p. 137).

Rachid's poetic efforts combine the goal of representing something and that of representing it best; they therefore conform to Huizinga's definition of one high form of play as "a contest for the best representation of something," and combine representational and agonistic play in one. Though Rachid's superiority in poetic skill does not bodily win him Nedjma, the reader is capable of appreciating his poetry, and the reader is "won." Moreover, the text far from supports the tribe's condemnation of the "mâles vagabonds" of the tribe--Rachid and Si Mokhtar--whom they consider to be impotent musicians, drinkers and hashish-smoking buffoons. The tribal representative says to them: "Il n'y a pas de haschich ici, pas de vin, et nul n'appréciera votre musique. . . . Keblout a dit de ne protéger que ses filles. Quant aux mâles vagabonds, dit l'ancêtre Keblout, qu'ils vivent en sauvages, par monts et par vaux, eux qui n'ont pas défendu leur terre..." (Nedjma, pp. 148, 151). Nedjma later escapes
the tribe which pretends to protect her. Its strict adherence to tradi-
tion gives it no more power than Rachid's ineffectual play and poetic
creation gave him. Nonetheless, Rachid's powers may have, we repeat,
been appreciated by the reader, and he has captured Nedjma's meaning for
us.

The pursuit of Nedjma as Mourad describes it in *Le Polygone
étoilé* suggests a game or quest for self-knowledge. In stating that
he desired the Nedjma of childhood, Mourad implies that by preserving
her in that state he would retain his own childlike spirit. He reacts
to the favor which Nedjma bestows upon her Corsican suitor, Marc:

...je l'aimais, tout en étant pour elle un cousin et un
frère, selon nos traditions. ...

---...je ne luttais plus pour moi, pour la reprendre
mais uniquement pour elle, par attachement à son destin,
car nous avions grandi ensemble, et la seule Nedjma que je
voulais garder était celle de l'enfance. Mais je perdis
tout à la fois. Je n'avais plus l'initiative. En tolérant
une intrusion, j'avais sapé moi-même le rempart que je
voulais être. Je ne saurais dire à présent combien dura
cette période où elle m'échappa. Je fus conscient de ma
defaîte, bien avant l'heure de l'explication.

(*Le Polygone étoilé*, pp. 154-155).

From the simplicity of the phrase, "je l'aimais," Mourad appears to be
the character whose love for Nedjma goes the deepest. His knowledge of
her, from growing up together, makes this love possible. His silence,
relative to the other characters describing their sudden infatuation for
Nedjma, also gives his love more credence. Yet he recognizes his human
limitations and her rights. Stating that because he had allowed the
first intruder to whom Nedjma feels attracted (Marc), Mourad accepts his
own defeat. At the same time, he recognizes that the child whom he sought
no longer exists. She has left the child behind and repressed her fierce
innocence beneath illusions concerning "love" learned from the adult
world. Mourad describes the artificial atmosphere which Nedjma created when recovering from her rift with Marc:


More than any other character, Mourad recognizes the roles which Nedjma begins to play so well at the end of her childhood. He refuses, however, to play according to the new sets of rules that she imposes.

Nedjma's involvement in representational play can be viewed from two perspectives. First, the other characters imagine that she fills certain roles which they define. For instance, the rivals for her attention see her in many lights—as she evades their grasp, their imaginations supply them with protean fantasies of her. Secondly, Nedjma casts herself into numerous roles for the benefit of others. Within a culture where a woman remains closely guarded within the family if not within the walls of the house and is given little responsibility beyond housekeeping and bearing and educating children, theatrical play can provide her a means of escape from the narrow role to which she is condemned. Either playing roles other than those which are culturally prescribed, or taking poses in relationship to her expected role, theatricality can liberate her from restraints. This is especially so in Nedjma's case, as we see that since her girlhood she desires independence strongly and refuses to fill expected female roles.

In addition to evoking Algeria's demographic heritage from Andalousia, the phrase, "Nedjma l'Andalouse" (Nedjma, p. 178), especially
by its structure suggests a comparison between Nedjma and an actress in one of her roles. In Islamic cultures an actress's career is followed closely by her admirers, who identify her with her roles. Further, one meaning of her Arabic name, star, is the term popularly used in many languages for a successful actor or actress. Indeed, her appearances and the personifications given her by her admirers proliferate. Some are enumerated in the poem, "La Rose de Blida":

Amante disputée
da femme voilée de la terrasse
déesse guerrière
La libertine ramenée au Nadhor
L'introuvable amnésique de l'île des lotophages
La Mauresque mise aux enchères
A coups de feu

Et la fleur de poussière dans l'ombre du fondouk
Enfin la femme sauvage sacrifiant son fils unique.

In these lines, roles into which she is cast from without include disputed lover, goddess of war, the veiled woman on the terrace, the stranger in the clinic, the libertine brought back to the ancestral lands, the unreachable amnesiac of the island of lotus-eaters, the Mauresque auctioned off by gunshots. The poem adds "fleur de poussière"—slang for hashish—suggesting Nedjma's power to unleash fantasy in those who see her. Finally, it evokes the wild woman appearing in the plays. The poet's list may be seen as virtuoso play on the extravagant number of images into which he can portray Nedjma, but in any case, the poem does evoke a number of the actual roles in which Nedjma is seen in Kateb Yacine's works.

Nedjma's suitors often compare her with the gazelle. Though the comparison of a woman with a gazelle constitutes a cliché in Algerian culture, the comparison is appropriate and meaningful here, not only to
complete the hunt metaphor describing the quest for Nedjma, but also to express her beauty, rarity, wildness, swiftness of foot and role as prey:

Je n'avais jamais vu pareille femme à Constantine, aussi élégante, aussi sauvage, en son incroyable maintien de gazelle; on eût dit que la clinique était un piège, et que la prestigieuse femelle était sur le point de s'abattre sur ses fines jambes faites pour la piste. . .

(Nedjma, pp. 106-107).

A confirmation of Nedjma's legendary beauty, made by a disinterested party, an écrivain public, can be found in Nedjma. He speaks in these words of his first encounter with her:

. . .le jour où il vit Nedjma d'assez près, pour la première fois, il ne put se défendre d'un choc au coeur. Il existe des femmes capables d'électriser la rumeur publique; ce sont des buses, il est vrai, et même des chouettes, dans leur fausse solitude de minuit; Nedjma n'est que le pépin du verger, l'avant-goût de déboire, un parfum de citron...

Un parfum de citron et de premier jasmin afflue avec le délire de la convalescente mer, encore blanche, hivernale; mais toute la ville s'accroche à la vivacité des feuillages, comme emportée par la brise, aux approches du printemps.

(Nedjma, p. 84).

The last paragraph of the passage demonstrates how the text expands a realistic description of the character of Nedjma into a symbol or symbols—here her power of stimulating the senses and imagination of those around her is implicitly compared to the spring fragrances of flowers and the liveliness of foliage, symbolizing the powers of nature.

With a dazzled audience of "mégères" (shrews) at the Moorish baths, Nedjma appears in multiple feminine roles. Her "présence" transforms the setting into an ideal precolonial age:

Mais les mégères émerveillées pouvaient aussi la voir au sortir du bain maure, fraîche et brûlante sous un voile blanc troussé à l'algeroise, ou clair et chaud, largement ouvert, à la tunisienne, ou d'un noir imposant, comme on le porte à Bône, Constantine ou Sétif, ou bleu foncé,
à la maghrébine, qu'elle arborait souvent à visage découvert (d'autres fois se masquant d'un transparent triangle) et qui s'attachait à ses formes, signalant sa démarche, son moindre mouvement, par un frisson de soie, apparition inespérée des Mille et Une Nuits. Sa seule présence, en de pareils moments, niant le siècle colonial, ressuscitait les vieilles murailles dont il ne restait plus qu'une mosquée sur la mer.

(Le Polygone étoilé, p. 153).

This passage describes what Rachid evokes of Nedjma in one work, in calling her a Salammô (Nedjma, pp. 176-177).

Even as a child Nedjma was cast into a goddess role. An image of her free-wheeling independence—the unusual comparison of her long legs with carriage wheels—suggests the innocence and sincerity of a child, personality traits soon to be obscured beneath the conscious use of representational play:

Toute petite, Nedjma est très brune, presque noire; c'est de la chair en barre, nerfs tendus, solidement charpentée, de taille étroite, des jambes longues qui lui donnent, quand elle court, l'apparence des calèches hautes sur roues qui virent de droite et de gauche sans dévier de leurs chemins; vaste de ce visage de petite fille!

(Nedjma, p. 78).

We now turn to the roles which Nedjma consciously plays. Nedjma's first and "eternal" game is the conscious use of her attractiveness in order to manipulate those around her:

... l'éternel jeu de Nedjma est de réduire sa robe au minimum, en des poses acrobatiques d'autruche enhardie par la solitude. ...

(Nedjma, p. 78).

After she begins school, she resorts to using tears as a forceful representational ploy; by puberty her theatrical talents are well-developed:

... la féminité de Nedjma est ailleurs; le premier mois de l'école, elle pleure chaque matin; elle bat tous les enfants qui l'approchent; elle ne veut pas s'instruire avant d'apprendre à nager; à douze ans, elle dissimule
ses seins douloureux comme des clous, gonflés de l'amère précocité des citrons verts; elle n'est toujours pas domptée; les yeux perdent cependant de leur feu insensé; brusque, câline et rare Nedjma! Elle nage seule, rêve et lit dans les coins obscurs, amazone de débarras, vierge en retraite, Cendrillon au soulier brodé de fil de fer; le regard s'enrichit de secrètes nuances; jeux d'enfant, dessin et mouvement des sourcils, répertoire de pleureuse, d'almée ou de gamine?

(my emphasis, *Nedjma*, p. 78).

At the age of twelve, Nedjma the eternal actress conceals her breasts, rejecting the traditional feminine role which they symbolize, and refusing the submission which the culture expects of a female. Instead, she retreats into solitary reading and dreaming, above all sharpening her dramatic skills—her facial expressions become a new form of childhood play which provides her with a repertory of poses. The narrator cannot be certain, from the form and motion of her eyebrows, whether the *jeux d'enfant* that she is playing are the role of "pleureuse," "almée" or "gamine"—mourner, actress or hussy. As Mourad has observed, the narrator notices that Nedjma loses some of the fire in her child's eyes, when her eyes are consciously used to produce an illusion for the observer. Nevertheless, much of the spirit remains, conveyed through her rosy cheeks: "...le sang, sous les joues duveteuses, parle vite et fort, trahissant les énigmes du regard" (*Nedjma*, p. 79).

The young married woman refuses to act pleased for her husband's sake:

*Invisible consumption du zénith. Ce matin, Nedjma s'est levée tout endolorie; elle n'a pas fait honneur aux aubergines mijotées de Lella Fatma; Kamel est rentré sans faire de bruit, le coeur lourd de journaux invendus et de tabac vendu à crédit! Contenant sa faim, l'homme décroche le luth; il tente de s'associer au spleen conjugal. Nedjma s'enfuit au salon, les sourcils froncés. Le musicien sent fondre son talent dans la solitude; il raccroche le luth; le calme de Kamel ne fait que l'affubler du masque de cruauté que Nedjma compose à qui ne tombe pas dans son*
When Mustapha first sees her, Nedjma has dressed as the emancipated woman that she would like to be, in a costume which hides her breasts, but which allows her unveiled face to show all its expressiveness:

Elle était revêtue d'une ample cagoule de soie bleu pâle, comme en portent depuis peu les Marocaines émancipées; cagoules grotesques; elles escamotent la poitrine, la taille, les hanches tombent tout d'une pièce aux chevilles; pour un peu, elles couvriraient les jambelets d'or massif (la cliente en portait un très fin et très lourd)... Ces cagoules dernier cri ne sont qu'un prétexte pour dégager le visage, en couvrant le corps d'un rempart uniforme, afin de ne pas donner prise aux sarcasmes des puritains... Elle m'a parlé en français. Désir de couper les ponts...

(Nedjma, p. 72).

We learn that Nedjma had offered herself in marriage to her cousin Mourad if the latter would take her to Algiers, where she could realize her dreams of emancipation (Nedjma, p. 184). She thus poses as his intended in order to have her way.

Nedjma's powers to charm spectators are implicit in this line from the poetic passage in the form of two columns of stanzas in Le Polygone étoilé:

Médusés

A la belle étoile

(p. 146).

Many times the word "game" or "play" describes her actions: "Nedjma menant à bonne fin son jeu de reine fugace et sans espoir..." (Nedjma, p. 187); "...s'allumaient les jeux déjà ravageurs de la Vestale sacrifiée en ses plus rares parures" (Nedjma, p. 185); "Et je découvris à Bône l'inconnue qui s'était jouée de moi..." (Nedjma, p. 176); "elle
les voyait réunis avec la même ferveur illusoire que des jouets rajeunis. . ." (Le Polygone étoilé, p. 160); "ses jeux taciturnes" (Le Polygone étoilé, p. 185).

Although Lakhdar becomes her lover, Nedjma allows each of the rivals for her favors to believe that she preferred him: "Ce malentendu leur donnait tous les courages" (Le Cadavre encerclé, p. 31). This misunderstanding fires their emotions and helps them in their revolutionary struggle.

The role of Nedjma as gazelle appears from both perspectives in Mustapha's comment in Le Cadavre encerclé; Nedjma's own representational play conforms to the role into which her suitors cast her:

La feinte la plus subtile de la gazelle en fuite n'est souvent qu'une halte à portée de fusil.

(p. 21).

Mustapha makes this remark when Nedjma has left to seek out Lakhdar, who has been shot down in the repression at the beginning of the play. He refers to the pose which the deerlike animal makes, freezing instead of continuing its flight, thereby enticing the hunter. The term "feinte" underlines Nedjma's representational play, and her "halte" evokes her seductive actions. Another reference to Nedjma—gazelle marks the transition in the nature of her play as she grows up from a child into a woman.

Her innocent flirtation becomes cruelty:

L'incurable amnésie n'était que ruse d'enfant, c'est aux gazelles qu'appartiennent les délectations de la cruauté, que d'amoureux et que d'amour! La victime incomprenue soupirait après les sacrificateurs qu'en sa candeur elle avait retenus, prisonnière de ses sourires; ils ne songeait qu'à se battre pour elle, qui reçut la plupart des coups; c'était sa honte et son orgueil, cette innocente séduction subitement aggravée, prenant pour elle trop de sens, et l'arrachant à sa fraîcheur, à sa pénombre et à son voile d'épouse mal enlevée, lui donnant à choisir parmi frères et cousins celui qui déposerait, non plus à ses pieds, mais au plus vif de ses entrailles, la rançon, la dot, l'impôt
d'une enfance à revivre de l'autre côté du décor; les renoncements, les alarmes, les deuils de la maternité...

(Le Polygone étoilé, p. 160).

The second sentence above describes the play in which Nedjma engages as reciprocal play, expressed in terms of the ritual pair, victim and sacrificers. Nedjma candidly responds to her suitors, but in doing so loses her innocence. Nedjma becomes her own victim, "prisonnière," because her "sourires"—smiles and facial expressions for the benefit of her audience—falsify her own sense of self.

Another passage in Le Polygone étoilé conveys the paradox of "Nedjma la conquérante. . .victime d'un mariage forcé" (Le Polygone étoilé, p. 156):

Les charmes de Nedjma, filtrés dans la solitude, l'avaient elle-même ligotée, réduite à la contemplation de sa beauté captive.

(Nedjma, p. 185).

Nedjma makes a conscious decision to return the power play inherent in the forced marriage, but in doing so accepts to play with the same rules and remains bound within the constraints of the prisoner-guard relationship:

Ils m'ont isolée pour mieux me vaincre, isolée en me mariant... Puisqu'ils m'aient je les garde dans ma prison... A la longue, c'est la prisonnière qui décide...

(Nedjma, p. 67).

Although her marriage curtails Nedjma's dreams of emancipation, she conducts herself as she pleases within her home, with her cousins. The last scene in Nedjma where the heroine appears demonstrates the liberties which she exercised in this milieu. She had returned from the aborted pilgrimage (see our p. 95), finding her cousins having dinner at her villa. Taking Lakhdar by the hand, she dances in the direction of her "chambre nuptiale," having singled him out to fulfill her amorous impulses:
Elle n'entra pas, dansa en direction de la chambre nuptiale, entraînant gaîment Lakhdar par la main... L'étroite fut d'une intensité jamais atteinte; Nedjma pleurait.

(Nedjma, p. 244).

Once again, Nedjma uses childish tears in representational play. In this scene, Nedjma's opened purse reveals a photo of the Corsican named Marc on her little mirror. Lakhdar, his jealousy aroused, burns the photo. Then Nedjma, dramatically "rouge et sinistre" (p. 245), leaves the bedroom.

Believing Nedjma to be with Mourad, Lakhdar locks her into the salon, thereby putting her to the test. When Mourad returns to the villa "ivre mort," Lakhdar realizes that Nedjma is alone with Mustapha, his greatest friend and rival. The rules of the game concerning his own glory and power over Nedjma backfire on him. Lakhdar feels his sense of insecurity, and the text again uses the image structure of play following the pain of a fall. Lakhdar sings following the sting of realization:

Les images perçaient comme des clous. Lakhdar marcha, la clé en main, à l'écoute du vent et de la haine. Il chantait.

(p. 246).

Lakhdar's song represents a solitary form of play. Song departs from everyday spoken language and imparts a release from tension to the singer. Kateb Yacine's works contain numerous instances of song, for example the one already quoted in Chapter I, "Mère, le mur est haut..."91

Nedjma's next chronological appearance in Kateb Yacine's Le Seuil works is her revolutionary-mistress role in Le Cadavre encerclé.92 At the beginning of the play she engages in representational play in an attempt to entice Lakhdar to forget his dangerous involvement in the revolution. At the play's end she begins to embody the "Femme Sauvage."

Just as Mustapha's mother goes insane as a result of her son's imprison-
ment, Nedjma's sanity, too, leaves her as a result of Lakhdar's death. She no longer controls others through her representational play, but falls victim to the tragic situation. Her maturity has been reached at a great cost to her.

We have seen how Kateb Yacine's adolescents evolve into young adults through the high forms of play. Their agonistic play ranges from a personal struggle to win a woman to a pilgrimage for personal worth or glory. Such contests most often result in no conclusive victor. Their culture having supplied them with a tradition of representational play in everyday affairs, the characters tap this resource in order to affirm their identities over against that of the dominating social members. On a solitary level, Rachid's play serves only to create more favorable fantasy environments. Mourad refuses to play Nedjma's games. Representational play provides Nedjma with avenues of escape from a restrictive traditional role, and yet her involvement in many roles backfires upon her, preventing her from self-knowledge. Others see themselves in fictitious dramas with Nedjma playing a role which they ascribe to her.

In many of these cases, however, the characters engage in the high forms of play in reaction to an untenable situation. They often use play as an escape route. Their maturity will arrive at the moment when they can exploit this creative ability on their own terms, and take an active role in the drama of their lives.
CHAPTER IV. ADULTHOOD: TRICKSTERS AND CREATORS

Maturity is defined at the end of the preceding chapter as the ability to exploit the creative aspects of play on one's own terms, and to take an active role in the drama of one's own life. Kateb's maturing characters reach this stage in varying degrees by their espousal of one serious application of play, that of becoming artists or creators. We will first look at two adult characters who have not been discussed in previous chapters, because the text does not detail their pre-adult existence. However, these characters serve both to define adulthood in Kateb's literary world and to influence the personalities of the younger characters. We will examine the kinship of these adults to the primordial trickster figure who has a double nature, both playful and serious. Finally, we will discuss how the adult stage of the developing characters is defined by the ability to create, especially verbally.

The two adults, Si Mokhtar and Nuage de fumée (the character is given no other name than this epithet applied to him by those who know him as a hashish-smoking popular philosopher often seen surrounded by a cloud of smoke), possess a double-faceted personality in which clowning alternates with dignified behavior. On the one hand, their actions appear amoral or immoral, and they constantly yet guilelessly violate their society's taboos; on the other, they assume on certain occasions the roles of teacher or prophet.
By virtue of their dual natures, they resemble the age-old literary figure of the trickster, called by Joseph Campbell the "chief mythological character of the paleolithic world of story." Elaborating on the trickster in his most archaic expressions, that of North American Indian folk tales, Paul Radin describes the trickster's basic ambivalence in these words:

Trickster is at one and the same time creator and destroyer, giver and negator, he who dupes others and who is always duped himself. He wills nothing consciously. At all times he is constrained to behave as he does from impulses over which he has no control. He knows neither good nor evil yet he is responsible for both. He possesses no values, moral or social, is at the mercy of his passions and appetites, yet through his actions all values come into being.

Both the deceiving and deceived qualities of the trickster coincide with the use of representational play in Kateb's trickster-like characters. A playful whim seems to guide many of their actions, resembling the trickster's lack of control. The creative quality of this perturbing behavior also appears in the positive sides of both Si Mokhtar and Nuage de fumée.

Already a septuagenarian at his appearance, Si Mokhtar has two natures, one desppicable and the other awesome. The narrative uses epithets for him almost as often as his name, and usually when speaking of his desppicable side: "le vieux brigand" (Nedjma, pp. 97, 100); "le vieux bandit" (Nedjma, pp. 97, 108, 181); "le vieux bandit et séducteur" (Nedjma, pp. 104-105); "le vieux diable" (Nedjma, pp. 106, 121); "le vieux gredin" (Nedjma, p. 110). Two other epithets evoke his taste for representational play: "le vieux bouffon" (Nedjma, p. 123) and "le cheikh en partance" (Nedjma, p. 112). On the serious side, Rachid calls
Si Mokhtar "le dernier philosophe de la famille" (Nedjma, p. 148) and the corresponding epithet appears in Le Polygone étoilé: "Si Mokhtar, pour ne pas dire le Mentor de Rachid" (my emphasis, p. 99). These epithets bestow a hyperbolic and almost mythological stature upon Si Mokhtar, "ce colosse septuagénaire" (Le Polygone..., p. 99). The phrases, "sa folle activité de proxénète et de mentor" (Nedjma, p. 106) and "le tuteur importun" (Nedjma, p. 99), capture his double personality. As the caricature of the "cheîkh en partance," "il est chargé de tant de pêchés qu'il respire une fiole d'éther pour se purifier." (Nedjma, p. 110). The following enumerative passage describes with Rabelaisian exuberance how his vitality is channeled amorally:

... lui qui fit le tour du monde, gagna l'Europe par la Turquie, faillit être lapidé en Arabie séoudite, fit la malabar à Bombay, dilapida son héritage à Marseille et Vichy, revint à Constantine, toujours aussi solide et pas encore ruiné, lui qui investit bien d'autres fortunes chez les femmes, les mauvais garçons, les hommes politiques, faisant et défaisant les mariages, les intrigues, remuant la ville de fond en comble pour reprendre l'argent perdu, toujours prêt à la banqueroute et à la bagarre, remplaçant rapidement ses fausses dents et ses habits dépareillés, mais ne quittant plus sa ville natale, n'ayant plus qu'une mère centenaire aussi alerte que lui, sans femme, sans métier, forçant les portes, vomissant dans les ascenseurs, oubliieux et impartial comme un patriarche, inventeur de sciences sans lendemain, plus érudit que les Ulémas, apprenant l'anglais dans la bouche d'un soldat, mais ne prononçant jamais un mot de français sans l'estropier comme par principe, colossal, poussef, voûté, musclé, nerveux, chauve, éloquent, batailleur, discret, sentimental, dépravé, retors, naïf, célèbre, mystérieux, pauvre, aristocratique, doctoral, paternal, brutal, fantaisiste, chausé d'espadrilles, de bottines, de pantoufles, de sandales, de souliers plats, vêtu de cachemire, de toile rayée, de soie, de tuniques trop courtes, de pantalons bouffants, de gilets de drap anglais, de chemises sans col, de pyjamas et de complets superposés, de burnous et de gabardines extorqués, de bonnets de laine, de turbans incomplets, couvert de rides, abondamment parfumé...

(Nedjma, p. 106).

While touring the world, he repeatedly got into mischief like the trickster. Careless with money, yet resourceful when he needed it for women, Si
Mokhtar had only his mother as best friend. While he lived like a pariah, he was "plus érudit que les Ulémas." The long enumeration of adjectives not only shows a bizarre mixture, "colossal, poussif...," but also reveals the protean nature of his personality—the roles he could portray and their corresponding array of costumes.

Assuming the role of Rachid's father, Si Mokhtar pays Rachid's debts and finds him work, in an attempt to compensate for having killed his father. As Rachid's mentor, he introduces him to many women and finally to Nedjma. As a teacher, he conveys to young men skills useful in perturbing the existing order: "aujourd'hui, tout en préparant son cours, il enseigne l'art du coup de tête à un groupe d'adolescents au torse nu. Beaucoup de spectateurs se sont offusqués" (Le Polygone étoilé, p. 100). For Rachid as well as for many children, Si Mokhtar had provided a bogey-man figure, the children fearing him while acting as if they loved him:

Il avait toujours fait partie de la ville idéale qui gît dans ma mémoire depuis l'âge imprécis de la circoncision, des évasions hors de chez nous, des premières semaines où Mme Clément m'avait donné une ardoise, c'était pour moi l'un des mânes de Constantine, et je ne le voyais pas vieillir, pas plus qu'il n'existe d'âge ni de visage définitif pour les Barberousse de l'histoire ou les Jupiter de la légende; j'avais toujours vécu à Constantine, avec les ogres et les sultanes, avec les locomotives de la gare inaccessible, et le spectre de Si Mokhtar. Il passait parfois devant chez nous; comme tous les enfants, je me précipitais alors sur ses pas, lui arrachant des sous, le suivant et lui jetant des pierres; il nous faisait peur, mais nous l'aimions avec la farouche dissimulation de l'enfance, et ne pouvions nous passer de lui; tous les proverbes, toutes les farces, toutes les tragédies étaient de Si Mokhtar; nul n'ignorait ce qu'il disait de la guerre, de la religion, de la mort, des femmes, de l'alcool, de la politique, de tous et de chacun, ce que Si Mokhtar avait fait ou pas fait, les gens qu'il combattait, ceux qu'il comblait de ses bienfaits.

(Nedjma, pp. 107-108).

This passage underlines his irascibility as well as his beneficence, and then summarizes his character's double nature with the words, "ce
que Si Mokhtar avait fait ou pas fait, les gens qu'il combattait, ceux qu'il comblait de ses bienfaits."

The words, "tous les proverbes, toutes les farces, toutes les tragédies étaient de Si Mokhtar," reveal that his positive side contains a poet vates or cult orator as Huizinga describes him in Homo ludens, linking play with poetry in the figure of the thulr of Old Norse literature:

The thulr sometimes appears as the speaker of liturgical formulae, sometimes as the performer in a sacred drama; sometimes as sacrificial priest, sometimes even as sorcerer. At other times he seems to be no more than a court-poet and orator, and his office no more than that of the scurra--buffoon or jester. The corresponding verb--thylja--means the reciting of religious texts, the practising of sorcery, or simply muttering. The thulr is the repository of all mythological knowledge and poetic lore. He is the wise old man who knows the people's history and tradition, who acts as spokesman at the festivities and can recite the pedigrees of the heroes and other worthies by heart. His special office is the competitive peroration and the wisdom-match. . . . All the above-mentioned characteristics fit in quite naturally with our picture of the archaic poet, whose function at all times was both sacred and literary. But, sacred or profane, his function is always rooted in a form of play.99

Si Mokhtar shares traits with both the farcical and the serious poet. In one scene, his participation in the May 8, 1945 demonstrations of Constantine, consists of the serious buffoonery of wearing a gag upon which he had written two original lines of poetry, "...deux vers de son invention que les passants gravèrent dans leur mémoire:"

Vive la France
Les Arabes silence!

(Nedjma, p. 156).

His act holds even the gendarmes spellbound ("médusés"). Both his verses and poetic sign and body language implement his power to charm his spectators.
Si Mokhtar later uses poetry and buffoonery in order to escape embarrassment or worse. When he decides that he will no longer continue to Mecca because Rachid does not have enough money to accompany him past Djeddah, he feigns distress while in customs, alledging that he had forgotten a moneybox ("cassette") on board ship.

Et Si Mokhtar fit un discours; planté devant le commandant qui s'approchait de lui, il le déclara en français, langue qui lui était familière. Les douaniers n'écoutaient pas; quant aux hommes d'équipage, ils se mirent à rire.

L'enterr'ment di firiti
i la cause di calamiti.

Et encore, d'une voix stridente:

Mon père Charlemagne
Ma mère Jeanne d'Arc.

Le commandant s'épanouit. Fut-il étonné d'entendre un hadj se référer à l'histoire de France? Préféra-t-il se tirer courtoisement d'une situation qui pouvait le couvrir de ridicule?

(Nedjma, pp. 121-122).

Si Mokhtar's emotional dramatization, complete with dramatic gestures, words and props, draws a varied response from his audience. The narrator hints that the spectators might sense an ambiguity in his behavior—is he ridiculous or insane? Following his plaintive prayer, Si Mokhtar pronounces two couplets, both from repeated discourse, or cliché. The first is a French proverb spoken with a marked Algerian native accent, an example of how he deformed French pronunciation on purpose. This saying furthermore carries serious meaning, and is an ironic message on
the representational illusion that Si Mokhtar is in the process of creating. Kateb Yacine's footnote (p. 122) gives the proper French: "L'enterrement des vérités/Est la cause des calamités." Si Mokhtar's final couplet recitation parodies the French schoolchild's history lesson which typically begins, "Nos ancêtres les Gaulois...," said to have been taught to Algerian children in the colony, and an absurdity on Algerian tongues that points out French cultural chauvinism and insensitivity to the Algerian heritage. The narrator speculates on the commander's polite reaction to Si Mokhtar's dramatization—his antics and recitations: placed in the difficult situation of deciding whether to take Si Mokhtar seriously, he opts to avoid a scene, and allows him and Rachid, who has been interpreting, to return to the ship.

Si Mokhtar has not finished, however. In order to obtain a bed, he feigns that the alleged box was stolen: "Le vieux bouffon s'agitait et simulait le désespoir" (Nedjma, p. 123). He becomes "ill" as a result, and he is then given a bed in the infirmary. Since the infirmary is rarely visited by an attendant, Rachid, too, can have a bed.

On the strictly serious side, Si Mokhtar, during a dramatic scene on the bridge of the ship leaving Djeddah, appears to go into a trance. Speaking in harmony with gusts of wind, he recites the legend of the Keblout tribe, their wanderings from Arabia to Spain and finally to the Maghreb, and their Algerian past up to their taking to the forest to elude for decades the French conquest (Nedjma, pp. 124-128). He recounts the dramatic tale from the conquest era in which a couple were found stabbed to death in the tribal mosque. Who they were and why they were murdered was never clear, but the French used the crime as the excuse for a punitive expedition. Six tribal leaders were executed; the telegram pardoning them arrived tragically late. Their sons, then too
young to take revenge, were then named "caïds" and "caïds d'office."
The French proscribed the tribal name and divided the families into four
groups, the culmination of the French "oeuvre de destruction" of this
family. One group was given lands on the other side of the Constantinois,
lands which were soon expropriated; the second group was given adminis-
trative posts, and a third the same, except that it made many marriages
with less proven families; finally, the fourth remained to guard the ruins
of the mosque and the little ancestral land remaining (pp. 126-128).
Sî Mokhtar's recitation captures Rachid's imagination to such
an extent that many years after Sî Mokhtar's death, in his deserter's

cell, Rachid dreams a continuation of the "rêvélations passionnées."
Rachid sees Sî Mokhtar telling how the history of Algeria is parallel to
that of the tribe and of his own life (Nedjma, pp. 128-129). According
to legend, the first Keblout, or the eponymic ancestor, was "un idéologue
et un artiste;" many subsequent generations included "Tolbas," wandering
students, musicians or poets (p. 125).

In a scene during the stay in the ancestral Nadhor, we see that
like Sî Mokhtar, Rachid plays music and produces poetry. Sî Mokhtar
can be viewed as a shaman or mentor for Rachid in these arts. Though
Sî Mokhtar's feet have been mysteriously wounded, and he has lost much
blood, he insists on playing more music (p. 142), and jokes about the
black man who had just startled Nedjma after her bath, saying, "Les nègres
sont des amis de Dieu, sans compter qu'ils jouent admirablement du tam-
tam" (Nedjma, p. 143). That night he arises, "en proie au démon de
l'éloquence" (p. 144). He delivers "un grand discours dans la langue
classique des ulémas" (p. 143). Once again both his laughing and serious
sides are manifest. Soon thereafter, he dies, having said, "Je ne suis
pas mécontent de moi" (p. 144). The inner harmony that he feels is not shared by Kateb's other adult characters. 100

Though Si Mokhtar dies without a generally recognized heir, he leaves not only an army of natural children, but more importantly, the effect of his contagious talents. Some time after his oration in the Nadhor, Rachid re-creates the saga of both the buffoon and philosopher and of their tribe. Si Mokhtar's words have left such a vivid impression that they surface in the normally taciturn Rachid, suffering the throes of malaria, and delirious:

Le chœur des femmes, les femmes séduites et délaissées, il ne croyait pas en avoir oublié une seule, ne passant sous silence que celles de notre propre famille, car Si Mokhtar descendait comme moi de l'ancêtre Keblout; il me le révélâ plus tard, alors que nous voguions ensemble sur la mer Rouge, après avoir faussé compagnie aux pèlerins de La Mecque... C'était bien avant notre dernier séjour à Bône, bien avant... Et le vieux brigand m'en avouait chaque fois un peu plus, mais je ne comprenais toujours pas cette bouffonne confession, bien qu'il m'eût déjà suggéré l'essentiel; propos de mythomane pris à son jeu, réduit à cracher la vérité par la matérialisation imprévue de ses mensonges: «...Ce qui m'échappe, me disait-il, c'est l'engeance, l'engeance vengeresse de toutes les amantes induites en erreur, femmes mariées dont j'étais le second époux juste le temps de bouleverser la chronologie du sang, pour abandonner un terrain de plus à la douteuse concurrence des deux lignées--celle de la tradition, de l'honneur, de la certitude, et l'autre, lignée d'arbre sec jamais sûr de se propager, mais partout vivace en dépit de son obscure origine...»

(Nedjma, p. 98).

Rachid, quoting Si Mokhtar, uses play terms to describe the latter's existence. By the nature of his multiple involvements in women, Si Mokhtar destroyed his chances for receiving recognition for fathering their children. Si Mokhtar's play is both representational--"bouffonne," "mythomane," "mensonge"--as well as agonistic--"pris à son jeu," "abandonner un terrain de plus à la douteuse concurrence. . . ." The remainder of Rachid's speech evokes the sterility and death which follow
the lost contest, and includes vegetative images, a dried-up tree without fruit, one without velvety lichen, denoting children (Nedjma, pp. 98-99).

Whether in buffoonery or in teaching, Si Mokhtar is a player and a poet at the same time. He fears that in his lifetime he has not successfully passed on "l'ancienne richesse sanguine," which may be taken as all the physical and moral sense of values commonly held by a family as essential to its sense of unity and worth. Because Si Mokhtar has raised none of his children, he fears the loss of the blood's vitality with his death. His spirit does survive, however, through his influence on Rachid's personality and by his blood-ties with Nedjma.

Nuage de fumée, the protagonist of La Poudre d'intelligence (in Le Cercle des représailles, 1959), shares some of Si Mokhtar's traits, namely the dual personality of buffoon and philosopher. In Nuage de fumée, however, the clown overshadows the philosopher. This is attributable to the fact that Nuage de fumée reflects a character of Maghrebian popular literature known as J'ha, the still thriving manifestation of the archaic trickster. Nuage de fumée appears as the ingenious simpleton in certain stock scenes to which he gives a new slant. Because of his J'ha kinship, the use of ruse in his personality receives emphasis. Ruse is the same as representational play intended to deceive. At the same time, Nuage de fumée's play is agonistic, in that he consciously uses his "tricks" in order to triumph over the usurpers of power and wealth.

On the negative side, Nuage de fumée's lack of values is manifested in his laziness, hypocrisy, thievery, drinking and smoking. He refuses to seek work when there is not even a pinch of salt in the house.
Unlike his wife Attika, he would rather close his eyes and eat wormy
dates than starve. Like the trickster he has no moral scruples, yet he
leads a charmed existence, or shows extreme cleverness in escaping diffi-
cult situations. By pure chance he is punished and later richly rewarded
by the Sultan within the same day. He plays tricks on the Cadi and the
Sultan by setting up illusions which work in his favor. In his major
coup, he passes off ordinary sand as a magic dust capable of bestowing
intelligence upon those who snuff it up.

Ultimately his games backfire on him; the leaders make him one
of them. When the play's farcical episodes seem in danger of repeating
themselves ad nauseam, Nuage de fumée becomes the tutor for the Sultan's
son. The play's last trickster gag is that of the deceiver deceived:
Nuage de fumée urinates into the prince's cradle, only to find that mean-
while the prince has soiled the rug.

Like Si Mokhtar, Nuage de fumée has a side that benefits society.
His antics first remind spectators, those both outside and within the
drama, of the power made accessible through play, and in the least provide
an outlet through cathartic laughter for the tensions felt by the oppressed.
Nuage de fumée may be credited for influencing the prince, who first
joins with and later dies in the revolutionary struggle against the
Sultan. Nuage de fumée had performed certain of his ruses as revolu-
tionary actions, a stance which is equally apparent in Si Mokhtar's role
as educator-perturber, particularly in Le Polygone étoilé.

If Nuage de fumée lacks the depth of character found in Si
Mokhtar, in that his play most often bases itself upon falsehood and
illusion, it is because his art of deception belongs to the J'ha tradi-
tion on which he is modeled. He disappears in the manner suggested by
his name, but his trickster spirit remains a constant for Kateb Yacine,
who will reincarnate him as needed. In an interview for French television, Kateb called Nuage de fumée a shadow figure, a sort of emblem for the leaders whom he admired for their sense of humor and closeness to everyday reality, and affirmed his intent to treat great figures humorously in order to humanize them.

The interest of Si Mokhtar and Nuage de fumée, however, remains secondary to that of the developing young characters. In teaching and perturbing, role-playing and mystifying, these two fringe-living adults influence the development of the characters' personalities, but they do not participate directly in the process. They do not evolve, but stand as images of unchanging ideas, among them the life-giving nature of creative play.

The adult trickster-like characters provide a model for the type of adult personality toward which Kateb's characters evolve. Within this adult personality, that which we call the verbal creator, childish play has been reconciled with serious ends. We have seen that the trickster is capable of making positive, creative contributions to society through apparently foolish and amoral play. In the trickster, as in the adult artist personality, the innovation of established norms is brought about through perturbing them. Si Mokhtar, sharing traits with the Old Norse poetic personification of the trickster, or thulr, provides the most significant model for Kateb's adult creators.

A significant indication of mature development is the commitment to a vocation. If only subconsciously, Kateb's characters consider the vocation of creator or artist to be the occupation par excellence. Many of their fellow Algerians are creators, in their own ways. One compatriot's artistry in crime is compared to a magician's skill: "L'art
des apparitions rapides et souveraines était compris dans ses fonctions" (Le Polygone étoilé, pp. 75-76). Artistic professionals mentioned in passing include singers, dancers, barbers, painters, orators or storytellers, and poets. We discussed the coiffeur Si Khelifa and Tayeb the painter in Chapter II. Certain characters display a sense of esthetics. For example, the character named "Tapage Nocturne," who "En matière d'art" is "intraitable," wishes to purge all of the Maghreb of the "faux artistes qui s'y prélassent," and the character "Pas de Chance" is "un ami des Lettres et des Arts" (Le Polygone... p. 130). Another, "Visage de Prison," manufactures a mandolin from objects found in his cell, and his audience—cellmates—are playfully called artists as well (Le Polygone... p. 137). Si Ammar Mauvais Temps, "esthète combatif," combines the two sides seen in Si Mokhtar, esthetic and immoral, and "avait déjà son orchestre, comme il avait sa maffia." His calling card reads, "Si Ammar, Artiste et Commerçant" (Le Polygone... p. 92). During the concentration camp scene of Le Polygone..., the collective narrators conduct a quest for a true artist on the mandolin:

En attendant des jours meilleurs, nous consacrons tout notre temps à la recherche d'un vrai joueur de mandoline.

(p. 130).

In the perspective of his preoccupation with artists, Kateb endows even the Keblout totem vulture with the vocation of sculptor. Calling the vulture's eating habits artistry, Kateb writes, "Le vautour noir et blanc se considère comme un artiste" (Les Ancêtres redoublent de férocité, p. 135), and he entitles a short prose work "La Sculpteur de squelettes," referring to the same ancestral vulture. The vulture represents both living and dead, both Lakhdar and the ancestors, and is an artist just as several generations of Keblout ancestors had been "idéologues et artistes" (Nedjma, p. 125).
Creativity, especially in speaking or writing, develops to one degree or another in the four male protagonists of *Nedjma*. Possessing verbal arts constitutes a significant part of Kateb Yacine's concept of adult identity. The texts refer more than once to eloquence, sometimes as a demonic possession, and suggest a preoccupation with the fear of verbal impotence. 108

In *Nedjma*, Mustapha keeps a "Carnet" (pp. 79-84, 185-188) or "Journal" (pp. 240-242). At the end of *Le Polygone étoillé*, he reappears and outlines his own initiation into poetry. During his childhood, Mustapha's father had imposed on him the mastery of the French language. Maître Gharib had continued his own writing activities on his deathbed. Speaking lines of poetry on his father's death, on his mother's insanity and on becoming head of the household at age twenty, Mustapha calls himself "scribe" (*Le Polygone*..., p. 169). Renewing a cliché, Mustapha compares his father's pen with the sword of old. He particularly alludes to the sword connected with the legendary death of the Keblout ancestor whose wife decapitated him in order to deny the Turks the gesture. 109 Mustapha would like to take up the pen for his sword, but he must sacrifice his dream of writing in order to support his family.

Following Mustapha's account of his introduction to the art of poetry, a vision of the eternal struggle for liberation serves as a monument to his symbolic commitment to poetry. The lines conclude on an optimistic note, the new generation taking up the cause of the defeated older one. **Hope is expressed in a dialogue between Mustapha and his father which explicitly signals his commitment:**

Le sang
Reprend racine
Oui
Nous avons tout oublié
Mais notre terre
En enfance tombée
Sa vieille ardeur se rallume
--Veux-tu que je t'enseigne la grammaire ou
la poésie?
--La poésie.
--Ou les deux à la fois?
--Oui, les deux à la fois.

Le lion reste lion
Même dépourvu de ses griffes
Et le chien reste chien
Même élevé au milieu des lions.

--Tous ceux qui retiennent ce poème sont des lions,
dit mon père.
Donc je suis lion.

(Le Polygone étoilé, pp. 175-176). 110

While Mustapha temporarily leaves poetry for work, Lakhdar makes artistry and poetry his work, often in revolutionary acts. He had written poems and political tracts at the lycée. He had carved "Indépendance de l'Algérie" on desks and doors (Nedjma, p. 227). In order to cheer the peasants during the May 8, 1945 repression, Lakhdar played the clown, a dramatic form of artistry (Nedjma, p. 54). Possessing an adult personality barely distinct from Mustapha's, and like him, forced to become an emigrant worker in France, the character named Lakhdar of Le Polygone étoilé demonstrates creativity. He exchanges his ability to write with a fellow emigrant worker's skill at driving nails. The compatriot reassures Lakhdar: "T'en fais pas. Ecris la lettre et moi je plante les clous." (Le Polygone. . . , p. 67). In this role, Lakhdar represents an autobiographical aspect of Kateb Yacine, who as an écrivain public learned much about human nature through writing letters for illiterate fellow workers. Lakhdar says elsewhere in Le Polygone. . . :

Je deviens célèbre en écrivant des lettres. . .
[at the times when he will not accept money] alors ils me gavent de café. Ils me balancent tout ce qu'ils ont sur le coeur, mais c'est trop long. Leur moustache frémit. Et le café devient amer.

(pp. 30-31).
The issue of verbal creativity appears at its most complex in the personality of Rachid. The playmateless child had exercised his imaginative faculties from an early age, his fantasies projected like cinema on the impasse wall. Rachid's friends consider him the quiet one: "Bon, dit Rachid qui se distinguera longtemps par son silence." (Nedjma, p. 71). Any departure from taciturnity is brought on only by illness or drugs.

Following his trip to the Nadhor, including the experiences of kidnapping and then losing Nedjma and witnessing Si Mokhtar's death, Rachid speaks to his friend Mourad. Rachid's state of agitation soon becomes one of illness and delirium. Mourad reports that Rachid's speech is troubled and intermittent, and he comments on the progress of the illness with relation to Rachid's periods of alternating speech and silence:

On ne pouvait douter que Rachid ne fût en plein désarroi; il fumait, ne dormait guère qu'une nuit sur deux... s'il me parlait (paroles fiévreuses, éclats de voix suivis de mornes silences), c'était toujours comme à regret... il maigrissait de jour en jour, devenait tout à fait taciturne; puis une attaque de paludisme le retint plus d'une semaine dans ma chambre... (Nedjma, p. 96).

The lengthy speech (pp. 97-102) which Rachid delivers during his delirium touches upon Si Mokhtar and Nedjma, the Keblout ancestors, the fathers of the male protagonists, the drama of their families and the Algerian conquest. During his fever, Rachid pauses to ask Mourad whether it is the illness which causes him to talk so much:

--Dis-moi, Mourad, dis la vérité. Tu crois que c'est la fièvre qui me fait parler? Je répondis, en essayant de rire:
--Non, non, continue, qui était le Bônois? (Nedjma, p. 100).

In a scene where he had been smoking hashish with friends, he recalls his school days, and speaks as if in a trance, possessed by his
memories' inner voices:

Rachid n'entendait plus sa voix; il nageait dans le calme profond de la mémoire, gouailleur, indifférent. Les paroles s'échappaient en feux d'artifice dont il était le premier à s'étonner, mais il ne les entendant pas jusqu'au bout, parlant vite, s'embrayant et se débrouillant au hasard, sans faire ouf, avec une étouffante facilité qui l'entraînait toujours au delà, bien qu'il poursuivit l'une sur l'autre des rêveries chaotiques dont la substance enfuie n'affluait pas avec les paroles, mais les impulsion, les imprégnait, leur donnait couleur et forme. Otant ses lunettes fumées de temps à autre, faisant une pause, il reprenait brusquement, louchant à la ronde, mi-triumphant, mi-persécuté, sans répondre aux regards, aux sourires, au silence indigné du boxeur, -- parlant plus vite encore de sa voix surfaite, pleine d'éclats, qu'il semblait destiner à quelque contradicteur inaccessible, lui-même peut-être, bien qu'il n'entendit pas toujours sa propre voix...

(Nedjma, pp. 163-164).

Not only does he create verbally despite himself, but by the aggressive nature of his voice he appears to be engaged in an imaginary contest, or a form of agonistic play, "parlant plus vite... de sa voix... qu'il semblait destiner à quelque contradicteur inaccessible;" he appears "mi-triumphant, mi-persécuté" (my emphasis); perhaps he himself is his only opponent.

It is under the effects of hashish that Rachid's contest, with the black man or with himself, on the esthetic ability of viewing Nedjma bathing (see our pp. 102, 103), takes place. Just before the Nedjma bathing scene, Rachid and Si Mokhtar play music in a euphoric state induced by "l'herbe assassine" and Rachid refers to the drug during his dramatic monologue.

Rachid's reverie combines the sensual excitement of watching Nedjma bathe in an ancient copper cauldron with the intellectual satisfaction of perceiving the scene on multiple levels and from several points of view.
However, no matter how superior Rachid's imaginative abilities, he alone acknowledges his triumph, for neither Nedjma nor the black man hear his verbal creations. He suppresses the declaration of his passion for Nedjma, since few words can capture his extraordinary feelings:

_Mais je ne pouvais rien dire de cela devant Nedjma, me contentant de l'énoncer à voix basse, murmurant pour moi-même le peu de mots capables de suggérer le mystère de pareilles pensées._

_(Nedjma, p. 140)._  

Rachid carries on a one-sided, if not mute, conversation with the sleeping black man, in which he observes a connection between his hashish pipe and loosed tongue:

_Je rallumai donc ma pipe dans l'intention de lui parler: «Homme noir, quittez cette ombre avant la nuit, sous peine de perdre votre chemin... Rentrez chez vous! Le soleil décline... Tant que vous n'êtes ni le rival ni la victime, faisons donc la conversation, car, bien que je n'aie pas la parole facile, il y a longtemps que ma langue remue comme un édifice infesté de dragons!»_  

_Mais je comptais sans les méfaits physiques de l'herbe... Mes propos s'effritèrent sans plus de résonance, et quant à l'interpellé, à supposer qu'il m'eût confusément entendu, il n'en continuait pas moins son somme et ses soubresauts, si bien que je quittai ma position, honteux d'avoir ainsi gâché ma journée._

_(my emphasis, Nedjma, pp. 141-142)._  

The hashish destroys Rachid's voice almost as soon as it looses his tongue; the drug triumphs, not Rachid.

Toward the end of _Nedjma_, when Rachid looks out from his perch over the gorges of the Rhummel, he produces some of the most intense poetry of the novel. Rachid links his own life cycle with that of the cities of Bône and Constantine, which are also likened to Nedjma the femme fatale. From time to time during this period, Rachid has an almost silent listener, a journalist and "écrivain public" who is investigating the killing of Monsieur Ricard. The introduction to the scene in which the journalist is trying to get Rachid's version of Mourad's crime suggests
the possibility that Rachid may have facts to add and then states that
the longer Rachid has spent in the smoking den, the less and less is he
prone to talking, his words wasting away just as his body:

... à l'époque, on avait cru et répété dans Constantine que
Rachid avait son mot à dire, sans être tout à fait complice,
et l'on avait cherché à savoir. «Ce n'est rien. Un simple
accident», répondait-il; affaire passionnelle, disaient les
journaux. Rachid n'en parlait plus, ne voulait plus en
parler; à mesure qu'il s'habituaït au fondouk, son langage
se raréfiait, de même que s'embuait et se creusait son
regard sombre, et les côtes se dessinaient sous la vieille
chemise de soldat, comme si son corps de plus en plus sec
devait mettre en relief le squelette, uniquement le squelette
de l'homme puissant qu'il eût été en d'autres circonstances...
(Nedjma, pp. 169-170).

The text implicitly equates eloquence with physical power, for if Rachid
had been the powerful man possible in other circumstances, he would have
been capable of speaking on Mourad's behalf.

Rachid literally speaks out into the spaces of the gorge, but he
assumes the pose of a storyteller:

Le vent d'été gonflait sa vieille chemise ouverte, et il
continua sans se retourner, comme si l'écrivain n'était
pas présent; la voix devenait sourde—ni monologue ni
récit—simple délirance au sein du gouffre, et Rachid
poursuivait à distance, dans l'attitude du conteur
emporté par sa narration devant l'auditoire invisible;
au comble de la curiosité, l'écrivain somnolait sur sa
chaise comme un enfant réclamant sans en venir à bout
la vraisemblance qui le berce.
(Nedjma, p. 189).

Again Rachid's words have taken hold of him; he could be likened to an
oracle who throws light on certain enigmas presented elsewhere in Nedjma,
such as those of the heroine's birth and her relationships with her
cousins.

Irony underlies the conversation between the journalist and
Rachid, for the writer seeks only the facts behind Mourad's crime, while
Rachid tells the entire story of Nedjma, to which the écrivain remains
indifferent. For Rachid, Mourad's apparently motiveless crime had resulted from his unbridled passion for Nedjma, which allowed him to commit the senseless killing:

Mourad n'a pas commis de crime. Il a tué par mégarde le père d'une femme qu'il n'aimait pas. C'était la nuit de noces... Les circonstances... Une erreur d'aiguillage, avec d'autres causes que celles dont la justice fera mention. Tout provient de l'insouciance d'une Française probablement morte à présent qui ne pouvait choisir entre ses amants; de sorte que l'inceste est problématique... Quel tribunal? N'écris pas. Écoute mon histoire... (Nedjma, p. 189).

The poetic richness of Rachid's fondouk story describes how it has been Rachid's fate not to have been allowed to reach full maturity. In geographical reality, the Rhummel, called a oued in Algeria since water flows in it only a few days of the year, flows at this time into the Oued El Kebir, its outlet to the sea. The river Rhummel, whose form as a vector (directed force) gives it connotations of virility, never joins the sea, whose expansive, life-sustaining quality and receptive attitude (for its rivers) evoke traits that are traditionally feminine. Rachid reflects upon the Rhummel and its impotence, implying his own futility. Even the river into which the Rhummel flows, the Oued El Kebir, lacks its own identity, because it was named after the Guadalquivir by Moors driven from Spain during the Christian reconquest. Rachid draws parallels between the "unfulfilled" rivers and his father's early death, and the fact that his own birth occurred after his father's death. Like the Rhummel's waters, carried away by the Oued El Kebir, Rachid's father had been torn from the body of his mistress by his friend and rival Si Mokhtar. Because Nedjma had been born of this union, and had come to provoke Rachid's passion, he was then impotent to avenge the death of his father. Their relationship precluded Rachid's ability to act out
the necessary revenge: Si Mokhtar protected himself from Rachid's avenging his father's death and tantalized Rachid with the forbidden consummation of his passion for Nedjma. Although Si Mokhtar prevents Rachid from acting either in revenge for his father or in his passion for Nedjma, the buffoon-orator does pass on the breath of eloquence to Rachid. Rachid's verbal ability remains unappreciated, however, as a result of his choice of remaining forever within his fondouk-refuge.

Like Rachid, Mourad ends in isolation and there manifests verbal creativity. He is pictured in Lambese prison (near Constantine), and it is plausible that his subsequent narration, recounting events leading up to his imprisonment, represents the creative play of his adult mind in forced seclusion. His storytelling or thulir aspect appears when he recounts Lakhdar's arrival in Bône to his friends (Nedjma, pp. 71-72, 76-78), when he voices the Bônois' observations of Rachid and Si Mokhtar (Nedjma, pp. 91-92) and as he reconstitutes the fragments of Rachid's tale of Si Mokhtar, Nedjma and the Keblout tribe (Nedjma, pp. 71-99). Mourad implicitly calls his activity of rearranging disjointed details gleaned from Rachid into a form of literary creation, a story, by stating, after he tells Rachid's story, that Mustapha "avait lui aussi sa légende" (my emphasis, Nedjma, p. 95).

The verbal creativity of Mourad and all the other characters involved is stimulated from two sources, Nedjma in her role as muse and their sense of competition for her. Their increasing verbal creativity accompanies a concretization of their personalities, as in Mourad's particular case. Mourad grew up as a brother to Nedjma, came close to marrying her and finally was separated from her. Because of this loss, Nedjma for him remained the sister of his youth. Distant from the adult
Nedjma, Mourad can only retell what his friends have said and felt about the Nedjma he refuses to acknowledge.

Mourad learns the magnitude of this rivalry among friends for Nedjma in a bloody rite of passage in prison. When Rachid is put in the same cell as Mourad, guards subsequently find Mourad in a pool of his own blood (Nedjma, p. 40). Previously, the contest for Nedjma had been discussed in terms of a contest of eloquence or verbal creativity—Rachid "redoute l'éloquence de Mourad quand celui-ci parle de sa cousine" (Nedjma, p. 76). Prison has provided its own type of maturing process. Mourad's knowledge of violent rivalry results from this initiation. His tragedy consists of having to live his second twenty years behind prison walls.


Anticipating these twenty years, Mourad fears that only at age forty will he enjoy life as a twenty-year-old. Because he is imprisoned during his adult years, his maturity is cut short from a social standpoint; he matures, perhaps, to the greatest extent, however, through his prison experience, although the text does not explicitly support this idea.

The characters have thus arrived at their particular degrees of maturity by depending on playful, creative solutions to successive hardships or challenges. Theirs is no complacent maturity; none finds a stable "place." They cannot afford such a luxury, for creators depend, for their lifeblood, on destruction, disturbance and challenge. Kateb has revived the trickster, an archaic literary figure, in his characterization and quest for a new Algeria, firmly rooted in the past, yet willing to take a positive role in the present. In Kateb's world,
dynamic channels of responsiveness between regions formerly separated by barriers would be opened through the mechanism of play. His characters and his literary style, both of whose existence is grounded in play, provide models for the revivification of institutions—social relationships, political structures, philosophical systems—that run the risk of becoming ossified—at rest, joyless, in a word, devoid of play. As his characters will never cease to evolve, Algeria, Africa, even the world, carry the potential for the continual renewal of their vitality through play.
CONCLUSION

LAKHDAR. --Quand nous sommes nés, vous avez perdu la bataille.
VISAGE DE PRISON. --On ne savait plus où on en était.
MUSTAPHA. --Ni même qu'i on était.
VISAGE DE PRISON. --Vous nous avez laissés en salade.
KEBLOUT. --Assez. (A LAKHDAR :) Pourquoi cette plume derrière l'oreille?
LAKHDAR. --Ne m'as-tu pas dit d'écrire mon histoire?

The dialogue above contains the basic themes of the present study. The lines are taken from a scene that was omitted from the first public performance in Paris of Les Ancêtres redoublent de férocité (January 1967). Having just died, the three protagonists are jesting with their eponymic ancestor in his eternal abode. As our research has shown, the dominating concern in Kateb's characterization is the progression from non-entity to identity, or from "salade" to "histoire," and these lines suggest that such an evolution had taken place. Words related to the mechanism of play also suggest that it is play that was instrumental in the evolution of their personalities. The battle mentioned by Lakhdar represents agonistic play as well as does the characters' implied quest for identity. Representational play occurs in Lakhdar's use of the quill as a dramatic prop in the writer role that he had assumed in the quest for identity, echoing Kateb Yacine's own quest.
In this conclusion, we would first like to recapitulate the functions of play in the four stages of character development, the evolution that we posit as a level of coherence in Kateb's major works. We will also offer some remarks on the significance of Kateb's works seen in this light with respect to contemporary literature as a whole.

For Kateb Yacine's purposes, the colonized world is not the sole domain of alienation and suffering, for these are constants of universal human experience. Radical breaks in personal identity, or the loss of security with its incumbent longing for continuity, occur throughout a lifetime. The means by which Kateb's characters seek to transform separateness into unity, from their earliest stages of personality, is through forms of play.

Agreeing with Johan Huizinga's dual categorization in *Homo Ludens*, we saw play as either agonistic (competitive) or representational (dramatic). At each stage, both types of play function to resolve the tensions within a tragic situation and result in the creation of an ever-developing identity, culminating in the poet or creator personality at the adult stage.

In characterizing the birth and early childhood stage, Kateb works more than he plays. Psychological, sociological and poetic exposition appear necessary in order to set up the characters' trajectory toward adulthood and the possession of an autonomous personality. If such an analogy may be proffered, supplying this background involves as much work as a mother caring for her helpless infants. Yet in his poetic work, Kateb's use of figurative language is based upon play principles; the choice of images and metaphors (e.g., tadpoles, initiations) reflects a desire to depict the fact that his characters are evolving.
The point at which the infant character initiated play activity coincided with the birth of his personality or identity. We recall Lakhdar's *singerie*, the rivalry with his stepfather and the quest for fascinating objects beyond his reach, as well as the infants' struggle against their keepers (in *Le Polygone étoilé*), as examples of the origin of personality in play. The playful verbal intimacy between Mustapha and his mother may be interpreted not only as representational play--his mother was a theater--but also as agonistic play, in that they created satirical verses for jousting with Mustapha's father. The episode in which Grandfather Mahmoud initiated young Lakhdar into life's secrets through playful actions already presents, in the early childhood state, a pattern for the young adults' relationships with mentors.

We explicated the opening passage of *Le Polygone étoilé* as an enigma on birth and early childhood with a twofold intent. First, it depicted the play function awakening in the infants, especially the agonistic play-function, in their attempt to recover a lost unity. Secondly, in its enigma form, the passage shows the author engaging in highly stylized play intended to mystify the reader with the obscurity of the masks it assumes.

For the developing characters, the possibilities for play expanded in the larger social circle of classmates, and play compensated for the tragic separation from the mother. The greater exposure to society also resulted in a growing consciousness of injustice and created the need for further compensational play. The use of play for dealing with inner conflict is illustrated not only in Mustapha's monologue but also in his quest for academic excellence in the French schools. His father had valued the prestige of association with a winning team, that
of the dominators. He passed on this spirit of competition and honor to his son. Heading rival bands, Lakhdar and Mustapha proceeded from war games to organized sports. As the sophistication of their play increased, their personalities assumed more civilized dimensions.

The value of social play was negatively illustrated by Rachid's solitary youth. Instead of finding his own place through play with others, Rachid based his identity on either figments of his imagination or his obsession with a pair of violent neighbors. The murderous twins illustrated a danger to security in identity. Wherever play was excluded, repressed emotions were liable to break out in hostility.

Play seemed to raise the characters above the pain of the inevitable mental and physical suffering experienced within the colonial situation. The sequence of the falling cyclist and laughing children established a pattern for other scenes in *Nedjma*: play redeems after a fall. In harmony with Erikson's concept of mutuality, play for Kateb facilitated a circuit of responsiveness and the creation of mutual feelings of security between two parties.

As the characters left school behind, the function of their play inevitably changed. In the cases of Lakhdar and Mustapha, the experience of May 8, 1945, served as a rite of passage into adulthood. Even with the suffering that it entailed, however, this rite was not totally devoid of play. An atmosphere of mass playfulness existed that allowed the youths to be initially unaware of the gravity of the situation. Their bizarre adult model, Si Mokhtar, made a significant appearance at this time. Marching in the demonstrations, he revealed poetic talents in both word and act; on the gag ironically covering his mouth he had written original verses criticizing French repression of the Arabs' right
to free speech. Following Si Mokhtar's example, Lakhdar played the clown and enchanted the suffering peasants with his antics and verses. The proud adolescents did not abandon the sense of collective honor and pride that assured the adversary that they remained undefeated in the struggle for survival.

The characters began their third stage with the second and most radical break with the security and continuity of identity of an earlier age. Lakhdar and Mustapha accomplished the break via the rite of passage with its repression, imprisonment and torture. The rest of the four also found themselves faced with the sole responsibility for their survival. Thus challenged, Kateb's characters drew upon play resources from childhood in order to better overcome the predicaments they found as young adults. They combined their spirit of competition with their abilities at make-believe, often useful in finding and keeping employment.

At the adolescent and young adult stage, the characters' lives appear to be pervaded by the theatrical. When Kateb expresses the unfortunate fate of the young emigrant worker in France, he describes his "fate" as a pre-conceived theater of suffering, with its symbolic instrument of torture, the ladder. In order to further explain the prevalence of representational play, we referred to the theatricalization of everyday life that is characteristic of Islamic society.

The characters' skills at pretense were also stimulated by an ambivalence of forces at play in their group structure. On the one hand, they were close friends who had banded together for the purpose of collective might. On the other, their friendship bonds were shaken whenever their intense rivalry for Nedjma would come into play.
The quest for Nedjma was often described in terms of the hunt. The characters projected the hunt fantasy in order to sublimate their base desires for Nedjma. The hunt is also a pure play form, harking from a heroic past, and would confer glory to the hunters. Such a metaphor also captured Nedjma's indomitable, exotic nature, and reflects the author-poet's participation in a type of play all his own.

While no quest—the ultimate form of the contest (agonistic play)—ever came to a conclusion, such quests were instrumental in the characters' personality development. A unique personality for each character could be perceived in the manner in which he conceived of and approached Nedjma. At certain times, however, as with Lakhdar and Mustapha, the characters became interchangeable.

The language generated around Nedjma illustrated both the role of play within male-female relationships and the fact that poetry, with its figures of speech, evolves from play. Through roles projected on Nedjma both by her admirers and herself, and aided by Mourad's observations, we became aware that her play developed more sophisticated or calculating forms as she grew up. The pursuit of the elusive female also laid a groundwork for the characters' adulthood by stimulating them to exercise their competitive drive and to experiment in representational play. As a result, the characters would be able to translate these play forms into resources for creativity in their mature personalities.

We opened the chapter on the characters' mature stage with a substantial parenthesis on trickster-like characters created by Kateb Yacine. The trickster figure illustrates, by extremes, the survival of play functions in an adult personality. The significance of the trickster-like characters lies in their bivalent personality pattern and its
resulting creativity. Society often benefited from the amoral, provocative play of Si Mokhtar and Nuage de fumée. Sometimes their play was channeled toward didactic ends. Without their type of competitive, albeit initially destructive spirit, there would be no progress made by either the personality or society. Si Mokhtar's role as thulr or tribal cult orator presented a meaningful model, based upon forms of play, for Kateb's concept of adult maturity.

The trickster characters' play often involved a show of eloquence, behavior that can be considered a simultaneous form of agonistic and representational play. The young characters' rivalry for Nedjma's love was transposed, in their adulthood, into an implicit competition for the most eloquent descriptions of her. The ability to engage the listener's response using old words in new combinations became important to the maturing characters, echoing the creativity inherent in the tricksters' perturbing of old patterns. Kateb's mystifying and iconoclastic writings might justly be characterized as trickster-like literary creations.

The most eloquent of the characters were Rachid and Mourad, who, curiously enough were the least socially adapted. It is significant that the most complete evocation of the problem of verbal creativity appeared in Rachid's case. His efforts at eloquence went largely unappreciated—no other character in the fondouk listens to the vivid poetry that he speaks. Traditionally the poet is a solitary figure. The poet, ill at ease among ordinary men, resorts to the elaborate game of creative writing as a means of social intercourse.

If Lakhdar and Mustapha appeared to be less eloquent, no doubt was ever cast on their creative abilities. The two characters set aside
the vocation of poet to go to work in France. Their healthier childhood play seemed to leave them less introverted, with fewer inner questions about their identities.

While each adult character displays a degree of maturity and eloquence, each shows creativity that springs from their use of both representational and agonistic play. The burgeoning life in Kateb's characters and in his creative utilization of the French language are rooted in common phenomenon, the exploitation of play on all levels.

Kateb's creative use of play in his writing and ideas has a didactic value, although his reading public is quite an elite group. On one hand, his writings reveal the regional and cultural bases for the existence of play behavior in the Maghrebian identity, and the necessity to keep the value of play alive. On the other, because Kateb's subject matter extends beyond regional bounds, the evolution of his characters provides models for creative social relationships everywhere. The common human factor of play allows for harmonious relationships among regional and planetary identities, both on an individual and a national basis. While Kateb has been known above all as a militant poet, his littérature de combat is a peaceful means of playing a war game against forces that would stifle creativity. We have already pointed out that underlying all his antagonisms is a desire to overcome antithetical forces among men and to enter into games among friends. These games would be less likely to lose their play quality, while real wars are not play in that they are rarely fought for the sheer pleasure they bring.

Kateb Yacine is now engaged in a type of literary creation that might be called folk drama. Spontaneous, at least in appearance, unpublished and appealing directly to the common Algerian, rather than an
elite of readers with an advanced knowledge of French, Kateb has produced several dramatic presentations in collaboration with Algerian theatrical troupes since 1972. Exploiting the highly entertaining activities of music, mime, dance, elaborate masks and costumes, and divided into numerous short vignettes with a central thread, these plays are designed to elevate the consciousness of the common man through laughter. Play and laughter now appear to monopolize Kateb's literary pursuits. This most playful form of existing literature is the logical conclusion of the evolution of personality described in Kateb's Le Seuil works. Like his L'Homme aux sandales de caoutchouc, they are perhaps shallow from a poetic viewpoint, but they are significant in the evolution of Kateb's personality. His first mission was to dominate and then to become superior within the French language and its literature, and with that instrument, tell the occidental reader the story of Algeria in his special way. He has now gone home to his people. There he plays the role of folk dramatist, combining the foolery of the farce with the serious ends of awakening his compatriots to their past and present, an awakening that has perhaps been denied to them during centuries of colonization.
NOTES

INTRODUCTION

1Kateb Yacine, "Les Intellectuels, la révolution et le pouvoir" (interview), Jeune Afrique, No. 324 (May 26, 1967), p. 28.

2For a brief but relatively complete biography of Kateb through 1972, see Jean Déjeux, Littérature maghrébine de langue française (Sherbrooke, Canada: CELEF, Editions Naaman, 1973), pp. 210-216.

3A passage in Nedjma expresses in metalanguage the mosaic structure of his narratives. The passage includes an obscure reference to Moses (at least Michelangelo's horned version)—and we would link, at least linguistically, Moses' name to "mosaic" (the passage straddles two sections of the novel):

Le monde ne grandirait plus, réduit à une cruelle vision d'ensemble; le rêve perdait de son obscurité, le cerveau s'éteignait à la découverte de tant de refuges éboulés, la langue se refusait à broyer vivantes les idées dont Rachid avait pris conscience avec rage, comme si les formes définitives du monde pesaient désormais sur sa tête en manière de cornes.

XII

Rachid ne quittait plus le fondouk, le balcon; l'espace de mosaïque, de fer forgé. . .

(p. 168).

We propose that Kateb senses that language can only approximate reality, as a mosaic picture has low resolution; "fer forgé" suggests prisons—language can be a prison, carrying potential dangers of stultifying concepts in unchanging form rather than keeping them dynamically and vitally
meaningful. Moses enters the picture perhaps ironically, because Kateb tries to keep prophets in human perspective, while their words—as the Ten Commandments—have sometimes been taken too literally.


7 "The Algerian Novel of French Expression," p. 44. Sellin explains further: "Its action or force... moves out from a central point, returning time and again to that point to move out on another radius... universally implied in the center and in the circumference and an infinite variety of repetitions possible in the radii: a geometric modification of the arabesque, if you will," p. 44.


9 University of Washington, 1975. I have read only the dissertation abstract and the articles listed in the Bibliography of our study.


12 Littérature maghrébine..., p. 239.

13 Littérature maghrébine..., p. 238.

14 Arnaud voices the idea of the individual merging with the group in "Individu et collectivité dans l'oeuvre de Kateb Yacine," p. 49.


16 "Kateb, ou la corde tranchée," p. 52.

17 Childhood and Society, p. 213.

18 Childhood and Society, p. 222.

19 Homo Ludens, p. 28.

21. Among the numerous references to sports in Kateb's works we list several. The first comes from an uncollected short piece which pits athletes and "savants" against artists and orators, and having no title, begins: "À l'instant d'un match sanglant de football...," *Simoun*, No. 8 (May 1953), pp. 62-67. In the same work we find "marathon céleste," "un jeu de jambes décent," "Le jeu des pochettes-surprise reste un excellent moyen d'éducation," and "...au jeu...elle accuse un coup fourré du jeune Marx." Not only does Kateb compare characters to athletes, often boxers, but he sees runners in trees, "jujubiers et des cèdres penchés en arrière, coureurs éblouis à bout d'espace et de lumière en un sprint vertical" (*Nadjma*, p. 65). In *Le Cadavre encerclé*: "un cortège intime où la mort n'est qu'un jeu" (p. 18). In *Le Polygone étoilé*: "un enfant du port aux manières sportives" (p. 33).

22. *Le Polygone étoilé* presents numerous examples of the path image:

Sur les frissons du fleuve mort de peur
Et le cheval fumant gronde en un corridor épouvantable
On traverse
L'Enfer
(a locomotive, p. 25);

"la route de l'exil" (p. 10), "le long de la coursive" (p. 36), "...atrocelement relevé de routes où j'eusse perdu le sens" (p. 22); in *La Poudre d'intelligence*, "Il y a plusieurs chemins pour aller au cimetière" (p. 80). Because the quest structure is evident in the development of the characters' personalities, Kateb's works have a distant kinship with the Bildungsroman. The adult personality, of which Kateb's writings give a living example, is that of the creator or writer, placing Kateb in the tradition of the portrait-of-the-artist novel as well.

23. *Homo Ludens*, p. 25: Huizinga states that poetry fulfills the conditions for play. "The function operative in the process of image-making or imagination is a poetic function. ...or a function of play, the ludic function, in fact." An entire chapter, "Play and Poetry," pp. 119-135, explores the links between play, poetry and culture.

24. For our definition of the trickster, given in Chapter IV, we combined ideas from Paul Radin, *The Trickster* and Joseph Campbell, *The Masks of God*, Vol. I. Their views of the trickster complemented Huizinga's example of the archaic poet, *thulr*, who was at times a fool, at others, an educator. Huizinga discusses the *thulr* in *Homo Ludens*, p. 121.
CHAPTER I


28 *Homo Ludens*, p. 4.

29 The tribe whose saga in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries provides the background for the Nedjma story is the "Kebblout," possibly denoting "corde cassée" (broken rope--see *Nedjma*, p. 124). During the French conquest, the French are said to have decapitated six of the tribe's male adults. The verb "coupérer" and synonyms abound in the text: "coupérer les pontes" (*Nedjma*, p. 72), "voie coupe la route" (*Nedjma*, p. 69), "coupée de navire" (*Nedjma*, p. 74), "barrer la route" (*Nedjma*, p. 69), "Toujours elles s'étènissent, la rupture des amarres" (*Le Polygone étoilé*, p. 45), "Je suis passé sans le savoir/De l'autre côté de la barricade" (*L'Homme aux sandales de caoutchouc*, p. 73). Similarly, Frantz Fanon says of the colonized world: "Le monde colonisé est un monde coupé en deux," *Les Damnés de la terre*, p. 7.


31 Erik Erikson astutely links the awareness of these polarities with contemporary (to 1963, the date of his revised edition) struggles for liberation: "The polarity Big--Small is first in the inventory of existential oppositions such as Male and Female, Ruler and Ruled, Owner and Owned, Light Skin and Dark, over all of which emancipatory struggles are now raging both politically and psychologically. The aim of these struggles is the recognition of the divided function of partners who are equal not because they are essentially alike, but because in their very uniqueness they are both essential to a common function," *Childhood and Society*, p. 418.
32 Erikson describes the paradise of orality once in these terms: "The mouth and the nipple seem to be the mere centers of a general aura of warmth and mutuality which are enjoyed and responded to with relaxation not only by these focal organs, but by both total organisms," Childhood and Society, p. 76.

33 Childhood and Society, pp. 76-80.

34 Childhood and Society, p. 136.

35 Childhood and Society, p. 136. Erikson ties in this psychological and social stage with the symbolic and metaphysical—for him, it is at this stage that the knowledge of good and evil enters a baby's mind. The child enters into a dilemma caused by a physical change and a social problem occurring simultaneously: "It is of course impossible to know what the infant feels, as his teeth 'bore from within'—in that very oral cavity which until then was the main seat of pleasure, and a seat mainly of pleasure; and what kind of masochistic dilemma results from the fact that the tension and pain caused by the teeth, these inner saboteurs, can be alleviated only by biting harder. This, in turn, adds a social dilemma to a physical one. For where breast feeding lasts into the biting stage (and, all in all, this has been the rule on earth) it is now necessary to learn how to continue sucking without biting, so that the mother may not withdraw the nipple in pain or anger. Our clinical work indicates that this point in the individual's early history can be the origin of an evil dividedness, where anger against the gnawing teeth, and anger against the withdrawing mother, and anger with one's impotent anger all lead to a forceful experience of sadistic and masochistic confusion leaving the general impression that once upon a time one destroyed one's unity with a maternal matrix. This earliest catastrophe in the individual's relation to himself and to the world is probably the ontogenetic contribution to the biblical saga of paradise, where the first people on earth forfeited forever the right to pluck without effort what had been put at their disposal; they bit into the forbidden apple, and made God angry," Childhood and Society, pp. 78-79.

36 Speaking of the arabophone personality as a whole, Bourdieu explains the preoccupation with exterior appearances: "...cette volonté de livrer à autrui, plutôt qu'à l'être profond, une apparence, un personnage, paraît le propre d'une personnalité qui se saisit avant tout en tant qu'être pour autrui, qui est sans cesse sous le regard des autres et ressent la toute-puissance de l'opinion," Sociologie de l'Algérie, p. 85.

37 Kateb Yacine, widening the metaphor of the "gueule du loup" (France, French school), finds a sympathetic model in "Modern Times," Chaplin's film concerning the reification of man inherent in the capitalist system; "Charlot" (the Frenchman's name for Chaplin's familiar character) embodies the little man triumphing over greater powers through the use of humor and representational play.

38 Jean Déjeux has synthesized the image of the foreign woman in the Maghrebian francophone novel in "Le Thème de l'étrangère dans le roman maghrébin de langue française," Présence Francophone 11 (Automne 1975), pp. 15-36.

40. Pierre Bourdieu, Sociologie de l'Algérie, pp. 73-79.


42. In Kateb's bestiary the fish occupies a privileged place; time and space often have a certain viscosity from which the individual would like to escape: "... tout les révolterait dans cette flaque de durée où les Ancêtres prêteraient les plonger" (Le Polygone étoilé, p. 10); "À présent, pensait-il, nous nous ressemblons tous, comme des poissons, derrière le bocal froidement familier du vieux Paris cosmopolite, sous les faux printemps d'outremer" (Le Polygone, p. 70); "... poisson mort procréé au-delà des entrailles maternelles" (Le Cadavre encerclé, p. 28); "Tes poumons sont clairs, dit le docteur. Mais je sais que je mourrai d'étouffement, à la façon des poissons... Je me fais vieux, et j'ai de plus en plus d'idées; et chaque fois que je remonte, je descends encore plus bas" (Nedjma, p. 162); "Rien qu'à sa lèvre/Jaillit/Un sang de proie/ Et de tout son long/S'ouvre ce corps de poisson" (Le Vautour, p. 160). The shark appears at least twice: "privée de proie comme un requin" (Les Ancêtres redoublent de férocité, p. 139) and "Près de ce doux requin/D'amour" (Le Vautour, p. 167).

43. "Rachid sursaute à mainte reprise, songeant à l'araignée qui le fixe, prisonnière elle aussi; on dirait qu'elle se sent seule, qu'elle cherche de la compagnie, des caresses peut-être" (Nedjma, p. 38); "Affalé contre la fenêtre ouverte, Rachid tomba nez à nez avec un cafard qui allait rejoindre lui aussi son gîte après la nuit... Rachid poussa un faible rugissement, et le cafard croisa ses antennes en signe de soumission; le ciel demeurait sombres" (Nedjma, p. 159).

44. Time the destroyer is revealed in complicity with "le ciel"—implying a terrible angry god jealous of joy in man, looming over joyous moments with the bombs of time.

45. In an opposing sense, the "impasse natale," or the fate of being eternally subjugated, evokes its own transcendance, or the potential for transcending itself: at the beginning of Le Cadavre... Lakhdar makes a dramatic speech while lying in a heap of victims, on a dead-end street, which he calls "la seule artère en crue où je puisse rendre l'âme sans la perdre... .ici même abattu, dans l'impasse natale... .seule persiste ma voix d'homme pour déclamer la plénitude d'un masculin pluriel... .la gloire d'une si vaste carnage venait soudain prolonger l'impasse vers des chevauchées à venir," (pp. 18-19).

46. Kateb Yacine, cited by Jean Déjeux in Littérature maghrébine... , p. 231, Note 49.

Erikson found this method in use among Sioux Indians practicing traditional childrearing methods and theorized that the infant's otherwise flailing arms and legs were immobilized until such time as the suppressed rage could be channeled into pursuits useful to the community such as buffalo hunting and fighting enemies (buffalo hunting supplanted by cattle raising), *Childhood and Society*, p. 137.

We discuss combativeness and Lakhdar's pride in his strength in Chapter II.

Rachid Boudjedra, *L'Insolation* (Paris: Denoël, 1972): "Quand j'avais le cafard, je chantais une vieille chanson de prisonnier: Mère, le mur est haut. . .," p. 90. Though I was unable to locate the entire song, this line also appeared in the novel of poetic intensity.

Huizinga, p. 119 ff.

Though he would not be inclined to agree with my interpretation of this passage in *Le Polygone étoilé*, Bernard Aresu must be credited with reminding me of the earlier version of the first eighteen pages of *Le Polygone*. . ., and emphasizing its political significance. This earlier version is entitled "Les Fondateurs," *Les Temps Modernes* 135 (May 1957), pp. 1648-1662.


Erikson, pp. 219-220.


Erikson, p. 78.

Huizinga: "...play loves to surround itself with an air of secrecy... temporary abolition of the ordinary world," p. 12
CHAPTER II


60 See our Chapter I, pp. 33-35, 42-44, Lakhdar learning to pretend and role-play as power, respectively.

61 A scene in Le Cadavre encerclé expresses the same sort of contradiction in which French racism makes exceptions (pp. 36, 37):

MARGUERITE: J'ai freiné juste devant votre corps. J'étais seule au volant. Vous avez de la chance... J'ai freiné juste à temps. Vous avez remué. J'ai entendu des mots français...

LAKHDAR: Vous avez dû confondre. Il y avait d'autres blessés.


LAKHDAR (rougissant): Ce que c'est que d'être allé à l'école...

MARGUERITE: Vous dites?

LAKHDAR (se reprenant): Rien.

[ . . . . ]


LAKHDAR: Oui, j'ai le sang.

MARGUERITE (pensive): C'est bizarre... Les autres, je ne peux pas les voir. Ils sont sales. On dirait des poux. Vous n'êtes pas comme eux. Étendez-vous sur mon lit.

LAKHDAR: Je dormirai chez mes amis.

MARGUERITE: Je vous laisse. Étendez-vous sur mon lit.

62 Eric Sellin has observed the same structure, and described it thus: "In Yacine's poetry, there is a sense of suspended or latent violence, an unstable repose implied by the ambiguity of Nedjma's origin, the idea of virginal promiscuity, and by paradoxical statements... passages in which no specific violence occurs often suggest an ominous tension and forebode overt violence," in "Algerian Poetry: Poetic Values, Mohammed Dib and Kateb Yacine," Journal of the New African Literature... 9-10 (September 1971), p. 64. Fanon had already commented: "La tension musculaire du colonisé se libère périodiquement dans des explosions sanguinaires: luttes tribales, luttes de çofs, luttes entre individus," Les Damnés de la terre, pp. 19-20.
Writing six centuries earlier, Ibn Khaldoun, an important figure for Kateb, put forth the concept of "asabîya (social solidarity, esprit de corps, Gemeinsinn) as the primary impulse in the gradually progressing states of human society, from the nomadic groups of camel breeders satisfying their simple needs in the way of life of a Bedouin—meaning primitive—culture ('umrān badawī), to the life of cities generating a richly diversified civilization (hadīrā) characterized by refinement and luxury, the practice of arts and sciences, and the specialization of economic activities, and calling into existence kingdoms and empires." Stephen and Dandy Ronart, Concise Encyclopaedia of Arabic Civilisation: The Arab West, (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, Publisher, 1966), p. 202.

In Le Polygone... this structure appears in the enigmatic terms typical of this narrative:

--Elle avait un château suspendu à un câble élevant ses amants à de telles hauteurs qu'ils croyaient vivre parmi les aigles.

[. . . .]

Tombé du câble initiatique, dégringolé de sa potence à la tranquille caresse d'enfer, ce fut lui qu'on hissa au bout d'un second câble, jusqu'à l'échelle de soie rompue par l'araignée, puis par la pieuvre qui entraîna notre héros dans ses bras roses, l'obligeant à monter vers la couche de Moutt. . .

(p. 72).

Another example of play and ascending motion occurs when Lakhdar leads Mustapha and Rachid to see Nedjma, not realizing that both have met her before:

Nous gravissons le talus!
Se sont-ils brouillés? Dissimulés au prix de sérieuses acrobaties (inspirées par Lakhdar), nous voyons Nedjma dans son jardin.

(my emphasis, Nedjma, p. 242).

CHAPTER III

68 Homo Ludens, p. 47.
69 Homo Ludens, p. 13.
70 Alistair Horne, A Savage War of Peace, p. 41.
71 Jacqueline Arnaud places Kateb's theatricalization in a mythical context, which merely operates on a different level from that of our individually based concepts: "merveilleuse ingéniosité des descendants de Keblout! Ce peuple de paysans, de manoeuvres, de gueux, de reprise de justice est chez Kateb un peuple de princes déguisés" (my emphasis), "Individu et collectivité dans l'oeuvre de Kateb Yacine," Écrivains du Maghreb, pp. 46-47.
73 Jacqueline Arnaud, "Kateb, ou la corde tranchée:" "Nulle faute n'a provoqué la catastrophe, qui découle d'un Fatum," p. 37.
74 It is a point of honor for a Moslem to be able to trace ancestry back to the Prophet.
75 Jean Déjeux, in Littérature maghrébine. . . quotes from an interview (interviewer: Y. Romi, Le Nouvel Observateur 114, January 18, 1967) where Kateb states that his own prison experience gave him treasured "illuminations": "C'est alors... qu'on assume la plénitude tragique de ce qu'on est et qu'on découvre les êtres. C'est à ce moment-là aussi que j'ai accumulé ma première réserve poétique. Je me souviens de certaines illuminations que j'ai eues... Rétrospectivement, ce sont les plus beaux moments de ma vie. J'ai découvert alors les deux choses qui me sont les plus chères: la poésie et la révolution," p. 212. Víctor Brombert, in "Esquisse de la prison heureuse," in La Prison romantique (Paris: Corti, 1976) reviews the same concept with respect to literature.
76 Jean Déjeux has spoken of Kateb's theater functioning as a "psychodrame thérapeutique" in "Les Structures de l'imaginaire dans l'oeuvre de Kateb Yacine." However, the sense of mental drama which we use here refers to a general state of the psyche and not specifically to therapy. Déjeux remains vague in his use of the terms.
78 Huizinga, p. 46.
"Fascination ou métamorphose?" Cahiers du Sud 338 (December 1956), pp. 133-137.

Jacqueline Arnaud, "Kateb, ou la corde tranchée," p. 43.

--Je vais à Constantine, dit Rachid.
--Allons, dit Lakhdar. Je t'accompagne jusqu'à Bône.

Et toi, Mustapha?
--Je prends un autre chemin.
Les deux ombres se dissipent sur la route.

Maghrébian popular saint.

Nerval's black sun appears in the first of Les Chimères, "El Desdichado," line 4: "le soleil noir de la Mélancolie," and in Aurelia, II, 4: "Que va-t-il arriver quand les hommes s'apercevront qu'il n'y a plus de soleil?. . .Je voyais un soleil noir dans le ciel désert."

See Chapter I, p. 27.

Huizinga first notes that in far-ranging languages, Arabic and Germanic and Slavonic, that the manipulation of musical instruments is called "playing," and he postulates a deep-rooted psychological reason for so remarkable a symbol for the affinity between music and play; he further states qualities that music and play hold in common: Both have "nothing to do with necessity or utility, duty or truth. . .musical forms are determined by values which transcend logical ideas, which even transcend our ideas of the visible and the tangible. These musical values can only be understood in terms of the designations we use for them, specific names like rhythm and harmony which are equally applicable to poetry." Homo Ludens, p. 158.

The last sentence to us represents Kateb Yacine's delight in mystification, or the author's game of hide-and-seek with his reader. We discover that "lézard," discussed by Déjeux and Arnaud as a cave-dwelling, crawling animal and symbol, also belongs to the realm of printing, at least in its feminine form, "lézarde." Kateb's career as newspaper journalist, as a Le Seuil author and as an amateur of dictionaries sent us to the latter where we found that "lézarde" can be a typographical term: "Se dit de certaines raies blanches qui se présentent parfois dans la composition." Dictionnaire de la langue française, Émile Littré (Paris: Gallimard, Hachette. Édition Intégrale, 1960), p. 1561. We see this as a play on a rare use of a word, denoting the writer's self-conscious statement that Nedjma's beauty will be marred by the ink on the printed page, or the error in that printing.

Compare with Mallarmé's "L'Après-midi d'un faune," as well as certain passages of Claude Simon.

Homo Ludens, p. 13.

"La Rose de Blida," Lettres Françaises (February 7-13, 1963), p. 3.

Our p. 38 ("Mère le mur est haut!").

Nedjma also appears as a "militante" in a poem entitled "Le Temps qui tue," in Espoir et parole, ed. by Denise Barrat, p. 26.

CHAPTER IV

Kateb Yacine, "Un Long Rêve et un coq rôti," Cahiers de l'Oronte 1 (February 1965), [p. 4].

Looking for examples of mature adults in Kateb Yacine's works, one cannot expect to find a character answering to a traditional concept of maturity, which might be defined as the adjustment of one's lifestyle to the social norms and engaging in an occupation beneficial to the society in question. The heroes of modern fiction do not meet this definition, as they are rarely in harmony with their times.

The name "Nuage de fumée" also resembles, in its syntactical structure as well as its image and meaning, the device of the character's invention, "la poudre d'intelligence," which itself evokes more than its literal signification, or the hallucinogen hashish which elsewhere Kateb Yacine calls—and is known in popular terms as—"la fleur de poussière."

Bernard Aresu, to whom I am grateful for background information and discussions on Kateb Yacine, has described this conception of Sî Mokhtar and Nuage de fumée as their "bivalent characterization."


Huizinga, p. 121.

Among other adults given less textual presence are Mustapha's unstable and tubercular father and his insane mother; Lella Fatma, Nedjma's sterile stepmother; Tahar, a thoroughgoing hypocrite and Lakhdar's stepfather. These characters do not voice their feelings, and are seen only from the exterior.

102. Déjeux and Arnaud have observed Kateb "playing the J'ha."

103. Millie J. Scelles, in Contes Arabes du Maghreb (Paris: G.-P. Maisonneuve et Larose, 1970), notes various names for the Maghrebian popular trickster, among them "Djihha," and defines him: "un garçon très fin et d'une ruse narquoise qui joue à l'innocent pour pouvoir stigmatiser avec esprit et sans trop de risques les travers des puissants (rois, sultans, vizirs, cadis) ou des riches (bijoutiers, juifs, mozabites)." She endows this contemporary version of the archaic trickster with the power of exorcism and political commentary: "Ce sont des récits de 'compensation' qui permettent un dévoilement des sentiments de rancune ou d'agression qu'ils résolvent en un sourire, tout en étant un spirituel avertissement pour les potentats et les nantis," p. 19. Funk and Wagnalls' Standard Dictionary of Folklore, Mythology and Legend, Maria Leach, ed. (New York: 1950), defines the trickster first on the same psycho-political as does Scelles for the J'ha and then gives the view of the more archaic figure: "Psychologically the role of the trickster seems to be that of projecting the insufficiencies of man in his universe onto a smaller creature who, in besting his larger adversaries permits the satisfaction of an obvious identification to those who recount or listen to these tales. The trickster is frequently a character in the sacred mythology of a people, and is often regarded as the culture hero who has brought the arts of living to mankind," Vol. 2, pp. 1123-24.

104. Characters other than Nuage de fumée demonstrate J'ha traits. For example, Mustapha ceremoniously serves tea to the marchand de beignets and the latter's guests while all are aware that Mustapha knows of their hypocrisy—they are secretly drinkers and seducers of young girls—and Mustapha hates them for it. Mustapha, the "drôle de serviteur qui sévit contre leur existence," holds them in his power by feigning deference to them while they squirm and wonder when his hatred might erupt into aggression (Nedjma, p. 82).

105. In Afrique-Action (June 12, 1961), Kateb resuscitates him in the form of J'ha-journalist, commenting on the trickster figure and giving warnings on the fate of independent Algeria.

106. Interviewed by Charles Haroche for the ORTF television program, "Kateb Yacine ou un certain regard," Kateb Yacine said: "Comment traiter les grands personnages: on les enrichit en les rendant comiques... c'est une façon fraternelle de présenter un personnage comique. Charlot a montré qu'on n'est jamais si comique que dans une situation tragique."
The fear of verbal impotence perhaps reflects the author's own concerns.

This episode appears in a dramatic scenario published as "La Guerre de 130 ans," Révolution Africaine 19 (June 18, 1963), pp. 22-23.

The same lines appear at the beginning of "Jardin parmi les flammes," Esprit (November 1962), p. 770, a short piece of writing which is a variation on the ending of Le Polygone étoilé.

The relation of physical atrophy and verbal difficulty is later re-expressed in the same scene (Nedjma, p. 181), another version of which appears in Le Polygone étoilé:

. . . le délire ne perdait rien de son intensité, sillon de disque vibrant encore au plus profond de son usure, râles entrecoupés de phrases insensées, peut-être chargées de sens, jusqu'à la défaillance, à la trivialité, ou au pur charabia; il lui semblait alors entendre (et il voulut l'écrire, mais à quoi bon? Il n'allait pas surprendre ce pseudo-Rachid qui, même en pleine force, avait souvent désespéré le scribe par sa façon verbeuse de se dérober à tout ce qu'un sujet pouvait avoir de brûlant) le contraire d'un homme, et moins qu'un animal, insignifiante bête de sépulcre. . .

(p. 162, "il" here refers to the écrivain public).

As a matter of fact, Kateb's text creates an inconsistency with regard to the murder victim at this point--Mourad had killed Suzy's husband, not her father, for it is Suzy that one might be led to believe that Mourad was attracted to, as he had previously entertained fantasies of taking the foreman's daughter.

CONCLUSION

Lettres Françaises (Jan. 26 - Feb. 1, 1967) pp. 15-16. The publication is prefaced as a scene cut from the stage version, but included in the Le Seuil version. However, it is not found in the latter.

Childhood and Society, pp. 68 ff., 75.
The interchangeability of characters is particularly evident in Le Polygone étoilé; in one sequence, it appears in the indistinct group of admirers for a woman who has at once all the multiple roles given to Nedjma, pp. 144-157.

The longer we readers play Kateb's games, the more skilled we become at appreciating his sophisticated play.

The ambivalence of the trickster, who can be at the same time a destroyer and creator, links him to the myths of creation such as Mircea Eliade outlined in The Myth of the Eternal Return (Princeton: Bollingen Series XLVI, 1954-French original 1949), in which death is a pre-requisite to birth, destruction to re-creation.

A large portion of Nedjma is made up of the young characters' narratives, particularly around Nedjma. The importance of storytelling ability is suggested in the details of a dream which Rachid had of the ancestor Keblout. The ancestor, at the same time demonstrating hyperbolic and understated storytelling skill, tells the story of each of the tribal members by his very glance in their eyes:

Lui, l'ancêtre au visage de bête féroce, aux yeux sombres et malins, promenait son superbe regard sur sa tribu, la triche à portée de sa main; il racontait ironiquement par ce seul regard l'histoire de chacun, et il semblait à ses descendants que lui seul avait réellement vécu leur existence dans toute son étendue...

(Nedjma, p. 134).

Kateb's fourth and last work published in France by Le Seuil, L'Homme aux sandales de caoutchouc (1970) is a drama composed of eight tableaux that depict, in a satirical manner for the most part, the Vietnamese struggle for liberation across an epic two thousand centuries. The folk hero, Ho Chi Minh, the Viet Minh and their forebears are the only characters to be treated poetically and seriously. Uncle Ho is the title figure, and significantly a hero because he is both a poet and close to the people. This play marks Kateb's departure from "serious" literature, and his adoption of a literary form that could not only be appreciated by the common man, but also serve Kateb's goal of educating through laughter.
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