

**VOL. 4**

DECEMBER 2007 | ISSUE 4

# NEBULA

## **LUBANG BUAYA: Myth, Misogyny and Massacre**

**Steven Drakeley**

PAGE 10

## **KING ARTHUR IN THE LANDS OF THE SARACENS**

**NIZAR F. HERMES**

PAGE 111

## **HUMOR, LITERARY THEORY AND TERROR**

**WISAM MANSOUR**

PAGE 120

nebula



A JOURNAL OF MULTIDISCIPLINARY  
SCHOLARSHIP

**ISSN-1449 7751**

### **The *Nebula* Editorial Board**

Dr. Samar Habib: Editor in Chief (Australia)  
Dr. Joseph Benjamin Afful, University of Cape Coast (Ghana)  
Dr. Senayon S. Alaoluw, University of the Witwatersrand (South Africa)  
Dr. Samirah Alkasim, independent scholar (Egypt)  
Dr. Rebecca Beirne, The University of Newcastle (Australia)  
Dr. Nejme Khalil-Habib, The University of Sydney (Australia)  
Dr. Isaac Kamola, Dartmouth College (U.S.A)  
Garnet Kindervater, The University of Minnesota (U.S.A)  
Dr. Olukoya Ogen, Obafemi Awolowo University (Nigeria)  
Dr. Paul Ayodele Osifodunrin, University of Lagos (Nigeria)  
Dr. Babak Rahimi, University of California (San Diego, U.S.A)  
Dr. Michael Angelo Tata, City University of New York (U.S.A)

### **The *Nebula* Advisory Board**

Dr. Serena Anderlini-D'Onofrio, The University of Puerto Rico  
Dr. Paul Allatson, The University of Technology, Sydney (Australia)  
Dr. Benjamin Carson, Bridgewater State College (U.S.A)  
Dr. Murat Cemrek, Selcuk University (Turkey)  
Dr. Melissa Hardie, The University of Sydney (Australia)  
Dr. Samvel Jeshmaridian, The City University of New York (U.S.A)  
Dr. Christopher Kelen, The University of Macao (China)  
Dr. Kate Lilley, The University of Sydney (Australia)  
Dr. Karmen MacKendrick, Le Moyne College of New York (U.S.A)  
Dr. Tracy Biga MacLean, Academic Director, Claremont Colleges (U.S.A)  
Dr. Wayne Pickard, a very independent scholar (Australia)  
Dr. Ruying Qi, The University of Western Sydney (Australia)  
Dr. Ruben Safrastyan, Armenian National Academy of Sciences (Armenia)  
Dr. Alberto Sandoval, Mount Holyoke College (U.S.A)  
Dr. Judith Snodgrass, The University of Western Sydney (Australia)  
Dr. Helga Tawil-Souri, New York University (U.S.A)

Opinions expressed in articles published in *Nebula* reflect those of their respective authors and do not necessarily reflect the opinions of the journal or its editorial or advisory board members.

## Content

- i**    **Note on contributors**
- 1**    **Louise Bourgeois: An Existentialist Act of Self-Perception.**  
Federico Sabatini
- 10**   **Lubang Buaya: Myth, Misogyny and Massacre.**  
Steven Drakeley
- 30**   **The Construction of Islamic-Educational Institutions in Mamluk Gaza.**  
Hatim Mahamid
- 35**   **Transformation as Narrative and Process: Locating Myth and Mimesis in Reality TV.**  
Yasmin Ibrahim
- 48**   ***The Nights*' Singer of Tales: Performing Tradition in the Story of the King of China's Hunchback.\***  
Zaid Mahir
- 80**   **Selected Writings...**  
Juno Galang
- 84**   **Home, Journey and Landscape in Charles Frazier's *Cold Mountain*: the Mirroring of Internal Processes in the External World and the Literary Construction of Space.**  
Oswald Yuan Chin Chang
- 102**   **Sokoro Sakara: A Contextual and Gender Analysis of Some Offensive Yoruba Proverbial Songs.**  
Abayomi Daramola
- 111**   **King Arthur in the Lands of the Saracens.**  
Nizar F. Hermes
- 120**   **Humor, Literary Theory and Terror.**  
Wisam Mansour
- 124**   **The Postmodern Condition as a Religious Revival: A Critical Review of William Connolly's *Why I am Not a Secularist*, Dipesh Chakrabarty's *Provincializing Europe*, and Alvin Plantinga's *Warranted Christian Belief*.**  
Ryan McIlhenny
- 135**   **The Lady Iraq.**  
Joseph Taylor

## Note on contributors

### Oswald Yuan-chin Chang

Yuan-chin Chang received his MA from the National Chengchi University in Taiwan in English and American Literature. He has previously published articles in *Journal of National Taichung Institute of Technology*, and his article on "...the Tension between Political Commentary and Existential Drama in Athol Fugard's *Sizwe Bansi is Dead*" is forthcoming in *Languages, Literary Studies and International Studies*. Chang is currently teaching Applied English Studies at the China University of Technology in Taiwan.

### Yomi Daramola

Yomi Daramola is a lecturer in African Music, Musicology, Music Theory, and Music Performance at the Department of Music, Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, Osun State, Nigeria. His research interests are in the areas of Ethnomusicology, Traditional (African) Music, Popular Music, Islamic and Islamized Music.

### Steven Drakeley

Steven Drakeley PhD (University of Sydney) is a Senior Lecturer in Asian and International Studies in the School of Humanities and Languages at the University of Western Sydney, where he has taught for the last ten years. He is the author of *The History of Indonesia*, Greenwood Press, 2005 and of several book chapters and articles, and is currently researching the role of Islam in the first 25 years of postindependence Indonesian political history.

### Juno Galang

Juno Galang has been writing creative fiction and poetry since childhood. As a student, she has completed several units of *English, Text and Writing and History, Politics and Philosophy* at the University of Western Sydney and is currently looking forward to new and different paths.

### Nizar F. Hermes

Originally from Tunisia, Nizar F. Hermes is a PhD Candidate and Research Assistant at the Centre of Comparative Literature, the University of Toronto. He has published several articles and creative pieces both in English and Arabic in the U.S.A, Canada, and Britain. Forthcoming is a book entitled *Al Tاجر's Journey to the Orient: A Ninth Century Arab Merchant's Remarkable Account of India and China* (Sep. 2008: Markus Wiener Publishers, Princeton, USA). He is expecting to complete his PhD Thesis: 'Ifrajalism': Images of the [European] Other in Medieval Arabic Culture and Literature in March 2008. Routledge and Brill, among others, have expressed their interest in publishing the thesis in the latest Middle East Studies Association Annual Conference, Montreal, Canada: November 17-20 (2007).

### Yasmin Ibrahim

Yasmin Ibrahim is a Senior Lecturer in the division of Information and Media Studies at the University of Brighton where she lectures in

globalisation and the media and political communication. Her main research interests include the use of the Internet for empowerment and political communication in repressed polities and diasporic communities, global governance and the development of alternative media theories in non-Western contexts.

### **Hatim Mahamid**

Hatim Mahamid is a lecturer in the Dept. of Middle Eastern Studies at Ben-Gurion University. He received his PhD from Tel Aviv University in 2001, where he specialized in the History of Medieval Islam, from Fatimid to Late Mamluk Egypt and Syria. He has published numerous journal articles and contributed to three critical anthologies as well as presenting papers at numerous conferences. His book *AlTatawwurat fi Nizam al-Hukm wal-Idara fi Misr al-Fatimiyya* was published by alAsil in Jerusalem in 2001.

### **Zaid N. Mahir**

Zaid N. Mahir is a current faculty member of the University of Baghdad (College of Languages), a professional translator, and a writer. His translations include literary articles, critiques, book reviews, narrative, poetry, and two books, and have been published in Iraq and other Arab countries. He reviewed and annotated (in English) Arabic books on folklore, popular literature, and oral tradition for the Center for Studies in Oral Tradition at the University of Missouri-Columbia, where he pursues graduate research towards obtaining a Ph.D. in English Literature. He is also translating into English his Arabic war-novel,

*The Way to Baghdad: Day 18 of the War.* Among Mahir's research interests are multiculturalism and cross-cultural influences on the literary text.

### **Wisam Mansour**

Wisam Mansour is a professor of English literature and literary theory at Fatih

University in Istanbul. He previously taught at various universities in Jordan, Cyprus, Lithuania and Turkey. Dr. Mansour has more than 60 papers published in academic and professional journals and books, many of which are indexed in the *Arts and Humanities Citation Index* (A&HCI).

### **Ryan McIlhenny**

Ryan McIlhenny is a Teaching Assistant, at the University of California (Irvine), in World History. He received his Masters from California State University and his PhD on radical slave abolition rhetoric in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, from the University of California. His article "The Austin T.E.A. Party: Home School Controversy in Texas, 1986-1994" appeared in *Religion and Education* (Vol. 30. No. 2). He has presented papers at the 4th Annual Religious Studies Symposium (Florida State University, 2005) and at the 27<sup>th</sup> Mid-America Conference on History (at the University of Kansas, 2005).

### **Federico Sabatini**

Federico Sabatini has a Phd in Comparative Literature and currently teaches at Turin University (Italy). His literary and philosophical research deals with issues of space and perception and their visual and literary recreations in the arts of the XXth century. He has also specialized in gender studies by focussing on the relationship between gender identity and autobiography. In 2007, he has published the book *Im-marginable. Lo spazio di Joyce Beckett and Genet* (“Im-marginable. The Space of Joyce, Beckett and Genet”) which has been inserted in the annual bibliography of Samuel Beckett studies. He regularly writes for peer-reviewed magazine *Lindice*, where he reviews contemporary novels written in English, as well as for other magazines in which he has featured with a number of articles and short stories.

### **Joseph Taylor**

Joseph Taylor is completing a Bachelor of Arts at the University of Western Sydney, Australia. He is passionate about the multifarious history of the land of Iraq and its many peoples including the history and culture of the Iraqi Assyrians to which he feels he belongs. This is his first published work.

# Louise Bourgeois: An Existentialist Act of Self-Perception.

By Federico Sabatini

“Thank you father.

Father why, why, I said why does the touch of my friend’s skin feel so nice?

*Well my child that’s a very good question, but I simply do not know*

Thank you father.

Father, father listening to me who made the day and the night?

*Well my child that’s a very good question, but I simply do not know.*

Thank you father.

I will pass your wisdom unto my children.” (L. Bourgeois, *The Five W’s*, 1999)

The life and the work of Louise Bourgeois show, constantly and astonishingly, an incredible mixture of experiences, feelings and settings, as well as the intersection of several temporal layers, which she seems to recreate simultaneously within the inspiring tension of a single creative moment. Such a peculiarity poignantly leads to the complexity and to the forceful conceptual meaning of her artworks, which, as I’ll suggest in this essay, are infinitely open to discussion and interpretation.

Bourgeois was born in Paris in 1911 and moved to New York in 1938, where she soon became an integral part of the intellectual and artistic life of the city. After being involved with the French Surrealist Movement, she participated in the rise of Abstract Expressionism, shared the legacy of the New York School (the informal group of avant-garde artists active in the city from the 50s) and, in her early works, she anticipated the practise of Minimalism and of Process Art, namely that particular movement which didn’t focus on the art object *as a result*, but rather on the creative process itself, conceived as a journey with its own meaning and conceptual power. Bourgeois shared with Process Art artists (such as Eva Hesse, Bruce Nauman and Richard Serra, amongst others) the inclination to use non-traditional materials (latex, wax, felt) in order to create forms and objects which focussed on the craftsmanship itself, as for example

on the process of cutting, hanging, or freezing.

Her art, however, defies any kind of categorization. She has shown a progressive exploration of themes, techniques and materials, ranging from small scale, fetish-like sculptures (from *Paddle Woman*, dated 1947, to *Germinal* (1967), *Maison Fragile* and the *Nature Study* series in the 80s) to prints and drawings (such as the famous *Femme Maison* (1947), *Spider* (1947) and *Father and Son* (1997)) and room-sized installations (*I Do, I Undo, I Redo* – Tate Gallery of Modern Art, London, 2000). She has also mastered several techniques, such as carving, assembling, modelling and casting, and a varied range of media, including wood, plaster, latex, bronze, marble, as well as an array of *found objects*, so as to refer to the tradition of *readymades* originated by Marcel Duchamp in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>1</sup>

It has been argued in different contexts, that in all her work she explores her own past experience in an ongoing quest to exorcise the painful memories of childhood and adolescence. Bourgeois herself has said that all her work in the past fifty years, all her subjects, have found their inspiration in her childhood, which “has never lost its magic, its mystery and its drama.”<sup>2</sup> The childhood myths are often recreated in terms of loss and tragic cuttings off, especially the ones related to the house, another recurrent motif in Bourgeois’s art, most notably in her drawings, but often evoked in her sculptures as well:

The house represents the past. I go there, it’s demolished. It was replaced by the Paul Eluard theater. The mayor of the little city said, Louise, I am going to put your piece in a park near the town hall; the French government placed a commission with me. It is a tiny place, but at least nobody’s going to come and replace it with a high-rise. *The demolition of the house means that the present destroys the past--cuts it, breaks with it.* Oh yes, the idea of cutting is terrible. The guillotine appears all the time in my work-- remember that poor guy the hysteric; he had no more arms, nothing.<sup>3</sup> (my emphasis)

Here, she describes the exact reproduction of her childhood house, realised for the installation *Choisy*, over which she put a guillotine. As a matter of fact, she seems to be dealing with universal themes, which have long obsessed her personally: anxiety, alienation, rejection, love, the search for identity, sex, death and, above all, human relations, communication and the suffering they inevitably involve. This is probably the main reason why her work has been considered, and is still defined as “autobiographical”, meaning that her main (if not only) source of inspiration was her life and the only aim of her art was to overcome her private pains and obsessions, such as her experiences as a child, her relationship to motherhood and fatherhood, and the complex physical states brought about by strong feelings. Nevertheless, her art can’t be easily dismissed as autobiographical, due to the high degree of sublimation that she achieves, reaching for her work a timeless and universal status which doesn’t only belong to her as a woman, but refers, more widely, to human consciousness and to human perceptual experience.

Considering Roland Barthes’<sup>4</sup> conception of the “death of the author” and Jacques Derrida’s “disappearing of the human being”<sup>5</sup>, I would like to suggest a wider interpretation of Bourgeois’ work, an interpretation which goes beyond the mere (auto)biographical reference, giving plausibility to her art as a vehicle for

expressing more profound and existential ideas. Both Derrida and Barthes have stated the necessity of the author to disappear, in order for the audience to exist in front of any piece of writing. In his essay, Barthes disapproves of the reader's propensity to consider aspects of the author's identity (such as his/her historical context, religion, psychology, or other biographical events) to extract meaning from his/her work:

To give an Author to a text is to impose upon that text a stop clause, to furnish it with a final signification, to close the writing. This conception perfectly suits criticism, which can then take as its major task the discovery of the Author (or his hypostases: society, history, the psyche, freedom) beneath the work: once the Author is discovered, the text is "explained:" the critic has conquered; hence it is scarcely surprising not only that, historically, the reign of the Author should also have been that of the Critic, but that criticism (even "new criticism") should be overthrown along with the Author. In a multiple writing, indeed, *everything is to be distinguished, but nothing deciphered*; structure can be followed, "threaded" (like a stocking that has run) in all its recurrences and all its stages, but there is no underlying ground; the space of the writing is to be traversed, not penetrated: *writing ceaselessly posits meaning but always in order to evaporate it*: it proceeds to a systematic exemption of meaning. (my emphasis).

Readers must thus separate a literary work from its creator in order to get as close as possible to its real, and at the same time constantly changing, significance. Instead of discovering a "single theological meaning", readers must thus discover that writing is created to make its meaning evaporate and change endlessly, it constitutes "a space of many dimensions," which cannot be "deciphered," but only "distinguished" and disentangled. The implications of such a radical vision of critical reading reverse the balance of authority and power between author and reader: the "birth of the reader" can only happen after the author has ceased to exist. Similarly, Michel Foucault, in his influential 1969 essay "What Is an Author", has examined the "author-function" within a wider study of the "literary discourse". He conceives the works of literature as collective cultural products that are not to be referred to single psychologies or to authors as individual beings. The author is not the only reference for the meaning of a work but, on the contrary, is part of a larger system of beliefs that restrict meaning itself. Though with ideological differences (Foucault underlines the system of constraint that works upon us as readers), both authors agree on the fact that the author, or the "author function", may (or must) soon disappear. In a similar fashion, Jacques Derrida has argued that a literary work must continue to be readable even when what is called the author no longer answers for what he has created, so as to make the philosopher speak of the "disappearance of the human being", which leaves utter independence to the structure of the work and to its semantic units.

Although the question of authorship is still an open and vibrant one in critical writing, I think that the aforementioned intellectual positions prove to be still very fruitful in terms of a deep reflection on the visual work of art as well, especially when confronting authors who, like Louise Bourgeois, have challenged many aesthetic issues, including the ones of authorship, and, more specifically, of "autobiography." While taking into account post-structuralist views, moreover, we should also bear in mind that Louise Bourgeois only revealed details of her life in her late seventies and, therefore, the understanding of her

work is not necessarily and directly connected to the events which strongly marked her life. Among these, however, it is worth mentioning the most debated sexual affair between her father and her governess, which, as she lately said, influenced her perception of the human behaviour as a child and, subsequently, her work as an adult artist. Critic Frances Morris has talked out this crucial biographical event, by connecting some old and new declarations by Bourgeois:

It was not until she was seventy-one years old, and preparing for her first major retrospective at the Museum of Modern Art in New York, that Bourgeois told the story of her early life in full. In an autobiographical slide show Bourgeois unravelled the detailed history of her family background and childhood, dwelling on the traumas of negotiating her identity within the triangular adult relationship of her ailing mother, her father's mistress Sadie, the children's English governess. (...) As Bourgeois recalls: 'She was introduced into the family as a teacher for Pierre and myself...and she slept with my father. The thing about Sadie is that she lived in the house. And she stayed for ten years – the formative years of my sister and myself. The story of Sadie is to me almost as important as the story of my mother in my life.'<sup>6</sup>

Despite the importance of this episode (admitted and unravelled by the artist herself), it seems also impossible to reduce her work to a mere "representation" of it, due to the extreme "multilayeredness" of her aesthetics and to her acute awareness of the function of art. All her emotions and feelings, in fact, have been constantly sublimated and re-interpreted through the use of real, pre-existing artistic forms and devices. She mainly turned to spatial claustrophobic enclosures and to the image of the body in all its permutations and fragmented forms, as a vehicle for expressing ideas about universal questions such as suffering and pain, and as a means not only of connecting with the outside world, but also of reaching deep into her own psyche, and into the spectator's one as well. Discussing her need to express herself as "discharged", she simply said "my subject is the rawness of the emotions and the devastating effect of the emotions you go through."<sup>7</sup>

After a number of sculptures realised in the eighties (which mainly focus on the idea of the fragmented body, such as *Untitled, Fingers* and *Untitled, With Hand*), in the early nineties she analysed the body/emotion relationship by creating a series of installations called *Cells*, stating that "they represent different states of pain: the physical, the emotional and the psychological, the mental and the intellectual."<sup>8</sup> Like many other works she did before, the cells are highly architectural in structure, aiming to define, almost scientifically, emotions which are universally difficult to be described and profoundly communicated by any means of expression. Interestingly enough, her first formal training was in mathematics and geometry, two disciplines that have played an important role in the development of her visual aesthetics, acting as an organizing device, since "they offer a reliable world, a reliable system and an unchanging frame of reference."<sup>9</sup>

Bourgeois' architectures, however, are often dysfunctional, presenting, as in *Cell III*, an impossibility of access and ladders or passageways that don't lead anywhere. It is fairly evident that the chaos in human inner lives is not likely to be given an order, reflecting this way the absurdity and difficulty of human

relations, both to the external world and to the internal, personal one. As a matter of fact, her use of geometry and mathematics shows a constant ambivalence, given by her belief in the impossibility to geometricize emotion, even if a scientific frame of reference seems to be indispensable. Her need of such a “frame of reference” seems to reflect on our urge to explain psychic and physical phenomena, our urge to possess scientific means in order to prove our hypotheses. On the other hand, such means always show to be deficient and to provide a deficient explanation. In this respect, it is well arguable that Bourgeois’ geometry is more a non-Euclidean one (focussing on the *imaginary* relations between bodies in a curved space) and, above all, it reveals a non-Cartesian, non-analytic approach, or rather a more phenomenological one, more similar to the one offered by French Philosopher Merleau-Ponty,<sup>10</sup> as I will further point out in this essay.

The cells, her most architectural works besides her room-sized and site-specific installations, are all enclosures. Constructed from a variety of scavenged materials such as wire mesh and steel frames, old doors and windows, these bricolages contain pieces of furniture, found objects, mirrors and sculptures by the artist. In addition, some of them contain the fragmented body parts from which many of her works are built: hands, severed arms, legs, hands, and torsos. In *Cell III – Eyes and Mirrors*, the viewer is denied access and a pair of enormous eyes (built as two perfect, immaculate, marble spheres), are set in the middle of the space to guard the entrance. A round heavy mirror has been inserted into the open ceiling, reflecting the fake marble eyes, which are surrounded by five more round mirrors of different dimensions. The only way for the viewer to enter the space is through his gaze through the cage. The work evokes the theme of looking but also being looked at, for the mirrors give different perceptions of the body. The viewer tries to see something but also feels that he/she is constantly seen, almost spied by the eyes and by the whole world enclosed in the cell. As a consequence, standing in front of the cell means also to be forced to perceive one’s body, one’s physical, but also psychological, self. And to realise the perspectival compromise that human perception ought to accept: we look differently, act differently, and are different, according to countless circumstances that occur in our lives.

In 1945, French philosopher Merleau-Ponty<sup>11</sup> published *Phenomenology of Perception*, a book which has largely influenced visual artists who were experimenting with the use of space (among which are included Alberto Giacometti, Donald Judd, Carl Andre, Sol LeWitt and all the members of the American Minimalist Group), whose aim was to create simple but highly conceptual works, which had to confront the audience and make them aware of their presence in the exhibition’s space, aware, above all, of their own perception and (changeable) point of view. As in Merleau-Pontian terms, in these artworks space and body become inseparable concepts, due to the essential influence of our personal and unique “horizon” of perception:

All my knowledge of the world....is gained from my own particular point of view, or from some experience of the world without which the symbols of science would be meaningless [...] I am the absolute source, my existence does not stem from my antecedents, from my physical and social environment; instead it moves out towards them and sustains them, for I alone bring into being for myself....the horizon whose distance from me would be abolished ....if I were not there to scan it with my gaze.

Many artists, including Bourgeois, put such theories into operation in their own aesthetic discourse and started to focus on the importance of the human's point of view (and its mutability) for a wider understanding of reality. They began to conceive the audience, and the exhibition's space, as fundamental parts of the artwork, creating a kind of mutual communication between them and the viewer, who ceased, therefore, to be a mere addressee of their message. As a result, Bourgeois' cell, which is originally meant to be self-contained and isolated, becomes a place of interaction, which, though the viewer is forced to remain external to it, asks for a complex process of self-consciousness and for a broader comprehension of one's own experience of suffering from the impossibility to fully look at (perceive) oneself. Such a theory convincingly echoes the relationship between self and "others" as expressed by Russian theorist Bakhtin, a theory that, in this context is able to enlighten Bourgeois' aim as well:

In order to understand, it is immensely important for the person who understands to be located outside the object of his or her creative understanding – in time, in space, in culture. For one cannot even really see one's own exterior and comprehend it as a whole, and no mirrors or photographs can help; our real exterior can be seen and understood only by other people, because they are located outside us in space, and because they are others.<sup>12</sup>

If we consider such a complex relationship between self and others, it is also important to realize that a fragment body (and a body "perceived as fragmented") corresponds in Bourgeois to the fragmentation of the "self", of a self which is made up by countless voices, often contrasting, often stimulating, each other. In this respect, we ought to take into account all the connotations of the title "cell"<sup>13</sup> she adopted, here carrying the primal meaning of a small and confined room, but also the biological one referring to the basic structural unity of an organism, which has to establish a relationship with other cells in order to exist, and in order to "form" our body (analogous to the semantic units of a text for Derrida and, similarly, to the single elements with which Bourgeois constructs and structures her works).

Mirrors, for instance, also play a crucial role in the work.<sup>14</sup> They can be mythologically seen as an allegorical embodiment of vanity, but looking into them (as an act) is really about having the courage it takes to look at oneself, and really face oneself or, as Lacan says, to delineate one's contours and to perceive oneself as a whole:

Mirrors are devices for reflection, for capturing a kind of truth, but when polished or curved they are also a means of intensification and magnification. Both effects contain aspects of distillation and clarification, but also of distortion and manipulation.<sup>15</sup>

Complaining about critics who kept misunderstanding her work, Bourgeois famously said "I'm not a surrealist, maybe I could be an existentialist". The act of courage involved in *Cell III – Eyes and Mirrors* could be seen in terms of her own identification with – and simultaneous distance from – Albert Camus, whose work *The Myth of Sisyphus* she often quotes in her interviews:

An artist performs his/her problems. There's no cure anyway because the representation itself

doesn't involve any learning. It avoids it. That is why it continually repeats. Sisyphus liked pushing his rock up. It was his reason for life. A form of self-expression that taught him nothing. Camus didn't want to learn. He wanted to justify his suffering. I want to learn.<sup>16</sup>

Both for Camus and for Bourgeois, however, action is always a necessary gesture, no matter how absurd or futile. It is the same dilemma Friedrich Nietzsche outlined in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, his parable of overcoming the unconditional, infinitely repeated circular course of existence, the conviction that the universe will always recur for an unfathomable number of times. Speaking about her installation *I Do; I Undo; I Redo*, Bourgeois expressed ideas that are closely related to existentialism:

The *Undo* is the unravelling. The torment that things are not right and the anxiety of not knowing what to do. *There can be total destruction in the attempt to find an answer*, and there can be terrific violence that descends into depression. One is immobile in the wake of the fear. It is the view from the bottom of the well. In terms of a relationship to others, it's total rejection and destruction. It is the return of the repressed. I take things away. I smash things, relations are broken. I am the bad mother. It is the disappearance of the love object. *The guilt leads to a deep despair and passivity*. One retreats into one's lair to strategize, recover and regroup.<sup>17</sup>

Bourgeois' ambiguity is close to Nietzsche's overcoming and to Camus' existential absurdity, i.e. the human limitations to find meaning in the universe: it is her response to the recursive condition of mutual dependency between individuals and their environment, which she must see as forces of opposition and/or indifference. Despite the abundance of visual cues, mythological subtexts and symbolic devices, Bourgeois is more interested in establishing a rapprochement which takes advantage of the viewer's proximity to – or perspective on – her arranged objects (i.e. the fake eyes and the mirrors within the cell). Although her art is based on her experience, it doesn't speak *only* to the primacy of our intimacies, but to also the ways we must engage in social interactions to give plausibility to our identities.

In Louise Bourgeois' *Cells*, the emotions she derives from memories become a more generalized outrage at a universal inability to communicate or to find answers, not only because the right questions are not being asked, but also because the right answers might not exist. The artist, as much as the audience, remains impotent, a child who is no longer innocent and struggles against the difficulty of understanding why. Her work spasmodically tries to find the right answers,<sup>18</sup> and constantly questions itself, the artist's mind, and the public's mind. It is what Italian philosopher Umberto Eco calls an "open work", a work which can be read at several different levels, according to several different factors, and which doesn't communicate a final unique message but, on the contrary, suggests a wide range of possibilities, an endless interpretation within an endlessly moving geometry of anxiety.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Louise Bourgeois aligns herself with the tradition of Surrealism, even if her art shows a lot of divergent aspects. As for the use of *readymades*, it can be argued that for Bourgeois they don't only represent objects on which art is "imposed". On the contrary, she uses many objects for particular purposes, such as the one of evoking past times or past cultures. The work *Choisy*, for instance, is mounted on an old sewing-machine stand. Bourgeois explains her aim to capture a 19<sup>th</sup> century atmosphere in contemporary New York, by using a "real" piece from that time: "It's a 19<sup>th</sup>-century workbench. I find this period of the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century--the period of Charcot, the Salpetriere, you know - mysterious. You find these beautiful machines abandoned here in New York: I like the connection, because it is, in a way, a historical piece." (Pat Steir, "Mortal elements - interview with artist Louise Bourgeois - Interview", *ArtForum*, Summer, 1993; FindArticles.com. 05 Sep 2007 ([http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi\\_m0268/is\\_n10\\_v31/ai\\_14156122](http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m0268/is_n10_v31/ai_14156122))).

<sup>2</sup> Frances Morris, *Louise Bourgeois*, London, Tate Gallery Publishing, 2000, exhibition catalogue, *Tate Gallery of Modern Art*, London, 12 may – 17 December 2000; first Unilever commission for the "Turbine Hall", the monumental entrance of Tate Modern.

<sup>3</sup> Pat Steir, "Mortal elements - interview with artist Louise Bourgeois - Interview", *ArtForum*, Summer, 1993; FindArticles.com. 05 Sep. 2007, [http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi\\_m0268/is\\_n10\\_v31/ai\\_14156122](http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m0268/is_n10_v31/ai_14156122)

<sup>4</sup> All references from Roland Barthes, *The Death of the Author*, Hill & Wang, 1977; *Aspen*, n.5 and 6; <http://www.ubu.com/aspen/aspen5and6/threeEssays.html>

<sup>5</sup> Jacques Derida, *Signature, Event, Context*, The John Hopkins University Press, 1977.

<sup>6</sup> Frances Morris, *Louise Bourgeois*, p.9.

<sup>7</sup> Frances Morris, *Louise Bourgeois*, p. 10.

<sup>8</sup> Frances Morris, *Louise Bourgeois*, p. 12.

<sup>9</sup> Frances Morris, *Louise Bourgeois*, p.12.

<sup>10</sup> As I will argue, the difference in thought between Descartes (abstract space based on the notion of "extension") and Merleau-Ponty (perceived space based on the notion of the "body") seems here extremely relevant. Merleau-Ponty accused Descartes' *extension* of having liberated space and spatial investigation from the role of our body in perceiving it and in arranging our perceptual experience in our mind. Similarly, in her "attempt at geometry", Bourgeois reveals the importance of a geometric "frame of reference" which, however, must always connect to our body functions. At the same time, these are inseparable

from a kind of abstract “measurement”, even though such a measurement proves to be fallacious and constantly subjected to modifications, and partial understanding. It is exactly in the space of this ambivalence that Bourgeois sets the (equally) ambivalent meaning of her art.

<sup>11</sup> Merleau Ponty Maurice, *Phenomenology of Perception*, Routledge London, 1995.

<sup>12</sup> Mikhail Bakhtin, quoted in Aileen Jelly, “Bakhtin, The Outsider”, *New York Review of Books*, June 10, 1993.

<sup>13</sup> Frances Morris has introduced the concept: “It was not until the *Cells* that Bourgeois created a dynamic, spatial formula for the exploration of body and environment, self and past, past and present. (...) Evoking the biological cell as well as the imposed cell of the prison or the self- imposed cell of the convent, each one explores, through metaphor, an aspect of human pain or suffering.” (Frances Morris, *Louise Bourgeois*, p.13).

<sup>14</sup> Bourgeois used mirrors in several other works, including in the installation *I Do; I Undo; I Redo*. The site-specific work was composed by three gigantic towers which the viewer could climb through a steep vertiginous spiral staircase. At the top of each tower was an open balcony delimited by several round mirrors, which the viewer was almost forced to use.

<sup>15</sup> Frances Morris, *Louise Bourgeois*, p.6.

<sup>16</sup> Chrstiane Meyer-Thoss, *Louise Bourgeois, Designing for Free Fall*, Ammann Verlag, Zurich, 1992.

<sup>17</sup> Frances Morris, *Louise Bourgeois*, p. 20, my emphasis.

<sup>18</sup> “The *Redo* means that a solution is found to the problem. It may not be the final answer, but there is an *attempt* to go forward”, Interview in Frances Morris, *Louise Bourgeois*, p. 20.

# Lubang Buaya: Myth, Misogyny and Massacre.<sup>1</sup>

By Steven Drakeley

In 1992 when this work was first presented at a postgraduate seminar at the University of Sydney a very different political climate pertained in Indonesia. Then the airing of topics such as this in the public domain was totally taboo inside Indonesia, unless the writer adhered strictly to the “script” sanctioned by the Soeharto regime. Even outside Indonesia, scholars thought twice before venturing into this highly sensitive terrain.<sup>2</sup> At that juncture few expected that within a few years President Soeharto would be removed from power and that his New Order regime would fall (or begin to fall) with him, ushering Indonesia towards democracy.<sup>3</sup> Perhaps nothing has better epitomised the new atmosphere of political openness that has pertained in Indonesia since May 1998 than the public questioning of the New Order’s foundation narrative that has begun to emerge, although not without considerable resistance and reluctance.<sup>4</sup> An important dimension of this questioning has been the hitherto unimaginable publication in Indonesia of numerous works of history related to this sensitive subject matter, a phenomenon echoed beyond Indonesia where overseas scholars have also been prompted by the new climate to engage in this re-examination.<sup>5</sup> I hope that this revised work can make a contribution to the revived scholarly discussion of this pivotal period in Indonesia’s post-independence history.

This foundation narrative in question, foundation myth to put it less politely, was centred on the regime’s version of events associated with what it referred to as “Gestapu”.<sup>6</sup> This acronym refers to what according to the regime was a coup attempt by the Indonesian Communist Party (PKI), a terrible disaster had it been successful from which the regime claimed to have narrowly saved the country thanks to the decisive intervention of then General Soeharto. Having thus emerged as Indonesia’s savior in its hour of most desperate need, the regime narrative continued, Soeharto proceeded to establish the New Order in order to safeguard the nation and to steer it towards development and prosperity. The focus of this article is on a particular component of the Soeharto- New Order foundation narrative, one that is integral and fundamental to it: the myth of Lubang Buaya. More specifically, the primary focus here is on the contribution that this myth’s propagation in 1965-66 makes toward an explanation for the mass political killings that occurred in Indonesia in this period, killings which both accompanied and propelled the regime change associated with Soeharto’s seizure of power. By the time these killings petered out in 1967 hundreds of thousands of people with leftist associations had been put to death arbitrarily, mostly at the hands of their civilian political opponents operating in concert with the Army (Cribb, 1990: 7-14).

The Lubang Buaya myth was a black propaganda campaign which luridly and highly effectively detailed alleged crimes against humanity, against the Indonesian nation and state, against God, and against the normative Indonesian cosmic and social order. These alleged crimes occurred at a place called Lubang Buaya (Crocodile Hole) on the night of 30 September-1 October 1965. The campaign was primarily aimed at the PKI and through it at the secondary target of the so-called “Old Order” regime of President Sukarno of which the PKI was a major bulwark. The autonomous women’s movement was also a target, an aspect to which I will return below. Accordingly, elements of the PKI, or more correctly elements associated with the PKI, were alleged to have committed the heinous crimes detailed in the propaganda. The featured perpetrators were claimed to be members of Gerwani (Movement of Indonesian Women), a PKI-affiliated women’s organisation that occupied (in context) the most radical end of the spectrum of the Indonesian women’s movement. Interestingly, after their initial splash (both inside and outside of Indonesia), the specific details of the horrific events alleged to have taken place at Lubang Buaya have rarely been accorded more than a passing reference. The lurid details of female sexual sadism and promiscuity, so featured in the Lubang Buaya horror story, were relegated to the status of a macabre footnote, or glossed over in language that hinted only vaguely at this aspect of the events that were claimed to have taken place there.<sup>7</sup> Even the regime’s own propaganda film of the Gestapu affair, a four-hour epic “reconstruction” does not reproduce the lurid details contained in the original black propaganda.<sup>8</sup> Here it is argued that the actual content of the Lubang Buaya myth as first disseminated warrants serious attention because of the important role it played in mobilising and motivating the Army-civilian coalition which crushed the PKI through the mass killings and mass detentions. Further, it is argued that the sex and gender aspects of the Lubang Buaya horror story are central to its impact, and thus demand serious scholarly treatment in their own right.

### **Torture, Atrocity, and Massacre**

On 17 August 1965 Indonesia celebrated twenty years of independence. Beneath the customary pomp and bravado so beloved by President Sukarno, it was not a happy occasion. The euphoria of independence having long since faded, Sukarno’s Indonesia - in self-imposed exile from the United Nations, embroiled in confrontation with Malaysia, and with an economy swamped by hyper-inflation - seemed to be sliding towards catastrophe. It was against this ominous backdrop that long simmering tensions in Indonesia’s complex and highly polarised political spectrum rose suddenly towards boiling point. Almost daily demonstrations railing against various foreign enemies fueled the politically charged atmosphere of 1965, as did vicious clashes between rival political youth groups in Jakarta and other cities. In the countryside competing Muslim and PKI- led peasant groups continued the brawls and tit-for-tat beatings, arsons, kidnappings, and murders begun in 1964 over a land reform campaign. At the same time, the jockeying for strategic advantage between the would-be institutional successors (the Army and the PKI) to Sukarno’s highly personalised rule intensified as rumours of the President’s deteriorating health unsettled political players and the general populace alike. In this highly charged atmosphere, rife with coup and plot rumours, few doubted that a conflagration was imminent, and fewer still did not fear the consequences.

It was at this precise juncture that the events associated with the term Gestapu occurred. It appears that during the night of 30 September-1 October a group of disaffected and mostly middle-ranking Armed Forces officers with leftist/radical nationalist inclinations seized control of strategic points in Jakarta and kidnapped and then killed several members of the Army General Staff. Calling themselves the 30 September Movement (G30S), they announced from the captured central radio station that they were taking power to protect the Indonesian Revolution and the President from an imminent right-wing coup led by a “Council of Generals”. Despite the intervening forty two years it is still not clear if the G30S was what it purported to be. Nor, if it was not, is it clear what else it was and who (if anybody) was behind it or manipulating it. The Gestapu or more neutrally the G30S affair remains the subject of considerable controversy, a classic and intriguing historical “whodunit”.<sup>9</sup> It is clear however that (rightly or wrongly) the actions of the G30S were blamed successfully on the PKI by General Soeharto, one of the few senior Generals to have survived. Over the next few days Soeharto’s crack Kostrad (Strategic Reserve Command) troops crushed the G30S and repression of the PKI and its allies began; repression which quickly assumed the form of indiscriminate mass killings of people associated in some way with the PKI.<sup>10</sup>

There can be little doubt that this repression was incited by the G30S affair which had contributed significantly to the generation of a massive wave of anger towards the PKI. Central to understanding how the G30S affair had this effect is an appreciation of how it was presented to the Indonesian public, bearing in mind that the media came under tight Army control after 1 October. It is under this essential condition that certain events, which took place during the brief bid for power by the G30S, became the essential subject matter of a powerful and pervasive black propaganda campaign (in Army Intelligence terms a “psywar”, or psychological warfare, campaign). The centrepiece of this propaganda campaign was the Lubang Buaya horror story, for which, like most effective black propaganda, there is a little basis in fact, if only the better to make the ludicrous embellishments ring true. Except in passing, the following pages do not address the question of what really happened at Lubang Buaya. Here the primary objective is to consider how the official story was used in the months – and years - which followed.

An outline of the key events may be quickly given. It appears that during the attempt by G30S forces to kidnap seven Generals, three were captured alive, three were killed in the process, and the seventh, General Nasution, managed to escape, while his aide, Lt. Tendean, was seized in his place. The four captives and the three bodies were taken to the G30S coup headquarters at Lubang Buaya, located within the sprawling Halim Air force base on the outskirts of Jakarta. Shortly after their arrival the four captives were killed and the seven bodies dumped in a disused well which was then filled in. Present at Lubang Buaya, in addition to troops commanded by officers committed to the G30S, were members of the PKI-linked Pemuda Rakyat (People’s Youth) and members of Gerwani. Ostensibly at least, these civilians were present as volunteers undergoing training by the Air force for the “Fifth Force” (a civilian militia that the PKI proposed should exist alongside of the four armed services). The Generals’ bodies were discovered on October 3 and exhumed the following day in a publicity blitz which maximised the emotive impact of the exhumation and directed the duly aroused abhorrence towards the G30S and the PKI. Not surprisingly the presence at Lubang Buaya of Gerwani and Pemuda Rakyat members was a key piece of evidence put forward to implicate the PKI.<sup>11</sup> Over the ensuing days gruesome allegations appeared in the press,

including assertions that the G30S captives had been tortured and mutilated, specifically that their eyes had been gouged out and their genitals severed. However, even these horrible deaths were not enough grist for the propaganda mill. Further purported details of the Generals' deaths began to appear, usually first in the Army's newspaper *Angkatan Bersendjata*. In a new twist to the propaganda theme it was alleged that the atrocities had actually been carried out by Gerwani members. Thus on 9 October it was reported that the Gerwani women had mocked the Generals before they killed them by "playing with and fondling the genitals of the victims while at the same time displaying their own..." (*Angkatan Bersendjata*, 9 October 1965). A few days later it was reported that Lt. Tendean was used as an "obscene plaything (by the) Gerwani mothers of evil" before they used him for target practice (*Angkatan Bersendjata* 11 October 1965). A few weeks later the "confessions" of Gerwani members in Army custody began to appear. Particularly featured were the confessions of three young Gerwani members: Sujati, Saina, and the reportedly pregnant Djamilah, aged 19, 17 and 15 respectively.

According to Djamilah's "confession", she and a hundred other Gerwani women were issued with small knives and razor blades which they used to slash and hack at the genitals of the captured Generals (*Angkatan Bersendjata* 5 November 1965). Djamilah's confession specifically states that all of the Gerwani members present took part in this atrocity (which makes one wonder how there could have been enough male genitalia to go around). Sujati's confession added the salacious detail that the Pemuda Rakyat and Gerwani members who underwent training at Lubang Buaya had "mixed in complete freedom" during their stay in the barracks (*Kompas*, 30 November 1965). Saina's statement was even more accommodating. According to her confession, for six and a half months the Gerwani and Pemuda Rakyat members at Lubang Buaya had "indulged in delirious sexual orgies which the ancient Romans under Nero would have been jealous of" (*Antara* 8 December 1965, morning edition). Twice a day, her statement continued, she and the other Gerwani women performed the Tarian Bunga Harum (The Dance of the Fragrant Flowers) which the Army-controlled news agency, *Antara*, described as "a shockingly obscene show". *Antara* went on to explain for the benefit of its readers that "the Bunga Harum dance was performed by totally unclad females with a view to tempting the approximately 400 male "Gestapu" members into various obscenities". After each twice-daily show a mass sex orgy was supposed to have ensued, in which every woman had to "serve three to four men" (*Antara*, 13 December 1965, morning edition). Any incredulity on the part of *Antara* readers as to the inclination for such frequent sexual activity was catered for by the confession's claim that the Gerwani members were frequently injected with drugs to stimulate their libidos. As Saina explained, after receiving the injections she was "overcome with an irresistable (sic) desire to indulge in all kinds of immoral acts" (*Antara*, 8 December 1965, morning edition). Other propaganda claims, not directly related to the Lubang Buaya story but with similar themes, were also forthcoming; including the claimed existence of a PKI organisation with the alluring name, Kantjing Hitam, (or Black Button). The Kantjing Hitam was said to have comprised "seductive members of Gerwani, enchantresses (whose task was to) lure leaders of other parties by offering themselves, (and thereby persuading) them to follow the PKI program" (*Djakarta Daily Mail*, 5 November 1965). Documents, allegedly captured from the underground PKI, supported the claim that the PKI utilised "beautiful women to destroy opposing parties", on the premise that these women would "weaken the spirit" of the nationalist and Muslim youths whom they seduced (*Djakarta Daily Mail*, 20 December 1965).

## Terror, Myths, and Monsters

At a comfortable remove from the events and atmosphere of 1965 this sort of material seems inherently ridiculous. Were it not for the real human tragedy involved, its crudity, absurdity and total lack of plausibility prompt its dismissal with derision. But these fantastic accounts deserve to be treated seriously for the simple reason that they were widely believed at the time.<sup>12</sup> To understand how such material could be so widely accepted it is necessary to bear in mind the highly charged atmosphere of fear and tension that had built up over the months and years, even decades, beforehand. Against this background a wide range of irrational fears and rumours readily washed around the country (a phenomenon not unknown in other historical contexts, such as the “Great Fear” during the French Revolution). These fears and rumours acquired further credibility thanks to a press full of panic-inducing reports of water and food supplies being poisoned by the PKI, and of discoveries of “poisoned arrow” caches and suspicious stores of DDT (*Djakarta Daily Mail*, 16 November 1965, 9 December 1965). Also reported discovered were comprehensive death lists, ready-prepared mass graves and arms caches in every PKI stronghold. In this atmosphere, in which every rubber-tapping tool was construed as an “eye-gouger”, the “PKI Malam” (underground PKI) seemed supernaturally potent, and ever ready and able to strike regardless of how many times it was decapitated.

To a significant degree it is to this climate of fear that the phenomenon of the killings can be attributed. The tense atmosphere that had prevailed in the months leading up to the G30S affair had led many people to expect a denouement almost as terrible as that which occurred, and the expectation is itself a part of the explanation for the extremity of the violence.<sup>13</sup> Long held fearful expectations of terrible things about to happen perhaps inured people to the horror of what did happen, perhaps even to the point of allowing them to perpetrate horrors of which they would never have imagined themselves capable. Numerous testimonies make clear that many of those who participated in or egged on the killings were convinced that they were engaged in a life or death struggle. Otherwise quite ordinary people, they acted driven by the fear that if they did not kill their PKI neighbours they would become their neighbours’ victims. Nor was this a wholly irrational perception. Serious violence between pro and anti-PKI forces had been taking place since early the previous year, and there were the bitter memories (held by both sides) of the tit-for-tat massacres of civilians which accompanied the Madiun Affair of 1948.<sup>14</sup> Bearing the psychology of this atmosphere of terror in mind, it is not difficult to see how not only the Lubang Buaya horror story was believed but also how it galvanised the perpetrators of the killings into action.

Of perhaps equal importance, however, are the ways in which the portrayal of the G30S affair contributed to the conditions which made the mass killings possible. That same wave of hatred that the propaganda campaign fostered greatly swelled the ranks of the PKI’s committed enemies. At the same time it washed away the PKI’s sympathisers and allies. Those, like Sukarno, who tried to defend the PKI, found their political influence much undermined and thus their ability to protect the party much diminished. The PKI was left exposed to the severe repression that occurred by isolating it from potential sources of political support while fostering the largest possible coalition of enemies. Of particular significance was the

central place of the Army in the anti-PKI coalition, in part a consequence of how profoundly it had been enraged by the G30S affair. Until this juncture, Army actions against the PKI had been constrained by the protection afforded the latter by Sukarno, and also by a degree of pro-PKI sympathies in sections of the Armed Forces, especially amongst the lower ranks. The enormity of the crimes associated with the G30S affair and attributed to the PKI (essentially the Lubang Buaya story) overwhelmed Sukarno's protection and poisoned the party's name amongst the significant proportion of Armed Forces members who hitherto had been ambivalent rather than hostile towards the PKI, or had even harboured some sympathy for it. For these Armed Forces personnel the dramatic shift in the political climate left them vulnerable to discharge or worse as a purge of suspect military personnel got under way. In these circumstances the most effective means whereby they might expunge any suspicions about their loyalty lay through enthusiastic participation in the violent campaign against the PKI. Thus unrestrained, indeed inflamed, the full force of the Army's might fell upon the PKI, making for a completely unequal struggle. Furthermore, the Army's enthusiastic engagement in repressive operations against the PKI also served to generate confidence amongst anti-PKI civilians groups, as well as providing them with political endorsement. With their numbers much augmented, their morale raised high by the sudden turn of events, and with crucial Army protection, civilian enemies of the PKI were able to go much further in late 1965 and throughout 1966 than had been possible previously. That in many areas, Central Java for instance, large scale civilian on civilian killings did not begin until after elite troops had arrived from Jakarta is one indication of the significant degree to which the Army's intervention made a difference. Amongst civilians too, participation in or support for the killings of PKI and its sympathisers was augmented by a desire to demonstrate one's loyalty to the cause, particularly amongst those upon whom suspicion might otherwise have fallen.

The success of the Lubang Buaya propaganda campaign also greatly reduced any intrinsic capacity the PKI might have had to survive the wave of repression that engulfed it in 1965-66. Since the G30S affair was clearly a complete surprise to the overwhelming majority of the PKI cadre (though perhaps not to a few of the party's principal leaders) the party was totally unprepared to deal with the backlash that resulted from the G30S's failure. This in itself created a serious problem of paralysis that was as much psychological as logistical. But the Lubang Buaya horror story further contributed to this paralysis. Few PKI members and supporters could justify the terrible deeds claimed to have occurred at Lubang Buaya in their name. Many of the thousands of PKI members who in vain publicly renounced their party memberships in October probably did so as much because they shared the widespread repugnance towards the purported Lubang Buaya events as out of fear of the personal consequences that these events held. In turn, these mass resignations exacerbated the PKI's psychological paralysis and severely hampered its already ineffectual efforts to defend itself, or even to shift to a clandestine mode of operation.

Thus as direct consequences of the Lubang Buaya story the PKI was organisationally and psychologically paralysed, politically isolated, and confronted with overwhelming military firepower. All of these factors ensured that the 1965-66 clashes between the PKI and the forces arraigned against it were extremely lopsided. There was simply no means, either military or political, by which the PKI could protect its membership or its leadership. The PKI's military weakness also meant that the Army and the civilian killers it protected need have little concern for their own potential casualties, thereby removing another need for

restraint on their part that might have served as a check in other circumstances. It is this very lopsidedness, as much as the virulence of the hatred and fear, which led to the systematic massacres, as opposed to sporadic and mutual killings which might have erupted otherwise in response to the G30S affair failure or to some other triggering event. The Lubang Buaya story ensured that the G30S affair became far more than a mere trigger for repression meted out to the PKI. To a significant extent it shaped the extreme form that the repression took - the large scale, extra-judicial killings of largely helpless victims. Clearly the Lubang Buaya myth was a crucial causal aspect of the killings phenomenon.

Few Indonesians at the time had both the platform and the courage to dispute the Lubang Buaya horror story publicly. The notable exception was President Sukarno who in December 1965 castigated journalists for writing “untrue things”, declaring (in vain) that post mortem autopsy reports proved that the mutilation stories were false (*Antara*, 13 December 1965, afternoon edition). Since (not surprisingly) the autopsy reports were not made public at this juncture, this crucial element of the Lubang Buaya horror story remained intact. As a consequence, the manner of the Generals’ deaths at Lubang Buaya remained an irresolvable historical issue until the autopsy reports emerged and were published (though not in Indonesia) in 1987 (Anderson, 1987). The autopsy reports make clear that the seven officers taken to Lubang Buaya were neither tortured nor mutilated. This can only mean one of two things. Either Djamilah, Saina and Sujati decided to deceive their interrogators by spinning an elaborate fantasy of their participation in the torture, sexual mutilation and murder of the Generals, or else they were induced to sign (quite detailed and mutually consistent) statements fabricated by their captors.<sup>15</sup> It seems safe to prefer the latter explanation.

It is not difficult to imagine what motivated the concoction of the Lubang Buaya horror story. It needs to be borne in mind that the G30S had portrayed itself as an internal Armed Forces group acting entirely on its own initiative against a corrupt and treacherous High Command, and that the PKI had strenuously endorsed this claim. While this version is certainly questionable, it was certainly the case that (relatively senior) Armed Forces officers were involved in the plot. It was they who implemented it, and it was troops under their command who were directly responsible for the deaths of the Generals. For the new Army leadership, political necessity decreed that these inconvenient facts be suppressed or at least attention diverted from them, and that quite a few fresh “facts” be invented. The Lubang Buaya horror story served to fulfill this purpose, undercutting the degree of sympathy which existed within the Armed Forces for the G30S (or at least for something like the G30S). Thereby it forestalled the real possibility of the Army splitting asunder.<sup>16</sup> It did so first by downplaying the role of Army personnel and highlighting that of Air force personnel and PKI-linked civilians, thereby portraying the G30S affair as an attack on the Army as an institution by the PKI and its dupes. Secondly the Lubang Buaya horror story served to enrage and thus motivate Army personnel. That it had the same effect, as mentioned above, on anti-communist civilians fostered civilian support for the Army’s stance. This support was vital, not only because it lent the Army political legitimacy, but also because civilian forces were vital to the Army’s efforts to eliminate the PKI. Civilians made up the shortfall in the numbers of reliable troops and brought crucial local knowledge to the exercise.

This brings the discussion to the question of how, given the context of its dissemination described above,

the Lubang Buaya horror story functioned to produce the effect desired by its creators. Essentially, as black propaganda of about the darkest shade imaginable; the horror story was designed to “otherise” the PKI to a truly extreme degree. In other words, it was intended to demonise the PKI (and dehumanise its members) in order to feed the fear and loathing with which many regarded it, and thereby to stimulate, justify and facilitate the harshest possible anti-PKI measures.

Two principal interrelated themes had always dominated how the PKI was represented by its enemies: that it was an extrinsic, alien element which had no place in the Indonesian nation; and that as the supreme manifestation of atheism it was intrinsically immoral, evil and against God. The Lubang Buaya horror story played upon both these themes. The very framework in which the Lubang Buaya story was placed (the G30S coup attempt) established the PKI as traitors to Indonesia. The inherent assumption that the PKI needed to employ such intrinsically illegitimate means in order to come to power reinforced the notion that it was an alien element. This was also reinforced by the implication that as it came to power so it would go on, imposing its alien ideology upon an unwilling Indonesia through force. The ruthless, even sadistic, violence that the PKI allegedly employed at Lubang Buaya also exemplified the PKI’s “otherness”, since such behaviour was presented as alien to the true Indonesian culture and character. The immoral-because-of-atheism theme fitted snugly with the foregoing. It did so in a formal sense because “belief in the one God” is the first of the five principles which comprise the Pancasila, the national ideology contained in the Preamble to the Constitution. Thus for its enemies the PKI was automatically disqualified from inclusion in Indonesia. But on a broader level it fitted because the PKI’s atheism was seen, particularly by its Muslim enemies, as the root of the immorality it displayed in a number of ways: betraying the nation, seeking to pervert the national identity, perpetrating appalling acts of violence, and above all by wallowing in sexual licentiousness, all of which were features of the Lubang Buaya horror story. Indeed the PKI’s alleged sexual immorality stood for its general immorality, and as the prime indicator of its inherently evil/atheistic nature.

The Lubang Buaya horror story also “otherised” the PKI on an even cruder level. Its rigorous demonisation of the PKI dehumanised PKI supporters so that they appeared as nothing but bloodthirsty and sexually sadistic monsters. The dehumanisation even approached a literal equation of PKI members with animals: “these scurvy mongrels (who) put their slimy claws on the innocent souls of our children” (*Djakarta Daily Mail*, 11 December 1965). This equation was also conveyed through the sexual behaviour attributed to the PKI at Lubang Buaya: sexual behaviour unrestrained by morality and propelled only by “animal” sexual instinct and appetite. Yet another feature of the demonisation/dehumanisation process included the repeated association of the PKI with a range of pollutants. Thus the description of the PKI as the “poisonous stabbers in the back (who) must be eliminated”, and the employment of headlines such as: “The Coming Generation must not be Infected by the Anti-God Mentality”, “Clean all Departments Etc. from “G-30-S” Elements” (*Djakarta Daily Mail*, 16 November 1965, 17 December 1965, 17 November 1965 respectively).

The natural corollary of this sort of propaganda, all of which fostered the image of the PKI as the ultimate dangerous “other”, was a tendency for the PKI’s enemies to see themselves in the opposite terms: as the

defenders of morality, religion, and the national identity. As such they not only felt justified in purging the Marxist pollutant, but obliged to do so. Islamic leaders stressed that crushing the G30S/PKI was not merely *sunnat* (recommended) but *wajib* (obligatory) for Muslims.<sup>17</sup> Moreover, the very extremity of the danger, and of the PKI's otherness, encouraged an equally extreme sense of self-righteousness on their part, which in turn both encouraged and justified the extreme measures taken to expunge the PKI from the face of the Indonesian earth. Thus "... not only the roots should be pulled out but also the seeds of Gestapu should be destroyed..." (H. Anwar Tjokroaminoto, General Chairman of the PSII, (*Antara*, 21 December 1965, morning edition), and "Cast out this spawn of hell root and branch, tear down the walls of their ideological edifices, plow the salt into the sterile sands of their alien mental beachhead, let Communism nevermore sojourn in this Nation" (*Djakarta Daily Mail* (editorial) 11 December 1965). Perversely, the more drastic the means employed, the more the means justified themselves by emphasising the extremity of the perceived PKI threat. The significance of these extraordinary efforts to dehumanise the PKI is quite simple. Death, for such dangerous animals and pollutants, dealt out without compunction, question, trial or mercy, even without the dignity of a burial, became merely a reasonable response to the PKI's nature and the threat that it posed.

### Misogynous Themes

Given their general effectiveness, and the political motivations of those who used them in this instance, it is understandable that black propaganda techniques should have been utilised against the PKI at this juncture. But what is intriguing about the Lubang Buaya material, as should by now be apparent, is its rich vein of misogynous themes. Their presence cannot be dismissed as either incidental or accidental, if only because they are featured so prominently. Indeed, upon closer examination it is clear that the misogynous themes are absolutely indispensable to the material's impact, and therefore to the propaganda campaign's success.

A striking feature of the Lubang Buaya horror story is the casting of the Gerwani women as the principal torturers, mutilators and executioners. This cannot be attributed to the need to downplay the involvement of military personnel in the Gestapu affair and to highlight that of the PKI. This effect could have been achieved by casting the male Pemuda Rakyat members in the sadistic role allotted to the Gerwani women. Closer analysis reveals how this "casting decision" made the propaganda much more effective in demonising the PKI. Although intrinsically horrifying, the alleged murders, tortures, and mutilations appeared even more so as the acts of women. This effect hinged on the well-founded assumption that for the target propaganda "consumers" there was an immediately obvious contradiction between this sort of behaviour and that expected of women. As *Angkatan Bersendjata* (9 October 1965) asked rhetorically "How far is behaviour such as this from the values of women?" Thus the propaganda authors exploited the widespread belief in the existence of innate gender characteristics in order to magnify the desired sense of outrage.<sup>18</sup> On another level, the very subversion of the Gerwani women from their "true" female natures (indicated equally by their callous capacity to commit atrocities and their wanton sexual behaviour) was presented

as one of the most wicked of the PKI's crimes. Thus the actions of the Gerwani women were frequently portrayed as being initiated by PKI leaders (*Angkatan Bersendjata*, 5 November 1965). Even the alleged orgies were presented as being personally orchestrated by PKI leader Aidit (*Antara* 8 December 1965, morning edition). More explicitly, when Saina was asked how she could have had the heart to carry out murder she explained that she had been indoctrinated by Aidit to believe that "women should be as brave as men" (*Kompas* 8 December 1965). Similarly Sujati stated that she had been taught to believe "that in the communist world there is no difference between men and women" (*Kompas*, 30 November 1965).

There was a subtle but powerful warning here. The claimed PKI subversion of the "true" female nature conveyed the propaganda authors' version of the PKI world: a world turned upside down (to borrow Christopher Hill's phrase from his work on the English Revolution) both in the cosmic and the social senses which are inextricably linked in the traditional Indonesian world view. The propaganda suggested that a PKI Indonesian "world" would be one in which women defied their "inherent" natures, and rejected their "proper" social places, a condition powerfully symbolised by their sexual assertiveness. This message would have disturbed its target audience because of the entailed loss of male privileges and of male power over female sexuality. But more was suggested by the powerful symbolism through which the profoundly upside-down nature of the PKI world was conveyed. The "inherent" nature and role of women stands for all the values and norms of society, thereby suggested was that the very foundations of civilization and order would be uprooted. Thus threatened were all aspects of social order, including all forms of privilege and status, and all notions of righteous behaviour and community. To a religious audience the symbolism would have been particularly resonant as such "improper" female behaviour necessarily entailed the flouting of religious laws and values. The message was conveyed explicitly as well as symbolically. The Lubang Buaya horror story frequently made the explicit point that the PKI consciously attempted to counter the influence of religious morality, suggesting thereby that the PKI understood that this was a major obstacle to its plans. For example, Saina stated that Aidit and others "gave talks at Lubang Buaya asserting that the male and female PKI volunteers should not be restrained by religious regulations but should live and mix in complete freedom including having sexual relations" (*Kompas*, 8 December 1965).

The phenomenon of political propaganda employing misogynous themes is of course not exclusive to the Indonesian context. For example, Francoist propaganda during the Spanish Civil War disparaged and demonised anarchist and communist women, accusing them of bloodthirsty crimes, sexual immorality and sacrilege in a manner strikingly similar to the Lubang Buaya material. Through such material propaganda authors condemn their political enemies and their ideas as barbaric, while simultaneously counterpoising themselves as the upholders of civilization. Of course this technique is a variation on an old propaganda theme which employs the "fair sex" representation of women. A group's women are like a flag around which the group gathers, representing the group's cause and way of life, indeed its very identity. The Lubang Buaya horror story was simply a variation of this technique amended to take into account the idea that the enemy was within, both in the sense of being within the nation and in the sense of being within the self, an illegitimate condition that demanded purging. The idealised representation of women was crucial, because it allowed the contrast with the Gerwani members who were accused of having "besmirched the prestige of Indonesian women who are renowned for their noble character..." (*Angkatan Bersendjata*, 11

October 1965). Thus the Lubang Buaya horror story authors portrayed themselves as upholding the values of their idealised Indonesian woman (and thus of the nation, religion etc), values which they contended were far from those of the Gerwani (*Angkatan Bersendjata*, 9 October 1965). The propaganda's easy shifting between the (supposed) nature of women per se and that of the Indonesian woman also allowed reiteration of the point that the true Indonesian identity was threatened by alien values. As Soeharto put it: "...morally Indonesian women are ignorant of sadism. They only know tender feelings which correspond to harmony in life" (*Antara*, 31 May 1966, morning edition). He went on to regret that the "sadistic practices perpetrated by members of the Gerwani...had destroyed the identity of Indonesian women", and called for "Indonesians, including women, to have the courage to return to the true national identity...".

The drug injection image also reinforced the charge that the PKI sought to subvert the "inherent" nature of women. The claim that they were drugged suggested the externality of the evil force moving the Gerwani women (*Antara*, 8 December 1965, morning edition, *Angkatan Bersendjata*, 8 June 1967). Even the method by which the drugs were administered (injection) reinforced the impression of their externality, as well as suggesting their foreign origin. Again this implied that the PKI's philosophy was so unnatural that it could only be introduced artificially. Of course the metaphor could be readily extended to stand for the PKI's attempted subversion of Indonesia itself: the injected women standing for Indonesia and the drugs for the alien ideology. On another level, the image of drugs with their mysterious capacity to radically distort human behaviour smacked of magic potions, thereby echoing the widespread fear that PKI members possessed black magic powers (Young, 1990: 74). This idea was part of the propaganda's literal demonisation of the PKI. The frequent employment of epithets such as "savage she-devils" constantly reinforced the suggestion that PKI members were possessed by tangible evil forces (*Djakarta Daily Mail*, 11 December 1965). Moreover the central image of the Lubang Buaya horror story was of a macabre, female-dominated, sexually charged event, conducted by torchlight in the dead of night, suggesting an Indonesian equivalent of a coven of witches busily serving supernatural evil. For an Indonesian audience, such images, and the behaviour attributed to the Gerwani women, resonated with Indonesia's rich tradition of "superstitious" beliefs which particularly feature female monsters and ghosts that usually happen to be the most dangerous in the Indonesian monster-ghost pantheon. Interestingly, particularly characteristic of these female monsters is their wanton cruelty, sexual licentiousness and sexual provocativeness, precisely the characteristics attributed to the "Gerwani Mothers of evil".

The Lubang Buaya horror story could be read as a darker, more subterranean, misogynous tract which suggested that the PKI deliberately released a powerful evil potency, inherent in female sexuality, which leads inexorably to mayhem and violence.<sup>19</sup> The message implied therein was that the maintenance of social (read male) control over women is necessary to keep this potential evil in check. Therefore the Army and its civilian allies had to act decisively in order to force this evil genie of unrestrained female sexuality back into the confines of "proper" female behaviour. Thus their actions amounted to a restoration of order in a political sense, as well as a restoration of the natural and spiritual orders.

The demonisation (both literal and a figurative) of the Gerwani readily included the PKI because of the intimate political relationship between the two organisations, a relationship which the Lubang Buaya

horror story was, as noted, at pains to display in operation. But more was implied. Within this discourse the Gerwani was frequently used to denote the PKI. This was made explicit in an article entitled “Can we still be bed partners?” where the PKI was assigned the female gender and the characteristics ascribed to the Gerwani (Lucas, 1965). Here the PKI (the daughter of Karl Marx) was presented as a young girl whose favourite game was torturing animals, then as a teenager who obtained amusement by duping boys into fighting each other, and finally as a married woman who delighted in using a “homemade eye-gouger” on her husband (Indonesia) and in amputating parts of his anatomy. In keeping with the monster theme, the PKI was referred to as a “Gorgon” with “the new Medusa look”. The author concluded by calling for this “bitch” (whose crimes included the “exasperating habit” of striving to get on top of her husband in bed) to be strung up from “the tallest pole or tower in town”. The strident tone of his last sentence is no doubt reflective of the prevalent political mood amongst anti-communists, but equally well the stridency as well as the phallic symbolism indicates just how virulent was the vein of misogyny the Lubang Buaya horror story was tapping into and exploiting.

There is another feature of the material that begs attention. The details of the sexual promiscuity attributed to the Gerwani women were necessary if the propaganda was to convey the messages discussed above. Arguably this material was intrinsically titillating, crammed as it was with details of dancing naked women, sexual orgies, free love, aphrodisiacs, and seductive *femmes fatales*. But its very manner of presentation, the breathless purple prose, was deliberately titillating (despite the accompanying affected tone of outrage). For example, the description of the orgies as “delirious” and their comparison with those popularly associated with the excesses of ancient Rome (*Antara* 8 December 1965, morning edition). In part this may have been a product of the embellishment of the journalists through whom the propaganda was conveyed to the public. But it is interesting to note that while this sort of material might seem pretty tame (as well as quaintly amateurish) by today’s standards, it would have stood out starkly at the time. With the notable exception of matters related to the Gestapu affair, sexual references in the Indonesian press, up to and during this period, were rare and phrased quite delicately.

There is a distinct possibility that the titillating nature of the material enhanced the effect of the propaganda. The sexual arousal of some of the key intended propaganda consumers may well have sharpened the virulence of their hatred and thus further stimulated their participation in the killings. There is surely an element of repressed sexuality in the phenomenon of young men, who often shared a strong institutional bond (such as shared membership of a religious school), roaming at night with little or no “adult” supervision, and hunting down and killing their immoral enemies, often in a highly ritualistic manner (MacDonald, 1980: 53). Moreover, it is not difficult to imagine young Muslim and Catholic men (the main perpetrators on Java) finding the idea of seduction by sexually assertive women rather appealing, but simultaneously threatening and guilt inducing.<sup>20</sup> The profound concern of the PKI’s enemies with morality ensured that propaganda detailing the PKI’s alleged moral turpitude would evoke disgust. That the material was also titillating was likely to have evoked a sense of shame on the part of the self-righteous “voyeurs” who despite themselves were aroused by the material. Because the propaganda emphasised the associations between the Gerwani and the PKI, and aroused feelings of sexual threat and sexual guilt, then participation in the killings was a subconscious means of eradicating the supposed source of these

uncomfortable feelings. The political sins of the Gerwani/PKI allowed any sense of sexual guilt on the part of the killers to be turned outwards instead of inwards. It was, after all, the enemy within the self and within the nation that needed to be exorcised.

### Lubang Buaya and Gerwani

Hitherto, the main thrust of the argument has been to show how the Lubang Buaya horror story's misogynous themes served to swell the wave of extreme anti-PKI sentiment. However, the black propaganda's vicious slandering of the Gerwani cannot be entirely attributed to its authors' desire to achieve this objective. The virulence of the slander, both in substance and tone, suggests that this propaganda form was more than a mere means to the end of the PKI's destruction. The virulence also seems to reflect the authors' genuine abhorrence of the Gerwani and suggests that its destruction was an important subsidiary objective. Illustrations of the virulence abound. Extreme denunciations of the Gerwani such as: "the savage she-devils of Lubang Buaya, depraved women who can go from mutilation and murder to immorality in almost the same breath" were common in the press of the period (*Djakarta Daily Mail*, 11 December 1965). It is also striking how reflexive was the equation between the Gerwani and sexual immorality; hence the 23 November 1965 *Djakarta Daily Mail* headline: "Gerwani Top Jezebel Caught". Similarly, the epithet "Gerwani whore" was an automatic term of abuse directed towards any woman identified as an opponent of the New Order. For instance, the insult "Gerwani Whore" (Lonte Gerwani) was hurled at Hartini, Sukarno's left-wing wife, by pro-New Order students, who painted it, along with similar slogans, on her Bogor house in January 1966 (Soe Hok, 1983).

By today's standards the Gerwani was not a particularly militant or effective exponent of women's interests. Ironically this was largely due to the PKI's influence which sharply curtailed Gerwani's ability to campaign for reforms which conflicted with the party's short term political interests. Particularly pertinent here was the party's cosy relationship with Sukarno whose ostentatious polygamy undermined Gerwani's long-standing campaign on this issue. Nevertheless, the Gerwani was a large mass movement and thus had considerable impact in the realm of sexual politics.<sup>21</sup> It had fought for greater social equality for women, notably campaigning for a "democratic marriage law" which would outlaw polygamy and remove the ease with which Muslim men could obtain a divorce. It had also urged heavier penalties for rape and abduction (Wieringa, 1988: 78). In pursuit of such causes the Gerwani earned the ire of all socially conservative forces, but especially of many Islamic groups for whom many of these policies were a blatant contradiction of Islamic teachings. That the Gerwani was also seen as the PKI's creature added additional sharpness to the animosity directed towards it, and tended to confirm the view that its policies were part of broader secularisation campaign which key Muslim organisations were resisting.

The proposition that the propaganda authors bore a specific malice towards the Gerwani helps to explain a prominent feature of the Lubang Buaya slander: the lie that Gerwani members castrated the Generals. In terms of the propaganda's horror-creation needs it surely would have been sufficient for the Gerwani

women to have been portrayed as torturing the Generals to death. Why instead of the castration concoction is there not a lingering description of them gouging out the General's eyes? This fabrication was also one of the horrors supposedly perpetrated at Lubang Buaya, but it remained unattributed to any specific group or individuals. At the risk of straying into "vulgar Freudianism", the explanation offered here is that the castration story was intended to symbolise the Gerwani threat to male dominance. The bizarre allegation that the Gerwani women mockingly displayed their genitals to the Generals immediately before killing them can also be explained by this particular theme of the propaganda. Such alleged behaviour suggested that the Gerwani were flaunting their gender in triumph over their hapless males prisoners whose "potency" they were about to remove a slice at a time.

Certainly if the destruction of the Gerwani and thereby of an autonomous women's movement was an objective of the Lubang Buaya propaganda story then this purpose was met. Gerwani activists were hunted down, killed or detained for long periods, often in hellish conditions, and the organisation utterly destroyed (Pohlman, 2006). Once established the New Order implemented a policy of enforced "cooptation and regimentation of women's organisations", effectively transforming them into agents of the state, a policy which was greatly facilitated by the trauma of the 1965-66 terror, especially by the vivid example of what happened to the Gerwani (Nursjahbani, 1992: 1-2). This is well understood by contemporary Indonesian feminists. At a Women's Congress in Yogyakarta in December 1998 a former leader of Gerwani, was the first speaker.<sup>22</sup> The Congress organizers sent two important and related signals with this controversial action. First, that the resurrection of an autonomous Indonesian women's movement after the stultifying decades of the New Order demanded an acknowledgment of Gerwani's historical legacy and, second, that the New Order's propaganda linking Gerwani to the horrific crimes allegedly perpetrated at Lubang Buaya has to be confronted. At the Lubang Buaya site today there is an elaborate monument (officially known as Monument of the Sacred Pancasila). Below a pedestal upon which the murdered Generals stand there is a relief in which Gerwani women are depicted performing the Dance of the Fragrant Flowers and cavorting lasciviously with men. In the background are scenes of chaos and violence including a depiction of one of the generals being lowered into the disused well.<sup>23</sup> The New Order's Lubang Buaya slander against Gerwani is literally cast in bronze set in stone and constitutes part of a major national monument visited by tens of thousands of school children each year. This is an apt metaphor for the solid place that the Lubang Buaya myth occupies in mainstream Indonesian historical accounts and popular understanding of the events in question. Confronting this vicious slander is necessary not merely for the sake of historical accuracy, but more importantly because the slanders hurled against Gerwani contained in the Lubang Buaya myth are by extension also leveled at all Indonesian women who dare to engage in autonomous political activity.

### **The "Voices Off" of the not-quite silenced victims**

More than forty years on the "Gestapu affair" still reaches into Indonesia's present with a palpable force, showing just how much life remains in that "dead hand of History". The Lubang Buaya events are a

pivotal aspect of the Gestapu affair, but their importance is largely a consequence of the myth that was manufactured from them: a myth which harnessed misogyny to the political goals of its creators. Lubang Buaya (Crocodile Hole) could hardly be a more ironically appropriate place name considering the role allotted to the Lubang Buaya myth in Indonesian political history. The very term became synonymous with infamy in the political lexicon of New Order Indonesia, the mythical events of Lubang Buaya serving as a the epitome of the horrors from which it is claimed the nation narrowly escaped. Indeed the term Lubang Buaya, as much as the site itself with its monument, its museum, its diorama and its preserved buildings and well, was a key shrine in the New Order-approved Indonesian national legend.<sup>24</sup> However, like many other such national “shrines” around the world when “excavated”, Lubang Buaya proves to be a fraud. The “bodies” that were recovered from the “Crocodile’s” hole eventually spoke louder than the sanctified lies in which the Lubang Buaya myth-makers shrouded them. Moreover, if counterpoised against the silent witness of the “bodies”, the lies of the myth themselves cast an additional glimmer of light into the shadows of what is still only a partially excavated mass grave. Crumbling newspapers, half-forgotten documents, and decomposed bodies unite to tell tales on those who exhumed the bodies only in order to bury them in the sacrosanct silence that a shrine is meant to evoke, or perhaps impose.

At the Lubang Buaya monument the faces of the famous Lubang Buaya victims: Generals Yani, Suprpto, Harjono, Pandjaitan, Parman, Siswomihardjo and Lieutenant Tendean, still stare down accusingly from their pedestal above the well that was their temporary mass grave. The statues were intended as a permanent accusation against the PKI, but perhaps now their accusing gazes are directed at those who constructed the New Order regime and authored the Lubang Buaya myth: those who built their regime on the deaths of these seven men and on the deaths of hundreds of thousands of largely anonymous other Indonesians. These countless others remain in their rather more anonymous mass graves, still awaiting their own exhumation, both physical and historical. They too were Lubang Buaya victims, as were Saina, Djamilah and Sujati.

## References

Anderson, B. (1987) ‘How did the Generals die?’ *Indonesia* 43 (April)

\_\_\_\_\_, B.R. and McVey, R. T. (1971), *A Preliminary Analysis of the October 1 1965 Coup in Indonesia*, Cornell University

*Angkatan Bersenjata*, 5 October 1965 - 8 June 1967

*Antara*, 11 November 1965 - 31 May 1965

Barley, N. (1993), *The Duke of Puddle Dock*, Penguin

- Bourchier, D. (1987) 'The military and the trauma of 1965' *Inside Indonesia* 12 (October)
- Cribb, R. (1990), Problems in the historiography of the killings in Indonesia. In Cribb, R. (ed) *The Indonesian Killings 1965-1966*, Monash University
- Crouch, H. (1973). 'Another Look at the Indonesian Coup' *Indonesia* 15 (April)
- Dake, A.C.A. (1973), *In the Spirit of the Red Banteng*, Mouton
- Djakarta Daily Mail*, 5 November 1965 - 17 December 1965
- Evans, B. (1989) 'The influence of the United States Army on the Development of the Indonesian Army (1954-1964)' *Indonesia* 47 (April)
- Harian Rakjat, (1965) 1 October
- Hughes, J. (1968), *The End of Sukarno*, Angus and Robertson
- Kompas*, (1965) 30 November - 8 December
- Lee, O.H. (1976) 'Sukarno and the pseudo coup of 1965: ten years later' *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* VII 1 (March).
- Lucas, F. A. (1965) *Djakarta Daily Mail*, 6 December
- MacDonald, H. (1980). *Suharto's Indonesia*, Fontana
- McGehee, R. (1981) 'The CIA and the White Paper on El Salvador' *The Nation* 11 April
- McGregor, K. E. (2002) 'Commemoration of 1 October, Hari Kesaktian Pancasila: A Post Mortem Analysis?', *Asian Studies Review* 26 no. 1 March
- McGregor, K. E. (2007) *History in Uniform: Military Ideology and the Construction of Indonesia's Past*, Asian Studies Association of Australia in association with NUS Press
- Nursjahbani, K. (1992) Engendering a New Order: endangering democracy. Paper presented at Indonesian Democracy 1950s and 1990s Conference, University of Melbourne
- Pohlman, A. (2006) 'A Fragment of a Story: Gerwani and Tapol Experiences' *Intersections* 10 June, Murdoch University

Roosa, J. et al (eds) (2004), *Tahun yang tak Pernah Berakhir*, Jakarta: Lembaga Studi dan Advokasi Masyarakat in association with Tim Relawan untuk Kemanusiaan Institut Sejarah Sosial Indonesia

Roosa, J. (2006) *Pretext for Mass Murder*, The University of Wisconsin Press

Schreiner, K. H. (2005) 'Lubang Buaya: Histories of Trauma and Sites of Memory', in Zurbuchen, M.S. (ed.) *Beginning to Remember: The Past in the Indonesian Present*, Singapore University Press in association with University of Washington Press

Sen. K. (1999) 'Women on the Move' *Inside Indonesia*. No.58, April-June.

Soe Hok. G. (1983) *Catatan Seorang Demonstran*. Jakarta: LP3ES.

*Suara Muhammadiyah*, (1966) November

Sulistyo, H. (2004), *Palu Arit di Ladang Tebu*, Jakarta: Kepustakaan Populer Gramedia in association with the Yayasan Adikarya IKAPI and the Ford Foundation

Swift, A. (1989) *The Road to Madiun: The Indonesian Communist Uprising of 1948*, Cornell University

Van Klinken, H. (1999) 'Coming Out' *Inside Indonesia*. No.58, April-June.

Wertheim, W.F. (1970) 'Suharto and the Untung Coup - the missing link', *Journal of Contemporary Asia* 1:2.

\_\_\_\_\_, W.F. (1978) 'Suharto and the Latief Trial: A Painful Revelation', *Tapol Bulletin*, 29, August.

\_\_\_\_\_, W.F. (1979) 'Whose plot? New light on the 1965 events', *Journal of Contemporary Asia* 9:1.

Wieringa, S. (1988) 'Aborted Feminism in Indonesia' in Wieringa, S. (ed) *Women's Struggles and Strategies*. London: Gower.

Wilkinson, M. (1999) 'Hidden Holocaust'. *Sydney Morning Herald*. July 10.

Young, K. R. (1990) 'Local and national influences in the violence of 1965'. In Cribb, R. (ed). *The Indonesian Killings 1965-1966*, Monash University.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> This article is a revised version of a paper published (with the same title) in the Working Papers series of the Centre of Southeast Asian Studies, by the Monash Asia Institute of Monash University in 2000. An earlier version, which circulated rather too widely, it seems, was given as a paper to the Women in Asia Conference held at the University of Melbourne in October 1993.

<sup>2</sup> Prominent scholars, such as Ben Anderson and Ruth McVey (1971) who had written alternative accounts were placed on a “blacklist” and prevented from visiting Indonesia, providing a salutary lesson for others considering such a course.

<sup>3</sup> I do not wish to be detained here by quibbles about the precise nature of the current regime in Indonesia, the degree to which it is democratic and the degree to which it has retained elements of the New Order, both in terms of personnel and institutions.

<sup>4</sup> Not surprisingly, given that Soeharto’s version was propagated so widely, insistently and repeatedly for more than thirty years in Indonesia, alternative accounts have been slow to gain acceptance. But it is more than the dead weight of decades of propaganda that has impeded this process. Active and committed resistance to even the consideration of alternative accounts from a range of groups and individuals who retain a vested interest in the previous historical orthodoxy is largely responsible for the persistence of the New Order’s version of history. Earlier this year for instance the Attorney General’s Office banned thirteen books associated with the 2004 history syllabus simply because they did not include the standard terminology that implied acceptance of the normative account. The terminology in question is G30S/PKI. This term implies that the G30S movement was a PKI operation, a version which many historians regard as dubious, or at least open to challenge. In response Indonesian historians circulated a petition of protest demanding that other versions of the events not be precluded from consideration in this manner.

<sup>5</sup> Notable works published in Indonesia dealing with this subject matter include Sulisty, 2000 and Roosa et al, 2004.

<sup>6</sup> The acronym “Gestapu”, with obvious similarity with the term “Gestapo” (itself an acronym for the infamous political police of Nazi Germany), was ascribed to the 30 September Movement by Army propagandists. Using selected letters it was constructed from the Indonesian for 30 September Movement (Gerakan September Tiga Puluh).

<sup>7</sup> Recently Lubang Buaya has received more scholarly attention. See the studies by McGregor (2002 and 2007) of the Museum and monument at the site and of the annual commemoration ceremonies that took place there during the New Order.

<sup>8</sup> The film is Pengkhianatan G30S/PKI (The Treason of the September 30 Movement/PKI) (1984). Screened on television every year on the night of 30 September it was a powerful tool for imprinting the

New Order's account of events.

<sup>9</sup> There have been numerous attempts to fathom the mystery. Prime examples include: Anderson and McVey 1971, Oey Hong, 1976, Dake, 1973, Crouch, 1973, Wertheim, 1970, 1979. More recently there is the excellent work by Roosa, 2006.

<sup>10</sup> Much about the killings remains unknown. For an excellent discussion of the state of our knowledge on this and related subjects see Cribb, 1990: 1-45. The subject's extreme sensitivity in Indonesia has been and remains the major impediment to the research necessary to answer these and other questions.

<sup>11</sup> Other evidence included a cartoon on the front page of the PKI newspaper, *Harian Rakjat* (People's Daily) which implied support for the G30S and seemed to indicate foreknowledge of the G30S's actions.

<sup>12</sup> Indeed, although now rarely repeated in an explicit form, for most Indonesians the Lubang Buaya horror story remains an established historical fact. It is worth pointing out that Indonesians are not alone in taking this view. The Lubang Buaya story has been repeated uncritically by Western journalists, and not a few scholars. John Hughes, one of the few Western journalists in Indonesia at the time, is one whose gullibility in accepting the Lubang Buaya story is more difficult to excuse. Hughes was granted the opportunity to interview some of the captive Gerwani members whose confessions constituted virtually the only evidence offered to substantiate the Lubang Buaya story. As Hughes himself relates, the Gerwani prisoners he interviewed denied their guilt and insisted their confessions had been extracted under duress (Hughes 1968, 45-50). Not surprisingly, when he re-interviewed them later in the presence of Army interrogators they admitted their guilt and dutifully repeated the details contained in their confessions. Hughes, for reasons unknown, preferred the accounts acquired in his second interview.

<sup>13</sup> I am indebted to Herb Feith for stressing this point in a personal communication.

<sup>14</sup> For the Madiun Affair see Swift, 1989

<sup>15</sup> Wieringa, 1988: 82-4 states that the Gerwani women who signed these confessions were "badly tortured" and notes that none of them, nor any of the other women arrested because of their presence at Lubang Buaya, were ever brought to trial.

<sup>16</sup> According to David Bouchier, 1987: 8) Ben Anderson made a similar point at a seminar held at Monash University on 11 July 1987.

<sup>17</sup> See *Antara*, 11 November 1965, morning edition, 15 November 1965, afternoon edition, and *Suara Muhammadiyah*, November 1965.

<sup>18</sup> The precise identity of the propaganda authors is unknown to this writer, but according to (logical) rumour they were Kostrad Intelligence Officers. They may well have been amongst the 2,800 members of

the Indonesian officer corps who received training in the United States, some of whom certainly received training in counter-insurgency/intelligence operations (Evans 1989, 39n, 40. McGehee, 1981 implies that the CIA played a role in the propaganda's creation, but his (CIA- censored) article does not make clear the precise nature of this alleged CIA role. Similarly vague suggestions appeared in the Sydney Morning Herald recently (Wilkinson 1999).

<sup>19</sup> Much the same idea of the potency of female sexuality perhaps is contained in the legend of Nyai Loro Kidul, the Goddess of the Spirit World and the Southern Ocean, who, surrounded by a court of women in her underwater palace off the south coast of Java, accepts offerings from the Sultan of Yogyakarta in exchange for her spiritual/magical support. Her "marriage" to the Sultan is surely a metaphor for the "necessary" social control that marriage places on this potency.

<sup>20</sup> Nigel Barley, 1993: 123 suggests the Indonesian "soft-porn" industry caters to an obsession of Indonesian men with "predatory, aggressive female sexuality (that they) find simultaneously titillating and terrifying". Often employed in this context is the Nyai Loro Kidul legend.

<sup>21</sup> Wieringa, 1988: 82 suggests a Gerwani membership of 1.5 million at its peak.

<sup>22</sup> See Sen and van Klinken, 1999.

<sup>23</sup> For a full analysis of the relief see McGregor, 2007, especially pp.75-84.

<sup>24</sup> See McGregor, 2002. Also see McGregor, 2007 and Schreiner, 2005.

# The Construction of Islamic-Educational Institutions in Mamluk Gaza.

By Hatim Mahamid<sup>i</sup>

The development of educational institutions and main mosques (*jami* 's) in the principal cities of Syria was compatible with the importance of the cities as centres of government. A review of the educational institutions in various cities of the region reveals two different phenomena.<sup>ii</sup> The first is the development of educational institutions during the Zangid and Ayyubid periods in the northern cities of Syria, which were not affected by the Crusader conquest, like Aleppo, Damascus, Latakia, Hama, Ba'albek, Busra, Balis, Manbij, al-Ma'arra and others. During the Ayyubid period, most of these cities were governed by Ayyubid rulers, who exercised almost complete autonomy. This led to the development of Islamic education under their auspices, which reflected the positions of the Ayyubid rulers. These cities (the northern ones) were also affected by the Mongolian invasion of Syria during the Mamluk period, which directly or indirectly damaged educational and religious institutions.

The second phenomenon was the development of educational and religious institutions during the Mamluk period, in the southern and coastal cities of Syria, and particularly those cities that had previously been under Crusader rule or influence, like Jerusalem, Hebron, Gaza, Safed, Tripoli, and others. Most of the educational institutions in those cities were founded during the Mamluk period after the Crusaders were entirely expelled from the coastal areas of Syria.

Although information about educational and religious institutions in these cities is scarce, one may conduct a limited survey based on the biographies of scholars or rulers who were involved in these enterprises during the period under discussion. In this study, I'll focus dealing with this topic related the city of Gaza as a case study and model of the southern cities of Syria which were affected by similar political circumstances.

The historian Ibn Qadi Shuhba contends that Gaza developed and flourished as an urban center as a result of the initiative of the Mamluk governor 'Alam al-Din Sanjar bin 'Abdallah al-Jawuli (d. 745/1344), who sought to make it the seat of his regime. He built various governmental and public institutions there,

including a palace, a mosque, a bathhouse (*hammam*), a madrasa for adherents of the Shafi'i school, a hospital, a commercial center and merchants' inn (*khan*) and a military training camp (*al-midan*).<sup>iii</sup> Al-Jawuli served as governor of Jerusalem from 711/1311 to 720/1320, overlapping the reign of Sayf al-Din Tankiz, the governor of Damascus (*al-Sham*). In addition to Jerusalem, al-Jawuli's authority extended to the cities of Gaza, Hebron, Nablus, and the areas along the coastal plain.<sup>iv</sup> As was the case with Tankiz and other Mamluk rulers, al-Jawuli endeavored to reinforce his authority by means of institutions he constructed in the region. Among these was the Jerusalem madrasa known by his name, *al-Jawuliyya*.<sup>v</sup>

As noted, Gaza developed as an urban centre during the first Mamluk period, when Sanjar al-Jawuli was governor of the southern area of Palestine. He turned Gaza into the seat of his government and administration (*niyaba*) by constructing government and educational institutions there.<sup>vi</sup> Al-Jawuli dedicated the principal mosque in the city, named *al-Jawuli* after him, a madrasa for the Shafi'is, and a hospital (*maristan*). In his description of the city during his visit to Gaza in 726/1325-1326, Ibn Battuta refers to the construction of buildings. He also describes the beauty of the main mosque (*al-Jawuli*), in which prayers took place on Fridays.<sup>vii</sup>

The disruptions and changes that took place in the functioning of educational institutions during the last Mamluk period engendered differences of opinions among historians in determining the names and number of madrasas in Gaza during the period under discussion. Despite the fact that some of these madrasas were utilised as mosques or vice versa, the available sources make it clear that nine of the educational institutions in Gaza were utilised as madrasas (see the table down).<sup>viii</sup>

**Table:** Educational Institutions in Gaza Until the End of the Mamluk Period

Madrasa	Founder	Year Founded
Al-Ghusayn	?	During the reign of Sultan al-Zahir Baybars
Al-Shafi'iyya	Governor 'Alam al-Din Sanjar al-Jawuli	711-720/1311-1320
Arzamak	Emir Arzamak al-Zahiri	797/1395
Riwaq Ibn Miqbil	Ibn Miqbil	807/1404
Al-Kujuki	Emir Shahin al-Kujuki	821/1418
Al-Basitiyya	Judge Zayn al-Din 'Abd al-Basit bin Khalil al-Dimashqi	Before 854/1450

Al-Jarkasiyya	?	857/1453
Al-Bardibekiyya	Emir Bardi-bek al-Dawadar	859/1455
Al-Ashrafiyya	Sultan al-Ashraf Qaytbay	Second half of the 9 <sup>th</sup> /15 <sup>th</sup> century

This list presents two principal facts that further reinforce what has previously been presented regarding the development of educational institutions in other Syrian cities. The first fact is that almost all of the madrasas in the coastal regions of Syria and in Palestine were founded during the Mamluk period, except for the madrasas that were established in Jerusalem during the Ayyubid period.<sup>ix</sup> The second fact is that most of the various institutions in Syria were founded by the ruling class.

What characterises the madrasas of Gaza is that most of them were founded during the second Mamluk period, except for two madrasas, *al-Ghusayn* and *al-Shafi'iyya*, which date to the first Mamluk period. Although *al-Ghuṣayn* madrasa was known by this name during the Ottoman period, it was actually founded during the reign of Sultan al-Zahir Baybars (658-676/1260-1278) and was destroyed not too many years later by Sultan Muhammad ibn Qalawun. The madrasa was rebuilt at the end of the Mamluk period, during the reign of Sultan al-Ashraf Qaytbay.<sup>x</sup> Furthermore, most of these institutions were founded by the Mamluk ruling class, with the exception of *al-Basitiyya*, which was dedicated by judge Zayn al-Din 'Abd al-Basit al-Dimashqi.<sup>xi</sup>

Apparently, Gaza's location on the route between Egypt and Syria, and the fact that the Mongolians didn't reach or damage it, gave it the status of an important way-station and refuge for travellers from Syria to Egypt. Gaza became an extraordinarily important city compared with the other cities of Syria, which had been severely damaged as a result of the war with the Mongolians and the conflicts between rival groups of Mamluks. The stability in the Gaza region was maintained because of its proximity to Egypt and the function it fulfilled as the first way-station for the Mamluk armies sent to Syria during crises. The Mamluk rulers bestowed on Gaza a special importance due to this status; they continued to dedicate institutions there, despite the economic and political crises that erupted in the state during the last period of the Mamluk regime. This importance is reflected in the institutions that were constructed in Gaza by Sultan al-Ashraf Qaytbay during the second half of the fifteenth century. He founded a mosque and madrasa there, in addition to the endowments he made in Jerusalem and in other cities of the Mamluk state.<sup>xii</sup>

## Conclusions

In the southern and coastal regions of Syria, the Mamluk period saw a boost in the development of educational institutions. Two reasons account for this; the first was the effect of the Crusader threat and conquest of these regions during the Zangid and Ayyubid periods. The second was the fact that they were not directly affected by the Mongolian invasion during the Mamluk period, as happened to the northern

cities between Aleppo and Damascus.

## Notes

<sup>i</sup> A lecturer in the Department of the Middle Eastern Studies in Ben-Gurion University and in The Open University.

<sup>ii</sup> For comparison, see Chapter three in: Hatim Mahamid, “Islamic Education in Syria (Bilad al-Sham) in the Ayyubid and Mamluk Periods, 569/1173 - 922/1516”, Thesis Submitted for the Degree Doctor of Philosophy in Tel-Aviv University, 1999.

<sup>iii</sup> Ibn Qadi Shuhba, *Tarikh ibn Qadi Shuhba*, (Damascus, 1994), 2: 426-429. See regarding al-Jawuli: Almad bin Ali ibn Hajar al-‘Asqalani, *Al-Durar al-Kamina fi A‘yan al-Mi‘ah al-Thamina*, (Beirut, 1993), 2: 170-172; Ibn Aybak al-Dawadari, *Kanz al-Durar wa-Jami‘ al-Ghurar*, (Cairo, 1960), 9: 390; Mahmud ‘Ali ‘Atallah, *Niyabat Ghazza fi al-‘Asr al-Mamluki*, (Beirut, 1986), 280-283.

<sup>iv</sup> See the *sijill* of al-Jawuli’s appointment: Ahmad bin ‘Ali al-Qalqashandi, *Subh al- A’sha fi Sina‘at al-In-sha’*, (Beirut, 1987), 12: 209-212.

<sup>v</sup> See regarding the *al-Jawuliyya* madrasa in Jerusalem: Mujir al-Din ‘Abd-al-Rahman Al-‘Ulaymi, *Al-‘Uns al-Jalil bi-Tarikh al-Quds wal-Khalil*, (Amman, 1973), 2: 38; Muhammad Kurd ‘Ali, *Khitat al-Sham*, (Damascus, 1928), 6: 119; ‘Arif al-‘Arif, *Al- Mufasssal fi Tarikh al-Quds*, (Al-Quds, 1986), 243; Kamil Jamil al-‘Asali, *Ma‘ahid al- ‘Ilm fi Bayt al-Maqdis*, (Amman, 1981), 116; ‘Abd al-Jalil Hasan ‘Abd al-Mahdi, *Al- Madaris fi Bayt al-Maqdis*, (Amman, 1981), 1: 19-21.

<sup>vi</sup> Muhammad ibn Rafi‘ al-Sulami, *Al-Wafayat*, (Beirut, 1982), 2: 498-499; Ibn Hajar, 2: 170-171; Ibn Qadi Shuhba, *Tarikh Ibn Qadi Shuhba*, (Damascus, 1994), 2: 428-429. On the development of Gaza as an independent center of government, see: Mahmud Ali ‘Atallah, 121-159.

<sup>vii</sup> See: Muhammad bin Ibrahim ibn Battula, *Rihlat Ibn Battuta*, (Beirut, 1985), 54.

<sup>viii</sup> The information and data on the madrasas in Gaza were mentioned in various sources. See: Muhammad Absharli and M. al-Tamimi, *Awqaf wa-Amlak al-Muslimin fi Falastin*, (Istanbul, 1982), 9, 14; Kurd ‘Ali, 6: 129, 131; Mahmud ‘Atallah, 221-247; Mohamed Moain Sadek, *Die Mamlukische Architektur der Stadt Gaza*, (Berlin, 1991), 322-331.

<sup>ix</sup> See: Hatim Mahamid, “Developments in the Establishment of Islamic Educational Institutions in Medieval Jerusalem”, in: *Annales Islamologiques*, 37, (2003), 329-354.

<sup>x</sup> The madrasa of al-Ghuṣayn, known by this name during the Ottoman period was named after one of the *'ulama*, 'Abd al-Qadir bin Ahmad ibn al-Ghusayn (d. 1087/1676-1677). See: M. Sadek, 323-324.

<sup>xi</sup> The judge Zayn al-Din al-Dimashqi (d. 854/1450) served the Mamluks in the capacity of supervisor of the armies (*nazir al-juyush*). He dedicated several madrasas in Damascus, Jerusalem, Gaza and Cairo. See: M. Sadek, p. 325; 'Abd al-Jalil Hasan 'Abd al-Mahdi, 2: 112-113; Muhammad bin 'Abd al-Rahman al-Sakhawi, *Al-Daw' al-Lami' li-Ahl al-Qarn al-Tasi'*, (Cairo, 1935), 4: 24-27; See also on his biography: Muhammad bin Ahmad ibn Iyās, *Bada'i' al-Zuhur fi Waqa'i' al-Duhur*, (Cairo, 1982), 2: 285-286.

<sup>xii</sup> See: Kurd 'Ali, 6: 131, Mahmud 'Atallah, 245-246. See regarding the *waqf* of the mosque in Gaza and the madrasa in Jerusalem: Absharli and al-Tamimi, 14.

# Transformation as Narrative and Process: Locating Myth and Mimesis in Reality TV.

By Yasmin Ibrahim

*Abstract:*

The terrain of television has been perceived as mythopoeic with its ability to integrate the real and the unreal, crafting a liminal space which is always betwixt and between. The recent debates about the medium have centred on the genre of reality television where new boundaries are constantly transgressed. This paper re-visits the theories of television as a myth space and examines why reality television is accommodated within this liminal paradigm where the familiarity of folklores and storytelling fuse narratives of transformation in lifestyle-based reality programmes. This transformative agency in television assumes both concrete and abstract forms reflecting both the cultural context of a society and the power of the medium to represent and distort the real.

*Key words: myth, reality TV, narrative, ritual, Lifestyle programmes*

## Introduction

Lifestyle television has been classified as a sub-genre of reality television in as much as it claims to represent the real (Palmer 2004). This paper examines reality television particularly the lifestyle-based makeover programmes by relating it to theories of television as a myth space where reality and fantasy occupy a liminal world. It argues that the reality television genre capitalises on the mythic dimensions of television to construct transformation narratives in makeover programmes. Myth and mimesis (of the real) are co-conspirators in constructing a mediated reality. In relating myth and mimesis to lifestyle television and makeover formats, this paper draws considerably from Roger Silverstone's theories of television and

the medium's ability to locate itself between two worlds and to transgress boundaries between not only reality and fiction but between common and specialist knowledge. Equally, reality television's intrinsic ability to blur boundaries further augments this process.

Gareth Palmer (2004) in discussing the class discourses and ideologies in lifestyle makeover shows moots the need to enquire further into ordinary people appearing on television. In identifying that people 'understand television as an active agent of transformation', he asserts that 'we need to ask what they expect from it?' (Palmer 2004: 190). While this paper does not set out to answer this particular enquiry, it nevertheless seeks to analyse the transformative agency of television. It contends that the transformative element manifests in television in material forms as visual and textual narratives and equally as an abstract process where an ordinary person's appearance (and perhaps journey) in this public space and communal consumption signifies a liminal world between their ordinary lives and celebrity status. This paper argues that this liminal experience is enabled through the appropriation of both myth and rituals in the formats of makeover programmes.

The compression of time and manipulation of visual imagery often enact a story in which the transformative narrative constitutes a pivotal element in lifestyle television. The television space in this sense is depicted as a transformative sphere where miracles and makeovers can happen and where happy outcomes are embedded within the narrative plot. In tandem with the integration of this distinct transformative space is the emergence of television experts who weave magic into the everyday and mundane lives of people, leaving nothing unchanged. The relentless ability to effortlessly transform badly-behaved children, gardens, homes, outdated wardrobes, wrinkled faces and obese bodies is a distinct characteristic of makeover reality shows. Their popularity and their inherent ability to convince that change can happen are bound with the mythic and folkloric tradition in every culture. In our contemporary culture, television appropriates this myth space where its location as a liminal space between reality and fiction and its accent on the visual enables transformative narratives to draw on the mythic as well as the primitive. It's a space where new forms of order are imposed and restored and where people's anxieties about their context, environment and nature are dealt with through these transformation narratives.

The act of the public gazing into the personal and ordinary lives of people constructs reality television as a transformative space where the public gaze alters the ordinary lives through the act of public consumption. Nick Couldry's (2003; 2004) 'celebrification' is a reference to this transformative space in which a programme's formats and rituals construct an individual as being altered through his or her participation in the programme. With the incorporation of non-celebrities into reality television formats, television is perceived as a transformative space in which the public gaze can possibly provide celebrity status (Turner: 2006; Palmer 2005). The transformative space, or more specifically this process of celebrification, is tied to a media economy in which ordinary individuals may enjoy a considerable circulation and currency in tabloids and magazines through their appearance in reality television. Palmer (2005) notes that 'here it is the television exposure per se that constitutes the basis for an often very short but intensive moment of fame.'

Reality television as a transformative space is rooted in both the mythic dimensions of culture as well as the media economy which widens the transformative sphere beyond the television space. The belief in the transformative potential of television then accords it a degree of both concrete and abstract power. James Carey (1989: 87) invokes 'reality as a scarce resource because so few command the machinery for its determination and the fundamental form of power is the power to define, allocate and display that resource. Reality television's association with the 'real' further accentuates its power to negotiate boundaries in society where these demarcate and define the relationships between entities.

Television's mastery over time and images and the ability to narrate changes in seconds and minutes recreates it as a magical sphere where reality and make believe fuse into new reality television formats where technical and specialist discourses are woven to transform and to instantly gratify audiences. The transformation of ageing bodies through the intervention of medical science (i.e. plastic surgery) is both a reflection of our anxieties and primitive fears as well as our need to find instant solutions to them. The mediation of common and specialist knowledge into singular narratives highlight the ability of television to transgress many boundaries between science and lay knowledge (Livingstone 1999; Silverstone 1999).

## Myth and Television

Levi-Strauss perceives myth as a basic element of culture which conditions its possibilities and significance in and for societies and consequently he asserts that one can understand the mode of societies' thoughts through myth. Myths as prototypical stories concretise fundamental themes of human existence, weaving archetypal characters and situations, articulating the basic curiosities, hopes, fears, desires, conflicts, choices and patterns of resolution (Sheehan 2001:2). Fiske (1992:86/87) points out that primitive myths are about elemental themes such as life and death, men and gods, good and evil, and a myth is a story by which culture explains or understands some aspect of reality or nature. Like Levi Strauss, structural theorist Roman Jakobson (1970) implored the idea that the human mind works with binary opposites and these contradictory themes become the underlying frames of human culture. Myth then mediates between profane and sacred, common sense and arcane, and between the individual and the social (Silverstone 1988:23) resolving a myriad of contradictions. Myth signifies a culture thinking about itself in symbolic and metaphorical ways while locating itself in the physical and literal world.

According to Roland Barthes, 'myth is a type of speech....a mode of signification' (cf. Easthorpe and McGowan; cf. Fulton 2005: 6) where language can be linked to the formation of ideology and the 'naturalisation of values, truths and beliefs' (Fulton: 7). As a metaphorical and narrative tool, myth provides society a means to articulate about themselves and about other people as well as about the wider complex world of natural and man-made objects which they occupy. The narrative realm then provides for 'symbolic action that creates social reality' (Walter Fisher 1987: 93).

Ernest Laclau views myth as a necessity and requirement with the increased fissuring and dislocation

of contemporary societies (cf. Couldry 2004). From this functionalist perspective, myths are collective dreams which provide meaning to everyday life. Myths are carved out from old dreams and become the building blocks of new dreams: and myths are generated from fantasy, both collective and individual (Sheehan 2001: 7). Helen Sheehan (2001:2-3) argues that myths as a collective consciousness not only reveal and capture the zeitgeist of a time and place but also shed light on the forces at work, illuminating its problems and crystallising its values, embodying ‘prophecy, incarnation, epiphany, mission, migration, metamorphosis, martyrdom and resurrection’. Myths when transformed into folk tales often assume a narrative predictability and are often associated with rituals. This communion of mythic narratives and rituals define space and time while highlighting the social and cultural contexts of their utterance. Myths as primitive and associated with man’s proximity and relationship to nature and to the supernatural is a resonant element in various sociological theories (Ernst Cassirer, Lucien Levy-Bruhl and Mircea Eliade; cf. Silverstone 1988) and represent the ways in which the primitive perceives the world. Myth, ritual, magic and folktales are inextricably bound together and are perceived as the preserve of primitive cultures. In our contemporary culture our sense of reality is increasingly structured by narratives (Fulton 2005: 1) and the television space is no exception. Television and myth in many ways conjoin values with narratives. Storytelling is an inimical part of television as media narratives tell us stories about who we think we are, and in so doing they are historically and culturally positioned to turn information and events into structures that are already meaningful to their audiences (O’Shaughnessy & Stadler 2002:127; cf. Fulton 2005:1).

Roger Silverstone (1981; 1984; 1988; 1994; 1999) in his many books and essays eloquently inquired into the incestuous relationship between myth and television as a folk medium. He articulates that the primacy of myth in everyday life is also intrinsically bound with the everydayness of television:

Myths are elementary but often extremely complex; elemental but often superficial. Television is like myth. It occupies the same space of intimate distance. (Silverstone 1988: 24).

Television, like other forms of mass communication, uses specific items of folklore, myth and representation of ritual (Silverstone 1981; Burns 1969; Denby 1971; Bock 1974; Shils and Young 1953, cf. Silverstone 1988). It conveys the same messages and in similar ways. For Silverstone (1988:24) television’s appropriation of the mythic space raised various sociological issues where the medium creates both an immediacy, ephemerality and displacement. He relentlessly argued that the ‘public broadcast texts of television images, narratives, icons, rituals are the site of contemporary mythic culture’ (1988: 25). The highly technological world of television inexorably manufactures a magical space in which the boundaries between reality and fantasy is constantly transgressed and where fact and fiction fuse into various permutations to combine our primitive fears and our endless anxieties about the constructed world which lie beyond our control. Television is emblematic of culture as it draws on frameworks of culture to tell its stories where programme formats take the form of rituals to enforce beliefs and values as well as make-believe. ‘So much of television culture consisted in the display of simple stories, easily recognizable, continually reiterated and remarkably similar in form and content not only to each other but to other stories in other cultures at other times’ (Silverstone 1988:22).

Silverstone suggested that television occupies a liminal space between the ‘taken-for granted world and that of the unreachable and otherwise inaccessible world’ (1988: 25). Victor Turner’s (1977; 1982) concept of liminality and the transient journey between two worlds has been used by others to theorise the medium of television (Martin 1981; Newcomb and Alley 1993; Dayan Katz and Kerns 1984; cf. Hoover 1988). For Silverstone ‘movement into and out of the liminal, which Arnold Van Gennep considered the heart of the ritual process, is a feature of television-making where it entails a journey from the everyday and mundane into another world’ (Silverstone 1988:25). In this sense, consuming television was a journey from the constraints of the normal and everyday into another, and one is then transformed by the experience.

The incorporation of myth and new forms of rituals into the medium of television makes the complex relationship between culture, technology and our value systems even more problematic as television is more than make believe. It in many ways constitutes a reflection of the contextual paradigms and our cultural responses to them making television both a cultural text and text produced through culture and society. The search for the mythic in contemporary societies is grounded not only in the plausible expectation that ‘we too perforce must find ways of expressing basic concerns, core values, deep anxieties; and equally we must find ways of expressing publicly and collectively our attempts at resolving them’ (Silverstone 1988:24).

Television does not make magic happen without our underlying beliefs and value system or cultural frameworks and this explains its ability to appropriate and capitalise on the mythic space. The integral association between societies and myths and folklores provides a stage to integrate new formats into the television space where ordinary people can seemingly transform their habitats or personal appearance. Myth is intrinsic and inseparable to the medium of television and its manifestations in reality television are ever more potent. Transformation in the guise of makeovers draws from the familiar and from primitive folklores. Metamorphosis is possible and achievable through television experts and image manipulators who convince and deliver instant gratification creating an intimate distance in which miracles can happen.

Silverstone, in quoting Durkheim’s nephew Marcel Mauss (cf. Silverstone 1988), reiterates the interconnections between magic and belief;

[magic} is still a very simple craft. All efforts are avoided by successfully replacing reality by image. A magician does nothing, or almost nothing but makes everyone believe he is doing everything and all the more so since he puts to work collective forces and ideas to help the individual imagination in its belief (Mauss 1972: 141-142; cf. Silverstone 1988).

The narratives of metamorphoses in lifestyle television are in part the manipulation of time and images but mostly it is the invocation of the collective beliefs and anxieties which enable the crafting of a television reality. To paraphrase Marcel Mauss, such genres of reality television ‘makes everyone believe it is doing everything’ when it is essentially igniting the primitive and collective psyche of an audience.

Kavka and West (2004: 137) emphasise that ‘reality TV pursues intimacy (emotional closeness) through immediacy (temporal closeness) coupling the proximity, made by the medium of television right from

the start that viewers can traverse space in the blink of the eye', where it creates a 'now thisness of the medium' (Heath 1990: 279; Kavka & West 2004: 137). While television can re-order time through its representation, reality television dismantles time by often trying to convince viewers that events are unfolding as they watch and the elements of surprise and unpredictability are built into the narrative of reality television. Here reality television uses technology to leverage on the collective cultural psyche to suspend and invent new forms of reality. The seamless flow of TV (Raymond Williams), transience of imagery and an abundance of information build television as a medium that requires a disappearance of the 'just-seen' to make way for the 'now-seeing' (Houston 1984; cf. Kavka & West 2004: 137).

Time is manipulated, mechanised and woven in the rituals of the programming format where 'before' and 'after' assume a synthetic time where transformations and metamorphoses happen. Couldry (2004:59) defines rituals as 'formalized action organized into a form or shape that has meaning over and above any meaning of the actions taken by themselves' (and can reproduce building blocks of belief without involving any explicit content that is believed). Rituals by their repetitive forms reproduce categories and patterns of thought. In the same vein, transformative images become ritualistic where audiences expect radical changes to happen in the blink of an eye. Reality television delivers both the need for instant gratification as well as the illusion of instant solutions to complex and primitive fears about physical form, ageing and the lack of aesthetic beauty in one's environment.

### **Crossing Boundaries in Reality television**

Writings on television in the last few years have centred on the 'post-documentary culture' (Corner 2001) of reality television. While the term 'reality television' has invited various interpretations, there is an implicit and overarching recognition that it claims to represent reality to some degree by depicting ordinary people and lives (Holmes & Jermyn 2004; Friedman 2002). Chad Raphael (2004: 120) defines reality television as 'an umbrella term for a number of programming trends that have rapidly expanded since the late 1980s across all hours of network schedules, first-run syndication, and cable.' One disconcerting element of reality television is its ability to cross boundaries and to blur demarcations between bounded genres (Nichols 1991). In production terms reality television is often seen as less scripted, with an assemblage of live coverage and pre-recordings which creates a seamless narrative misconstruing temporality and reality. The growing literature on reality television nevertheless confirms its popularity and its consolidation in contemporary culture (Reiss and Wiltz 2004; Holmes & Jermyn 2004).

Media and social scientists have explored various issues associated with this genre ranging from an enquiry into the essential understanding of realness that manifests in this genre, the political economy behind the emergence of this format, and issues of temporality to the processes and rituals that have popularised these genres the world over (cf. Doane 1990; Caldwell 1995; Berenstein 2002; Derrida and Stiegler 2002, Couldry 2002; Raphael 2004). The writings have also centred on new forms of empowered audiences where the act of voting constructs audiences as having the agency to determine the outcome of the

programme (Tinkell & Raghuram 2004). Here agency is recast through people's engagement with new media technologies and interactive elements which compel audience participation through push-button technologies and mobile telephony. The authenticity of 'realness' and 'liveness' have come under scrutiny (Botz- Bornstein 2006) whilst acknowledging the increasing spaces on television which cater to lifestyle and people-oriented reality television.

The pervasiveness of watching the personal lives of people has been a major debate in reality television literature where reality television is seen to be transgressing the boundaries between private and public and between entertainment and voyeurism (Kilburn 1994, Dovey 2000, Hill 2000). The debates on the production values of these formats coupled with their rising popularity have nevertheless renewed interests in understanding new media audiences as citizens as well as the politics of gazing into the personal lives of people. Television's double articulation in this instance is understood through its representation of the everyday as well as the 'social technology' of 'the popular' as 'people watch it all the time, are affected by it and incorporate it into the structure and references of their daily lives' (Kavka and West:138).

Makeover shows such as *Ten Years Younger*, *Extreme Makeovers* and *What Not to Wear* celebrate the possibility of transformation in ordinary people's lives. The number of programmes both in public broadcasting service and satellite channels that cater to makeover shows has been on the rise. Gareth Palmer (2004), in commenting on lifestyle as a sub-genre of reality television, probes how these shows enact a new public sphere where the audience re-question their role as citizens and consumers. Palmer (2004: 174) contends that the concepts of lifestyle and surveillance are part of a new discursive formation of prime-time consumption. Here the act of gazing occupies new levels of the liminal in celluloid culture where private and public boundaries are transgressed and blurred constructing a perverse novelty that is constantly exploited in different ways. In discerning the class discourses in makeover shows, Palmer (2004) confirms that the increasing number of 'lifestyle programmes in Britain both feed into and contribute to the nation's preoccupation with style, and outlets for styling life, home and garden.' The everydayness of life, home and garden are re-told in programme formats in which change, transformation and a promise of 'altered states' are built and drive audience expectation. Such programmes deliver instant gratification in transformative narratives which couch change as empowering and as a remedy for socially constructed problems or deviance.

Rachel Moseley (2001:34) conceives the extension of programming into the private realms of the everyday (i.e. the garden, the self, and the home) as the privatization of the public sphere, which marks a shift in the ethos of public-service broadcasting. Moseley (2001) also points out that there is a blurring of gendered preferences as spheres traditionally considered as feminine now occupy prime-time television but more importantly it re-mediate the boundaries of what can be considered as public.

Palmer (2004) emphasises that the heart of makeover and lifestyle television is 'the reveal' where contestants (and audience) get to see what the transformation is. This 'Cinderella' effect often unfolds through the process of a television narrative where disorder and lack of control over houses and bodies is socially constructed and the narrative plot then seeks to impose new forms of order through television

gurus who make transformations happen. The transformation or change is seen as achievable within the format of the programme, manipulating temporality to function in accordance with the visible narrative of television. These narratives reflect both the anxieties as well as our construction of social deviance. In makeover shows, deviance can come in the form of poor selection of apparel, neglect of bodies or the natural process of ageing. In a society where youth culture dominates the media, ageing is seen as a social deviance and science, in the guise of invasive surgery, is portrayed as a form of salvation often reducing technical and medical discourses into heroic narratives. According to Barbara Herrnstein Smith (1981:225) 'we know a 'Cinderella' story when we hear one and 'Cinderella' is a heavily coded term in our culture'.

In tandem with makeover shows, other reality shows such as *Make Me a Supermodel*, *Faking it*, *Come Dancing*, reality-based talent shows and a myriad of other formats emphasise the ability of amateurs to become professionals (or non-celebrities to become celebrities) through the process of their television journey. Here amateurs are expected to turn into professionals through the process of a television programme. Reality television caters to our need for instant gratification by delivering transformation in half-hour and one-hour slots and in weekly formats which trace change taking place in front of the viewers. Surveillance shows such as *Big Brother* cater to the transformative element by fusing the process of celebrification where ordinary people and lesser known celebrities become famous through their appearance in these programmes. In talent shows, audiences are led to feel that they are creating celebrities and TV personalities through their votes. Hence the transformative element is encoded within the genres and the accent is on instant gratification where makeovers on both property and people can be done in matter of minutes.

The notion of transformation can manifest in two main ways. It can be visually documented through images or it can entail an abstract process where the act of being watched transforms an ordinary person into a celebrity. The process of celebrification is also tied to the wider economy where press, magazine and online space may further extend the period of scrutiny and coverage that may be accorded to reality television celebrities. The liminal space of television allows this rite of passage where a contestant or ordinary person leaves a familiar world and enters into an unfamiliar one and returns transformed by their experience. Thomas De Zengotita advances the notion that 'for human beings, our need to be recognised is almost as basic as food' and he contends that the force behind the virtual revolution is primordial where there is a fundamental need for acknowledgement and significance within the human tribe (2005:117). The proliferation of spaces from reality television to blogs, create public platforms for individuals to narrate private experiences enabling people to re-mediate their identities and experiences through technology and public consumption.

Reality television in part caters to this need for recognition with its increasing use of non-celebrities in its programme formats. These narcissistic tendencies have been perceived as the democratization of celebrity culture where the spaces for acquiring recognition have increased with more access to the machinery of celebritization (Braudy 1997; Stark 2003). Anita Biressi and Heather Nunn (2004: 47) contend that the phenomenon is 'celebrated as a democratization of public culture and the deconstruction of the components of fame'. The re-mediating of individual experiences through public gaze and spectacle is also

viewed as a form of self-validation and self-promotion (Palmer 2005) where these appearances constitute new conceptions of fame.

### **Transformation as Communal Resolution**

Television as a mythic space fuses both reality and fiction but it also intrinsically communicates our anxieties, fears, as well as hopes. The increasing emphasis on form and physical appearance has constructed ageing and unfashionable bodies as deviance and medical science in the form of plastic surgery as a panacea (Doyle and Karl 2006; Banet-Wiser 2006). These transformation formats embrace medical science and technology as solutions and appropriate technical and specialist discourses into personal narratives. Body makeover narratives reflect society's anxieties and fears while the appropriation of specialist discourses reflect its attempt to portray science as a heroic discourse to resolve primitive fears with regard to nature and the wild. Television's transformative abilities are conveyed in its ability to compress contradictory and competing discourses into a singular narrative to forge its own commentaries and forms as well as responses to our primitive fears and modern anxieties. Television by mediating between the popular and the inaccessible converts the arcane into storytelling formats (Silverstone 1999; 1985; 1984). The mix of personal narratives and science as utopian and as a discourse of salvation in makeover formats reflects television's intrinsic ability to mediate between common and specialist knowledge while constructing new forms of mediated reality.

Silverstone (1988: 36) in arguing that 'television is a contemporary expression of myth' implicates television's role in our everyday life in equally sustaining 'knowledge that informs everyday life'. He contends that this knowledge of common sense is both shared and fragmentary (Silverstone 1988: 36-37) and works to negotiate the boundaries between the familiar and the unfamiliar. While common sense is a contentious term both in the disciplines of sociology and political science, Silverstone refers to common sense as 'the knowledge I share with others in the normal self-evident matrices of everyday life' (Berger & Luckmann, 1967: 37, cf. Silverstone 1988). Common sense is then not finite and is forever evolving with the context of our existence. It is often contrasted with specialist knowledge and equally associated with rituals and mythic narratives (Geertz 1975; cf. Silverstone 1988). Mythic narratives in the form of television play a role in sustaining common-sense reality by bringing together diverse and incompatible elements and in the process it negotiates the known and unknown. Television has the ability to create its own culture and its own forms and to impose its singular narrative while drawing contradictory and incompatible discourses together. Hence science (e.g. discourses of plastic surgery) and nature (e.g. anxieties about ageing) often occupy an equivalent space as both are intrinsically beyond reach (Silverstone 1988: 37; 1985).

The transformative process is manifested in the framing of science and specialist knowledge in television where programme narratives involve the transformation of multiple realities into a singular narrative

expression (Silverstone 1985: Singer 1966) where the presentation of science is an attempt to resolve the demands of myth and mimesis of the real. For Silverstone (1988: 35), if the mythic in television documentary draws the viewer into a world of fantasy (i.e. of the heroic) then the mimetic pulls her or him towards the real (Silverstone 1988: 35). Television's technical and aesthetic invisibility and the familiarity of narrative formats underpin its ability to narrate transformations and to equally represent a transformative space. Makeover programmes by the virtue of their emphasis on change and 'alteredness' capitalise on television's ability to transgress both the boundaries between real and fiction as well as common and technical knowledge.

## Conclusion

Transformative narratives in television in the form of reality lifestyle programmes capitalise on the mythic sphere of television. Television as a liminal space between the real and the unreal and between the familiar and unfamiliar also constructs a space where journeys and rituals of transformation can happen. The 'Cinderella' effect as a television narrative is consistently woven into reality television formats where there is an expectation of change and the documentation of this change through visuals and images. The changes are often portrayed as positive outcomes and as solutions to socially constructed problems and anxieties. The transformation narratives, with their emphasis on change and the possibilities of altered states, offer instant gratification to complex social and biological issues while feeding narcissistic and primordial tendencies for individuals to be recognised through lifestyle television formats. The act of public consumption and the incorporation of non-celebrities into reality formats offer spaces for ordinary people to explore celebrity status and to be transformed by their journeys in the television space. The ability of television to transgress other boundaries (i.e. between common and specialist knowledge) and to draw science into the popular accords its power to further celebrate its transformative potential.

## Bibliography

Berenstein, Rhona J. (2002) 'Acting Live: TV Performance, Intimacy and Immediacy.' **Reality Squared: television discourse on the Real**. Ed. James Friedman. New Brunswick, NJ and London: Rutgers University Press.

Banet-Wiser, Sarah. (2006) 'I just want to be me again, Peauty pageants, Reality Television and Post feminism' **Feminist Theory** 7. 2 : 255-272, 2006.

Biressi, Anita and Nunn, Heather. (2004) 'The Especially remarkable: Celebrity and social mobility in Reality TV.' **Mediactive** 2 : 44-58.

Botz-Bornstein, Thorsten. (2006) "The New Surrealism: Lost Stories, Reality Television and Amateur Dream-Censors." **Janus Head** 9.1 : 181-186.

Braudy, Leo (1997) **The Frenzy of Renown: Fame and its History**. New York: Vintage Books.

Carey, James. (1989) **Communication as Culture**. Boston: Unwin Hyman.

Corner, John. (2001) 'Documentary in a Post-Documentary Culture? A note on Forms and their Functions,' Loughborough University, 5 Jan 2006. Available <http://www.lboro.ac.uk/research/changing.media/John%20Corner%20paper.htm>

Couldry, Nick (2002) "Playing for Celebrity: Big Brother as Ritual Event." **Television and New Media** 3.3 : 283-93.

Couldry, Nick. (2004) 'Teaching Us to Fake it; The Ritualized Norms of Television's 'Reality' Games.'" **Reality TV: The Re-making of television culture**. Eds. Susan Murray & Laurie Ouellette. New York: New York University Press.

Couldry, Nick. (2003) **Media Rituals; A Critical Approach**. Routledge: London, 2003.

Caldwell, John T. (1995) **Televisuality: Style, Crisis and Authority in American Television**, New Brunswick, NJ and London: Rutgers University Press.

Derrida, Jacques and Stiegler, Bernard. (2002) **Ethnographies of Television**, trans Jennifer Bajorek, Cambridge: Polity Press.

Doanne, Mary A. (1990) "Information, Crisis, Catastrophe." **Logics of Television**. Ed. Patricia Mellencamp. London, British Film Institute.

Dovey, Jon. (2002) **Freakshow: First Person Media and Factual Television**. London: Pluto.

Fulton, Helen. (2005) "Introduction: the Power of Narrative." **Narrative and Media**. Eds. Fulton, H. et al. Cambridge University Press.

Fisher, W. R. (1987) **Human Communication as Narration: towards a Philosophy of Reason, Value and Action**. Columbia: U of South Carolina.

Fiske, John. (1992) **Introduction to Communication Studies**. London: Routledge.

Friedman, James (2002) 'Introduction' in **Reality Squared: Television Discourse on the Real**. Ed. James Friedman. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press.

- Hill, Annette (2000) "Fearful and Safe: Audience Response to British Reality Programming." **From Grierson to the Docu-soap: Breaking the Boundaries**. Eds. John Izod and Richard Kilborn. Luton: University of Luton Press, 131-145.
- Holmes, Su, and Jermyn, Deborah. (2004) "Introduction." Eds. Su Holmes and Deborah Jermyn. **Understanding Reality TV**. London: Routledge.
- Hoover, Stewart, M (1988). "Television, Myth and Ritual; The Role of Substantive Meaning and Spatiality." **Media, Myths and Narratives, Television and the Press. Sage Annual Reviews of Communication Research** 15. Ed. James, W. Carey. London: Sage, 20-47.
- Jakobson, Roman. (1970) "On Russian Fairy Tales," **Structuralism. A Reader**. Ed. M. Lane. London: Jonathan Cape.
- Kavka, Misha & West, Amy. (2004) 'Temporalities of the real: Conceptualising Time in Reality TV.' **Understanding Reality TV**. Eds. Su Holmes and Deborah Jermyn. *London*: Routledge.
- Kilborn, Richard. (1994) "How Real Can You Get? Recent Development in 'Reality' Television," **European Journal of Communication** 9: 421-39.
- Livinstone, Sonia. (1999) "Mediated Knowledge: recognition of the familiar, discovery of the new." **Television and Common Knowledge**. Ed. Jostein Gripsrud. London: Routledge.
- Moseley, Rachel. (2000) 'Makeover takeover on British Television,' **Screen** 41.3: 299-314
- Moseley, Rachel. (2001) "Real lads do cook...but some things are still hard to talk about,' the Gendering of 8-9, **European Journal of Cultural Studies** 4.1 : 32-9.
- Nicholas, Bill. (1994) **Blurred Boundaries: Questions of Meaning in Contemporary Culture**. Indiana UP: Bloomington.
- Palmer, Gareth. (2004) 'The New You,' **Understanding Reality TV**. Eds. Su Holmes and Deborah Jermyn. London: Routledge.
- Palmer, Gareth. (2005) 'The Undead: Life on the D-List.' **Westminster Papers in Communication and Culture** 2.2 (2005): 37-53.
- Raphael, Chad.(2004) The political-economic origins of Reali-TV. **Reality TV: The Re-making of television culture**. Eds. Susan Murray and Laurie Ouellette. New York: New York University Press.
- Reiss, Steven and Wiltz, James.(2004) 'Why People Watch Reality TV?' **Media Psychology** 6 : 363-378

Sheehan, Helen. Irish Television Drama: A Society and its Stories. 2001. 19 Dec 2006 <http://www.comms.dcu.ie/sheehan/myth.htm>

Silverstone, Roger. (1999) 'Rhetoric, Play and Performance: Revisiting the Study of the Making of a Documentary.' **Television and Common Knowledge**. Ed. Jostein Gripsrud. London: Routledge, 1999.

Silverstone, Roger. (1994) **Television and Everyday Life**. London: Routledge.

Silverstone, Roger. (1988) Television, Myth and Culture, in Carey, J.W. (ed.) **Media, Myths and Narratives, Television and the Press**. Sage Annual Reviews of Communication Research 15: 20-47. London: Sage.

Silverstone, Roger. (1985) **Framing Science: The Making of a BBC Documentary**. London: BFI, 1985.

Silverstone, Roger. (1984) 'Narrative Strategies in Television Science. A Case Study.' **Media, Culture and Society**, 6.4 : 377-410.

Silverstone, Roger. (1981) **The message of television: myth and narrative in contemporary culture**. Heinemann: London.

Smith, Barbara, H. (1981) 'Narrative Versions, Narrative Theories.' **On Narrative**. Ed. W. J. T. Mitchell. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1981.

Stark, Myra.(2003) "You, Me, Celebrity." **Brandweek** 44.21 : 17-18 <http://www.lib.ncsu.edu:2067>

Tincknell, Estella and Raghuram, Parvati. (2004) 'Big Brother: reconfiguring the 'active' audience of cultural studies?' **Understanding Reality TV**. Eds. Su Holmes and Deborah Jermyn. London: Routledge.

Turner, Graeme.(2006) The Mass Production of Celebrities. **International Journal of Cultural Studies** 9.2 : 153: 165, 2006.

Turner, Victor. (1977) **The Ritual Process**. Cornell: Cornell University Press.

Turner, Victor. (1982) **From Ritual to Theatre**. New York: Performing Arts Journal Publications.

Zengotita, Thomas. (2005) **Mediated: How the Media Shapes Your World and the Way you Live in it**. New York: Bloomsbury.

# *The Nights*' Singer of Tales: Performing Tradition in the Story of the King of China's Hunchback.\*

By Zaid Mahir

No one denies the oral traditional roots of *The Arabian Nights*, but efforts to read it as a work of *verbal art* drawing for its vigor and vitality upon the oral tradition of the Arab-Muslim world are scanty. The aim of this essay is to read *The Nights* into the perspective of oral tradition theory, as an academic discipline. The theoretical approach is Richard Bauman's Oral Performance framework, one of the three major theoretical approaches to the study of oral traditions. The 'text' chosen for the application is the "Story of the King of China's Hunchback," which is recounted over sixty-nine nights and occupies 15% of the Arabic edition of *The Nights*. I am using Muhsin Mahdi's Brill edition of the earliest Arabic manuscript known which, as Mahdi informs us, is the same manuscript that was first introduced to Europe by Antoine Galland in a French translation in the early eighteenth century. Although entitled, *Alf Layla wa-Layla* [The Thousand and One Nights], this edition has thirty-five and a half stories, narrated over 282 nights, no more. Muhsin Mahdi keeps the original manuscript, which is maintained in the Bibliothèque Nationale de France, intact and free of 'decorous' intervention. Apart from filling in a small number of gaps, some of which resulted from damage to or poor maintenance of the papers of the manuscript, Mahdi refrains from redaction, elaboration, interpolation, or any such intervention that traditional editors made in their endeavor to produce a 'readable text.' His act of gap-filling is therefore limited to providing missing phrases and words that already exist in other parts of the tales, or that more commonly occur in other later verifiable manuscripts than less common phrases, clauses, and words. Equally important is the fact that Mahdi's gap-filling words and phrases do not pretend, or even try, to meet conventional grammatical and linguistic standards of 'correct' phraseology, sentence-construction, or diction.

## A Brief Reminder of Bauman's Performance Framework

Performance is culture-bound; it creates expectations among, and draws response from, members of a community engaged in watching and listening to a performance. In *Verbal Art As Performance* (1984),

Richard Bauman offers us a conceptual frame of reference in performance theory. His conception is based upon understanding performance as a mode of speaking, that is, “as a species of situated human communication” where “the formal manipulation of linguistic features” no longer maintains priority as it does in text-oriented utterance (8). Deviation from normality in linguistic usage is, according to Bauman, an assertion that verbal art as performance does in fact involve “transformation of the basic referential...uses of language” to suit situated communication. Artistic performance thus carries a message to its audience, requiring them to interpret what they see/hear in a special way: “do not take it to mean what the words alone, taken literally, would convey” (9). The conclusion that Bauman draws here is the implication that performance develops along its lines an interpretative frame peculiar to the experience that performance engages the audience in.

Since performance is shaped by its communicative teleology, the question of interpretation comes to the fore. Bauman tackles this issue by stressing the performer’s responsibility to his audience “for a display of communicative competence... [that is] an assumption of accountability to an audience for the way in which communication is carried out, above and beyond its referential content,” rendering the performer subject to the audience’s evaluation and, more significantly, making his performance “available for the enhancement of experience” (11). This realization of the nature of performance and its communicative interchange necessitates on the part of the audience a “heightened awareness of the act of expression” in which the performer is directly engaged, an act that shapes their reaction, evaluation, and aesthetic participation in the experience.

Bauman adopts Gregory Bateson’s concept of metacommunication to describe the “range of explicit or implicit messages which carry instructions on how to interpret the other message(s) being communicated” (15), that is, on how to enable auditors to decode the messages that the performance carries and articulates. Bauman then offers a list of the communicative means of performance that have been generally recognized and widely documented in various cultures as keys to performance. They are: *special codes, figurative language, parallelism, special paralinguistic features, special formulae, appeal to tradition, and disclaimer of performance*. His realization of the formal and conventional nature of these devices suggests to Bauman the formal appeal of the performance which, arousing a sense of group expectancy, “binds the audience to the performer in a relationship of dependence that keeps them caught up in his display” (16). However, these keys to performance are only examples of the communicative means that cultures utilize. There are many more possibilities, depending on the prominent features of each culture.

## Part I.

I will now provide a synopsis of the story under consideration, followed by a delineation of the distinct elements of popular culture that appear abundantly in the story. Then I will reveal the structural pattern that binds the tales together and informs their performance.

### Story of the King of China's Hunchback: A Synopsis.

There lived in China a hunchback who was the King's stooge and boon companion. One day he was invited to dinner by a tailor and his wife, who, loitering on the streets in the evening, came across the hunchback and were amused by his singing and drunkenness. His funny status appealed to them; they thought they could use him as their boon companion that night. At the dinner table, he choked with a fish-bone and died. Afraid of the consequences, though apparently unaware of their guest's identity, the tailor and his wife took the corpse to a Jewish medical doctor's house in the middle of the night. They asked to see the doctor, then secretly left the corpse on the stairs and went away. Stumbling over the body in the darkness of the staircase, the doctor believed he had caused his patient to die. Likewise afraid of the consequences, he took the corpse away and left it in a standing position against the wall of the King's Muslim steward's house next door. The latter, on his way back home after midnight, saw the standing figure and thought it was a thief-- the thief that he believed was stealing his meat and grease for quite a while. He struck the hunchback with a hammer and, believing that he had killed him, went out to try and get rid of the dead corpse. He took the corpse to the nearby market-place, before stores were open, and left it standing in a street corner against a store wall. It was almost dawn. Shortly afterwards, a bypassing Christian broker stopped by the store to urinate. Believing the standing figure to be a thief who wanted to steal his turban, the broker immediately struck the hunchback with his fist and called for help. The sentry assigned to protect the market-place responded to the call. However, at the sight of the dead hunchback lying on the ground and the broker beating him, he arrested the broker and took him to the Wali, that is, the man in charge of security in the town.

At the King's orders, the Christian broker was to be hanged but, thanks to a last-minute intervention by the steward who claimed that it was he who committed the crime, the broker was instantly pardoned and replaced by the Muslim steward on the gibbet. Again in a last-minute intervention, the steward was now replaced by the Jewish doctor, the latter then by the tailor, each successively stepping forward to indict himself and save his predecessor.

Informed of the death of his boon companion, the King of China had these four persons brought to court. He inquired into the nature of the murder and was made to hear the story from beginning to end. To save their life, each one of the four suspects told a tale and claimed it was more amazing than the tale of the hunchback's death-enigma. Each of the tales they told involved one type of physical deformity or another. None of the storytellers succeeded in satisfying the King's thirst for amazing details and bizarre events until it was the tailor's turn. Being the last storyteller, he had to face the greatest challenge: every one of the suspects looked up to him as their savior. He embarked on recounting a long and intricately woven tale. His skill was such that he managed to make his tale continuously unfold to beget new tales, in a non-stop sequence that ultimately drew the King's admiration. Consequently, the four persons were acquitted. Then the hunchback was miraculously brought back to life.

## Elements of Popular Culture

### Urban Background

The setting of the tales of the story is the urban sites of Baghdad, Cairo, and Damascus. Each of the tales recounted in relation to these sites incorporates well-known features of urban life recognizable in big wealthy houses, palaces and courts of sultans and princes, and market-places.<sup>1</sup> And the narrative frequently stops for short periods of time to provide highly descriptive passages wherein details of architectural beauty (particularly interior design), luxurious aspects of livelihood (incense, perfumes, expensive clothes), and plenty of food (particularly expensive meals where meat, sweets, and spices are profusely offered) are repeatedly mentioned with a view to highlighting a celebratory approach to life. Wealth and prosperity in the tales allow for the presence of characters whose corporeal desires are emphasized as stimuli to their social behavior. Sexual lust is allotted a noticeable space within the dynamics of the main plot. In an article entitled ‘The “Mansion” and the “Rubbish Mounds:” The Thousand and One Nights in Popular Arabic Tradition’ (2004), Muhsin al-Musawi stresses the importance of the bodily discourse in *The Arabian Nights*, where description of private life becomes intrinsically woven with the narrative structure. This relationship gives vent to scenes of physical love, playful displays of sexuality, and licentiousness which themselves are central to popular culture. However, al-Musawi maintains, these “properties of popular culture...are the properties of the ephemeral and passing against the upheld stability and institutionalization of the Metropolitan center” (366).

### Intrigue and Machinations

Along the same line of argument and the emphasis on physical pleasure, the story abounds in examples of schemes and wicked plots devised and implemented to enable certain figures to attain personal goals at the expense of naïve lovers and reckless libertines. Due to the conservative nature of the highly aristocratic society in the Arab-Islamic world, intrigues and plotting were instrumental to achieve interclass mobility, wherein social and ethnic barriers would be dismantled in order to articulate individual freedom.<sup>2</sup> In terms of power relations, I believe such maneuvering and scheming can be seen as an attempt to create possibilities for temporary suspension of class distinction, within the hierarchical frame of thought characteristic of such societies, before reinforcing the same hierarchy through acts of coercion, brutality, and torture. Often such acts in the story are committed or caused by female characters. One distinct trait of these characters is their resourcefulness. They never lack the means to entice their male targets and render them helpless and unequipped. Taking advantage of the hierarchical social build-up of their urban milieu, they use their physical beauty to enhance their act of coercion, sometimes aided by other females, other times by male assistants.

## Poetry and Song

Poetry is one of the distinct elements of popular culture in the story. The narrator frequently incorporates verses that do not totally conform to classical Arabic poetry but are vernacular variations on poetic norms. Usually these verses express human feelings and attitudes commonly regarded as universal and exemplary, such as wisdom, grief over the mutability of the things of life, erotic love and related suffering at denial, and joy at reunion of lovers and families. Verse-song is also found in the tales, being one characteristic element of prosperous and happy life in urban sites. As such, song and poetry recited to the accompaniment of musical instruments, generally inside palaces and great houses, tend to have a festive quality, as they contribute to the picture of wealth and abundance distinguishing urban life in the medieval Arab world. The “Story of the King of China’s Hunchback” has many such verses that the narrator uses to create emphasis, link the parts of the plot together, and sustain the power of narration. Often, these verses tend to be commentaries on life, expressed when characters are in the midst of certain difficult situations. They have therefore a particular resonance with the populace who would be able to identify themselves with the character in question.

Let us now examine the tales of the story under discussion, applying Bauman’s performance keys to the written ‘text.’ The story is structurally divided into four major tales, the last of which in turn unfolds into six tales. They are as follows:

Tale of the Christian Broker

Tale of the King’s Steward

Tale of the Jewish Doctor

Tale of the Tailor

### **Tale of the Barber and His Brothers**

First Brother: the Hunchback Tailor

Second Brother: the Paralyzed Baqbaaqa

Third Brother: the Blind Faqfaq

Fourth Brother: the One-eyed Butcher

Fifth Brother: He Whose Ears Were Cut Off

## Sixth Brother: He Whose Lips Were Cut Off

A quick look at the list and succession of these tales suggests a structure of *parallelism* in which the tales seem to be following a certain pattern that binds them together in a relationship of cause and effect. This pattern is the ransom-tale.<sup>3</sup> Since the story begins with the hunchback's apparent death and ends with his unexpected revival, all the composite tales between the beginning and end are, ontologically speaking, viable as long as they remain within the context of the hunchback's story. This is not to say that they cannot exist by themselves. But the tales' significance is closely related to the fact that they have been told to serve one particular end-- saving the life of their narrators. The urgency of the situation is such that the act of telling a tale, or even an interesting tale, is by itself not enough to obtain the King's pardon. Rather, it is telling a tale that should prove more amazing than the story of the hunchback's death, more amazing, that is, in every respect: detail, incident, character-involvement, mood, etc. Everything revolves around, and boils down to, this teleology.

At a structural level, then, the parallelism of the tales within the framework of a ransom-tale becomes so important to the narrative itself that, in terms of oral performance theory, it informs the act of telling the tales itself and dictates to the storyteller his performance. It creates a sense of regularity of situation for him and, as he moves from one event to another, from one tale to another, he becomes better able to emphasize the salient features of the tales, as they recur within the ransom-tale framework, and convey them to his audience. As a key to performance, parallelism rests on recurrence, and what counts for the storyteller here is the extent to which he can keep the idea of ransom alive in his audience's minds. He would have to create a sense of familiarity with the situation at hand and, depending on the quality of his performance, parallelism enables him to convey that sense of familiarity to the audience. As soon as his listeners are drawn into the world of the tales, they become partners in the act of performance of which they are witnesses. Their ears will be further attuned to narration, thanks to certain recurrent structures that act as prompts cuing the context within which interaction is to take place.

The discussion clearly underlines the significance of the essential ransom-tale of Shehrazad and Shahrayar, told anonymously at the outset of *The Arabian Nights*. A brief reminder, therefore, of this tale should not be considered redundant in this context.

### Synopsis of the Ransom-Tale

It is related that Shahrayar, a Sassanian King, provoked by his wife's unfaithfulness, decided to avenge himself upon all women. Killing his wife and her train of maids and black slaves, he made up his mind to marry every virgin girl in his kingdom and kill her on the following day, that is, after deflowering her. He carried out his plan for some time until no one in his kingdom could tolerate that practice any longer.<sup>4</sup> Shehrazad, the vizier's daughter, implored her father to marry her off to Shahrayar, in the hope that she might change his malevolent attitude towards women and teach him a lesson. Shehrazad is described as a

well-read woman, versed in the histories of nations and countries, and who has learned wisdom and poetry and acquired medicinal knowledge. Thus well-informed of human nature and the power and impact of the 'word' on the human psyche, Shehrazad embarked on her mission and, contrary to her father's wish, was married off to the despotic melancholic king. On the wedding night, she begins her narration.

This is the essential ransom-tale upon which the idea of *The Nights* is based and which informs the tales. Now an audience listening to the Nights recounted, with Shehrazad's ransom-tale in mind, would be able to follow up the progress of the numerous tales in the 'text', not only in terms of suspense created through sequential action, but also with a view to seeing the extent to which Shehrazad's skill as a narrator can encounter and subjugate that human psyche.<sup>5</sup> Of this, Muhsin al-Musawi, in his *Alf Laylah wa-Laylah fi Nadhariyet al-Adab al-Inghilizi* [The Thousand and One Nights in English Literary Theory] (1986), says: "Unlike other women, Scheherazade often depends on her wit, common sense, and wide knowledge. She is more familiar with, and aware of, his [that is, Shahrayar's] psychology; so she narrates to him a collection of stories to keep him occupied every night, thus manipulating him in the same way magic and medicine manipulate people: now comforting him, the next time treating his wound and pain. Her tales are not devoid of references to women's fickleness; yet as Scheherazade thus manages to win his confidence, she recounts stories of women's faithfulness [to their husbands] and cleverness. Moreover, she refrains from employing directly didactic preachment or blunt drollery; rather, her tales are exciting enough for Shehrazad to grow fond of this art for a thousand and one nights!" (7).

Although it does not appear again in the corpus, that is, it is never repeated, the ransom-tale's presence is domineering. This results from the recurrence of certain phrases and clauses at the beginning and end of each of the Nights. These phrases, functioning as a reminder of the essential situation (a newly married woman engaged in a cut-throat endeavor to buy time to ransom her life) maintain a sense of *parallelism* throughout the narrative. The opening phrase in each Night is:

-1 زعموا ايها الملك السعيد وصاحب الرأي الرشيد ...

with variations on the first word and the adjectives used to describe the addressee, Shahrayar. These are:

-a زعموا ايها الملك السعيد صاحب الرأي السديد...

-b بلغني ايها الملك السعيد...

-c بلغني ايها الملك العزيز...

Soon after the first few nights, a new phrase is added to this one wherein Shehrazad's sister, Dinarzad, takes the initiative and triggers a new Night:

-2 فلما كانت الليلة القابلة قالت دينارزاد لاختها شهرزاد لما دخلت مع الملك شاهريار الى الفراش يا أختاه بالله عليك إن كنت غير نائمة فحدثينا بحدوتة من أحاديثك الحسان نقطع بها سهر ليلتنا هذي

With variations on some portions of the phrase:

-a فلما كانت الليلة القابلة قالت دينارزاد لاختها شهرزاد بالله عليك يا أختاه إن كنت غير نائمة فحدثينا بحدوتة من أحاديثك.

-b فلما كانت الليلة القابلة دخلت شهرزاد مع الملك شهرابار في الفراش قالت أختها دينارزاد يا أختاه إن كنت غير نائمة فحدثينا بحدوتة وتمي لنا حديثك.

The closing phrase in each Night is:

-3 وإنشق الفجر وأدرك شهرزاد الصبح فسكتت وقطعت الحديث.

with variations on the position of the composite-phrases of the sentence:

-a وإنشق الفجر وأدرك شهرزاد الصبح فسكتت عن حديثها.

-b وأدرك شهرزاد الصبح فسكتت عن الحديث.

This phrase is often preceded by a request put forward by Dinarzad in which she praises her sister's storytelling and receives Shehrazad's reassurance of a more interesting narration on the following night:

-4 ولما ان طلع الفجر قالت دينارزاد لاختها شهرزاد ما أحسن حديثك وأعجبه. قالت وأين هذا مما أحدثك به الليلة القابلة إن عشت وأبقاني هذا الملك، فهو أحسن من هذا الحديث وأعجب.

with such variations as:

-a وقالت أختها دينارزاد يا أختاه ما أطيب حديثك. قالت الليلة القابلة أحدثكم بأطيب من هذا الحديث وأعجب وأغرب إن عشت وأبقاني الملك ولم يقتلني.

-b فقالت لها دينارزاد يا أختاه ما أطيب حديثك وأعجبه. قالت وأين هذا مما أحدثكم به في الليلة القابلة إن عشت إن شاء الله تعالى.

The above-mentioned phrases and clauses may be translated as follows:

1. It is purported, Oh thou happy King and possessor of wise opinion...

a. It is purported, Oh thou happy King, possessor of unerring opinion...

b. It came to my ears, Oh thou happy King...

c. It came to my ears, Oh thou mighty King...

2. When the following night came, Dinarzad said to her sister, Shehrazad, as she [i.e. the latter] went with King Shahrayar to bed, Oh dear sister, in the name of Allah, if you are not asleep, tell us a tale, one of your fine tales, whereby we may traverse the progress of this our night.
  - a. When the following night came, Dinarzad said to her sister, Shehrazad, in the name of Allah, Oh dear sister, if you are not asleep, tell us a tale, one of your tales.
  - b. When the following night came, Shehrazad went with King Shahrayar to bed. Her sister, Dinarzad, said, Oh dear sister, if you are not asleep, tell us a tale and finish your narration.
3. The dawn was broken, and the morning descended upon Shehrazad, so she stopped talking and suspended the narration.
  - a. The morning descended upon Shehrazad, and the dawn was broken, so she stopped her narration.
  - b. The morning descended upon Shehrazad, so she stopped narration.
4. And when it dawned, Dinarzad said to her sister, Shehrazad, what a pleasant and amusing narrative yours is! She [i.e. Shehrazad] said, and what is this in comparison with what I would tell you tomorrow night, if I lived and this king spared my life! It is more pleasant and amusing than this narrative.
  - a. And her sister, Dinarzad, said, Oh sister, what an agreeable narrative yours is! She [i.e. Shehrazad] said, tomorrow night I would tell you a more agreeable, amusing, and amazing narrative if I lived and the King spared my life and did not kill me!
  - b. So Dinarzad said, Oh sister, what an agreeable and amusing narrative yours is! She [i.e. Shehrazad] said, and what is this in comparison with what I would tell you tomorrow night, if I lived, Allah willing!

The recurrence of these phrases throughout *The Arabian Nights* is significant. It keeps the essential story of Shehrazad and Shahrayar alive in the minds of those engaged in listening to the tales as they unfold. The storyteller's awareness of this prerogative helps him cue his performance in such a way that his audience will always be alert to the significance of the upcoming Nights. He will be able to sustain anticipation among his listeners, whose admiration for the narrative and the narrator, Shehrazad, increases as the tales sequentially progress. Moreover, the parallel structuring of these phrases within the general narrative underlines for storytellers certain attributes of professional narrating. First, they emphasize the need to be able to keep listeners at bay, as Shehrazad does to Shahrayar, and gradually build toward the ultimate denouement. Second, they remind storytellers of their status in terms of historical narration.

According to Deborah Folaron, in her article "Oral Narrating and Performing Traditions in the History of Modern Middle Eastern and Maghrebian Theatre and Drama" (2002), "[t]he narration of events as they relate to each other within an ideological framework, and the contextualization necessary to re-enact those

events as they presumably would have happened, are the usual tasks of the historian” (3). This is precisely what Shehrazad does. Her selection of events is varied but deliberate: she has a higher goal than merely to provide entertainment. As each Night draws to an end, the audience receives the signal, through the recurrent phrases mentioned above, that the narrator has just finished one more night successfully and would remain alive for at least one extra night. This progression adds to the listeners’ hope for a better fate for Shehrazad but also, and more significantly, reinforces the power of verbal art in the face of tyranny and injustice. G. K. Chesterton, in *The Spice of Life*, says that for all his despotism, Shahrayar has become an eyewitness to the self-independent nature of art. That dictator was compelled to listen to a tale: art alone was the alternative to life.<sup>6</sup>

It is in the light of the preceding argument, informed by the *parallelism* indicated, that our reading of the “Story of the King of China’s Hunchback” (and of the parallelism distinguishing the structure of its four major and six minor tales) should proceed. The four major tales, told precisely to ransom their narrators, exemplify *parallelism* by virtue of being positioned against the background-narrative of the ransom-tale. But this is not all that there is to them. Like Shehrazad’s framework, these incorporate a number of phrases and clauses carefully distributed in the tales in a structure of parallelism. They recur at certain moments in the tales, defining the stages of the narrative and creating expectations to be met throughout. One interesting aspect of the narrative to which these recurrences give rise, theme-wise, is its insistence on deformity as an outcome of the love adventures in which the main characters are unwittingly involved. This aspect pertinently recurs in each tale and appears to be possible only after other stages have been reached. Below is a synopsis of each of the four major tales, followed by a survey of the recurrences that create the *parallelism* of the tales. The synopses, however, do not quote the phrases which will be mentioned and translated afterwards.

### **Tale of the Christian Broker**

The broker relates how, long ago, he met in Egypt (his homeland) a handsome, well-dressed youth from Baghdad. The latter’s liberal manners had such an appealing impact on the broker that the latter invited him to a luxurious dinner at his own house. The Baghdadi youth recounted his story- how he lost his right hand in the pursuit of physical love. He said that, while trading in Egypt long time before, he came across a beautiful woman whom he sold some cloth and instantly fell in love with. His attentions requited, the youth enjoyed the private company of the lady in her own house for quite a while. Night after night, he would fulfill his incessant pursuit of lust with her, squandering his money over food and drink and the pleasures of luxurious life, until he was broke. Unable to sustain himself anymore, he robbed a soldier in the market-place. Consequently, he received the conventional punishment inflicted upon thieves: the cutting off of the right hand with the sword. He ended up marrying the woman and inheriting her, shortly afterwards.

### **Tale of the King's Steward**

The steward recounts his tale that happened only the night before. He was dining at a friend's house with many fellow countrymen when one of the guests, to everybody's astonishment, refused to eat of a famous dish called al-Zirbaja. Faced with their persistent inquiry, he relented and started to eat, only after washing his hands 120 times with 3 kinds of soap. Thus he uncovered his thumbless hands. He then explained. He was from Baghdad, son of a well-known merchant who lived during the reign of Harun al-Rasheed. In his own store in Baghdad, the youth sold expensive cloth to a beautiful woman and instantly fell in love with her. She turned out to be the lady-in-waiting of Zubeida, Harun al-Rasheed's wife. Admitted to the palace through a secret plan, he was married off to the lady-in-waiting. However, before the consummation of marriage in sex, he incurred the bride's indignation at his unwitting behavior: he had eaten of al-Zirbaja dish offered to him at the wedding party, and neglected to wash his hands afterwards. She punished him by cutting off his thumbs, then his toes, and made him swear never to eat al-Zirbaja again without washing his hands 120 times in advance. They lived together as husband and wife until she passed away.

### **Tale of the Jewish Doctor**

The doctor relates the story of a beautiful youth whom he was commissioned to treat of some ailment a long time ago in Damascus. The marks of physical abuse on the youth's body and the sight of the right arm whose hand was amputated made the doctor suspicious. To his restless looks, the youth explained. He was a wealthy merchant's son from Mosul in Iraq. His father had sent him to trade in Damascus, where he was visited by an agreeable-looking woman. He fell for the woman and immediately enjoyed her private company in his rented residence. One day, after several amorous affairs, she brought a younger woman to his residence and let the two enjoy a private night. In the morning, he discovered that the young woman's head had been severed from her body and the first woman had disappeared. He escaped to Egypt where he lived for three years, before returning to Damascus utterly bankrupt. At the same residence he had formerly kept, he found a golden necklace that used to belong to the dead young woman. Attempting to sell the jewel at the market, he was arrested and tortured at the Wali's court. Charged with robbery, he suffered to see his right hand cut off. Soon afterwards, he was escorted to the Governor of Damascus' office. It turned out that the two women had been the Governor's daughters. Driven by jealousy, the eldest slaughtered her sister, before committing suicide. The Governor, himself narrating this last episode to the Mosulli youth, married off his third and remaining daughter to the youth as a compensation for the latter's unjust suffering.

### **Tale of the Tailor**

The tailor recounts his meeting, at a meal in the morning of the previous day, with a lame beautiful youth

who, at the sight of an old barber sitting among the invitees, refrained from joining the assembly. Prevailed upon to change his mind, he pointed to the barber and told his story. He used to live in Baghdad, he said, thriving on the fortune he had inherited from his wealthy father, when one day he fell in love with a young woman whom he briefly saw in a closed avenue. He became lovesick. However, through the agency of an old woman, he managed to obtain a date with his beloved one, the Justice of Baghdad's daughter, in her father's house. On the assigned day, recovering from his love-sickness, he sent for a barber. Instead of doing his job, the barber wasted his customer's time in the morning, prating and offering extra services, such as cupping. He insisted that he was more than a barber and that he was good at many disciplines: astrology, medicine, alchemy, Arabic grammar, linguistics, scholastic theology, arithmetic, algebra, and rhetoric. Resenting the youth's impatience, the barber insisted that he deserved attention and, further, demanded to be the youth's companion on that day. Dismissed, he was allowed to leave with a lot of food which he managed to send to his house, while hiding in the neighborhood in anticipation of the youth's departure. Then, he followed the latter to his destination.

In the Justice's house the enamored youth hid himself in the girl's chamber, at her father's sudden return. The Justice beat one of his slaves. The slave cried out loudly and his laments were immediately echoed by the barber who, stationed outside the Justice's house, believed the cries to be the youth's. The barber's laments, in turn, drew a lot of people to the house, forcing the Justice to open the door in astonishment. Awkwardly facing the multitude, the latter let the barber enter the house in search of his master, whom he accused the Justice of beating in retaliation. Upstairs, the youth had just hidden himself in a big box. Spotting the box, the barber realized who the occupant was. He lifted the box over his head and went away with it. Frightened and hopeless, the youth jumped out of his shelter and fell at the doorstep of the house, breaking his leg and developing a permanent limp. He ran away and, eventually, left Baghdad and wandered from one country to another, before he ended up in China.

To this, the tailor continues, the barber retorted in an attempt to defend himself against the youth's allegations. He did what he did in order to save the youth from death. I was neither curious nor talkative, he confirmed. Of all my father's sons, I am the least talkative, least curious, and most reasonable. To prove his claim, he begged to be listened to, as he told his tale.

### Elements of *Parallelism*

A number of clauses, similar to those of Shehrazad and Dinarzad mentioned earlier, recur at the beginning and end of each tale, underlying the challenge the narrators face as they attempt to ransom their life. To the King's wondering statement,

1. a. هل سمعتم بأعجب من هذه القضية وما جرا لهذه الأحذب.

the Christian broker approaches, kisses the floor before the King, and says:

-b يا ملك الزمان ان اذنت لي حدثتك بشئ جرا لي بيكي الحجارة اعجب من قصة هذه الأحدث.

When he finishes his tale, the broker says:

-c وهذه ما جرى لي وغريب ما اتفق لي. فهذا أيها الملك ما هو أعجب من حديث الأحدث.

But the King retorts:

-d ليس هذا أعجب من حديث الأحدث ولا بد لي من شنقكم انتم الأربعة على أجل الأحدث.

Next, the Steward approaches and, addressing the King, requests in a tone of bargain, saying:

-a. 2 إن احكيت لك حديثاً اتفق لي ليلة البارحة قبل أن التقي هذه الأحدث عندي، فإن كان اعجب من حديث الأحدث تهب لنا أرواحنا وتعتقنا.

The King's reply is:

-b نعم، إن وجدتها اعجب من حديث الأحدث وهبتكم أرواحكم الأربعة.

Finishing his tale, the Steward says:

-c وبعد هذا جرا لي مع الأحدث ما جرا. وهذا حديثي وما رأيت البارحة.

Dissatisfied, the King firmly turns down the storyteller, saying:

-d ما هذا والله بأغرب من قصة الأحدث الأكذب.

Third, the Jewish doctor proceeds, kisses the floor before the King, and says:

-a. 3 يا سيدي عندي حديث أقوله أعجب من هذا الحديث.

And the King briefly replies:

-b هات.

When the Jewish doctor's tale is over, he says:

-c فهذه ما هو باعجب من حديث الأحدث.

Further dissatisfied, the King replies at length:

-d نعم والله ما هو أعجب ولا أغرب من قصة الأحدب الأكذب ولا بد ما اقتلكم انتم الأربعة، فإنكم انتم الأربعة اتفقتم على قتل الأحدب الأكذب وقتلتم حكايات ما هي بأعجب من قصته، وما بقي غير انت يا خياط وانت راس البليه، فهات حدثني بحديث غريب عجيب يكون أعجب وأغرب وألد وأطرب، وإلا قتلتمكم الجميع.

The tailor takes the challenge and briefly says:

4. a - نعم.

Then he embarks on narrating his very long tale that brings about the King's pardon but only after the six minor tales (which will be briefly related in Section Two) are recounted. To the tailor's

-b فما هي أعجب وأغرب من قصة الأحدب الأكذب.

the King's final response is:

-c هذه القصة التي جرت بين هذه الشاب والمزين الفضولي انها لأطرب وأحسن من قصة الأحدب.

These phrases and clauses may be translated as follows:

- 1- a. Have you heard of a more amusing issue and what's happened to this hunchback?
  - b. Oh thou King of all time, if you give me the permission, I will tell you something that happened to me, which makes stones cry, more amusing than the story of this hunchback.
  - c. And this is what happened and chanced to me; so this is, Oh thou King, what is more amusing than the tale of the hunchback.
  - d. This is not more amusing than the tale of the hunchback, and I must have you all four hanged, for the sake of the hunchback.
- 2- a. If I tell you a tale that chanced to me last night, before meeting this hunchback at my place, and it turns out to be more amusing than the tale of the hunchback, will you grant us our life and set us free?
  - b. Yes. If I find it more amusing than the tale of the hunchback, I will grant you all four your life.
  - c. Hitherto, this is what happened to me indeed with the hunchback, and this is my tale and what I saw last night.
  - d. By God, this is not more amazing than the story of the hunchback-liar!

- 3- a. Sir, I have a tale to tell, which is more amusing than this tale.
- b. Go ahead.
- c. So this is what is more amusing than the tale of the hunchback.
- d. Verily, by God, it is neither more amusing, nor more amazing, than the story of the hunchback-liar; I must kill you all four. It is because the four of you agreed on killing the hunchback-liar, and told tales that were not more amusing than his story. No one remains except you, tailor, and you are the cause of this trouble. So come and tell me an amazing, amusing tale, more amusing, amazing, savory, and gleeful. Otherwise, I will kill you all.
- 4- a. I will.
- b. But it is not more amusing and amazing than the story of the hunchback-liar.
- c. This story that took place between this youth and the curious barber is, verily, more gleeful and pleasant than the story of the hunchback.

Now, within the framework of Richard Bauman's oral performance approach to oral tradition, *parallelism* "involves the repetition, with systematic variation, of phonic, grammatical, semantic, or prosodic structures, the combination of invariant and variant elements in the construction of an utterance." The above-mentioned recurrences in the four major tales do, in fact, suggest a pattern that fits into Bauman's definition of parallelism. In their insistence on maintaining basic structural principles but to a degree of flexibility defined by the context within which they fall, these recurrences enable the performance of the Arabic 'text' to meet the requirements of the situation. Such persistence, in Bauman's perspective, "may serve as mnemonic aids to the performer of a *fixed traditional text*, or enhance the fluency of the improvisational or spontaneous performance."<sup>7</sup>

With this understanding in mind, I now move to Section Two, where the survey of *parallel* structures continues, now in the six minor tales, with a view to underlining the general pattern of narration in the Story, before singling out (briefly) other keys to performance.

## Part Two

The structure of *parallelism* continues to inform the rest of the "Story", that is, the six minor tales attributed to the barber and narrated by the tailor, dictating to the narrator his instrumental use of the ransom-tale framework and maintaining a sense of urgency throughout. To meet the expectations of his listeners-- both the King of China in the "Story" and listeners in the general sense of the word-- the tailor takes advantage

of the deformity theme utilized thus far.<sup>8</sup> Building towards the salvation of the whole group of suspects, he includes details of *unnatural cruelty* inflicted upon each one of the barber's six brothers.<sup>9</sup> These details may seem gruesome and repugnant enough to draw listeners away from the act of narrating. Conversely, though, they keep the hunchback story alive in the listeners' minds; the King's dissatisfaction with the first three narrators testifies to the influence the hunchback's strange death had on the king's decree. In other words, the story of the hunchback's death begins to assume here a kind of significance that goes beyond serving as the *raison d'être* of the tales. It becomes intrinsic to the strategy that the four narrators, but particularly the tailor, will have to use to obtain ransom. In a sense, therefore, the hunchback story becomes *the* narratological background against which all the tales are to be judged. Indeed, the King's patient listening to the tales (and his final judgment of the narrative quality) suggests the amount of challenge that storytellers face as they attempt to win their listeners' approval and appreciation of narration.

The fact that, for all their ingenuity, the three preceding narrators fail to generate admiration gradually augments expectations and makes the sense of urgency all too real. During the progress of the tales, and through the agency of the Arabic storyteller who embarks on the mission of narrating these tales to an Arabic audience, the reality of the situation can be conveyed to the audience only via performance. We can see a kind of analogy between the role that the tailor plays within the text of the "Story" and the role the Arabic storyteller plays outside of the text. Just as the former's narrating is the decisive factor in the whole process of ransom-acquisition, the latter's performance of the tales, but particularly of the tailor's tale, is the decisive factor in the process of acquisition of audience' applause, to which the Arabic storyteller aspires. His success, within the general framework of Performance theory, rests precisely on the extent to which he can utilize the recurrences, structurally paralleled, to cue his performance in such a way that his auditors will be drawn to engage in interactive listening. He will, therefore, allot the barber's account prime attention, emphasizing especially the latter's reiterations, as they occur in parallels.

The following is a synopsis of the barber's tale, which includes the tales of his six brothers.

### **Tale of the Barber and His Brothers**

The barber used to live in Baghdad, during the reign of the Caliph al-Mustansir billah [who ruled from 1226 to 1242 A.D.]. At the Muslims' 'Eid, or religious festive celebration of fast-break, the Caliph ordered that ten highwaymen be brought to his court to be executed. Believing that the ten men, escorted by the Wali and his guards, were on their way to a feast, the barber slipped into the boat that would carry them to the Caliph. At the Caliph's court, after the ten men were beheaded, and to the Caliph's indignant inquiry, the barber explained that his silent acquiescence was due to his wisdom and farsightedness. The amount of science, philosophy, and rhetoric that I have acquired, he said, was incomparable. I have always been ill-requited, in spite of my disinterested endeavor to offer succor to the right people. He then told the following stories.

### **First Brother: The Hunchback Tailor**

He was a tailor who lived in Baghdad off a modest income. One day a married woman appeared to him through the scuttle of her house. She seduced him with her inviting smile; he fell in love with her instantly. Aided by her husband, she managed to entice the tailor into sewing a lot of clothes for herself, then for her husband, in return for nothing. To further humiliate him, she and her husband had him consent to marry their maid. On the eve of his wedding, they made him sleep in their mill and, with the assistance of the miller, the tailor replaced the mule in grinding the wheat. His consequent refusal to go on with the marriage plan drew one last act of humiliation. Made to believe that he was irrevocably desired by the wealthy man's wife, and that she had no hand in his latest misery, he accepted an invitation to enjoy the private company of the wife during an alleged absence of the husband. Discovered by the latter and put to shame in public, he suffered the Wali's physical punishment and was soon banished from Baghdad.

### **Second Brother: the Paralyzed Baqbaaqa**

Baqbaaqa was wandering in town when an old woman approached him and asked if he was interested in being admitted to a large house with an orchard, where he would enjoy the private company of a beautiful lady. He immediately responded to the invitation and ended up sitting in a luxurious pavilion, eating and drinking with a good-looking maid, to the accompaniment of other maids playing on the lute. Slapped on the neck repeatedly by the host- maid, he suffered to let his eyebrows be painted red, armpit hair plucked out, and facial hair utterly shaved. The maid got drunk and, in her excitement, had Baqbaaqa dance and her fellow- maids hit him with the furniture of the house. Recovering consciousness, he was made to strip and chase the drunken maid in the nude around the house until, in the frenzy of erotic pursuit, he fell from a dark room through a hole in the floor, down to the market. It was the skinner's section. He was humiliated and made a laughing-stock, beaten on the mountback of a mule, and banished by the Wali from Baghdad.

### **Third Brother: the Blind Faqfaq**

Faqfaq was a blind man who lived off beggary and shared a small residence with fellow beggars, where they kept the money they earned. One day he knocked the door of a big house seeking charity. Turned down, he fell over the stairs into the street where he was helped by an inmate. They went back to their residence, not knowing that they had been followed by the big house's owner, who had just denied Faqfaq help. Swiftly and skillfully, the pursuer managed to enter the house and hide, with the help of a rope dangling from the ceiling. Faqfaq received his share of the earned money and sat to eat with his inmates. Secretly sharing the meal, the stranger was soon discovered and beaten. The beggars cried for help and

the police arrived. These three and the stranger, who now pretended to be blind, were taken to the Wali's office. At the phony beggar's request, he received 400 blows with a stick until he opened his eyes. He then claimed to be a member of that group of four beggars and that they pretended to be blind in order to have access to the private life of others. He requested that his fellow beggars be punished, as they tried to rob him of his due share, and that Faqfaq be the first on the list. Their pleas of innocence were in vain. Further, at the phony beggar's suggestion, the Wali sent for the earned money, gave a quarter of it to this informant, confiscated the rest for his own use, and banished the three blind men from Baghdad.

#### **Fourth Brother: the One-eyed Butcher**

He had been a wealthy butcher, in possession of houses and landed properties. His customers had been high-class people and distinguished figures in Baghdad, before he was reduced to poverty in the wake of the following event. A simple-looking old man frequently bought meat at his shop for five months. The coins he paid were so bright and shiny that the butcher kept them in a separate drawer, for the good fortune they might bring. One day he opened the box with a view to using the coins to purchase new lambs. To his astonishment, he found small, circular pieces of paper instead! His anger and disappointment gave way to what he thought was an ingenious plan. He slaughtered a big ram and had parts of it hung on the hooks outside. Enticed, the old man stopped at the shop and did what he used to do before. The butcher got hold of his customer and quarreled with him, thus drawing people's attention. In refutation of the butcher's charges of fraud, the old man replied by claiming that the former sold human meat for lamb meat. Inside the shop, where the ram's flesh had been hung, the crowd were startled to see a human body, slaughtered and hung! The butcher immediately became the target of the furious crowd; he received a blow by the old man on his right eye. At the police-station, he denied the charges in vain. Beaten with a stick 500 times and scandalized in public for three days, the butcher was eventually banished from Baghdad forever.

In another city, now working as a cobbler, the butcher got one day very close to the King's convoy. As soon as the King saw the cobbler's right eye, he refrained from going out on the hunting trip he had planned to take that day. In retaliation, the King's guards beat the man hard. The incident drove the cobbler to the other part of the city, where he recovered health and lived well. A few months had passed before one day he heard the noisy sounds of horse-hooves nearby. Frightened, he took to the nearest house and opened its main door. Inside a dark corridor, he was held by two men who took him for a criminal terrorizing and intimidating the owner of the house. At the Wali's court, the knife he held and his excruciated body testified against him. Whipped 100 times and scandalized in front of everybody, the cobbler was kicked out of the city forever.

### **Fifth Brother: He Whose Ears Were Cut off**

He was a poor man who lived off beggary in the night time. Inheriting the trivial sum of 100 dirhams from his father, he bought glassware with the money and sat in the market to sell, dreaming of a better life. Soon, however, he lost himself in a daydream in which he envisioned himself making huge profits and accumulating a great fortune. His anticipated success continued until he became a powerful man to whom the minister would marry off his only daughter. Proud and arrogant, he would humiliate his bride and deny her consummation of the marriage in sex. Reaching an extreme level of misconduct, this daydreamer would kick a glass of beverage off his wife's hand, only to find out that he had just kicked off his glassware-basket and reduced all the contents to small pieces.

He spent his day wailing his misfortune and tearing his clothes in public. A distinguished lady passed by and, inquiring, she helped him with the huge sum of 500 dinars. Happy with the gift at home, he was visited by an old woman who lured him into following her towards a big house, where he would enjoy the private company of a beautiful woman. He did. The beautiful woman playfully seduced the guest, before handing him over to a well-built black slave who, with a sharp sword, repeatedly hit him until he fainted. Believed to be dead, he was thrown into a cellar, from which he escaped. A month later, uncovering his identity to the same old woman, he made her repeat the experience. This time he managed to avenge himself and kill the black slave, a maid, and the old woman, but, as he attempted to strike at the good-looking seducer, she lured him into believing that she would recompense his misery with money and precious things. However, she ran away with everything, leaving very little for the man to go back home with. Next day he was arrested and, at the Wali's office, he bought his life with the stolen merchandise and was banished from the country.

### **Sixth Brother: He Whose Lips Were Cut off**

This was a man who became a pauper after a life of richness. So he went out seeking help. At a big house owned by a wealthy Barmak, he asked and was admitted into a spacious property that ended in a great orchard. An important-looking man listened to his story and, pretending to be overwhelmingly touched, promised food and money. He asked his guest to eat of a series of dishes that actually were not brought in. Time and again, the host would order a certain dish and assume the attitude of a man engaged in eating and enjoying the luxury of expensive food. Baffled and amused at this humiliating mimicry, the guest joined the host in the act of make-believe until he decided to retaliate. Pretending to be drunk with the wine thus allegedly served, he slapped his mimic-host on the neck and said that, as he had been made drunk by the generosity of the landlord, he deserved to be pardoned. Applauded for this clever defense, the guest was not only pardoned but also raised to the status of a life-long boon companion of the Barmak, then his treasurer.

In the latter's mansion the barber's sixth brother lived long and thrived until his landlord died. The Sultan

confiscated everything that had been in the possession of the deceased and of his treasurer, rendering the latter a pauper again, subject to a life of aimless wandering in the country. One day he was attacked by a group of bandits who took him to be a rich man. Unable to ransom himself, he suffered to have his lips cut off. His captor's wife then seduced him; his reluctant response was ill-timed. Discovered by the husband, the man was further brutally mutilated: his penis was severed and he was cast away on the highway until he was rescued by caravan travelers.

### Tale of the Barber Continued

The barber's tales thus completed, he begged to be duly judged as an uncurious, untalkative man. Although the Caliph's reply was sarcastic, he commended the barber as such. However, the latter was dismissed from the Caliph's court and banished from Baghdad. Upon the Caliph's death, the barber returned to his hometown, to find all his brothers dead. The barber then turned to the young man, he said, and helped him escape a miserable end. Yet, he was ill-treated and accused of curiosity and misconduct.

### Elements of *Parallelism*

The following phrases and clauses have been used to create structural *parallelism* throughout the tales. Whenever the barber finished a tale, the Caliph joyfully replied with the statement

-1 فضحك الخليفة من كلامي وقال يا صامط، يا قليل الكلام، احسنت ما قصرت. وامر لي بجائزة وانصرافي.

The statement has the following variations:

-a فضحك الخليفة من حكاياتي وقال صلوه بجائزته ودعوه ينصرف.

-b فضحك الخليفة الى حين استلقى على قفاه وامر لي بجائزه.

-c فلما سمع الخليفة قصتي جميعها وما أخبرته عن اخوتي ضحك ضحكا شديدا وقال صدقت يا صامت، انت قليل الكلام وما عندك فضول، ولكن اخرج الان من هذه البلد واسكن غيرها.

To this the barber would reply

-2 فقلت لا والله يا أمير المؤمنين ما اقبل شىء دون ان احكي لك ما جرى لبقية اخوتي.

With the following variations:

- a فقلت له والله يا امير المؤمنين اني قليل الكلام وكثير المروة ولا بد ما احكي بين يديك بقية حكايات اخوتي حتى تعلم اني قليل الكلام.
- b فقلت والله يا مخدومي انا ما انا كثير الكلام ولكن حتى احدتك كماله حكايات اخوتي حتى يتحقق مولانا الخليفة حكاياتهم جميعها ويصير على خاطره ويورخهم في خزائنه ويعلم اني ما انا كثير الحديث يا مولانا الخليفة.

These phrases can be translated as follows:

1. The Caliph laughed at my speech and said, well done silent man, you haven't fallen short [of my expectations] untalkative man, and he ordered that I be given a prize and that I be dismissed.
  - a. The Caliph laughed at my tales and said, give him a prize and let him be dismissed.
  - b. The Caliph so laughed until he lay on his back, and ordered that I be given a prize.
  - c. When the Caliph heard all of my story, and what I told him about my brothers, he heartily laughed and said, in truth, silent man, you are untalkative and uncurious; but now, you are to leave this country and to reside in another.
2. So I said, Oh Prince of the Faithful, Allah forbid I accept anything until I relate to you what befell the rest of my brothers.
  - a. So I said unto him, Oh Prince of the Faithful, by Allah I am untalkative, though quick to offer succor, and I ought to relate unto your hands the rest of the tales of my brothers, so that you know I am untalkative.
  - b. So I said, Oh my master, by Allah I am reticent, I, but let me relate to you the remainder of the tales of my brothers, so that our lord, the Caliph, verily learns all their tales and perhaps, as the tales appeal to his heart, he has them transcribed and kept in his own bookcase, and verifies that I am reticent, Oh our lord, the Caliph.

In his account of his brothers' tales, the barber reiterated a certain sentence immediately after the banishment-stage in each tale. He would utter the following sentence by way of proving how helpful, chivalrous, and quick to provide succor he was. And he meant it to be a reminder set against the young man's accusations, namely, that the barber's curiosity and incessant chattering were behind the young man's ultimate misfortune.

#### First Brother's Tale

- 1 ونفي من المدينة فخرج وهو لا يدري اين يقصد، فخرجت وراه وزودته.

## Second Brother's Tale

-2 فصفع اخي مائة دره ثم نفاه من بغداد، فخرجت انا يا امير المومنين خلفه وادخلته المدينة سرأً ورتبت له مونتته، فلولا مروتي فعلت ذلك.

## Third Brother's Tale

-3 ونفا الوالي التلاته، فخرجت انا يا امير المومنين ولحقت اخي وسالته عن حالته فاخبرني بهده الذي دكرت فرددته وادخلته سرأً ورتبت له ما ياكل وما يشرب في الخفيه.

## Fourth Brother's Tale

-4 فهج اخي على وجهه وسمعت انا به فخرجت اليه واستخبرته فاخبرني بحديثه وما جرا له فاخذته واقبلت به المدينة سرأً ورتبت له ما يقوم باوده.

## Fifth Brother's Tale

-5 وخرج هاجا الى بعض البلاد فلقيوه اللصوص فعروه فسمعت انا به فخرجت له ثيابا لبسها وادخلته المدينة سرأً واضفته الى اخوته.

## Sixth Brother's Tale

-6 فخرجت اليه وحملته ودخلت به المدينة ورتبت له ما يقوم باوده.

The sentence is translated as follows:

1. And he was banished from town, so he left not knowing where to go; I went after him and supplied him with provisions.
2. So he slapped my brother a hundred times, and then banished him from Baghdad; so I went out, Oh Prince of the Faithful, after him, brought him back to the town secretly, and set his provisions; I did that out of my feeling of chivalry.
3. And the Wali banished the three [men], so I went out, Oh Prince of the Faithful, and caught up with my brother; I asked him how he was doing, and he told me what I have just related to you; I brought him back [to the town] secretly, and arranged for his food and drink in private.
4. So my brother wandered aimlessly about; I heard of him [i.e. his predicament], so I went out after him; I inquired and he told me what had befallen him; I took him back with me and entered the town secretly; then I supplied him with sustenance.

5. And he went out rambling in some country; he came across highwaymen who stripped him; I heard of him [i.e. his predicament], so I went out with clothes that he put on; I brought him back to the town secretly and had him join his brothers.
6. So I went out after him and carried him; then I entered the town and supplied him with sustenance.

In the light of Richard Bauman's performance approach, these reiterations gain momentum from the event that makes them possible and within which they are articulated. The event is the story of the hunchback's death and its consequences. Yet even this event cannot be fully appreciated as a work of verbal art (which is what the tales are, in the sense of form) without setting the "Story" against its narrative background--Shehrazad's ransom-tale. In other words, the tales of the "Story" are situated in two events simultaneously: that of the "Story" and that of *The Nights* as a whole. Further, the artistic vigor of these reiterations, as constituent parts of the narrative structure of the "Story," draws upon the social context of the event of the hunchback's death. He was the King's stooge and boon companion, in an age when to acquire such a position entailed high competition and drew intense rivalry. Therefore, the significance of these *parallel* reiterations, as situated utterances, becomes anything but merely textual. Awareness of this fact does inform the storyteller's approach to the 'text' and dictates to him his would-be performance. His narrating of the tales of the "Story" will be keyed to two things: the ransom-tale-guided "Story of the Hunchback," and the socially guided (and situated) act of narrating the Story.

Bauman's recognition of the nature of narrative as one rooted in human events, in the first place, underlines for him the two-fold ontological aspect of narration. Referring to Roman Jakobson, he observes: "narratives are keyed both to the events in which they are told and to the events that they recount, toward narrative events and narrated events."<sup>10</sup> This observation is important to our understanding of the "Story of the Hunchback" as a narrative event in the first place. It directs attention to several forces working "collaboratively", while the narrative text is being narrated. In *Narratology: The Form and Functioning of Narrative* (1982), Gerald Prince sets the narrative event under two distinct but complementary categories, *Narrating* and *Narrated*, and argues for an important position for the *Narratee* in the general presentation of the *Narrated* (16-26). Of special interest here is the position of the *narratee* in the general process of narration. It may be directly and explicitly articulated, through the preposition, you. In the "Story," as in the *Nights* in general, this preposition is used very often both at the beginning and end of each tale, distinctly reminding us of who happens to be the audience at that moment of narration. On the other hand, the preposition may not be articulated, and so we may not know of the listener's reaction or attitude during the narration. However, the oral performance approach to the text brings listeners onto a common plane of understanding, facilitating interaction between the *narrator* and *narratee*.

This plane exists as a result of the assumption that the audience is aware of their significance as receivers of the narration, that is, as decoders of all signs that are utilized in the act of *narrating* and which make up the narrative. Signs must be familiar to the audience; familiarity is the result of a common cultural background between the narrator and his audience. So when the latter receive the signs and decode them, they do so under the influence of a context-- their cultural context. Otherwise, they end up roaming in the

abstract: oral *narrating* (of a story) to an audience can never be an exercise in abstraction, since its vehicle of expression is the spoken word. Context draws attention to what happens in the narrative and is informed socially, politically, and historically by the milieu within which the narrative is possible. Therefore, the more able to decode the signs the audience are, the easier it is for them to (artistically) appreciate the act of storytelling and to interact with the storyteller. Performance, therefore, becomes the *sole* means for enabling the audience to decode, appreciate, and then interact.

Hence the significance of the *narratee* in the general framework of performance approach. This understanding designates Shehrazad's ransom-tale technique, as one rooted in an attempt to draw her audience-- Shahrayar-- to a common plane, where negotiation of power becomes possible only when she provides this audience with clues to her performance. Her structural parallels serve the purpose. And this is precisely what the "Story of the Hunchback" does. The text is informed and guided by *parallelism*, Bauman's key to performance. And it is within this frame of reference that any other key to performance should be underlined in the text.<sup>11</sup>

## Conclusion

The preceding reading of the 'text' of the "Story of the King of China's Hunchback," in terms of the Oral Performance approach to oral tradition, suggests to me the following:

1. Being rooted in the popular culture of Arabic-speaking countries, such as Egypt, Syria, and Iraq, the tales utilize certain features of urban life that are common in the Arab world and, therefore, accessible to the public. Not only do the tales reflect popular taste and give vent to popular needs-- psychological, social, political, etc (as popular literature often does)—but they are also pregnant with signs of, and references to, daily habits, social manners, and class-informed practices that constitute popular culture in urban centers. Their accessibility is further facilitated by the expressive language of the text. It is a combination of standard Arabic, Arabic vernaculars (particularly Egyptian and Syrian), and local dialects influenced by non-Arab neighboring countries. I call it Middle Arabic.<sup>12</sup> The Middle Arabic of the text is, by definition, understood by the populace, middle, and upper classes. It can be therefore designated as a *special register*, an in-between possibility of communicating what, otherwise, might be restricted to the language of this class or that.
2. The significance of this compromise is two-fold. On the one hand, it enables the tales to be 'read' and appreciated in their own terms, without subjecting them to rigorous critical standards, such as those customarily applied by orthodox critics.<sup>13</sup> On the other, it enables their narrators to take the narration to horizons of performance that are unlimited in their impact on the audience.
3. The idea of compromise is interesting in its indication of how flexible and, therefore, open to interaction a popular culture text can be, once approached properly-- that is, once cued via the right means

of reading. This means or method, as my reading has shown, is the Oral Performance approach instrumentalized, both aesthetically and socially, by Richard Bauman. The tales can be approximated through Bauman's keys to performance, which will help their text open up venues for interpretation, in addition to the initial act of artistic appreciation. *Parallelism* is the most conspicuous structural quality of the tales that serves as a key to performance. It is the one clue needed to argue for the oral traditional roots of the text of the "Story of the King of China's Hunchback." Moreover, I find myself inclined to emphasize the plausibility of the Oral Performance approach for an extensive study of *The Arabian Nights*, as a work of verbal art rooted in the oral tradition of the Arab world.

4. Application of this approach may also enable us to suggest a pattern of narration that is carefully and skillfully upheld by the writer(s) of *The Nights*. For example, and with respect to the question of deformity underlined earlier, the structural *parallelism* in the Hunchback story has suggested to me a mode of narration that is basically (though not strictly) founded on the following pattern:
  1. *A man in the market-place incidentally meets with a woman who stirs his amorous affections or erotic desire.*
  2. *The enticement generates a secret rendezvous to take place shortly afterwards, often at the woman's abode.*
  3. *The enamored lover's arrival at the designated place is often accompanied by generous supplies of food and drink.*
  4. *The rendezvous includes a celebratory consumption of food and drink and/or physical pleasure accomplishment.*
  5. *The rendezvous soon starts a series of adventures that end with the lover being cruelly deformed.*
  6. *The lover either changes course of life or place of residence, with signs of utter resignation to the rule of fate.*
5. In the light of Foucault's theoretical position, the success of the "Tale of the Tailor" can be attributed to the discursive power of the narrative, which is rooted in oral tradition. The text has the ability to continue to unfold, almost endlessly, and generate tales of increasingly "amusing" and "amazing" details to satisfy a well-informed and, accordingly, hard-to-win audience. It is discursive enough to defy narrative closure and, rather than being content with cold repetition of patterns, the "Tale of the Tailor" even suggests the possibility of generating more sub-tales ascribed to the barber. Indeed, the tale invites maneuvering and re-positioning of all the composite units of narration, such as character-involvement, scene-description, plot- execution, and the surprise element, which might help beget more sub-tales. The idea of deformity is itself an aspect of transformation, made possible by virtue of the discursive power of the tradition that informed these tales over time.<sup>14</sup>

6. I am therefore inclined to say that, contrary to Muhsin Mahdi's renunciation of later Arabic originals (printed in the nineteenth century) as an outcome of additions untrue to the original manuscript, *The Arabian Nights* is a work of verbal art that invites additions and transformations *precisely* because of its discursivity. This quality is a direct result of oral tradition. The "Tale of the Tailor" is a case in point. It serves to suggest the difficult task of a storyteller, as he strives to meet the expectations of a hard-to-please audience. The Tale highlights the significance of the ransom-tale frame and its narrator, Shehrazad. With this in mind, even the number 1001 may, to a flexible frame of thought, sound rigorous and boundary-bound in an Arab world rich with oral tradition.

## Appendix

The following is a list of phrases and utterances, occurring in the "Story of the King of China's Hunchback," which may be considered as potential keys to performance. Their regularity in the tales enables the storyteller, as performer, to cue his performance towards involving his audience in the act of narration as recipients of an encoded text with which they are already familiar. However, to determine exactly whether these phrases and descriptions fall under this category or that requires research to be informed by fieldwork, the kind that, for instance, Parry and Lord did in former Yugoslavia. For the purposes of this research (which is limited in scope), I include some, not all, of those utterances and suggest their eligibility as keys to performance, insofar as they fit into the definition that Richard Bauman provides for each key in *Verbal Art as Performance*. They are, therefore, liable to acquire different signification or added significance as this key or that, depending on how far we can prove, via extensive fieldwork in the Arab world, their conformity to Bauman's definitions.

### Special Codes

- 1 فدارت وجهها وشالت النقاب فنظرت نظره اعقبنتني حسره فما تماكنت عقلي.
- 2 وكشفت وجهها فنظرتها نظره اعقبنتني النظره حصره.
- 3 ان لهده سبب عجيب يجب ان يورخ في الكتب ولو من ماء الذهب.
- 4 ولما سمعنا الحكاية تعجبنا غاية العجب وهزنا الطرب.

These may be translated as follows:

1. She turned her face [back to me] and raised the veil; I looked [at her] once and an *Alas* succeeded: I lost composure.

2. And she uncovered her face; I looked at her once and an *Alas* succeeded.
3. There must be such an amazing reason for this [story] that it should be documented in books with gold water.
4. And when we heard the tale, we got extremely amused and were shaken with ecstasy.

There is a sense of archaism in these phrases, which is, as Bauman realizes, an attribute of the special language of verbal art. But they are old-fashioned utterances “readily understood by all, even children” (17). Also, there is a conventional use of rhyme, both internal and end-rhyme (which my translation does not show). A well-informed and fully equipped oral storyteller, versed in the oral traditional forms of his own speech community, may choose to stress or accentuate the above-mentioned utterances. He may reiterate them within their own structural space to gain effect. Or he may read them *melodiously* to make their particular context emotionally charged.

### Figurative Language

This is a characteristic quality of the text. Figures of speech are often used to emphasize the impact of meeting a beautiful woman in the market-place, sudden exposure to luxurious lifestyle (and the concomitant pleasures of watching and listening to pretty slave girls singing and playing on musical instruments), and the description of attractive urban sites and views. Moreover, the text abounds in verses and songs whose occurrence creates a particular resonance in the listener’s mind. Figurative language may strike the audience as exemplary of similar situations with which they are familiar and to which they can cue their reception. Examples include similes, metaphors, and personifications. One distinct quality in this respect is the use of hyperbolic language, creating emphasis and raising expectations.

- 1- فلما جلست وكشفت نقابها وقلعت ايزارها فوجدتها شكل عظيم وكانها البدر المصور وتمكن حبها مني.
- 2- فلم اجلس غير ساعة حتى فتحت طاقه وطلت منها صبيه كانها الشمس المضيئه، لم ترا عيني احسن منها، فنتبست لما نظرتني، فانطلق في قلبي النار ونقلب بغض النساء بالمحبه، وتميت جالس الى قرب المغرب وانا غايب الصواب.
- 3- فنزلت وجلست في القاعة الصغيرة وادا بعشر جوار كانهم الاقمار قد اقبلت واصطفت وعشرين جاريه اخرى قد اقبلت وهم نهد ابكار وبينهم الست زبيدة وهي ما تقدر تمشي من الحلي والحلل.
- 4- فدخلت الى الدهليز فاجد قاعه معلقه عن الارض سبع اجحر ودايرها شبابيك مطلقه على بستان فيه من جميع الفواكه وسائر الاطيار والانهار دافقه نزهة الناظرين وفي وسطها فسقيه في اركانها الاربعه اربع حيات مسبوكة بالذهب الاحمر تلقي الماء من افواهها كانها الدر والجوهر.

-5 وان درتم البصر في بركة الحبش ارجعت ابصاركم كليله من الدهش، الم تروا لذلك المنظر الجميل وقد احدقت بخضرتها مقطعات النيل، كانه زبرجد رصع بسيابك فضه.

-6 وان كنت بساحل مصر وقد حلت الشمس طلوعا ولبس البحر من اتوابه زردا ودروعا احياك نسيمه القليل وظله الوافر الطليل.

They may be translated as follows:

1. Sitting down, she uncovered her veil and took off her robe. I saw that she had a great face, like a full moon: her love conquered me.
2. I had not sat for more than an hour when a scuttle was opened and a young woman appeared. She was like the bright sun; I had not seen such beauty before. She smiled to me... and fire erupted in my heart: my hatred for women turned to love. I spent the rest of the day sitting, having lost my head.
3. I stepped down and sat in the small hall. All of a sudden, ten slave girls, like moons, appeared and lined up. Then twenty slave girls-- bosomy virgins-- appeared with Lady Zubeida between them: she could hardly walk, with the weighty jewels she had worn.
4. I entered the corridor from which I saw a hall that was suspended from the ground seven seas [that is, layers]. The hall had many windows commanding an orchard that had all kinds of fruits, birds, and rivers flowing to the satisfaction of picnicking onlookers. In the center of the hall, there was a fountain with a snake in each one of its four corners. The snakes were red-gilded, wherein water came out of their mouths like pearls and gems.
5. And if you look at al-Habash pond carefully and prolong the look, it would render your vision weary and dim. Have you not seen that beautiful view, where the Nile patches stare at the verdure of the pond, and the Nile itself looking like aquamarine studded with silver-casts?
6. And if you happen to be on the shore of Egypt, and the sun arrived to rise and the sea assumed an apparel of its own clothes-- an apparel of armors and coats of mail, it [i.e. the shore] would revive you with its little breeze and abundant shade.

### *Food Lists: Descriptive Codes?*

A common feature of the “Story” is the frequent listing of food items and dishes, generally within passages involving social interaction. Certain designated dishes, mentioned with an emphasis on meat and quality ghee (or cooking fat), draw attention to wealth and plenty characteristic of higher classes. Detailed listing of spices, grains, nuts, honey, and sweets, for example, indicates luxuriousness and lavishness to be found,

not only in rich people's households but also in houses that are particularly concerned with maintaining a refined taste for food as an expression of a refined taste for life. Being of different origins, these and other food items color the tales with a unique tinge of historical implications: it is a tinge resulting from an assemblage of cultures made possible in urban sites, only after the establishment of Arab-Islamic empires in Damascus, Baghdad, and Andalus respectively. The well-known medieval Muslim scholar, Ibn Khaldoun (d. 1406), in his *Kitab al-'Ibar wa-Diwan al-Mubtada' wal-Khabar*, commonly known as *al-Muqaddimah* [the Introduction], speaks of the transition of the State from nomadism to urbanization (190-92). He cites examples of unprecedented excessive luxury, particularly from the Abbasid era. They show the extent to which exposure to other far more civilized cultures can have an impact on the newly urbanized state. I am, therefore, inclined to consider food lists (of items, dishes, etc) as keys to performance, although they do not literally conform to Bauman's definitions. They do, however, combine attributes of special codes (in their restricted use in daily speaking) and parallelism (in their frequent mention throughout the "Story," though not necessarily in their structural positioning). For lack of a better designation, I call them *descriptive codes*. The following are but a few of them from the text:

- 1 فما لبت ساعه حتى قدمت لي خونجه من افخر الالوان من سكباج وطباهجه وقرموش مقلي منزل في عسل نحل ودجاج محشي سكر وفسق، فاكلنا حتى اکتفينا. تم رفعت المايده. تم غسلنا ايدينا ورشوا علينا الماورد الممسك.
- 2 تلك اليله قدموا لي خونجه طعام، من جملة الطعام خافقيه فيها زيرباجه مختره بقلب الفستق المقشر مجلبه بالجلاب والسكر المكرر.

They may be translated as follows:

1. It did not take long before she provided me with a khunja of excellent colors: skbaaj, tabahga, fried qarmoosh [i.e. catfish] dipped in bee-honey, chicken stuffed with sugar and pistachio. We ate until we had enough. Then the dining table was removed; we washed our hands and musked rose-water was sprayed on us.
2. That night they provided me with a food khunja. Among the food was a khafqiyya in which there was zirbaja, covered with peeled pistachio kernel and treated with julep and refined sugar.

An Arabic storyteller, well-informed of the connotative levels of food and feast descriptions in his own or in a related society, can cue his own performance of these passages in such a way that he manages to create a common plane on which his listeners can interact. Many of the food and feast descriptions in the "Story" are closely associated with amorous adventures and the pursuit of sexual lust. This is one more reason why such passages can be used to cue performance: their availability both to the upper classes and the populace. A storyteller, ignorant of the utilitarian aspect of these descriptions, may well miss a handy instrument to raise expectations and enhance interpretations. Further, and within the narratological significance of the ransom-tale framework, such passages prolong narration and prevent narrative closure, which is what the *Nights*, in a very restricted sense, are about.

## Notes

\* This research is part of an MA thesis, written under the advice of Professor John Foley at the University of Missouri-Columbia and defended and passed in 2006. I thank him for open-mindedly advising it.

1. The significance of such features for the study of popular culture has been adequately underlined in many recent publications in the Arab world. See, for example, Farouq Khawrshid, *Qadhaya Sha'biya* [Popular Issues] (Port Sa'id: Mektabet al-Thaqafa al-Diniya, 2003); Ibrahim Abdul-Hafidh, *Malamih al-Taghyeer fi al-Qassass al-Sha'bi al-Ghina'i* [Features of Change in Lyrical Popular Fiction] (Cairo: Mektabet Zahra' al-Sharq, 2001); and Mursi al-Sabbagh, *Dirasat fi al-Thaqafa al-Sha'biya* [Studies in Popular Culture] (Alexandria: Dar al-Wafa' li-'Aalam al-Tiba'a wa al-Nashr, 2000). On *The Arabian Nights*, see particularly Muhsin Jasim al-Musawi, *Mujtama' alf laylah wa-laylah* [The Society of the *Thousand and One Nights*] (Tunis: Markaz Manshuraat al-Jami'a, 2000).
2. I make this assumption in the light of Muhsin Mahdi's article, "From History to Fiction: The Tale Told by the King's Steward in the 1001 Nights". In this article, Mahdi makes the argument that the "tale...is adapted directly from a report about events said to have occurred early in the tenth century in Baghdad and transmitted not as fiction but as history" (65). The tale reveals, as the synopsis will soon show, the extent to which interclass mobility is possible in an age where class distinction is intensively endorsed by the ruling regime, itself an example of conventional power.
3. For a well-informed reading of the ransom-tale from a literary perspective, see Mia Gerhardt, *The Art of Storytelling*. In a section entitled, "Ransom Frame" (401-16), itself part of a discussion of the structure of *The Nights*, she describes the complex emplotment of a certain number of tales (four) and explains it in terms of the ransom-frame. She cites the "Story of the Hunchback" as one such example.
4. According to other editions of *The Nights*, Shahrayar carried out his plan for a very long time (3 years in Boulaq's edition), until there was no girl left in his kingdom!
5. In my opinion, it is this performative quality of Shehrazad's narrative that suggests the discursive nature of *The Arabian Nights*, from a Foucauldian perspective. This is largely due to the power of tradition that informs the corpus and persists in various forms throughout the tales.
6. In Muhsin al-Musawi, *Alf Laylah wa-Laylah fi Nadhariyet al-Adab al-Inghilizi*, 8.
7. In Richard Bauman, *Verbal Art as Performance*, 18-19. Emphasis is mine.
8. In *The Art of Storytelling*, Mia Gerhardt speaks of mutilation as a prominent motif in the "Story of

the Hunchback.” She says: “Each of the four men reports, not a personal experience, but an extraordinary adventure told by someone else...; and every time the account of this adventure serves to explain a bodily defect... [T]he mutilation is attributed to a third person, which puts the man who reports about it in the same position as the reader: intrigued at first, and subsequently pleased when his curiosity is satisfied by the mutilated man’s account” (413). Within the narrative context of the “Story,” deformity or mutilation becomes important enough to the act of narration itself that it should be emphasized during the *performance* of the text.

9. I am employing the term *unnatural cruelty* as it is used by Jane Garry and Hasan el-Shamy, in their edition of *Archetypes and Motifs in Folklore and Literature*. The two editors use the term to designate one of the prominent motifs in folklore and popular literature. Among the four types of unnatural cruelty they underline, there is one entitled Cruel Spouses (398-403). However, it is always the man who plays the cruel part. The editors do cite an early story in *The Nights*, one that is told by the vizier to his daughter, Shehrazad, by way of warning her of the consequences of marrying the King. The story is about a husband’s cruelty to his wife. There is no mention of women being the cruel party, as is the case in the tales in the “Story of the Hunchback,” which raises questions about the teleology of such practices in *The Nights*.
10. In *Story, Performance, and Event*, 2.
11. At the end of the thesis, I provide an Appendix of some utterances, descriptions, and motifs that serve as keys to performance. However, my point is to emphasize the overwhelming significance of *parallelism* in the text of the “Story,” as one that informs the narration, rather than being one key among several. According to Richard Bauman, it is enough for an oral traditional text to have one of these six keys to enable its performance.
12. By this I do not indicate any historical era in the same sense that, say, the designation Middle English does.
13. Ibn al-Nadim (d. 998), the first Arabic scholar to mention the 1001 Nights in his book, *al-Fihrist*, denounces the work and its likes as insipid and loathsome. He thus reveals the rigorous standards of literary appreciation dominating his age-- the second Abbasid era.
14. Needless to say, the word transformation should not be understood in a Kafkaesque sense of the word, a confusion which might issue as a result of the word deformity.

## References

Bauman, Richard. 1986. *Story, Performance, and Event*. Cambridge Studies in Oral and Literate Culture. New York: Cambridge University Press.

\_. 1977. *Verbal Art as Performance*. Illinois: Waveland Press, Inc.

Folaron, Deborah. 2002. "Oral Narrating and Performing Traditions in the History of Modern Middle Eastern and Maghrebian Theatre and Drama". *Nitle Arab World Project*, 16 Sept. 2005 <<http://arabworld.nitle.org/texts>>.

Gerhardt, Mia I. 1963. *The Art of Story-Telling: A Literary Study of the Thousand and One Nights*. Leiden: E. J. Brill.

Ibn Khaldoun. 1989. *Kitab al-'Ibar wa-Diwan al-Mubtada' wal-Khabar or al-Muqaddimah* [the Introduction]. Beirut: Dar al-Jeel.

Ibn al-Nadim. 1970. *The Fihrist: a Tenth-Century Survey of Muslim Culture*. 2 vols. Edited and translated by Bayard Dodge. New York: Columbia University Press.

Mahdi, Muhsin. 1989. "From History to Fiction: The Tale Told by the King's Steward in the 1001 Nights". *Oral Tradition*, 4.1-2, 65-79.

\_, ed. 1994. *The Thousand and One Nights* (Alf Layla wa-Layla). 3 vols. Leiden: Brill.

Musawi, al-, Muhsin Jassim. 1986. *Alf Laylah wa-Laylah fi Nadhariyet al-Adab al-Inghilizi* [The Thousand and One Nights in English Literary Theory]. 2nd ed. Beirut: Markaz al-Inmaa' al-Qawmi.

\_. 2005. "The 'Mansion' and the 'Rubbish Mounds'": *The Thousand and One Nights* in Popular Arabic Tradition. *The Journal of Arabic Literature*, 35.3, 329-67.

Prince, Gerald. 1982. *Narratology: The Form and Functioning of Narrative*. Janua Linguarum. Berlin: Mouton Publishers.

Shamy, el-, Hasan and Jane Garry, eds. 2005. *Archetypes and Motifs in Folklore and Literature : a Handbook*. New York: M.E. Sharpe.

# Selected Writings...

By Juno Galang

JOSHUARADIN

winter

There is a room, on 415 South Fourth Street, that used to be. It was born in spring and raised in winter. It remembers much – remembers silver mornings and foggy twilight, hot chocolate and the wind, the wind, the wind. It recalls warm nights filled with the scent of alcohol and plates of cake, with video game music and shoes scattered around the floor. It is scarred with the clumsy fingers of a child.

I see you now, a boy, a young man, a son, a brother, a friend, a lover. The ghost of you turns to me and sighs. “My hands have been shaking lately, and I noticed my teeth chattering once. It’s not cold either. I’m a weird guy.”

My memory keeps me company on nights that border centuries.

# HOUSEOFHEROES

serial sleepers

And what, I wonder, is the process of hating someone?

The bathroom ballooned – it billowed and sat forward, it clenched – it resisted. It made a fist of steam and shook the mirrors. FALL ON YOUR KNEES.

I looked at my reflection, murmuring in muted colours, softly now. To whip the glass lucid, to watch the droplets crinkle the dryness like leprosy, like bluebell scales, the haunted fish of the unknown Sea. You are apt to stand in that peculiar manner.

And you turn comedy into tragedy, you imagine yourself a war-hero.

“I cannot see the future anymore,” he whimpers, a child with an old soul, a child with an old soul.

“Leave. Me. The. Fuck. Alone,” she whispers, a child with an old soul, a child with an old soul.

# CHOPIN

## nocturne in f flat major op.9, no.2

Life is made up of details: the way light and shadow divide delicate leaf-lines, the way a patchwork fence stands proudly, the way a note dips, plucked by your fingers. You are a life, and you are made up of details: pores soaked in memory, bones carved by the air of the places you've travelled, and your eyes. Your broken, broken eyes.

Heart beating so slowly, I say, "One day, you'll forget me. Or worse – the memory of me will become common."

It is like the way your chest burns when you have forgotten the frail soul of a dream. If eternity exists, then it is here, in the loss, the loss, the inevitable loss.

And if there is permanence in never, is that not a kind of forever?

# COTTON

the beautiful

Lazy voice, old wood with the fragrance of a cosy bar, the rippling shades of blue on the Mediterranean, the wine between familiar fingers on a lost summer day. Vienna streets haunted by the bluegrass south, harmonicas and pianos dancing beside laughing guitar strings and old leather. Sistine ceilings speaking solemnly of bright red, pickup trucks, fields of wheat, gold.

And I  
Ache in an untouched unfound twisted  
Slipper in the dirt kind of way.

And – and there was a blanket of cobblestones upon the railroad track  
That turned into lines, lines of tan and chocolate and almond,  
That rose and fell like waves,  
Like a soothing flow of sun-swept sea.

# Home, Journey and Landscape in Charles Frazier's *Cold Mountain*: the Mirroring of Internal Processes in the External World and the Literary Construction of Space.

By Oswald Yuan Chin Chang

## Abstract

This article examines Charles Frazier's Civil War novel *Cold Mountain* in the light of postmodern space theory. The basic premise of the paper is that the environment and landscape within the novel consists of a constructed space. This space reflects back (almost as in a mirror) the mental, emotional and psychological states of the two main narrators, Inman and Ada. Another central concept in the paper is that the normal antithesis between home and journey seems at first to be in play here but then becomes less obvious as the novel progresses. In the end, it appears that both characters have been on a journey through unfamiliar landscape, thus adding to the presumption of space that is constructed rather than essential in form.

## Introduction

At various times, Charles Frazier's Civil War novel *Cold Mountain* has been described as a spiritual quest for redemption (Gibson, 2006); an anti-Homeric odyssey (Vandiver, 2004); an attack on the cruelty of slavery (McWilliams, 2003); an exploration of the horrors of war (McCarron & Knoke, 1999); a story of cross-cultural bonding (Piacentino, 2001); an examination of masculine/feminine co-existence within the human psyche (Lee, 2003); and as a battle between Homeric epic and Heraclitean philosophy tract (Chitwood, 2004). While these are all legitimate approaches to the story of a Civil War deserter trying to get back to his love and his home at the base of Cold Mountain in North Carolina, they are also mainly literary and text level in form, using traditional critical methods and techniques. In this sense, these approaches assume that *Cold Mountain* is in the modernist literary tradition resulting in a well-told story that features realistic three dimensional characters within a found environment. The approaches study literary representation, intentional connections between *Cold Mountain* and previous literature, use of devices such as parallelism and antithesis, and metaphoric psychological symbolisms.

In this paper, I would like to use postmodern space theory to examine the literary construction(s) of space in *Cold Mountain* in terms of the novel's journey and landscape structures—and to attempt to determine how well these fictionally-built environments reflect the internal processes of the two main characters, Inman and Ada. It is hoped that such an examination will allow the emergence of a meta-fictional structure in the novel that goes beyond the literal antiwar and romance themes. The key question to be examined is: How are the differences in the viewpoints, attitudes and approaches of the two main characters towards their respective environments a reflection of the characters' own internal disruptions—and at the same time a feedback loop from external to inner landscape? In other words, can we connect the external environment with the internal geography to create a meta-fictional spatial whole? Before delving into the particulars of the significance of such an external-internal interloping in the two main characters, a theoretical foundational base is set with an examination of postmodern space theory and its implications for literary critical analysis.

## Postmodern Space Theory/*Cold Mountain* Landscapes

According to Bhabha, the originator of the phrase “postmodern space,” the term refers to the “negotiation of those spaces that are continually, contingently, opening out, remaking the boundaries, exposing the limits of any claim to a singular or autonomous sign of difference—be it class, gender or race” (1994, p. 219). Bhabha speaks of a “third space,” described by De Toro (1999) as “a liminal space ... a transitory space, a space other, a third space that is not here/there, but both” (p. 20). It can be argued that it is within this pattern of an interstitial third space that an examination can be made of how Inman's journey and the landscape through which he moves elaborates on concerns having to do with a literary discourse that involves race, ethnicity and gender as subjective, created concepts rather than fixed. Similarly, Ada's “journey” within herself, her growth and her multiple realizations can be viewed as flexible and fluid examples of this

hyphenated space that serves as the boundary between outer and inner and has some elements of both. The result is a “new person”, a constructed identity, and the recognition of a web of identities, both personal and social within a special dimension:

What is theoretically innovative, and politically crucial, is the need to think beyond narratives of originary and initial subjectivities and to focus on those moments or processes that are produced in the articulation of cultural differences. These “in- between” spaces provide the terrain for elaborating strategies of selfhood--singular or communal--that initiate new signs of identity, and innovative sites of collaboration, and contestation, in the act of defining the idea of society itself. (Bhabha, 1994, pp. 1-2)

In terms of such an approach to *Cold Mountain*, it is interesting to note the similarities between the present-day East/West, secular/religious binary systems dialogue (leading to inevitable stereotyping, misunderstanding and fear-mongering of the “other”) and the North/South dialogue undertaken by many Civil War writers (leading to the stereotyping of entire societies as monolithic and filled with hatred of the “other”). Thus, it is not necessarily referring to an actual political divide but rather an attitude, approach or way of looking at the world that is infused with the structures put in place by others and which individuals must break down so that their own identities can surface.

It can be argued that the landscape (internal and external) in *Cold Mountain* does represent such a space, what De Kock (1993) called the space where “other” people were given the opportunity to tell their own stories rather than having someone else tell it for them and risk a mind-numbing stereotyping, something that was a danger not only to Southern blacks but also to Southern whites. We are all aware of the damage that the stereotyping of Southern blacks has done. But Southern whites were also stereotyped as a monolithic group or block ready to go to war to ensure that the institution of slavery would be allowed to continue.

In presenting a character who flees the horror of a war that he did not really want in the first place and that was mostly outside his concerns, *Cold Mountain* creates such a “third space”—both in physical and emotional terms. Postmodern space theory allows the temporal and geographical space of the time to reach across and speak to our own space and time; shows us where the two protagonists are caught in the margins as it were and positioned in a geographical and metaphorical periphery in terms of where the power structure is centered (be it North or South); and provides a foundation or basis for the exploration of the novel that seems on the surface about events in the late stages of the Civil War but which can work within the context of the concerns we have in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century.

This blends in with Hall (1993) and his denoting of postmodern space as a type of unfixed, difficult to pin down psychological space. It is a space where things are in a constant state of flux, where objects are created and recreated as needed, and where things such as gender and identity become multiple, merge into one another, and never stand still for very long. There is an essential instability to these concepts, in other words: “Cultural identities come from somewhere, have histories. But like everything which is historical,

they undergo constant transformation. Far from being eternally fixed in some essentialized past, they are subject to the continuous “play” of history, culture and power” (p. 394).

According to Soja (1989), critical thought is in need of spatialization so that it is not completely engulfed and devoured by language which is temporal (and which could be under the control of the very power centers that are trying to dominate and subjugate). He uses spatiality as a way to expose a mental geography and thus “recompose the territory of the historical imagination through critical spatialization” (p. 12). This leads to notions of simultaneity rather than linear time, of action at a distance as spatial similarities are introduced beside one another, and of a way of interpreting the way space, time and social or cultural identity interact in the making up of what we call a society. This fits in well with Bhabha and his “third space of enunciation” (1994, p. 37), which is a way to break down the typical barriers between the “I” and “they”, the self and other, center and margin, etc. As Bhabha put it, this concept:

[C]hallenges our sense of the historical identity of culture as a homogenizing, unifying force, authenticated by the originary Past, kept alive in the national tradition of the People. In other words, the disruptive temporality of enunciation displaces the narrative of the Western nation ... as being written in homogenous, serial time. (p. 37)

Thus, cultural identity becomes something hyphenated, something that has nothing of the essential in it, something that is ambiguous and constructed as one goes along, and something that does not conform to the definitions put forth by those who wish to simply maintain their hegemony and control.

This also fits in well with *Cold Mountain*. Here, many of these themes emerge and we are presented with both male and female protagonists who contravene in one way or another much of the perceived and conventional wisdom with respect to the Civil War, its causes, its rationale, and its benefits. More importantly the stereotyping is contravened on an even higher level—in terms, for example, of the female protagonist not being able to survive without the male. (In fact, here we have two female protagonists—Ada and Ruby—surviving without any help). For his part, Inman contradicts the socially accepted interpretations of the reasons and causes of the Civil War: the typical binary construction with the North on one side and the South on the other. Because he does this (starting with his fleeing the hospital and thus the battlefield), he becomes the enemy of both sides and must traverse a landscape that can be inimical and hostile for those who are considered trespassers, for those who dare tilt against the elaboration of that space according to the social norms then in fashion and for the benefit of those in power. At the same time, Inman must battle against his own internal geography of the mind, the constructions he has put up that enable him to maintain a continuous identity and that allow him to “connect” to others like him. In other words, these constructed spaces are not merely the result of power structures that impinge on the individual but also the result of the individual’s internal battles to create a landscape that is familiar (or at the very least the individual thinks it is familiar). Throughout the novel, Inman is constantly questioning himself and his motives and tries to adjust the external world to his internal workings. This is somewhat blurred by the fact that Inman is actually travelling through an ever-changing landscape and thus it becomes more difficult to determine what part of it he constructs and what part comes already constructed (or has been constructed

by the power structures that can mobilize the type of destruction and creation needed).

In much the same way and within a space that is at once at quite a distance from Inman (at least at the start) and yet very close to him, Ada undergoes a similar transformation in the landscape of her mind and her emotional states. This is true even though she does not move from the base of Cold Mountain for the entire novel. Her identity and mode of existence nevertheless undergo a fundamental alteration—and this helps point out the notion that space is not something fixed and sempiternal, once created and thus outside the ability of humans to control. Rather, it is something that calls for a different approach to spatiality, the “socially produced space” that, according to Soja, exists alongside “perceived space” and “conceived space”—the “lived space” (1996).

Ada goes from being a “tourist,” an urban-minded dweller (brought there by her minister father), to that of a survivor off the land following her father’s demise. She does this through her own willingness to adapt, with the help of a guide, someone who leads her not only through the actual practical help and advice she needs for physical survival but also the “spiritual” guidance she needs to keep her psyche intact and her feet literally on the ground—especially considering she has lost not only her father but also Inman.

In both cases, whether ultimately successful or not, a third space is represented. And it is the meeting of this liminal space, the melding of these two “third spaces” that perhaps best describes the ambivalent relationship between the two protagonists. According to Xie (1997), this ambivalence and hybrid nature can best be seen in postmodern identity/societal terms:

Bhabha constructs a third space, an interstitial locus of meaning, between the indigenous and the European, the colonizer and the colonized. This newly emergent cultural space proves subversive to both the Western and the indigenous, allowing neither of them cultural and discursive continuity.... Bhabha’s theory of postcolonial counterhegemony with its revisionary strategy opens up new spaces of reinscription and negotiation not only for resistance to present forms of imperialism, but for struggle against future forms of imperialism as well. Indeed, the world has witnessed many racisms and ethnocentricisms other than Eurocentric racism, although this has been the most dominant. (p. 17)

As well, it is this created space that is best for coming to understand how so-called social experiences can be brought into line with individual experiences, and how these merge to produce cultural identities. At the same time, this third space serves as the best way to avoid the stereotyping that humans tend to do at an almost subconscious level.

Interestingly, a warning against this sort of thinking came from none other than Joseph Conrad, who often wrote from his own peripheral distance from the center of empire. His words seem very appropriate in helping to describe the dilemma faced by Frazier in detailing the geography and landscape traversed by Inman and in his attempts to avoid what Barthes (1977) labelled the stereotype’s “sad affair ... constituted by a necrosis of language, a prosthesis brought in to fill a hole in writing” (p. 199):

The critic and the judge seems to think that in those distant lands all joy is a yell and a war dance, all pathos is a howl and a ghastly grin of filed teeth, and that the solution to all problems is found in the barrel of a revolver or on the point of an assegai. And yet it is not so.... The picture of life, there as here, is drawn with the same elaboration of detail, coloured with the same tints. Only in the cruel serenity of the sky, under the merciless brilliance of the sun, the dazzled eye misses the delicate detail, sees only the strong outlines, while the colours, in the steady light, seem crude and without shadow. Nevertheless it is the same picture. And there is a bond between us and that humanity so far away. (Conrad, [1896] 1947, pp. vii-viii)

While Conrad may have been describing the stereotyping of so-called savage lands, the latest group of “others” that helped take the mind of greedy and ambitious Europeans from the task of devouring one another (just like some theorists argue that the various nations will only stop trying to destroy each other when facing with an alien enemy), it seems appropriate to many of the encounters faced by Inman on his journey home: a large number of these encounters start with the display of a “barrel of a revolver” or “point of an assegai” and end up with a “picture of life, there as here.” The “far away” that Conrad describes could just as easily be the unknown in the heart of Civil War America, the dangerous and at the same time stereotyped landscape that Inman traverses in the hope of returning to the familiar (which, of course, turns out to be not so familiar and in fact becomes the most dangerous part of the entire journey).

### **Home, Journey and Landscape in *Cold Mountain***

While most commentators admit that the novel’s minutely-described landscape arises out of Frazier’s intimate knowledge of the area, both from personal experience and from narrations passed down by his family, it is also true that this landscape is “at the same time culturally constructed, both by that accumulated learning itself and by alienating aspects of culture. The very business of survival in a landscape identifies ... the difference between connecting and alienating attitudes towards land. For Frazier ... this quickly comes down to a matter of personal integrity” (Gifford, 2001, p. 88).

In other words, forced as it may be, Inman’s efforts to return to Cold Mountain and the woman to whom he was informally betrothed is a moral journey. In the novel, Inman says at one point: “This journey will be the axle of my life” (Frazier, 1997a, p. 55). The journey is filled with ambiguity and a lack of a moral center, a reflection of the terrain through which Inman is moving. In the early part of the novel, as Inman stumbles along, he encounters several groups of people and undergoes a variety of seminal experiences. He sees these very consciously as some sort of tests and later says “how he might have done things differently in each case” (p. 95).

As set up by Frazier, both the landscape that Inman must pass through and that in which Ada attempts to survive is filled with two types of people: “those with destructive or creative ways of living in it: the murderers and the healers” (Gifford, 2001, p. 92). At the same time, there is the effect of the actual geography:

“The creek’s turnings marked how all that moves must shape itself to the maze of actual landscape, no matter what its preferences might be” (Frazier, 1997a, p. 121).

As well as encountering ruthlessness and those who would like to kill him—both Federal troops and a vicious Home Guard on the lookout for Confederate deserters, Inman also runs into people who are gracious and kind, and those who possess genuine healing powers, such as the goat woman who has the knowledge to make medicines from plants. These can also be seen as shattered parts of Inman’s own identity, which he is trying to integrate once more, which he is trying to bring within himself so he can be whole again.

In commentary Frazier made on the writing of his novel he spoke of becoming “less and less interested in the war itself” and instead setting out to produce “a fictive world ... marked by change and threat and beauty” and the desire “to know what the world’s processes—human and nonhuman—were, how things looked and how they worked. Subsistence farming, vernacular architecture, herbal medicines, and the mysterious ways of wild turkeys, for example” (2001, pp. 314-315).

In fact, several commentators have noted the special place that landscape plays in *Cold Mountain*: Inscoc (1998) favorably in the way the characters relate viscerally to the mountains; and Crawford (2003) not as favorably, claiming Frazier spent too much time describing geography and landscape and not enough in the human relationships. The argument presented here is that Inman and Ada’s relationship to the geography around them is as complex, if not more so, than any human relationship—and that it informs and infuses those human relationships by presenting a connection between the two sets of relationships that cannot be severed without dire consequences. As Way (2004) points out:

Frazier treats the environment as a character in itself, with as much influence as any other: Inman’s struggles with an unfamiliar environment stir in him a degree of despair usually reserved for the complexities of human relationships; Ada and Ruby’s dependence on their surroundings casts the environment in a stern maternal role as the agent of both punishment and reward. Such relationships on the individual level offer a rarely acknowledged view of private life in the Civil War South that have important implications for the world at large. (p. 34)

There is a deep reminder in the novel that knowledge of the land can mean the difference between life and death. On top of that, once that struggle has been worked out, how the people and the land interconnect helps shape how they treat not only that world but the world at large. In other words, it is here at this level that people choose to be either destroyers or creators. Ransom (1930), writing about the hard-scrabble farmers in the south, said that this person “identifies himself with a spot of ground, and this ground carries a good bit of meaning ... he would till it not too hurriedly and not too mechanically, to observe in it the contingency and the infinitude of nature, and so his life acquires its philosophical and even cosmic consciousness” (pp. 19-20).

Interestingly, it is not words, not even the words of this particular novel, that help define how these

characters are connected to and react to the landscape around them. They do not philosophize about the agrarian versus capitalist society; they do not provide fanciful poetic descriptions of the pastoral. Rather, this landscape is created and maintained only through the hard, scrabbling physical labour of these characters. The old notion about being one with the land is something lived and felt rather than verbalized. Thus, Inman must physically traverse that harsh landscape to find himself; Ada must abandon her book learning and dig at the earth to come to understand the cycles of life, and with them the true meaning of existence.

The only way that these characters can come to a true understanding of the world around them is to partake in it on the most basic level. They have to get physical with it, crack open the earth and scoop it up, learn the nuances of the seasons. If they don't, it will not be a matter of switching philosophical tack or theoretical approach. It will be a matter of dying.

Both Inman and Ada are thrown into an unfamiliar landscape with very little warning. It is the landscape that shapes what their reactions must be. For Inman, the problem is surviving in a world that is literally always changing around him—by the sheer fact that he does not stay in one place and is constantly encountering the “other”. For Ada, with the death of her idealistic romantic arcadian father, she is thrown into a space where people “lived by farming a little bit of their own land, and by open-range herding of cattle and hogs, by hunting and fishing, gathering and gleaning ... perhaps a rough, redneck version of Jefferson's agrarian ideal” (Frazier, 1997b).

Opposed to this is Ada's romantic dad and his approach to nature—as a type of idyllic image to be observed; as a painting that needs to have some sort of esthetic value, brushed clean of anything that might actually look like, taste like, or smell like the earth. It is here that the three types of space—the perceived, conceived and the lived—come into contact. Frazier (1997a) describes Ada's father thusly:

Monroe never developed much interest in the many tiresome areas of agriculture. He had held the opinion that if he could afford to buy feed corn and meal, why bother growing more that they could eat as roasting ears? If he could buy bacon and chops, why be drawn into the more inconvenient details of pork? Ada once heard him instruct the hired man to buy a dozen or so sheep and put them into the pasture below the front yard to mix with the milk cow. The man had objected, pointing out to Monroe that cows and sheep do not do well pastured together. The man asked, Why do you want sheep? The wool? Meat? Monroe's answer had been, For the atmosphere. (p. 23-24)

For someone like Ruby, the person who teaches Ada how to survive after her father's death has left her almost totally helpless, the treating of a rural landscape as a painting is completely incomprehensible: a painting is a painting; the earth is the earth. Ruby “listed as achievements the fact that by the age of ten, she knew all features of the mountains for twenty-five miles in any direction as intimately as a gardener would his bean rows” (p. 23). She can't understand why anyone would want to travel or try to get materials from outside the immediate area and that this type of activity “marked a lack of seriousness in a person” (p. 82). Not surprisingly, she believes “that a world properly put together would yield inhabitants so suited

to their lives in their assigned place that they would have neither need nor wish to travel” (p. 85). The use of expressions such as “assigned place” and “knowing one’s place” comes across as Shakespearean in its chain of being connotations. However, while the Elizabethan world view called for an external and totally objective landscape vision that encompassed not only the physical world but also the spiritual world, the “being in your place” world of *Cold Mountain* in general and Ada’s little corner of it in particular has little within it of objectivity and firmness. It is obvious that it is Ada who decides what kind of world she wants, merely by her utility and ability. One cannot simply wish a world into existence—as her father tried. But at the same time, one can bring into fruition a tolerable facsimile of that world provided one learns to “perceive” the “conceived” universe in a way that turns it into a “lived” space. This recognition and acknowledgement can only be achieved through the help of someone willing to pass down the knowledge, to take someone under one’s wing, and to teach them how to really look at the world around them.

As for Inman, while he did not volunteer to travel, he did find himself away from the stability of the piece of land that he called his own. This could be seen (or at least this is how Inman sees it as he tries to scramble back to it) as the one spot on the earth that was not always constantly changing and altering itself to suit the whims of others—the omphalos and oracle, as it were, where Inman went to refresh himself. In a profound sense, and not because it really was but because Inman had made it so, that piece of land represented Inman’s Self, the center of his being; for him, everything else is Other. Thus, it is from the Other that he fled when he escaped from the hospital; it is through the Other that he must make his way to get back to his notion of safety. Along that way, he must learn the ways of the Other in order to return to his Self. If he does not succeed in learning the ways of the Other, he is doomed to perish, to remain lost forever in a landscape that might tantalize him into believing it was not Other but that would always betray him in the end. Or so he thinks as he sets out.

At the same time, Inman undergoes some serious changes—and these internal changes are strong signposts towards the postmodern approach to landscape shown in this novel. At first, Inman reacts like most would to these unfamiliar surroundings: fear, loss of hope, loss of self-confidence, and a belief that everything (including the physical landscape) is out to devour him. Hounded by Federal troops looking to eliminate Confederate stragglers and bloodthirsty Home Guards looking for traitors, he cannot help but view the landscape as hostile, ugly, out of phase, filled with the smell of fear and war:

It was a foul region, planed off flat except where there were raw gullies cut deep in the red clay. Scrubby pines everywhere. Trees of a better make had once stood in their place but had been cut down long ago, the only evidence of them now an occasional hardwood stump as big around as a dinner table ... What Inman wanted was to be out of there, but the river stretched wide before him, a shit-brown clog to his passage. As a liquid, it bore likeness more to molasses as it first thickens in the making than to water. He wished never to become accustomed to this sorry make of waterway. It did not fit his picture of a river. Where he was from, the word river meant rocks and moss and the sound of white water moving fast under the spell of a great deal of collected gravity. Not a river in his whole territory was wider than you could pitch a stick across, and in every one of them you could see bottom wherever you looked (p.

53, 64-65).

This is a result not so much of some intrinsic and essential ugliness in this part of the country but rather has more to do with Inman's own situation, his own view of what he cannot consider as part of himself. He is in the Other, in a state of unfamiliarity. This unfamiliarity feeds up from the landscape into even his thoughts on patriotism and the notion of a Confederacy as a unifying principle:

How did he ever think this to be his country and worth fighting for? Ignorance alone would account for it. All he could list in his mind worth combat right now was his right to exist unmolested somewhere on the west fork of the Pigeon River drainage basin, up on Cold Mountain near the source of Scapegoat Branch (p. 65).

Inman compares this landscape and its desolation to his recent experiences in the army: the nightmare visions of the battles; the brutal slaughter of the enemy, even if already wounded; his own near-death wound; his recovery at the hospital; his escape. The environment becomes politics. It changes and transforms itself through the action of the human psyche—and through the action of political will on physical landscape.

Inman retreats into another vision—that of the writer William Bartram from the previous century. Through reading his *Travels*, Inman is able to fantasize an escape from the Other. He finds himself with the ability to create “the topography of home in his head. Cold Mountain, all its ridges and coves and watercourses. Pigeon River, Little East Fork, Sorrell Cove, Deep Gap, Fire Scald Ridge. He knew their names and said them to himself like the words of spells and incantations to ward off the things one fears most” (p. 11).

While both Ada and Inman seem to come to the same conclusions with respect to what home means to the self (at least after Ruby has shown Ada how to manage the landscape and geography so that it actually becomes her home rather than simply a piece of art to be admired), Inman does not have the luxury of actually being in that home. He has been forced from it and it has re-arranged itself around him—to become a strange place. He is now truly a stranger in a strange land.

To him, the world around him shows only fear and trepidation. It has become random and godless, lacking in any type of order. Or at least Inman sees it that way, envisioning even “the comeliest order on earth as a heap of random sweepings” (p. 18). When he is presented with the notion of predictability, he states that it's a simple enough concept “if a man dedicated himself to the idea that the future will inevitably be worse than the past and that time is a path leading nowhere but a place of deep and persistent threat” (p. 16). He has lost his orientation and his will to live. At one point, he uses a series of hopeless words to describe how he feels both spiritually and physically:

Inman guessed Swimmer's spells were right in saying a man's spirit could be torn apart and cease and yet his body keep on living ... He was himself a case in point ... his spirit, it seemed, had been about burned out of him but he was yet walking. Feeling empty, however, as the

core of a big black-gum tree ... His spirit, he feared, had been blasted away so that he had become lonesome and estranged from all around him ... It seemed a poor swap to find that the only way one might keep from fearing death was to act numb and set apart as if dead already. [emphasis mine] (p. 16)

At this point, Inman says that he doubts he will ever “heal up and feel whole again” (p. 18). However, as mentioned previously, while this is a fair description of Inman towards the beginning of the novel where it seems he has lost all hope and is merely wandering about in a landscape that wants to do him in, there is a slow change that takes place as he proceeds deeper and deeper into the unfamiliar landscape—and eventually becomes familiar with it, or as familiar as anyone can ever get with the Other. For it is not the landscape that changes but Inman’s approach to it—and that in turn “constructs” the landscape. He “had tried to walk with no hope and no fear but had failed miserably, for he had done both. But on the best days of walking he achieved some success in matching his thoughts to the weather, dark or bright, so as to attune with what freak of God’s mind sent cloud or shine” (p. 343).

While at one point, seeing a golden sunrise, all he can describe is a “turdlike” snake (p. 53), things start to change when he steps in to save Veasey’s pregnant lover. This releases him from the landscape he has been constructing and brings about another where he starts to appreciate the beauty in things, even in a string of “near dead” gypsy horses which, now “all looked beautiful to Inman, the grace in the deep curve of their down-turned necks” (p. 97). Then, he dreams of Ada and “walked all through the day with some brightening of his spirit” (p.102).

Inman experiences a retrogression to his previous state when he is betrayed to the Home Guard. He and several others are taken to be executed but he is only wounded and left buried in a shallow grave until some wild hogs root him out. When he emerges, the first thing he notices is that he doesn’t recognize any of the constellations. While some have taken this as his inability to ever return to his previous life (Vandiver, 2004), other commentators believe this signifies Inman’s construction of a new world where he can make a fresh start on a new life (Gibson, 2006), the postmodern state of flux that exists without a center and whose space is only margin.

Inman himself still doesn’t recognize that a new life is possible at this point—even after a slave meets him as he waits at a crossroads and feeds him. Inman is still looking for signs that the universe is not a random place. He even uses the watermelon seeds as they fall on the ground to see if they will show him the way. That they don’t leads him to assume that the “invisible world ... had abandoned him as a gypsy soul to wander singular, without guide or chart, through a broken world composed of little but impediment” (p. 182).

Inman takes a further step towards reconstructing his inner geography and aligning it with other humans when he encounters the goat woman and tells her he wants to marry Ada, even “though he realized marriage implied some faith in a theoretical future, a projection of paired lines running forward through time, drawing nearer and nearer to one another until they became one line” (p. 220).

Inman has started to see the order in things again, an order that has been hidden for a long time because of the war. This is the natural order of the landscape around him, a landscape that is becoming ever more familiar in its patterns, patterns resembling those of his Cold Mountain home—from creatures going through their natural cycles to the trees fruiting. Despite this, Inman is still not yet prepared to accept his place in all this, because he feels “deeply at variance with such elements of the harmonious” (p. 218). This leads him to regress and the world around him again become mysterious, foggy, with no sense of direction, emphasizing the fact that it is his own interpretation of this universe that actually constructs the universe.

Although he fantasizes the sprouting of wings and flying off into some isolated mountain-top crag where “elements of humanity might come now and again like emissaries to draw me back to the society of people. Unsuccessful every time” (p. 236), the opposite happens. He is pulled back into human contact through Sara, the 18-year-old widow with a child. Inman realizes that “a woman had not touched a hand to him with any degree of tenderness in so long that he had come to see himself as another kind of creature altogether” (p. 245). Not only is the despair, hopelessness and randomness gone but Inman is actually reconstructing his belief in an after life. He sings a hopeful song:

The fear of the grave is removed forever.  
 When I die I'll live again.  
 My soul will rejoice by the crystal river.  
 When I die I'll live again.  
 Hallelujah I'll live again. (p. 250)

But the journey is not over yet—and the landscape (i.e. Inman's lived space) can change very quickly back to despair, to darkness and loss of hope. In fact, as Inman draws closer to his home, he begins to hear “dark voices”: “A dark voice came into Inman's mind and said no matter how much you might yearn for it and pray for it, you would never get it” (p. 315).

Meanwhile, as Inman undergoes this physical journey through a hostile landscape, Ada undergoes a more psychological or inner journey. In fact, it is a journey that many feel is more transformative than Inman's, one which Grauke (2002), for instance, says has allowed Ada to see deep into herself while Inman has spent his time battling external demons, and Polk (1997) describes as “richer and deeper” (p. 14). Ada is also the one who has been able to hold onto her faith throughout it all and the one who repels Inman's doom and gloom when she states: “I know people can be mended” (p. 333). Interestingly, Ada herself acknowledges that there has been some sort of transformation when she thinks to herself: “Certainly neither she nor Inman were the people they had been the last time they were together. And she believed maybe she liked them both better now” (p. 335). Ada, thanks to the guidance of Ruby, has learned “self-confidence ... compassion, ‘other-centeredness’” (McCarron & Knoke, 1999, p. 278). At the same time, she has also learned how to deal with disruptions within the settled circumference of her life, including a group of women who have been driven from their homes and hope to reach relatives in Tennessee. Frazier describes the reactions of Ada and Ruby towards these people:

Ada and Ruby saw the travelers off to bed, and the next morning they cooked nearly all the eggs they had and made a pot of grits and more biscuits. After breakfast, they drew a map of the way to the gap and set them on the next leg of their journey. (p. 136)

Inman undergoes a type of rollercoaster emotional ride as he journeys back towards the ideal. He undergoes as many changes as the external landscape. All that seems to change when he finally meets Ada and she touches him: “that loving touch seemed like the key to life on earth” (p. 331). Then, when they make love: “He had been living like a dead man and this was life before him” (p. 341). The landscape becomes benevolent, ordered, filled with meaning and significance and purpose. The description of Ada as she walks away towards the trees is a clear portrait of the construction of the landscape, of an inner geography:

When Ada disappeared into the trees, it was like a part of the richness of the world had gone with her. He had been alone in the world and empty for so long. But she filled him full, and so he believed everything that had been taken out of him might have been for a purpose. To clear space for something better. (p. 347)

This is followed in the next scene by Inman’s death at the hands of a boy with a rifle. Interestingly, Frazier describes this by writing, “an observer up on the brow of the ridge would have looked down on a still, distant tableau in the winter woods ... A pair of lovers. The man reclined with his head in the woman’s lap” (p. 353).

Several different interpretations of the meaning of the death of Inman at the end have been offered. For example, Crawford (2003) theorizes Inman as a constructed outsider who fails to fit into the domestic unity and harmony created by Ada and Ruby (p. 189); and Vandiver (2004) also sees Inman as someone who has been the outsider throughout the book, and who has familiarized himself with unfamiliar landscape only to get lost in his own home geography (p. 141); Way (2004) sees his death as the obvious result of the random workings of the universe and the senseless violence that is rampant throughout. Others argue that the death is necessary in order to complete the cycle of redemption that they feel Inman’s journey has really represented. For example, Gibson (2006) argues that “the ending is a triumph in which a human spirit has been reclaimed. At the beginning of his journey Inman is ‘dead,’ despairing, empty, and hateful; by the end of the journey he has been given life, hope, fullness, and love. He has been redeemed by his love for Ada and by her love for him” (p. 427).

Knoke (1998) also puts a positive spin on what seems like a tragic ending. He points to several clues in the novel to back up his claim, including the epilogue which shows an harmonious life for Ada, Ruby, the boy who shot Inman, and Ada’s child from the night spent with Inman. For Knoke, other indications include

[T]he pastoral description of Inman lying peacefully in his lover’s arms ... his happy reunification with Ada, the sexual consummation of their love, the healing of his spiritual wounds, his triumphant self-sacrifice for “family,” and the pantheistic passing on of his spirit to his Cold Mountain “heaven” on earth. (p. 28)

Perhaps the final word here needs to go to Frazier himself. Once again, it seems to be associated with a physical event or series of events rather than something theoretical and abstract. The constructed landscape is visible for the writer. Frazier returns to this landscape in order to determine how he is going to end the book. He said as part of an interview for BBC radio (2000):

I finally went back up to that area where these events happened and I went to the place where the actual Inman had a gunfight with the Home Guard. I walked around. I spent a whole day wandering around just thinking, “How am I going to end this book?” and suddenly it seemed very clear that I had taken this man’s short and very difficult life, had given him all kinds of experiences he probably never had, but that I owed it to him to keep his ending in some form that was fairly close to what really happened to him?

### **The Constructed Geography: Concluding Remarks**

Whether viewed as a spiritual quest towards redemption, the journey of the anti- Odysseus, or a vision of the destructive powers of war, *Cold Mountain* rests most securely on a basis of a socially and mentally constructed landscape and geography. A close analysis of the book makes that clear. For one thing, we have the split narrative of home and journey. One narrative represents the journey through a landscape that keeps changing seemingly depending upon the mood of the person involved in the journey. The other narrative fork represents the seeming familiarity of a home geography. Both of these are ultimately constructed and both turn out not to be what they originally seemed: the first dangerous and the latter safe.

In the journey part of the novel, that is fairly obvious in that Inman’s moods seem to be reflected in the way he sees the landscape and in how it builds itself around him. The writer goes to great lengths to point out that, in the end, Inman sees only what he wants to see, what he has been programmed to see. And that is the ultimate reality, the ultimate special acknowledgement. We really get to see this in a physical way when, as he lies dying in Ada’s arms, he goes on to describe “a bright dream of a home” (p. 353), once again trying to build up a landscape around him, only this time, it is an ideal one, a landscape resembling paradise (but in the form of the familiar world that he knows):

It had coldwater rising spring rising out of rock, black dirt fields, old trees. In his dream the year seemed to be happening all at one time, all the seasons blending together. Apple trees hanging heavy with fruit but yet unaccountably blossoming, ice rimming the spring, okra plants blooming yellow and maroon, maple leaves red as October, corn tops tasseling, a stuffed chair pulled up to the glowing parlor hearth, pumpkins shining in the fields, laurels blooming on the hillsides, ditch banks full of orange jewelweed, white blossoms on dogwood, purple on redbud. Everything coming around at once. And there were white oaks, and a great number of crows, or at least the spirits of crows, dancing and singing in the upper limbs. (p. 353)

The connection between internal moods and external landscape is not as obvious in the Ada- Ruby home section of the narrative—until, that is, we realize that Ada is just as lost in the beginning in what should be her home territory as Inman in his unfamiliar space. As the product of an urban upbringing and someone who knows very little about what it takes to live in harmony with nature, Ada finds herself on the point of not being able to cope once her father dies. Her salvation is Ruby, someone who knows the natural world inside out (or at least her constructed corner of it) and who realizes that “cures of all sorts exist in the natural world. Its every nook and cranny apparently lay filled with physic and restorative to bind up rents from the outside” (Frazier, 1997a, p. 333).

The obviousness of the situation is reversed at the end. Now we have Ada who has learned just about everything there is to know about the little corner of the world around her. She has achieved a type of harmony and peace. Inman comes in at this point as the outsider. He comes with extraneous and external knowledge of the world outside.

One needs to ask: Would life have been as harmonious if Inman had been allowed to live and he and Ada formed the family here? I think that Frazier realized that this would have been a false construction at this point. No matter how much Inman and Ada loved one another, their views of the world were not all that compatible. Within Inman, there would always be that core of scars, the wounds from the force with which he was forced to create the environment around him in order to keep it from swallowing him up within its randomness. Thus, it seems as if his sacrifice is necessary to help maintain order and harmony—especially if that order and harmony does not really exist in the external world but is actually a product of human emotions and relationships. Gifford (2001) perhaps puts it best when he says:

Ada’s learned humility in living with the processes of “burying and healing” leads to her inner nature learning directly from outer nature, which is ultimately, as it is for Inman and Ruby, a survival based upon the merging of culture and nature. In this state of living, “doing things right” is learned from reading the land as traveller or farmer so that the exploitation of people in the war becomes a metaphor for an unsustainable way of living on the land. (p. 95)

In Inman’s travels, he moves about in what he considers an unfamiliar, hostile landscape—even though the geography is actually just another part of North Carolina. As well, his reluctance to engage in the war indicates that the concerns of other parts of the South and the desire to maintain the institution of slavery are not as powerful in the area where Inman and Ada live. As Inscoc (1998) writes:

The war depicted here is indeed very different from the war ... which Robert E. Lee experienced. There are few if any plantations, slaveholders, or slaves on this home front. The many characters who people Frazier’s saga are far removed from those who made up Margaret Mitchell’s or John Jakes’s fictionalized Confederacy. With very few exceptions, these people are poor; leading lives of quiet--and often not so quiet-- desperation. For all participants, the war has become one of disillusionment, of resentment, of desolation, and of brutality as they engage in a primal quest for sheer survival. (p. 333)

The amount of detail that Frazier places within the novel goes beyond the usual needed to set a scene or paint a description. By providing the reader with minute details of the landscape as Inman journeys through it, the reader also embarks on this voyage of discovery. This is emphasized more strongly through the use of the device of William Bartram's *Travels* as an overlay and as a way to compare the landscape through which Inman travels and the remembered landscape of his home.

The differences between the two main characters has been shown most effectively in the examination of the difference between Inman's journey and his approach to the landscape around him (as mentally constructed in all its emotive parts), and Ada's experience at the foot of Cold Mountain. In both cases, there was a mirror-like reflection of interior states with external ones. When the characters felt abandoned, hopeless, inadequate, the environment around them reflected those states. When the characters felt at peace or discovered ways to make use of the land, the space around them became more accommodating. Of course, this is not a case of pathetic fallacy but rather a case of post-modern constructivism, a world created out of the mental activity of the characters in all the important senses (other than the purely physical one, that of brute existence *per se*). As Way (2004) points out: "Inman longs for Cold Mountain and Ruby cannot imagine leaving it because they know it; they know how to match their desires with those of the mountain environment ... The meaning is embodied in an immediate environment and the knowledge gained by working that environment lead to a sense of place that can be felt in any region" (p. 53).

Interestingly enough, the story ends with a final page in which the reader is given idyllic scenes of domestic bliss. It features a pair of children dancing (Inman's son and the boy who shot him), a fiddle being played by Ruby's dad (recently himself an outsider), a story being told by Ada (about peasant lovers who die in each other's arms and become intertwined part of the landscape as oak and linden tree), and a poultice being administered by Ruby. The bliss created in this scene is definitely not mythological. It has been constructed, forged "out of a traumatic narrative. For the reader must qualify the apparent idyll of their making music, dance, story and healing. Their resilience, their mountain people's ability to make healing tunes out of hardship, is what is being celebrated here ... The narrative's lovers have not died together intertwined by nature ..." (Gifford, 2001, p. 95). In a post-modern space, the use of myths and traditions serves only ironic purposes, as one more set of building blocks for the constructed universe.

## References

Barthes, R. (1977) *Image music text*, trans. by S. Heath. London: Fontana.

BBC Radio 4 (April 2, 2000) *Book Club*.

Bhabha, H.K. (1994) *The location of culture*. London: Routledge.

Chitwood, A. (2004) Epic or philosophic, Homeric or Heraclitean? The anonymous philosopher in Charles

- Frazier's Cold Mountain. *International Journal of the Classic Tradition*, 11(2): 232-243.
- Conrad, J. [1895](1947) *An outcast of the islands*. London: J.M. Dent.
- Crawford, M. (2003) Cold Mountain fictions: Appalachian half-truths. *Appalachian Journal*, 30(Winter-Spring): 182-195.
- De Kock, L. (1993) Postcolonial analysis and the question of critical disablement. *Current Writing*, 5(2): 44-69.
- De Toro F. (Ed.) (1999) *Explorations on post-theory: Towards a third space*. Madrid: Ibero- americana.
- Frazier, C. (1997a) *Cold Mountain*. New York: Atlantic Monthly Press.
- \_\_\_\_\_ (1997b) *Cold Mountain diary*. Salon. Retrieved March 24, 2007, from <http://www.salon.com/july97/colddiary970709.html>.
- \_\_\_\_\_ (2001) Some remarks on history and fiction. In M.C. Carnes (Ed.), *Novel History: Historians and novelists confront America's past (and each other)*. New York: Simon and Schuster.
- Gibson, B. (2006) Cold Mountain as spiritual quest: Inman's Redemptive Journey. *Christianity and Literature*, 55(3): 415-433.
- Gifford, T. (2001) Terrain, character and text: is Cold Mountain by Charles Frazier a post- pastoral novel? *The Mississippi Quarterly*, 55(Winter): 87-96.
- Grauke, S. (2002) Vietnam, survivalism, and the Civil War: The use of history in Michael Shaara's The Killer Angels and Charles Frazier's Cold Mountain. *War, Literature & the Arts: An International Journal of the Humanities*, 14(1-2), 45-59.
- Hall, S. (1993) Cultural identity and diaspora. In P. Williams & L. Chrisman (Eds.), *Colonial discourse and post-colonial theory: a reader*, pp. 392-403. New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf.
- Inscoc, J. (1998) Appalachian Odysseus: love, war, and best-sellerdom in the Blue Ridge. *Appalachian Journal*, 25(3): 330-337.
- Knoke, P. (1998) Cold Mountain in time and place. *North Carolina Literary Review*, 8: 20- 28.
- Lee, T. (2003) "It made me think, seeing myself like that": affective representations of the inferior masculine self, or good-bye, Billy Pilgrim. *The Journal of Men's Studies*, 11(2): 175-188.

- McCarron, B., & Knoke, P. (1999) Images of war and peace: parallelism and antithesis in the beginning and ending of *Cold Mountain*. *The Mississippi Quarterly*, 52(Spring): 273- 285.
- McWilliams, M.B. (2003) The human face of the age: the physical cruelty of slavery and the modern American novel. *The Mississippi Quarterly*, 56(Summer): 353-372.
- Piacentino, E. (2001) Searching for home: cross-cultural bonding in Charles Frazier's *Cold Mountain*. *The Mississippi Quarterly*, 55(Winter): 97-116.
- Polk, J. (1997) American Odyssey. Review of *Cold Mountain*, by Charles Frazier. *New York Times Book Review*, July 13: 14.
- Ransom, J.C. (1930) Reconstructed but unregenerate. In *I'll take my stand: the South and agrarian tradition*, by twelve Southerners. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press.
- Slemon, S. (1991) Modernism's last post. In I. Adams & H. Tiffin (Eds.), *Past the last post: theorizing post-colonialism and post-modernism*. New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf.
- Soja, E.W. (1989) *Postcolonial geographies: the reassertion of space in critical social theory*. London: Verso.
- \_\_\_\_\_ (1996) *Thirdspace. Journeys to Los Angeles and other real-and-imagined spaces*. Maiden: Blackwell Publishers.
- Vandiver, E. (2004) From Noman to Inman: The "Odyssey" in Charles Frazier's "Cold Mountain". *Classical and Modern Literature: A Quarterly*, 24(Fall): 125-148.
- Way, A. (2004) "A world properly put together": environmental knowledge in Charles Frazier's *Cold Mountain*. *Southern Cultures*, 10(Winter): 33-54.
- Xie, S. (1997) Rethinking the problem of postcolonialism. *New Literary History: A Journal of Theory and Interpretation*, 28(1): 7-19.

# Sokoro Sakara: A Contextual and Gender Analysis of Some Offensive Yoruba Proverbial Songs.<sup>1</sup>

By Abayomi Daramola

## Abstract

This paper examines the use of offensive Yoruba proverbial songs and how these songs reflect on gender construct as expressed in Olatubosun Oladapo's latest *ewi* (chanted poetry) album titled *Sokoro* which is an example of dialogic offensive proverbial songs. The study of Oladapo's musical *ewi* rendition shows that classification of Yoruba proverbial songs (*orin owe*), and by extension Yoruba proverbs in general, by sexes is possible. Relevant songs were selectively picked from Oladapo's album for analysis and interpretation. The analysis in this paper shows that contextual applications of these songs have some cultural implications that are unique to Yoruba traditional experience. The paper further reveals that contrary to the general belief that women are more adept in using abusive songs, men could also be prolific in matching women's ingenuity on the direct use of abusive proverbial songs.

## Introduction

Proverbs and gender are fundamental academic subjects of discourse throughout the world. On one hand, every society of the globe has its own proverbs. Though the use of proverbs may differ from society to society what is common to proverbs everywhere is that they touch on a wide a range of human concerns and activities. Most often proverbs are used not only to reflect on established norms and ethics but also as a means to bring back to memory past events and historic happenings concerning peoples, images and characters of periods and epochs. Among the Yoruba, proverbs and maxims are traditionally frequently used to teach moral and honourable behaviours known by the people as *iwa omoluabi*. This may be in the form of a (an) corrective, didactic, abusive or even eulogistic measure. Whichever way proverbs are used among the people, there is always a message to be passed across and a lesson to be learnt. Proverbs among the Yoruba are wisdom lore of every moment either in times of peace or in times of war. That is why it is

required of every Yoruba person to be versed in the use and understanding of proverbs. It is believed that only the wise is able to use and understand proverbs in conversations and dialogues and that those who are versed in proverbs are usually good orators.

Discourses on gender also occupy a central place in contemporary scholarship. Unlike sex which is biologically defined, gender is socially constructed and has changing variables. Gender refers to the social relationships between men and women and the way those relationships are made by society. It can also be described as the division of society into biological, occupational and social roles. Such roles include reproductive, productive, community management, politics, and other domestic and civic life participation (Aina: 2006). Gender construct among the Yoruba is, similar to what is obtainable in most traditional societies in Africa. In a patriarchy obsessed society like the Yoruba, women are regarded as “weaker vessels” although when it comes to the realm of spiritual powers they are regarded and esteemed as the owner of the world (*awon iya alaye*). This is because of the general belief that they possessed superior clairvoyant and spiritual powers. . It is pertinent to say then that the concept of “weaker vessel” is only applicable to physical ability and strength. This again may be subjective; in actual fact, some women are even stronger than men though the percentage may be insignificant. , According to Ogundipe (2002), if the essence of power or strength is the ability to get what one wants, then women cannot be reasonably referred to as *weaker* vessels.

In a typical Yoruba traditional setting particularly during quarrels and the attendant altercations between husbands and wives or among feuding parties abusive proverbial songs usually flow freely most especially from the women. Sometimes, the men who also have some singing skills do match such women with retaliatory proverbial songs. It is believed from the point of view of a Yoruba proverb that when there is a quarrel or rancour, songs usually become proverbs *ija lo de lorin d'ow*”.. These songs most of the time become the template by which gender chauvinism is expressed. Thus, the selection of songs for this discourse is based on the relevance of the selected songs to the hypothesis of the discourse. Olatunji (1984) categorises the use of proverbial songs into two contexts, the first context is when proverbs are used as statements, and the second context is when statements are used as proverbs. Sometimes, the characteristics of these songs may not reckon with that of proverbs but their cultural implications and contextual applications usually agree with them. This paper situated within the above framework.

### ***Sokoro and Sakara: A Gender Reflex and Musical Dialogue***

Tunbosun Oladapo has been one of the foremost Yoruba philosopher poets since the late seventies. His ingenuity as a prolific poet has earned him both national and international recognition.

The words “*sokoro*” and “*sakara*” as used in the title of his latest album are coined to interpret or explain the offensive or abusive retaliatory proverbial songs of men and women. . The two words are used here to dichotomize the proverbial dialogue between the male and female singers that represent these characters



both meaning “concubine”. The above song becomes relevant when a wife intends to show that she is not receiving adequate care from the husband even when she does not have a concubine. But at least she would have used her tongue to signal a threat. According to a Chinese saying: “a woman’s tongue is her sword, and she does not let it rust”. (Source?)

The reaction of the supposedly uncaring husband to the abusive proverbial song of his wife is also very interesting.

(Reaction)      Sakara:      *Lojo o ba f’ale re han oko o (iyawo)*  
    *Lojo o ba f’ale re han oko*  
    *Igbati, Igbaju lo o je sun o*  
    *Lojo o ba f’ale re han oko*

Meaning          The day you dare show your concubine to your husband (you wife)  
    The day you dare show your concubine to your husband  
    You will be thoroughly beaten  
    The day you dare show your concubine to your husband

Here the husband comes out with a warning threatening his wife with physical abuse and assault if she is found out to be dating another man. This song shows the firm authority of a man over his wife, which is most of the time, is encouraged by a male chauvinistic Yoruba traditional society. This proverbial song also implies generally that it is not good to go beyond ones’ limit. The song further reveals how nasty Yoruba men could be when they discover that their wives are involved in extra-marital affairs. . In the past wife battering was also justified by an old Italian proverb “women, asses, and nuts require rough hands”. (Source?) This could also be corroborated with a Latin proverb that translates to “a spaniel, a woman, and a walnut tree, the more they’re beaten the better they be” (Kelly 2002:2). The traditional marriage institution in Yorubaland wills such unending authority to men over their spouses. Another twin set of proverbial songs that are closely related to those analysed above as used in *Sokoro* are as follows:

(Action):          Sokoro:          *No w’oluranlowo,*  
    *Emi o w’oluranlowo o,*  
    *B’oko mi ko, b’oko mi ko ti o gberu mi*  
    *No w’oluranlowo*

Meaning          I shall look for another helper  
    I shall look for another helper  
    If my husband refuses to cater for my needs  
    I shall look for another helper

This song is used to warn uncaring husbands who could not meet their responsibilities to their wives of possible unpalatable reaction that may come from their wives. Looking for another helper in the song also

connotes having a concubine as explained earlier on. This corroborates a Yoruba saying that “*ati gbeyawo ko lejo ati gbo bukata loju*” meaning “marrying a wife is easy, the real challenge is to feed her”. According to what a French lady told her son every man must “remember that in wedded life there is only one thing which continues every day and that is the necessity of making the pot boil” (Kelly 2002:19). As usual the reaction of the husband to this threat is to issue his own counter threat.

(Reaction): Sakara: *Emi a gbe Yoyo wole*  
*Emi a gbe Yoyo wale o*  
*B'aya mi ko, b'aya mi ko ti o gbo temi*  
*Emi a gbe Yoyo wole*

Meaning: I shall marry a prettier lady  
 I shall marry a prettier lady  
 If my wife continues to disobey me  
 I shall marry a prettier lady

In this particular dialogue, the husband’s reaction is to call the bluff of the wife about getting another helper whenever the husband fails in his responsibilities towards her. Retaliatory offensive proverbial songs and the issuance of threats between the husband and his wife is in line with a Yoruba proverb that says “*eniti o ba soko si orule ni yoo gbhun onile*” meaning “he who throws stones on the roof will hear the voice of the house owner”. This proverb is akin to another one which says “he who brings home ant-ridden faggots must be ready for the visit of lizards (Kehinde 2004: 126). Again, the predominant authority attached to masculinity in Yoruba society restrained women after marriage from moving freely with any man other than their husbands and or the relatives, even with the relatives there are limitations. It is important to note that Any of the songs in this dialogue could come first as the “action” and the other becomes the “reaction”. The seemingly insatiable appetite of men to have sex with as many women as possible is clearly depicted in the Yoruba proverbial song below.

(Action): Sokoro: *Eesan l’okunrin yoo ma ran ka ni*  
*Eesan l’okunrin yoo ma ran ka ni*  
*Bojule se mejo ko sa ma ran ka’le*  
*Eesan l’okunrin yoo ma ran ka ni*

Meaning: Men are winkles that crawl about  
 Men are winkles that crawl about  
 Even if there are eight houses, he will still crawl into all  
 Men are winkles that crawl about

The expression in this song is symbolic. It portrays men as unsteady and sometimes unpredictable when it comes to sexual and marital issues. As pointed out earlier, Yoruba tradition allows a man to marry more than one wife and this most of the time does not go down well with their women counterpart. This song

is an expression of lack of trust, frustration and resignation from the spouse of men who have more than one wife. But the reaction to this abusive proverbial song appears more or less like a counter accusation which portrays the women folk as the chief culprit when it comes to issues such as marital infidelity.

(Reaction): Sakara: *Itakun l'obinrin yoo maa fa kaa ni*  
*Itakun l'obinrin yoo maa fa kaa ni*  
*Bo ba fa de Ilorin a tun fa lo Kaduna*  
*Itakun l'obinrin yoo maa fa kaa ni*

Meaning: Women are climber plants that overrun any available space  
 Women are climber plants that overrun any available space  
 They will appear in Ilorin and also appear in Kaduna  
 Women are climber plants that overrun any available space

Kaduna and Ilorin are two different cities in northern and central Nigeria respectively. This reaction compares the nature of women to that of a plant who has its stump in a place and its stems and leaves in another. The song pictures women as people of unpredictable and variable characters and that a woman has the natural propensity to be involved in multiple affairs at the same time. According to a translated German proverb “women are variable as April weather” (Kelly: 2002:4). Apart from the selected songs already analyzed, there are some other relevant but predominantly female-centered proverbial verbal interjections to substantiate or refute the claims for each action and reaction of the dialogue shown above. These include:

Baa fi gbogbo ile nla jin kolekole, kope o ma jale die kun,  
 Bi a si fi gbogbo odede jin iyawo agbere, kope o ma tara re f'ale

Meaning:

Give a mansion to a thief that does not prevent him from stealing  
 Give a promiscuous wife all you have in a beautiful house that does not precludes her from selling herself cheap to concubines

This proverb culturally implies that covetousness is an incurable disease.

*Obinrin ti ko dara nile oko re, ko lee dara nile omo re, iyawo omo re ni yoo ma ba s'orogun*

Meaning:

A woman that is bad in her husband's house cannot be good in her son's; she will become a rival to her son's wife

This proverb reflects on character. A good or bad character is not always hidden. If it is, it is just for a moment. Pretence ends where habitual character begins. This proverb portrays women as jealous though this is partly true; the tendency is not limited to women. The proverb is used here to charge wives on the need to be good ambassadors of their family anywhere they found themselves.

*Isense ti o fi de ihin kii kuro lara pansaga obinrin*

Meaning:

The saying “your mannerism brought you here” will always be a stigma on a promiscuous woman

A woman who is not contented with realities of life is bound to move from one husband to another. This may later become a stigma that will be used to deride such a woman even in the public. In the context of this paper it is used to detest the practices of divorce.

*Bi a ba maa gb’omo rere jo, iyawo rere laa koko gbe jo*

Meaning:

Dancing with a good wife is a precondition for dancing with a good child”

Good wives are pointers to good children and good families. Good family begets good living. Love and hatred are contagious. The honesty and love shown by a woman to her husband are usually reciprocated on their children. The proverb is used here to encourage women to be of good manner to their husband so that their children can find the favour of their husbands.

## Conclusion

The foregoing analyses of the selected proverbs in Oladapo’s album titled “Sokoro” has shown that the use of proverbs in music or other verbal arts does not only illustrate power in the tongues of those who are versed in the use and interpretation of proverbs but also serves as a didactic tool for teaching the norms and ethics in traditional Yoruba society. Didacticism and moral intentions run through the lyrics used in *Sokoro*. Oladapo’s creativity and dynamism in using *ewi* to teach and impart moral lessons based on concepts from Yoruba traditions and language is clearly shown in this work. His ingenuity in employing proverbs to propagate traditional virtues and condemnation of societal vices was also ultimately displayed. This corroborates Olatunde’s (1984) submission that African proverbs are like a social charter used to praise what the society considers to be virtues and to condemn bad practices.

*Sokoro* is a dramatic dimension of a dialogic use of proverbs where a reaction is given as commensurate to an action. The piece also provides a template for the classification of proverbs based on gender construct. The sources for the proverbial songs used in *Sokoro* are actually that of human behaviour in and around the environment they found themselves. These proverbs are used in such a way that a kind of reality that may be impossible through the use of mere spoken words, which Finnegan (1970) describes as making a point with extra forcefulness, was captured. Also noticed in the presentation is the use of a combination of verbal interjection and singing to drive home the gist of the dialogue. This makes the use of proverbs in the piece not only interesting but also more stimulating than the mere conventional chant of the Yoruba *ewi* genre.

It is convenient to conclude this discussion by asserting that although efforts have been made in the areas of documentation, interpretation, representation and contextualization of Yoruba proverbs, much is still required in the area of gender classifications of these proverbs and their cultural implications. It is established in this paper that gender bias in the rendition of offensive Yoruba proverbial songs is a reality and that both sexes engage in it. For scholars in proverbs and gender studies such proverbial songs may become research materials for further studies on gender and culture in Africa.

#### References:

Ajibola, J.O. (1979), *Owe Yoruba*. Ibadan: University Press.

Aina, O.I. (2006), "Sex Versus Gender." Paper presented at a workshop on Gender Disaggregation at the Obafemi Awolowo University Ile-Ife June 8 2006.

Finnegan, Ruth (1970), *Oral Literature in Africa*. London: Oxford University Press.

Ilesanmi, T.M. (2004), *Yoruba Orature and Literature: A Cultural Analysis*. Ile-Ife: Obafemi Awolowo University Press.

Kehinde, Ayo (2004), "Proverbs as Thematic Vehicle in Recent African Short Fiction" in *Proverbium*, Vol. 21:2004, pp. 119-136.

Kelly, Walter K. (2002), *A Collection of the Proverbs of All Nations*, (ed.) Wolfgang Mieder. Burlington Vermont: Queen City Printers Inc.

Ogundipe, Ayo (2002), "Power in Gender Discourse", in *Critical Gender Discourse in Africa*, (ed.) Ukhun, C.E. Ibadan: Hope Publications, p 34.

Olatunji, Olatunde (1984), *Features of Yoruba Oral Poetry*. Ibadan: University Press.

## **Notes**

<sup>1</sup> The author wishes to acknowledge the efforts of Dr Koya Ogen, who worked tirelessly to ensure that this paper was able to meet publication standards.

# King Arthur in the Lands of the Saracens.

By Nizar F. Hermes

We were taught that our civilization stemmed from classical and Christian roots: Greco-Roman and Judeo-Christian, and that the classical elements had been largely lost until the rediscovery known as the Renaissance. But, now that the world is smaller, communication easier, organized religion more relaxed and scholarly exchange more widespread, our common ground with the Arabian tradition is being recognized. Medieval culture is, in fact, Greek, Latin, and *Arab* (italics mine).

E.L. Ranelagh

Throughout the bulk of the Arthurian literary tradition, romancers, novelists, poets, and historians of King Arthur and his Knights have relegated the world's medieval games to that of the European chessboard. This Eurocentric mentality—that is unfortunately not uncharacteristic of an astounding number of western medievalists—has (un)intentionally participated in the widening of the cultural gaps between Islam and the West. Such an inflexible essentialism might debunk many medievalists' assumptions of “the uncontested humanism and universalism of the Arthurian tradition. What is meant here is that any liberal humanization of the Arthurian literature from a western critical and cultural standpoint cannot be divorced from what Maria Rosa Menocal aptly labels as “the myth of westernness in medieval literary historiography”(1). This becomes particularly significant if one, for instance, explores the cultural and literary reception of the Arthurian text in the very land of the “other” of King Arthur and his Knights, that is to say, the lands of the “Saracens”.<sup>1</sup>

Through a comparative reading of the themes of chivalry and courtly love, I will try, in the first part of my paper, to highlight the literary and cultural elements that might attract a Middle Easterner to the Arthurian literature. Setting the example of Sir Thomas Malory's *Morte D'Arthur*, I will try in the second part, to interrogate the Arthurian discourse of alterity and explore the polemical representation of Islam so as to unveil some of the literary and cultural elements that might, indeed, make King Arthur feel unwelcome in the lands of the “Saracens”.

Chivalry is indubitably a major source of literary and cultural identification that can make of the Arthurian tradition both readable and enjoyable in the Middle East. In fact, one must not forget that throughout

centuries and centuries, both pre-Islamic and Islamic Arabs have hailed the knight and his horse in an almost unequaled way in human history.<sup>2</sup> Both the knight and his horse have been a source of power, pride, poetry, and tribal celebration and romance. The observations of A. F. L. Beetsen, renowned for his study of Arabic literature until the Umayyad dynasty, and albeit their Orientalist spice, merit quoting in this regard: “The idea of chivalrous behavior,” Beetsen observes “was part of the inter-tribal moral code. The Arabs were great horsemen, as good breeders of horses as they were of camels, and they claim their pedigree horses were descended from the *Jin*”(63).

Although the heydays of Arab chivalry have dramatically dwindled, both the Arab knight and the Arab horse are still engraved in the collective memory of all Arabs across the world. Chivalry, one must not forget, is still colonizing a great space of the folklore of the *mashriq* and the *maghrib* where festivals of *al-furussia* are annually organized. The real desert, as such, is the most revealing *mnemotopos*.

The infatuation of Arabs with the cult of chivalry has encouraged some comparatists to see the very idea of Western chivalry as deeply rooted in the Arab cult of *al-furussiya*. In many other cases, it is our job as comparatists to conclude so. Marion Zimmer Bradley in her *Mists of Avalon* (1982), to set a postmodern Arthurian text, inadvertently acknowledges this “theory” through Gwydion (Mordred), who informs King Arthur of unrivaled horses and conquering knights that come from the land of the “Saracens”: “My uncle and my lord,” says Gwydon, “the best horses come from further still. The Spaniards themselves buy horses from Africa, from a desert country there. Now these Saracens are beginning to overrun Spain itself” (831).

The influence of Arab chivalry on that of the West can also be conjectured from the lack of a Germanic root for the English word chivalry.<sup>3</sup> The Arabic *al-furrussia* derives from *faras* (horse) and *faris* (knight) and has its root in the verb *farasa*. The English word for chivalry, however, is borrowed from French (*chevaucher/cheval / chevalier*), which, by its turn might have been influenced by the Spanish (*caballo/caballero*). This would make more sense if one calls to mind the Arab domination of Spain from 711 to 1492, which included most of the Iberian Peninsula and extended across the Pyrenees and southern France during the early times. It is unfortunate that the majority of western medievalists have not exhibited a serious readiness to investigate the matter despite the abundance of a plethora of philological and historical clues<sup>4</sup>. This academic discomfort, according to E. Lasater, is intrinsically related to “nationalistic interests and prejudices” (7).

Reading through any Arthurian text, King Arthur and his knights would evoke in Middle Eastern readers a feeling of redolence and nostalgia for a lost glory that was achieved by the same chivalric codes of King Arthur and his knights. It is not surprising, therefore, to see statesmen in many Middle-Eastern countries publicly exhibiting their chivalrous skills in their search for political consolidation. Such a “political” chivalry has always been endorsed by references to poems, tales, romances, and even to Quranic and Sunnah injunctions.<sup>5</sup>

The cultural identification with the Arthurian code of chivalry is essentially related to its striking similarity to the Arabs’ *akhlakiyat al-furrussia* (the codes of chivalry). Like his Arthurian counterpart, the word *faris*

does not; in anyway, suggest an invincible strength, or an unrivaled prowess. It is rather a Lancelot-like way of life and behavior including philanthropy, mercy, gallantry, and recognition of the other's prowess. "To the domain of chivalry," Beeston tells us, "belonged ideas of gallantry to women, holding to pledges, avoidance of tricks in combat, and treachery, and refraining from fighting an unarmed opponent" (31). It is the above-mentioned Arab-Muslim chivalric qualities that drew the attention and admiration of a rival West, even in such a callous time as that of the crusades<sup>6</sup>.

Like the Arthurian chivalry, courtly love, a central theme in the Arthurian saga, can be another rich source of aesthetic satisfaction and cultural identification for a Middle easterner. Thematically speaking, courtly love, with all its concomitants, has always occupied a fertile territory in the landscape of Arabic literature. Thereby, one may venture to say that the bulk of romances, tales, poems, and theories of love<sup>7</sup> in the Arabic culture is unrivaled in the world. The centrality of courtly love in Arabic literature and culture has drawn the attention of more and more unprejudiced comparatists who have become convinced of the Arabic ancestry of the western courtly love tradition.

It is Lasater, however, who pronounced the most courageous statement in his book *Spain to England: A Comparative Study of Arabic, European, and English Literature of the Middle Ages*. Lasater argues that courtly love was foreign to "the Germanic temper of Medieval Europe". French and English lyric poetry is, according to him, find their origin in the troubadour tradition of Provence, which is deeply rooted in Andalusian poetry. Lasater writes:

Romantic love, long a characteristic of Arabic poetry, is found in Arab Spain over a century before the first troubadours flourished, already so developed that it could have served as a blueprint for courtly love for the poets of the Provence. Through the Provençal poets, courtly love was further developed and spread into France and into England where it is found in lyric poetry, both secular and religious. (55)

As far as the Arthurian tradition is concerned, one might venture to say that the forgotten Arabic influence can be tracked by exploring the striking similarities between the Arthurian love tales and the older *ishq* tales of Arabia. "Tristan and Isolt", for example, is suggestively structured around a leitmotif that is archetypal in the Arabic tradition of love: love, marriage, separation, madness, and death. The tale of Tristan and Isolt would quickly bring into the mind of a Middle Easterner the unforgettable love tale of Qays *wa Layla*.

The romance of *Qays wa Layla* is one of the most breathtaking love romances in Islamic culture since it was equally influential in the three major literatures of Islam: Arabic, Persian, and Turkish. Abu al Faraj al Isfahani, in his momentous *Book of Songs*, tells us that the original version of the romance took place in Medina in the first century of *hijra* (670-680 A.D). It is the real love story of Qays ibn Dharih, the milk brother of Hussein, the Prophet's grandson. After falling in love and marrying Lubna bint al Hubab al Kabiya, Qays succumbed to the twenty-year pressure of his jealous mother and father who chastised him for madly loving a futile wife. Qays, a lovelorn could not stand the hardship of separation so he was taken by madness. While roaming around the tent of his beloved, Qays heard that another man wooed Lubna.

This drove Qays to his death.

Newstad in “The Origin and Growth of the Tristan Romance” briefly discusses the indebtedness of the romance of Tristan to the Arabic romance of *Qays wa Layla*. Yet, it is Lasater again that strongly sees it as deeply rooted in the Arabic tradition, albeit the Celtic mood that dominates it. This origin, according to Lasater, was the result of the contacts between Southern France and Muslim Spain (147). Bearing in mind that Lasater and Menocal are among a handful of contemporary medievalists that still defend what has been academically known as the Arabist theory in the study of western troubadour tradition.

The Arabist theory was first promulgated in the sixteenth century by Giammaria Barbieri in his *Dell' Origine Della Poesia*, advocated by Juan Andres in the eighteenth century, and became “a conventional maxim of criticism” during the nineteenth century. It is however, during the age of colonialism and western domination of the Muslim world that such a theory has become culturally insulting. Menocal writes:

It is clear, in any case, that it was at this moment [the age of western colonialism] that the Arabist theory not only ceased to be one of those theories advocated, denied, or discussed; it became virtually taboo. While the other theories, none of which violated any fundamental principle of Europeanness as it was then emerging, were spun out and set against each other, the older Arabist one, which was clearly at odds with the larger views that were affecting not only members of the profession but all Europeans' views of the world and of themselves, slipped into oblivion and undiscussability. (82)

The Arthurian tradition, as I have tried to explore in the first part of my paper, is teeming with tales of chivalry and courtly love that can make of this major tradition of western literature and culture both readable and enjoyable in the Middle East. Through it, one can also, revive the long overlooked influence of Arab-Muslim culture in Medieval Europe and consolidate the efforts triggered by some brave western comparatists such as Ranelagh, Lasater, and Menocal. Yet, the issue that is at stake when it comes to exploring the marketing of the Arthurian tradition in the Middle East is the overt islamophobic discourse of king Arthur. This can, indeed, compromise the success of king Arthur in the very lands of the “Saracens”.

Materialist critics of European Medieval literature acknowledge the fact that throughout the Middle Ages, literature had been a vehicle for religious propaganda and consolidation. The Christian discourse had dominated both the political and the textual. Thus, it had actively participated in fashioning the medieval crusading worldview. Since Christian Europe was haunted by the specter of a religiously and territorially conquering Islam, it was “Mohammedanism”<sup>8</sup> and the “Saracens” that defined the very idea of the “other” in medieval literature.

The Saracens became, to use Dorothee Metlitzki's phrase, “a crucial public theme” which permeated the political, military, and religious life of Christian Europe (116). Not surprisingly, this same public theme turned into a major literary theme across different parts of Europe. In France, for instance, the Saracens appear in many famous texts such as *La Chanson de Roland*, *L'entrée de Spagne*, *La Voyage a Jerusalem*,

to name but a few. In England, it is basically the Arthurian epics and romances that popularized the Saracens as a major medieval literary theme.

The medieval attempts to construct an Arthurian identity were dependent on the literary fashioning of a vilified and a threatening “Saracen”. It is not exaggerating; therefore, to claim that the textual King Arthur did exactly what the historical Charlemagne, for instance, did during the crusades. According to Ziaddin Sardar, the Arthurian tradition “Gave the contemporary crusades a history, locating their motifs, concerns, and rationale by harking back to the time of Charlemagne when the Muslim tide had been turned back from the heart of Europe”(12). Sir Thomas Malory’s *Morte D’Arthur* is our case in study.

Although one must admit that Malory’s *Morte D’Arthur* is, generically speaking, not a classical medieval Saracen romance like that of *La Chanson de Roland* or *The Sowdome of Babylon*, to name but a few, this referential medieval text harbors a stereotypical representation of the “Saracens”. The Saracens’ intermittent appearance in the narrative, albeit structurally insignificant, ideologically, it was very meaningful. Their presence seems to remind the medieval readers of those “heathens”, whose religion is not only a “heresy” but also an “affliction from God”. It is only King Arthur and his knights who will rid Christendom of their “terror”. Malory does not undermine their existence. They are, indeed, there, and they are a danger even to a relatively remote country, which medieval England really was.

The Saracens in *Morte D’Arthur* are depicted as demonic agents of war and destruction. They are in a perpetual state of devilish alert. Always at the disposal of a more civilized enemy: the Roman emperor Lucius, who can summon them at any time since they are constantly ready to wage wars that are not only morally unjust but thousands of miles away from their homelands. Parasitic as they are, the Saracens are not fully individualized. They are reflected through a less barbarian “other”. They are the “other” of the ‘other’.

The Saracens’ alleged allegiance to the Romans, as depicted by Malory, is axial in our interrogation of the transfiguration of history in this medieval narrative. In this, *Morte D’Arthur* religiously follows other medieval romances and epics<sup>9</sup>. Historically speaking, this allegiance was simply impossible due to the rivalry that had always characterized the relationship between Rome and Eastern civilizations, let alone between medieval Rome and Islam. In fact, history’s record is replete with devastating wars that took place around the Mediterranean between Romans on one hand and Phoenicians, Carthaginians, and Arab-Muslim on the other hand. The Roman /Saracen alliance in *Morte D’Arthur* translates the ideological shuttle of medieval literature between history as it happened, or could have happened, and history as Medieval writers would have it been happened.

In Malory’s case, the *telos* of this historical gymnastics is to put the ahistorical King Arthur in the very geo-history of the medieval map. Accordingly, the lands from which Malory’s “Saracens” flock out to help the Roman emperor represent the territorial expansion of medieval Islam: North Africa, Arabia, Egypt, Syria, Palestine, Iraq, Turkey, Armenia, and India. Metlitzki in this regard is worth quoting:

The Saracens are the same kind of foil and wonder in both. Before the crusades, the public

at large was aware that the Spanish Saracens were allied to Berbers of North Africa, that the Saracen Empire includes Persians, Turks, Armenians, Syrians, that the forces of the Saracen world were grouped under the Emir of Babylon, that is to say the Fatimide commander of the Faithful in Cairo to whom the title and power of the Caliphate that shifted from Baghdad in the Twelfth century. (119)

Malory's Saracens a, we are told, are "horrible peple," who sided with a Roman tyrant to destroy the Christian utopia of Camelot that King Arthur and his knights had striven to construct: "And thus, the emperor with all hys horrible peple," Malory tells us "drew to passe almayne to destroy Arthures londys" (117). In a striking opposition to the Roman emperor and his "people," the Saracens, the "democratic" king Arthur assembled his parliament to declare a holy and just war against the Roman emperor and "his" Saracens: "Aftir the utas of seynte Hyllary that all shuld be assembled for to holde a parlement at Yorke within the wallys"(111).

Malory constructs a binary opposition between the "democracy" and civilization of King Arthur and the autocracy and barbarism of the "others". This medieval religious and political Manicheism is no better dramatized than through King Arthur's nightmarish vision of the "other" the night of the decisive battle. It is this very nightmare that unveils much of the discourse of alterity in this medieval narrative. Actually, what seems to me the most significant moment in this tale regarding what might be read as Malory's orientalist discourse is Arthur's dream or vision of the black bear that loomed from his "orient". The narrative momentarily digresses from the tempo-spatiality of the expected battle and takes us, as if with Sindbad's magic carpet, to the far Orient – the very physical *topos* of the Saracens.

During his "oriental dream", King Arthur sees a dragon. This dragon was interpreted by King Arthur's "philosophers" as his divinely given invincible power. The dragon vision would soon be intercepted by the fearsome black bear: "Then hym semed there com oute of the Oryent a grimly bear, all black in a clowd and hys pawys were as byg as a poste. He was all torongled with lugerande lokys, and he was the fowlyst beste that ever ony man sye"(118). Although it seems axiomatic to see the emperor Lucius in the black bear as King Arthur's philosophers would interpret it as a token of a tyrant "betokyn a tyrant" (118), "medievally" speaking, this giant bear visualizes the very image of the Saracen in general, and Muhammad in particular, for as one may venture to say, Lucius is neither depicted as the first military danger, nor the cultural other.

This might be supported through a close reference to Malory's 'live' transmission of the battle between King Arthur and the Roman emperor. Malory does not seem to capitalize on the war between "English" and Romans. He, rather, seems to focus on the battle between Christians and "Saracens". In his dramatic narration of the battle, Malory zooms in on the dual battles between Arthur's Christian knights and the Saracens. Sir Cador, for instance, when killing the King of "Lybye," does not seem to be satisfied with killing him. He is elated at cursing him and humiliating his corpse: "now, haste thow corne- boote agayne warde and the devyll have thy bonys that ever thou were borne." (129). Such an encroachment of the Arthurian code of chivalry is even celebrated when the enemy is a non-Christian "Saracen". This is what

Dorothy Everett concludes when she surveys the un-chivalric treatment of the Saracens in medieval battles “The utter humiliation of the enemy is an end that justifies every perversion of decency in the chivalric hero” (199).

Like what we see in a plethora of Hollywood Vietnam War films when the real enemy is the Soviets, not the Vietnamese, the real enemy in Malory’s battle is, indeed, the Saracens, not the Romans. Malory’s unyielding differentiation between the two is evidently very suggestive of his perception and depiction of Arthur’s targeted enemy. Never does Malory refer to Arthur’s enemies as one. They are always the Romans and the “Saracens”. Arthur and his knights, we are incessantly reminded, overwhelm the “Saracens”. Arthur’s knights, for instance, glorify Sir Lancelot, after they know that he killed more than five hundred “Saracens”. Yet, there is no mention of the number of the Romans he might have killed.

Similar to the vision of the black bear and the defeat of the “Saracens”, Arthur’s fight with the “Grete gyaunts of Gene,” (131) convinces us of the real identity of the enemy and the “other” in Malory’s *Morte D’Arthur*. Like the ugliness and blackness of the bear, the great giant of Genes is another reference to the Saracens as symbols of bestiality, paganism, and otherness. The giantess, blackness, and bestiality are typical medieval attributes of the Saracens. “Saracens are often portrayed in the epics and in later romances”, we are told by Lasater, “as tall, hideous, huge, often misshapen, frequently as black moors or Negroes, and usually with eyes as red as glowing coals associated with ferocity” (142).

To conclude, it is evident that King Arthur and his Knights could be a source of cultural identification and aesthetic satisfaction in the very lands of the Saracens. Chivalry and courtly love are two thematic examples that can make of the Arthurian text not only readable, but also enjoyable for readers in the Middle East. Narratives of chivalry and courtly love, one has to remember, are, indeed, very central in the Arabic literary tradition. Accordingly, it is not surprising to discover through the Arthurian tradition “a forgotten heritage”, as Menocal calls it, which can even challenge the very Western “appropriation” of medieval courtly love and chivalry. King Arthur, however, can also be a source of cultural alienation for readers in the Middle East because of the *islamophobic* discourse of the Arthurian tradition and its stereotypical representation of the “Saracens”. It is the very otherness of the “Saracens” in the Arthurian saga that might make King Arthur and his knights feel quite unwelcome in the very lands of the “Saracens”.

## Works Cited

Beetson, A. F. L. *Arabic Literature to the End of the Umayyad Period*. Cambridge UP, 1983.

Bradley, Marion Zimmer. *The Mists of Avalon*. Bellantine Books. (1982).

Everett, Dorothy. (1955). *Essays on Middle English Literature*. Oxford UP.

Lasater, Alice E. (1974) *Spain to England: A Comparative Study of Arabic, European, and English Literature of the Middle Ages*. Mississippi UP.

Metlitzki, Dorothee. (1977). *The Matter of Araby in Medieval England*. Yale UP.

Menocal, Maria Rose. (1987) *The Arabic Role in Medieval literary History: Forgotten Heritage*. U of Pennsylvania P.

Ranelagh, E. L. (1979). *The Past We Share: The Near Eastern Ancestry of Western Folk Literature*. Quartet Books.

Said, Edward. (1978) *Orientalism: Western Conceptions of the Orient*. Pantheon Books.

Sardar, Ziauddin. (1999) *Orientalism*. Open UP.

Vinaver, Eugene. Ed. (1971). *Malory Works*. Oxford UP.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> According to different western accounts, Arabs (Muslims) had been known as (H)Agarians in reference to Hagar, Ishmael's mother, until Mohamed called them Saracens! For a more detailed account of this, see Bojen Olsommer *Nos Ancetres les Sarrasins* (Edition Bertil Galland, 1981), p.13. The word Saracen, however, does not exclusively refer to Arabs as a race; it rather refers to all Muslims who were interchangeably called Mohammedans, Saracens, pagans, infidels, Moors, Turks, and Tatars. Bernard Lewis compares the various names of Muslims by Christians in the middle ages and the Renaissance, to the Muslim's naming of European Christians in the Middle Ages. "Muslim writers show a similar, indeed, an identical, reluctance, and refer to their Christian rivals and enemies as Romans, Slavs, or Franks depending on when and where the encountered them" (*Islam and the West*, Oxford, 1993), p.7.

<sup>2</sup> One might refer the reader to the anthologies of *hamasa* collected by Abu Tammam and al-Buhturi. *Hamasa* in Reynold A. Nicholson's words "Denotes the virtues most highly prized by the Arabs—bravery in battle, patience in misfortune, persistence in revenge, protection of the weak and defiance of the strong."(Cambridge, 1966), p.79.

<sup>3</sup> The English *horse* and *knight* and the German *Pferd* and *Ritter*

<sup>4</sup> Despite the very ideological sensitivity of this topic, westerners who applaud the western influence on modern Arabic literature must not be horrified to acknowledge the Arabic influence on western literature especially during the Middle Ages, the Early Modern Period, and the Romantic Period.

<sup>5</sup> “Teach your children swimming, archery, and chivalry,” the famous saying by Omar al- Khatab on the value of teaching chivalry and equestrian skills to young Muslims is a relevant example.

<sup>6</sup> Saladin, the paragon of medieval Muslim chivalry is the most compelling evidence. Saladin’s chivalric behavior touched even Dante Alighieri who in both *Who’s Who of Heroes and Villains*, and *The Divine Comedy* exhibited his respect for this Muslim hero especially in comparison to the Prophet Mohammed and the caliph Ali.

<sup>7</sup> Here, I am particularly thinking of ibn Hazm’s *The Dove Neck Ring*.

<sup>8</sup> It was not surprising, for instance, to read that Muhammad was a Roman Catholic monk, who was sent by the Catholic Church to convert Arabia. “Abetted, however, by the devil, and fuelled by a vaulting political ambition and an unrivaled mastery of Arabic, he declared himself a prophet and contrived a heretic religion”. For an exhaustive account of the representation of Islam during the middle ages, see, for instance Norman Daniel *Islam and the West: the Making of an Image* (Edinburgh, 1960), *The Arabs and Medieval Europe* (London, 1975) and John V. Tolan ‘s *Saracens; Islam in the Medieval European Imagination*(New York, 2002).

<sup>9</sup> In *La Chanson de Roland*, for instance, the Saracens replace the Basques, the historical enemies of Roland and his army.

# Humor, Literary Theory and Terror.

By Wisam Mansour

In his theories of the Carnavalesque Mikhail Bakhtin<sup>1</sup> celebrates among other things the lower strata bodily functions. He believes that one of the spirits of the carnival is to celebrate the low, the banal, the popular as opposed to the classic and mainstream. This Bakhtinian notion brought to my mind a joke in the form of an angry exchange among several parts of the body: Brain, Heart, Lungs, Stomach, and Rectum, each disputing its right to the leadership of the body. The Brain declares its right to lead on the merit of its superior functionality and its capability for reasoning; the Heart sees itself as the engine of life; the Stomach contests its assumption for leadership on the noble ground of feeding and nourishing all the body; and finally the Rectum claims with a bang that it is more important than the other contesters, because if it shuts down none of the other organs will be able to function reasonably or properly. The joke has it that the other organs eventually yield and confer leadership upon the Rectum after the latter has shut down for a couple of days.<sup>2</sup>

With the ascendancy of the Rectum, this joke in essence demonstrates Bakhtin's views of the Carnavalesque, on the one hand, and celebrates, on the other hand, a postmodern, deconstructive view that sees the eminence of banality, marginality and the coming of the irrational as a mode of liberation from conventional social and cultural hierarchies.

Scientifically speaking, in terms of life sustaining organs, the brain, the heart, the lungs are seen to be more essential to the body than the rectum. If the heart, the brain or the lungs, for instance, shut down, the body may hardly have few minutes of life before lapsing into eternal unconsciousness. While the collapse of the rectum would eventually lead to degeneration and death, eternal unconsciousness occurs over a longer period of time. In this respect, the so considered primary bodily organs based their primacy on their power to control the life span they can remove from the conscious body and on the speed with which they can do so. And because the rectum is slow in terms of removing life from the body, it is not held in high esteem by the upper organs.

In the joke as well as in the postmodern reality, the Rectum now - armed with Bakhtinian notions of the Carnavalesque, Marxist and Foucauldian<sup>3</sup> notions of knowledge, power and discipline, and a welter of postmodern deconstructive notions of the referentiality of language to language in all forms of textualities including the body as a text- rebels against the hierarchies and power structures that divide the body into

upper and lower regions. The Rectum, coming from the lower part of the body and confined to guard and expel the filth of the upper parts of the body, suddenly recognizes its own centrality to the life force of all the organs that occupy and colonize its upper strata.<sup>4</sup> The rectum begins to understand that first of all, it is less malign and treacherous than the brain, the lungs or the heart, as it does not kill instantly or whimsically as they do. One always hears of heart and cerebral attacks that kill on the spot. In medical history there is nothing recorded about a rectum attack! In this respect the rectum sees its benignity as a quality that deserves recognition and celebration by others. The rectum here admittedly expresses its gratitude to some notions inspired by the writings of some postmodern feminists such as Luce Irigaray and Julia Kristeva.<sup>5</sup> Secondly, the rectum comes to fully comprehend that it is not without power to take hostage and cripple the other traditionally elitist organs through irrational acts of mutiny and terror.

The rectum realizes that the brain by virtue of its elitist predispositions will in no normal circumstances condescend to negotiate with it. The rectum cannot plea with the bloody heart or the airy lungs because it is stereotyped by them as foul, low and stuck in feces.<sup>6</sup> In short, the rectum, after situating itself in the discourses of some postcolonial and feminist pundits such as Edward Said's, Homi Bhabha's, Franz Fanon's, and Simone De Beauvoir realizes that it signifies "the rest" and "the other".

Driven by despair and fatal narcissism, and inflame by a revolutionary Marxist ideal it processed some while ago, the rectum realizes that there is nothing to lose but the bodily filth it is confined to live with.<sup>7</sup> It rebels against and terrorizes the other organs in an attempt to gain their recognition. In the joke, the irrationally rebellious rectum coerced the other organs to acknowledge its right to leadership. Ironically enough, though the rectum succeeds in getting what it wants, nothing has changed in its positionality and functionality. It remains a rectum, situated where it was before and is still processing and producing the same product.

The rectum joke marks a postmodern era in which signifiers and signifieds keep referring to each other in a vicious cycle of language detached from real or universal referents<sup>8</sup>. The joke, like the Bakhtinian carnival, celebrates simultaneously the banality of the irrational and the submission of the rational to the irrational. Since the irrational does not reason, it becomes suicidal.

Postmodern terrorists those days adhere to the rectum's irrational techniques in coercing the other societal organs to yield to their demands. The way the rectum terrorizes the brain into yielding to its demands in the joke, terrorists aspire for similar results in the real world. The blind terror and the ruthless campaigns of intimidation and indiscriminate killings taking place in many parts of the world, especially in the Middle East, are but a manifestation of the work of irrational recta armed by parochial ideals of conflict management, and convoluted readings of postmodern notions of the self and the other.

The post-11-September 2001 era has witnessed the rise and demise of so many recta trying to intimidate and take over control from the other organs without success. In other places recta are still trying hard, and even if at one point or another they temporarily manage to intimidate others into recognizing their presence, they will always remain recta.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Bakhtin, a Russian intellectual and critic, is considered the father of the notions of dialogism and the carnivalesque in literary studies. In his book *Rabelais and His World* (trans. Helene Iswolsky: Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1984) he celebrates the spirit of the carnival in the literary tradition because it accentuates the presence of the lower parts of the body and all its manifestations such as defecation, urine, mucus, semen, etc.; and because it “undermines the Kantian duality of subject and object that underlies conventional Western approaches to the relationship between individuals and their surroundings.” See Robert Stam. *Subversive Pleasures: Bakhtin, Cultural Criticism, and Film*. Baltimore, Md.: John Hopkin’s UP, 1989.

<sup>2</sup> The original joke goes like this: “All the organs of the body were having a meeting, trying to decide who was in charge. The brain said: “I should be in charge, because I run all the body’s systems, so without me nothing would happen.” “I should be in charge,” said the heart, “because I pump the blood and circulate oxygen all over the body, so without me you’d all waste away.” “I should be in charge,” said the stomach, “because I process food and give all of you energy.” “I should be in charge,” said the rectum, “because I’m responsible for waste removal.” All the other body parts laughed at the rectum and insulted him, so in a huff, he shut down tight. Within a few days, the brain had a terrible headache, the stomach was bloated, and the blood was toxic. Eventually the other organs gave in. They all agreed that the rectum should be the boss.” <http://www.withfriendship.com/jokes/manager/boss-organ.php>

<sup>3</sup> Michel Foucault is the author of *Discipline and Punish* and *The Archaeology of Knowledge* among many other influential books. Foucault contends that the desire for power dictates all motives of the human race. His ideal subject is the person who succeeds in subverting the prevailing order and hierarchies in favor of a new order. See Michel Foucault. *The Foucault Reader*, ed. Paul Rabinow. New York: Pantheon, 1984.

<sup>4</sup> This notion is based on deconstruction where the technique of position reversal on a binary opposition scale is employed. In the conventional sense, for example, White is the other of Black. White in logo centricism is given primacy over Black. Deconstruction subverts this order by arguing that White is what it is because of the color Black, and thus Black becomes more important than White as there will be no White without Black, and so on. In negative terms, deconstruction, particularly as articulated by Derrida, has often come to be interpreted as “anything goes” since nothing has any real meaning or truth. See G. Douglas Atkins. *Reading Deconstruction, Deconstructive Reading*. Lexington: UP of Kentucky, 1983.

<sup>5</sup> Some feminist theoreticians stipulate that the subject should, in her struggle to ameliorate her conditions, understand her body, accept it as it is and convert the traits that the other disadvantages her for into points of strength. See Toril Moi. *Sexual/Textual Politics: Feminist Literary Theory*. London: Methuen, 1985.

<sup>6</sup> The notions of elitisms and stereotyping are inherently part of Feminist, Marxist and Postcolonial discourses. These theories roughly pose respectively that man, the capitalist and the colonialist are elitists

while the woman, the worker and the colonized are seen as inferior and cast into negative stereotypes. See Simone de Beauvoir. *The Second Sex*. New York: Bantam, 1961; Terry Eagleton. *Literary Theory: An Introduction*. Minneapolis: UMP, 1983; Edward Said. *Orientalism*. New York: Vintage Books, 1979.

<sup>7</sup> The reference is to Marx's cry for the Proletariat to resist their bourgeoisie oppressors as they have nothing to lose in the process but their chains. See Louis Althusser. *For Marx*. Harmondsworth, England: Allen Lane, 1969.

<sup>8</sup> The notion of the arbitrariness of meaning and the referentiality of language to language rather than to a transcendental reality was first introduced by the Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure, and then found its way into the discourses of deconstruction via thinkers such as Jacques Derrida and Roland Barthes. See Vincent B. Leitch. *Deconstructive Criticism: An Advanced Introduction*. New York: Columbia UP, 1983.

# The Postmodern Condition as a Religious Revival: A Critical Review of William Connolly's *Why I am Not a Secularist*, Dipesh Chakrabarty's *Provincializing Europe*, and Alvin Plantinga's *Warranted Christian Belief*.

By Ryan McIlhenny

## Introduction

Much to the chagrin of skeptical philosophers from David Hume to Bertrand Russell, religion has withstood the onslaught of the Enlightenment project. Indeed, one of the benefits of Western culture's "postmodern condition" is that it has produced a revival of religion in the academic community. Modern thought, the brainchild of the Enlightenment, failed in its promise to emancipate humanity from the fetters of metaphysics. Given the scientific "rationalization" of war, genocide, the exploitative aspects of globalization in the twentieth century, and the collision of faiths in a post-9/11 world, it's understandable that many scholars express incredulity toward Reason's grand narrative. As Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer correctly put it in *Dialectics of Enlightenment*, "Enlightenment is mythical fear radicalized."<sup>1</sup> "Enlightenment" became the very thing it tried to destroy: a religion. And in the course of this (not so) surprising discovery, what intellectuals once silenced as self-alienation and wish fulfillment is now clamoring for attention: religion demands integration.

Religion is most often presented as a mere social and psychological phenomenon, offering a program whereby individuals and communities can get through the rigors of life. While these functional elements are important, there is more to religion that (literally) meets the eye. Have we forgotten that there are metaphysical realities that correspond to belief? Does God exist? Is there a specific God, one that we can identify by name? Is he active? Can Christians, for instance, truly know and have confidence in Christ's atoning work on the cross? For many, religious beliefs are outside the boundaries of knowledge; verification is futile. When it comes to the realities of the heavenly realm, those who bow the knee to Reason cannot—or perhaps should not—make a definitive decision. God is beyond their reasonable limits.

The practice of suspending judgment when it comes to faith-based issues has unsettled many in the scholarly community. Historian Eugene Genovese, for instance, admitted his inability in *Roll, Jordan, Roll* to move beyond the religious functionalism set down by his own craft: “the overpowering evidence of religious faith aroused in me a skepticism about the reigning tendency in academia...to, as it were, sociologize faith *out of religion—to deny the reality of spirituality.*”<sup>2</sup> Criticized by a handful of his colleagues “for slighting the spiritual dimension of the slaves’ experience,” Genovese pointed to the restrictions of the historical discipline, “a deficiency of talent, not of intention.” Frustrated by his own materialism, Genovese ultimately concluded that “slaves’ successful struggle for survival,” galvanized by religion, was “more readily spiritual than physical.”<sup>3</sup> I often wonder whether religious agnosticism among higher education professors stems from an epistemological *inability* or an ethical *unwillingness* to understand and incorporate the dynamics of faith in a particular discipline.

The protean term “postmodern” invokes notions of confusion, chaos, and contradiction: epistemology is disregarded; morality is relative; and language is slippery. Reality is a social construction, and “truth” is nothing more than what our academic colleagues let us get away with. Few religious observers see any value in our current cultural, social, and intellectual state. Yet, inadvertently, postmodernism has been a boon to religion.

Overtaking the errors of modern thought, a few well-respected contemporary thinkers who refuse to simply add to the dissonant clamor of critique have developed some creative ways in which to understand religion that, at first glance, *seem* “postmodern.” Political scientist William Connolly, historian Dipesh Chakrabarty, and philosopher Alvin Plantinga have offered different conceptual and methodological approaches to the study of religion that are essentially de-centered, pluralistic, and anti-foundational—all the ingredients to make a modern positivist cringe. Their work underscores the important idea that modernism has for years neglected to recognize religion as a necessary component of one's proper understanding of the present social world.

## Secularism's Dogma

Directly challenging the hegemony of Enlightenment secularism in his book, *Why I am Not a Secularist*, a title that plays on Bertrand Russell's *Why I am Not a Christian*, William Connolly underscores the importance of religion as a public phenomenon.<sup>4</sup> Modern thought has created a false dichotomy between a supposed secular/public realm and a sacred/private one. The author defines secularism as the "wish to provide an authoritative and self-sufficient public space equipped to regulate and limit 'religious' disputes in public life."<sup>5</sup> Yet in its attempts to do so, secularism, Connolly argues, has become exactly what it initially sought to overthrow: a dogma stemming from an overconfidence—call it blind faith—in reason that excludes those who fail to abide by it. Connolly's goal is to de-center the center, to sweep away the idea of a homogenous core in order to incorporate a plurality of ideologies.

In an odd yet illustrative way, Connolly's project relies on the work of neurophysiologist Joseph LeDoux. For LeDoux not even the brain is, strictly speaking, "rational" or dispassionate in an "enlightened" sense. Examining the relationship between the "thought-imbued intensities" of the amygdala, "an almond-shaped brain located at the base of the cortex," and the prefrontal cortex, the mind constantly exhibits irrational impulses. When receiving signs and stimuli, the amygdala reacts "quickly, relatively crudely, and with intense energy...below the level of conscious judgment and feeling"; the prefrontal cortex, in turn, receives such signs "more slowly, processing [them] through a sophisticated linguistic network in a more refined way and forming a more complex judgment."<sup>6</sup> One could say, hopefully without characterizing LeDoux's analysis, that the amygdala manifests immediate, intense, and inexplicable "pre-thoughts." Such impulses are not derived from rational deliberation, nor are they built on a series of core beliefs. With immediate vigor, they "just" happen, which then allows the prefrontal cortex to "organize *conceptually sophisticated translations of these intensities and feelings.*"<sup>7</sup> Thus, an essential part of a properly functioning mind is irrationality or, to be more specific, *pre-rationalism*.

Each part of the brain has a specific function that works in conjunction with other parts. In this case, the cerebral (rational-making part) is dependent on the visceral: "it is for the most part a good thing the amygdala is wired to the cortex, for it imparts energy and intensity to that center needed for the latter's formation of representations and practical decisions." In the end, LeDoux's point, according to Connolly, is that the "brain network is a rhizome [i.e., having multiple roots]...each with its own internal capacities, speeds, and relays with other brains."<sup>8</sup> The brain is multifaceted without one central core.

Removing the non-rational would not only misrepresent the rational, but it would significantly undermine our understanding of how the brain stimulates human interaction, which, according to Connolly, is "always accompanied and informed...by visceral intensities of thinking, prejudice, and sensibility."<sup>9</sup> In this way, the author is not far from the biblical idea that the issues of life flow from the heart and mind. Society, like the brain, is multifaceted: it is irreducibly complex:

When nervous cultural utilitarians insist that the organization of political action in concert would be impossible in a rhizomatic culture, they might learn a few things by examining

how their own brains work. Micropolitics and relational self-artistry shuffle back and forth among intensities, feelings, images, smells, and concepts, modifying some of them and the relays connecting them, opening up, thereby, the possibility of new thinking and alterations of sensibility.<sup>10</sup>

To say that religion is deeply emotional or inter-subjective and that such “visceral registers of being” should be removed from the public realm for the sake of stoic, cerebral rationalism is to severely truncate a well-ordered social sphere.

Connolly, in my opinion, needs to explain further his concept of democratic pluralism, what he calls the “ethos of engagement,” whereby the multiplicity of voices contributes to an enriching social and political environment. He fails to account for the willful suppression of religious claims. Nonetheless, he certainly provides a helpful alternative to secular thinking. Challenging the hubris of secularism necessarily reintroduces the significance of religious beliefs. More importantly, the public sphere *must* open itself up to religious and spiritual dialogue. Is religion solely a private phenomenon? Should we leave our metaphysical beliefs at the threshold of the public arena? Connolly doesn’t think so:

[A]n overt metaphysical/religious pluralism in public life provides one key to forging a positive ethos of engagement out of the multidimensional plurality of contemporary life. In such a culture, participants are called upon neither to leave their metaphysical baggage at home when they participate in various public activities nor to adopt an overarching faith acknowledged by all parties who strive to promote the common good. Rather, a deep plurality of religious/metaphysical perspectives is incorporated into public discourse.<sup>11</sup>

## The Subaltern’s Divine

Historians too face the difficulty of re-conceptualizing religion in a postmodern age. Galvanized by dialectical thinking, subaltern history, also known as “history from below,” highlights the symbiotic relationship between hegemonic and subordinate social groups in the development of unique social and cultural institutions. An essential goal of this school, often vilified for its revisionism, is to take seriously the place of the marginalized, to give them a voice (however true or imagined). The problem comes when that voice resounds with spiritualistic overtones.

For the twentieth-century materialist, labor, an essential part of the progress toward freedom, has been separated *a priori* from the dynamics of religion. Religion is not only backwards it alienates humanity from material change. According to Marx, true liberation follows the path of social labor and the gradual casting aside of heavenly speculations. Yet in many of the communities Chakrabarty analyzes, labor was a means of experiencing the divine, for “work and worship were two inseparable activities.”<sup>12</sup>

This puts the historian, especially one who has been trained in the doctrines of materialism, in a troubling situation—namely, how to take seriously the subaltern’s appeal to divine agency? “How,” Chakrabarty asks, “do we [historians] handle the problem of the presence of the divine or the supernatural in the history of labor as we render this enchanted world into our disenchanting prose... And how do we, in doing this, retain the subaltern (in whose activity gods or spirits present themselves) as the subject of their histories?”<sup>13</sup> Claims of divine activity “cannot be mediated through the secular code of history—bereft of gods and spirits.”<sup>14</sup> Western historians can only “grant the place of the supernatural, but to ascribe to it real agency in history will go against the historian’s craft... [consequently] the historian... cannot invoke the supernatural in explaining/describing events.”<sup>15</sup> Is it possible for us to think about God in the same way that we think about humans? Tracing the limits of a subject can be difficult (e.g., Who is God? or What is human nature?), but there *is* something there.

In order to overcome such limitations, Chakrabarty proposes a plurality of histories—specifically, the mutual existence of History 1 (H1) and History 2 (H2), two independent conceptual dimensions of time, which would mutually accommodate a western and an eastern history. The subaltern weakens the former’s (secular) conceptualization that offers one universal time zone, wherein all social groups participate (H1). In the same way that colonial Europeans in North America assumed that they were more culturally advanced than their Native American hosts, western historians today are out of order when they consider the subaltern as somehow pre- modern, presupposing that they are on the same evolutionary trajectory toward liberation. “Thus the writing of history,” Chakrabarty theorizes, “must implicitly assume a plurality of times existing together, a disjuncture of the present with itself.”<sup>16</sup> History 2 is the time that overlaps History 1, but does not consume or collapse it in a kind of totalizing (or totalitarian) presupposition. Does this mean that we should give up H1 for H2? Certainly not—Chakrabarty’s point is that H1 and H2 are valuable in their own right.<sup>17</sup>

A point of clarification is necessary at this point. Most people assume that history is a thing, an ontological organism. But the term “history” comes from the Greek word “inquiry,” which can also be defined as “investigate.” Thus, history is essentially an epistemological activity. The number of historians who argue that materialism and empiricism are the ultimate foundations on which their work rests always perplexes me. History is neither empirical nor material. Methodology, conceptualization, memory, and imagination are essential elements in the historian’s tool kit. Given this understanding, it’s appropriate to propose the existence of multiple and complementary histories. Consider for example four people at four different ends of a busy intersection, witnessing an accident. Each person’s account of the incident, although different, paints a picture of the event as a whole. Such is the case, for example, with the four gospels of the New Testament. It’s when one testimony sets itself up as *the* only authority—i.e., becomes the hegemonic discourse—that a bit of revision is healthy.

When dealing with religion, the materialist is akin to one who analyzes a language that he is not fully acquainted with. Having an intimate knowledge of a particular language is comparable to having an intimate understanding of the religion under examination. “The Marxist or secular scholar,” Chakrabarty concludes, “who is translating the divine is in the place of the student who knows well only one of the two

languages he is working with.”<sup>18</sup> Knowing well one of two languages is inadequate. Similarly, in order to have a better understanding of a particular religion one must have an intimate acquaintance of its texts, community, and practices.

### The Mind’s Knowledge of God

Arguably, in the modern mind, philosophy and religion seem to be much stranger bedfellows. Yet much of what is dealt with in philosophy focuses on issues related to religion (ethics, God, evil, the soul, etc.). Notre Dame philosopher Alvin Plantinga, proponent of a system known as Reformed Epistemology, a mixture of Common Sense realism and Calvinistic theology, has spent much of his career dismantling traditional epistemology—the “justified true belief” paradigm.<sup>19</sup> The ultimate goal of his three-part series on warrant and proper function, which culminates in his final installment, *Warranted Christian Belief*, is to show that people are within their epistemic right to hold certain religious beliefs (e.g., the Christian God) without the use of external evidence, a coherent theory of knowledge, or the use of any theistic proofs. This rests on the fact that the mode of forming such beliefs about the divine is the same as when we form beliefs about other humans. For millennia, epistemology has been inconsistently applied.

Warrant is often confused with the aspect of knowledge that is based on responsible cognitive ascent. According to the “deontological” theory of knowledge, it is wrong always and everywhere to accept a belief on insufficient evidence. The idea is that one can only know something if they can provide evidence for it. Anyone who cannot present reasons for what they believe is outside the legal limits of belief. In other words, I must be able to prove that  $2+4=6$  before I am allowed to give ascent to it. In this system, warrant is equivalent to justification. This is one reason why thinkers suspend judgment when it comes to religion: there’s just not enough evidence, as Russell maintained.

For Plantinga, however, this will not do.<sup>20</sup> Warrant, also known as “positive epistemic status,” is not the same as justification. Distinct from simply “truth,” warranted beliefs are “not accepted on the evidential basis of other propositions” nor do they require external evidence (i.e., traditional epistemic justification): “To say that a belief is *warranted* or *justified* for a person is to evaluate it or him (or both) *positively*; his holding that belief in his circumstances is *right*, or *proper*, or *acceptable*, or *approvable*, or *up to standard*.” Such core beliefs come in degrees. For instance, my belief that  $2+2=4$  is more warranted—that is, it is more weighty or central to my understanding of myself and the world around me—than the fact that the human brain depends on both the visceral and the cerebral for cognition. The belief that I was born and raised in San Francisco has a greater degree of epistemic status than the fact that Shakespeare was the author of *Two Gentlemen of Verona*.

For the Reformed Epistemologist, warranted beliefs are “properly basic.” They are neither *a priori* nor universal, but are nonetheless appropriately formed in our minds. Memory beliefs, perceptual beliefs, or beliefs that ascribe certain mental states to people are immediate. They are occasioned in the mind in

given circumstances to the degree that one cannot help but accept them. For instance, when Professor *S* speaks to me in class, I form a warranted belief that Professor *S* appears before me and speaks to me. It is a positive epistemic belief. Am I warranted (and justified) in holding the belief that I experience Professor *S*? Yes, of course. Yet did my mental state come from external evidence? No. My belief came from the experience itself. It required no external evidence, no epistemological theory, and—importantly—no prior proof of Professor *S*'s existence.

The argument supports the reality of a belief, but not the reality of the object. Yet most of our beliefs are formed without prior inquiry concerning the object's existence. Professor *S*'s existence is not properly basic. While this is true, it is important to understand that such a belief (viz., that professor *S* appeared to me at a point in the past) *entails* the existence of Professor *S*. My proper belief, to use another example, that I had breakfast this morning necessarily entails the belief that the world has existed for more than three hours. The belief that the world has existed for a given amount of time is not basic, but the formation of the belief after the particular experience is basic and therefore so is the world's existence. The point is that my belief, if it is properly basic and warranted, cannot be simply an illusion.

A critic of Plantinga may ask: Is it possible for our minds to function properly but not acquire warranted knowledge? What if a person is hallucinating or suffering from a brain lesion? What if they are under the influence of an opiate? Plantinga answers these questions in his second book, *Warrant and Proper Function*. The mind functions in a specific way, in accordance with specific external circumstances (i.e., one's cognitive environment), and according to a designed plan aimed at acquiring truth. "A belief has warrant for person *S* only if that belief is produced in *S* by cognitive faculties functioning properly (subject to no dysfunction) in a cognitive environment that is appropriate for *S*'s kind of cognitive faculties, according to a design plan that is successfully aimed at truth. We must add...that when a belief meets these conditions and does enjoy warrant, the degree of warrant depends on the strength of the belief, the firmness with which *S* holds it."<sup>21</sup> Thus, a person whose cognitive faculties are functioning inappropriately cannot adequately have warrant.

Moments and degrees of cognitive dysfunction are not enough to overturn Plantinga's theory. Humans (rightly) assume that their minds work in most if not all circumstances. An airplane is designed to function in a particular way. The presence of a few airplane crashes, for example, does not undermine the intent or design function of the actual plane. "The idea of proper functioning is no more problematic than, say, that of a Boeing 747's working properly. Something we have constructed—a heating system, a rope, a linear accelerator—is functioning properly when it is functioning in the way in which it was designed to function."<sup>22</sup> Hallucinations do not undermine the general design function of the mind. If they occurred on a regular basis, then either such manifestations would be part of the mind's function (of which we'd have to cope with), or we wouldn't recognize them as a problem. Saying, for instance, that often times a person's liver fails does not discredit the knowledge of what the liver does on a regular basis. In fact, unveiling moments of failure in any organism presupposes design. Exceptions rarely disprove the rule.

So what does this iconoclastic theory of knowledge have to do with religion? Plantinga demonstrates

that belief in God—and specifically the Christian God—fits (i.e., doesn't violate) the criteria for warrant. God, like Professor *S*, reveals himself to me. The idea that God loves me and saves doesn't depend on my ability to prove his existence, nor does it require universal acceptance for it to be warranted. Furthermore, in *Warranted Christian Belief*, Plantinga wraps up the concept of warrant and proper function, criticizes materialists (specifically, Marx and Freud), and offers an alternative model derived from the writings of Aquinas and Calvin, the so-called A/C model. Accordingly, the *sensus divinitatus* (the sense of the divine), whereby beliefs concerning God are occasioned in the human mind, reflects the way in which the mind was created to function—namely, to produce beliefs about the true God. God has implanted in the mind of all human beings a sense of the divine. This “sense” is aroused and occasioned in the proper circumstances; at other times it is, as Calvin writes, citing Romans 1, suppressed. However, the suppression of the divine sense is, again, not enough to collapse warrant and proper function or the accompanying model.<sup>23</sup>

Most thinkers confuse belief in God with God's existence—the former an epistemological position, the latter an ontological question. There is a world of difference between the two. When I tell someone that I believe in God, a belief deeply situated in my mind, the common response is a demand to prove the divine's existence. Using Plantinga's system, I could appropriately answer, “I don't have to.” All I've said is that I *believe* in God. Instead, the modernist must show how belief in the divine is unwarranted—viz., how my mind is suffering dysfunction, that my cognitive environment is skewed, or that my belief is not along a design plan aimed at truth. The mode of knowing God is the same as knowing other people. As I mentioned above, belief in an existing being, like Professor *S*, does not require a proof or exhaustive delineation of her person. Nonetheless, the warranted belief entails the existence of Professor *S*. In a similar way, theistic proofs are not required for belief in God. If my belief in God is warranted—and one would have to do a considerable amount of homework to show that it is not—then the belief itself entails the existence of God.<sup>24</sup>

The notion that one can obtain warrant without argument or reason has caused great angst among today's scholars. If belief in God requires no argument, evidence, or justification (in the deontological or positivistic sense), then can we believe in just anything? For Plantinga, why would someone even raise such an objection? Consider, once again, the belief in the appearance of Professor *S*. Does my “Professor *S*” belief, which is not based on outside evidence but the experience itself, mean that I can believe in just anybody? Of course not, and no one would respond in that way.

A second objection relates to other non-Christian beliefs. Is it possible for a Jew or a Muslim to employ the same epistemology to account for their belief in God, which is qualitatively distinct from the Christian's God?<sup>25</sup> Again, refer to the response in the preceding paragraph: why would an appeal to another religion necessarily collapse the argument Plantinga is making concerning Christian beliefs? The position of the Jew or the Muslim has no logical bearing on the warranted nature of the Christian's belief. Should a Christian reject his or her belief simply because of the objections raised by secularists, atheists, or competing religions? No. It is important to keep in mind that Plantinga is simply arguing that Christian belief satisfies the criteria for warrant in the same way that belief in other human minds is warranted. Furthermore, because it accords with the standards of proper thinking, the A/C Christian model is more

cogent than any other cognitive model.

## Conclusion

Everyone agrees that a building with a dilapidated foundation is untenable. Demolition, the material equivalent of literary “deconstruction,” precedes rebuilding. Connolly, Chakrabarty, and Plantinga have uncovered the rot at the base of the Enlightenment project. Although iconoclastic, none of the authors are anarchistic. A few things can be drawn from their disparate studies of religion. First, they show the conceptual myopia and contradictions of modern scholarship and its utter failure to incorporate religion in the evolution of intellectual professionalism. Second, they propose that taking seriously the place of religion and religious groups offer a richer picture of how we can understand the world. Third, religion is essential to academia’s rebirth. Its presence is necessary for a healthy social, intellectual, and cultural ethos, allowing us to understand the relationship between divine and human agency. Finally, what they have offered innervates those, like the present writer, already committed to a specific religious community.

Who will deny that an important characteristic of postmodernism is its indefatigable assault on the contradictions inherent in modernism? A window of opportunity has opened up—namely, the prospect of a re-evaluation of religion as a necessary component of human life and thought. What have we learned? Let those who are members of religious communities become guarded postmodernists, for this is the time for a healthy dose of radical revision.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *Dialectics of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments* ed. Gunzelin Schmid Noerr and trans. Edmund Jephcott (Stanford: Stanford University, 2002), 11.

<sup>2</sup> Eugene Genovese, “Marxism, Christianity, and Bias in the Study of Southern Slave Society” in D. G. Hart (eds), *Religious Advocacy and American History*, 90.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> William Connolly, *Why I am Not a Secularist* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1999)

<sup>5</sup> Ibid. 5.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid. 29.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid. 175. Emphasis is the author's.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid. 176.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid. 36.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid. 76.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid. 185.

<sup>12</sup> Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 79.

<sup>13</sup> Id.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid. 76.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid. 104-105.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid. 109.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid. 113.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid. 90.

<sup>19</sup> There are a number of problems with the “justified true belief” paradigm. Let me highlight a couple. First, what constitutes “truth”? Quite often scholars have used the same evidence but have produced different truths? Rather than say true, let's use the term “cogent.” The idea is that certain claims can be considered more persuasive than others, leaving open the possibility that our assumed “truth” may be overturned in the future. At this juncture, then, knowledge is “cogently justified belief.” Second, what is meant by the term “justified”? There is a difference between “justified” and “justifiable.” The former can convey the meaning that our claims are not groundless, while the latter suggests that we are required (i.e., duty-bound) to point out the justifying factors before giving cognitive ascent. Traditional philosophy has suggested the latter—namely, that justifiable proof precedes cognitive ascent. Therefore the paradigm should be “justifiable cogent belief.” Only then can one say that belief is warranted.

<sup>20</sup> Plantinga doesn't reject justification. He just wants to separate it from warrant. Furthermore, Plantinga argues that our beliefs must be “grounded.” We have no right to believe in just anything. But there are things that we can believe without external evidence.

<sup>21</sup> Quote in *Warranted Christian Belief* (New York: Oxford University, 2000), 156.

<sup>22</sup> Alvin Plantinga, “Positive Epistemic Status and Proper Function,” *Philosophical Perspective* vol. 2 (1988): 1-50. This essay was the precursor to Plantinga’s *Warrant and Proper Function*. You will notice by the title of the essay that Plantinga prefers “warrant” to “positive epistemic status,” but the two mean the same thing.

<sup>23</sup> In contradistinction to Van Tillian presuppositionalists, the suppression of the knowledge of God is an ethical problem—not an epistemological (i.e., cognitively functional) one.

<sup>24</sup> I’m not arguing that knowing God means that I know his every predicate. I know God in as much as he has revealed himself to me. The same is true for our daily human interaction. I know someone solely on the basis of what that person reveals about herself. I know my wife, but I don’t know her *in-herself*.

<sup>25</sup> Competing religious claims should not be dismissed. Indeed, I would argue that one would have to employ a different strategy to deal with comparative religious claims or constructions. It’s a much more complicated enterprise. I have deliberately left atheists from the list of objectors. It is much more difficult to prove a universal negative—namely, that God *does not* exist. Not even the so-called argument from evil can cogently dismantle certain theistic arguments. Which statement, for instance, has more weight: “It is possible that God exists”; “It is impossible for God to exist.” The latter has little merit, if any.

# The Lady Iraq.

By Joseph Taylor

She enters my mind with a nostalgic tune so often it is unbelievable.

The passion I have for this woman who is the mother of my people is so powerful to me. Will I ever see her? Touch her? Smell her? Eat her? Or am I destined to hear of her through my television and through stories of “the old times.” It was once one of the most beautiful places on earth and has now become an embodiment of the western stereotype of the Arab world. Her mountains, agriculture, night life, rivers, homes, universities, hospitals, churches, mosques, historical monuments, bazaars, shopping centres and all her gifts. All gone. Replaced with pain, destruction, political unrest, hate, fear, religious chaos, persecution and greed and death. Her skies are no longer lit up with a starry white so unexplainable, instead they flash with asteroids that cause screams when they land.

She is cursed by her own individuality: The black gold along with gas and phosphate, all call out to the hungry green eyed monsters. They sense she is wounded and they close in and devour everything in their path, they have entered and she is being killed from the inside out. Once united now segmented and divided, they beat her down. Changing her to what they want her to be, it's something she can never be. Once the city of palm trees, now the dates cannot be eaten for the intruder's breath has poisoned them, now it is the most dangerous place on earth. Once rich beyond belief, now starving, once the origin of peace and brotherly love, now the birthplace of despair and detestation.

Her children flee and their uncertain eyes scour for help. Yet the world turns a blind eye. Who will help them? Me? But all I can do is sit here and speak of it. Sit here and think about it. I wait for her to live or to die, I wait for a miracle, I wait for an answer, I wait for her to rise like a phoenix from the ashes... I can do nothing. Nothing but wait...

