

Nonstandard Space: Tayeb Salih, Fantasy, and World Literature

By

Sofia Samatar

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of  
the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

(African Languages and Literature)

at the

UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON

2013

Date of final oral examination: 4/18/13

The dissertation is approved by the following members of the Final Oral Committee:

Harold Scheub, Professor, African Languages and Literature

Dustin Cowell, Professor, African Languages and Literature

Samuel England, Assistant Professor, African Languages and Literature

Caroline Levine, Professor, English

Mary Layoun, Professor, Comparative Literature

Dedicated to

my parents

and to

Professor Harold Scheub:

inspiration, mentor, and guide.

## Abstract

*Nonstandard Space: Tayeb Salih, Fantasy, and World Literature*, approaches the idea of world literature through attention to the function of fantasy in the work of Sudanese writer Tayeb Salih. Salih's three long works of fiction, *The Wedding of Zein*, *Season of Migration to the North*, and *Bandarshah*, provide an entry point to the study of fantastic, "nonstandard" space: a reality that is invisible and emotional, rather than visible and empirical. The construction of literary nonstandard space is a highly effective means of connecting locality and system, of expressing small-scale and large-scale realities in the same instant. Through the representation of diverse worlds at the same time, fantasy draws attention to the construction of "world" as a conceptual category. The shifts in perspective that characterize literary fantasy show world-creation at work.

The comparative portion of the dissertation treats work by Ibrahim al-Koni (Libya), Bessie Head (South Africa/Botswana), and Ben Okri (Nigeria). This section draws attention to the ecological, utopian vision of al-Koni's *The Bleeding of the Stone*, the uncanny and abject interior spaces of Head's *A Question of Power*, and the cyclical epic as a figure for the postcolonial interregnum in Ben Okri's *The Famished Road* trilogy, showing how these texts resonate with Salih's and how they use fantasy to theorize the environment, the self, and the state. The project proposes an approach to world literature that employs a scalar reading, one that attends to shifts in scalar perspective to trace the formation of textual worlds. In doing so, the dissertation illuminates both Tayeb Salih's planetary vision, and the richness of fantasy as a field for comparative study.

## Contents

1. Fantasy, Planetaryity, and Globalization
2. On Fantasy Worlds
3. The Desired World: *The Wedding of Zein*
4. The Haunted World: *Season of Migration to the North*
5. World-Making: *Bandarshah*
6. Fantasy in the Works of Ibrahim al-Koni, Bessie Head, and Ben Okri
7. Gestures of Belonging

## Chapter One

### Fantasy, Planerarity, and Globalization

*Khartoum from above, in this hour before dawn, seems like a bald head, without symmetry. A small spot of yellow and blue light...wide areas of darkness, a shallow gleam like the water in puddles...a misty, deceptive city, like a dream not yet made real. But you can make out the river, illuminated by its own light, like the face of a man at prayer. The city, in this hour of dawn, sleeps in its rags like an orphaned child... Cities increase in beauty or ugliness at this hour, when their human elements are hidden, when colors are mixed and the angles of perspective are distorted, and the city is left in its essence, with its stones and trees beneath the dome of the sky.*

—Tayeb Salih, quoted in Ḥasan al-Ṭayyib, *Al-Ṭayyib Ṣāliḥ: Dirāsāt naqdīyah*, p. 172

The work of Tayeb Salih (al-Ṭayyib Ṣāliḥ, 1929-2009) holds a prominent place in the Arabic literary establishment and, increasingly, in the world at large. His best-known novel, *Mawsim al-hijrah ilā al-shamāl* (1966; *Season of Migration to the North*, 1969), was declared the most important Arabic novel of the twentieth century by the Arab Literary Academy in Damascus in 2004, and has been translated into more than thirty languages. In the United States, *Season of Migration to the North* has become an important text for the investigation of the concept of world literature, figuring in the work of scholars such as Edward Said, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, and Susan Stanford Friedman. These scholars share an interest in developing new approaches to world literature. Like other scholars who have turned their energies toward world literature in the last fifteen years, such as Pascale Casanova, Franco Moretti, David Damrosch and Wai Chee Dimock, they are interested in thinking big: in reading

world literature in a way that keeps the category *world* in view, without sacrificing the specificities of individual texts. The problem confronting them is one of scale.

This problem figures prominently in *Season of Migration to the North*, in which pinpoint-fine attention to a single small community in rural Sudan, and the individual characters who make up that community at a particular moment, shifts rapidly to a broad perspective that takes in global migrations and centuries of bloody human history. The world of the village is set against the world at large, raising questions of belonging and authority. The juxtaposition of local and global emphasizes the various ways in which they meet: through conquest, the search for knowledge, seduction, friendship, disease. In tracing these connections, Salih employs an uncanny doubling effect that makes the “local” and the “foreign” inextricable from one another, equally familiar and equally unknown. Through the uncanny, he represents the world as a system that transcends the borders between nation-states, and between the conceptual categories of “home” and “away.” Like the epigraph to this introduction, which describes Khartoum as seen from the window of an airplane, *Season of Migration* makes periodical shifts to the long view, the view from above. This perspective makes the world disturbingly alien—mere trees and stones, the human elements erased—but it also suggests a liberating possibility, the possibility that because human categories, including geopolitical ones, are human-made, the human world can be reimagined. The preoccupation with *world* as a category suggested by the long view, and the efforts perceptible throughout Salih’s oeuvre to destabilize and re-envision apprehensions of what the world is and how it functions, make his work a rich site for the exploration and theorization of the slippery category to which it belongs: world literature.

David Damrosch, in his influential book *What Is World Literature?*, offers a working definition of world literature as literature that circulates beyond its point of origin (4). According

to this definition, the fiction of Tayeb Salih, and particularly *Season of Migration to the North*, which is taught in universities around the world, amply qualifies as world literature. Yet to describe a text as world literature is not to close the question of how to read it, but to open it. From the time of Goethe's introduction of the term *Weltliteratur* in 1827, the concept of world literature has been expressed in a variety of ways: masterpieces or "classics," global literature, transnational literature, and the self-consciously plural "world literatures." Goethe, who was inspired by Persian, Chinese and Serbian works in translation, envisioned a vigorous and yet polite literary marketplace, to which producers and consumers of culture might come to engage in a "general intellectual commerce" (in Casanova 14). The implications of Goethe's marketplace metaphor have not been lost in the ensuing conversations on world literature: Marx and Engels attribute the dissolving of national literary lines to bourgeois exploitation of the world market (421), while Pascale Casanova, linking Goethe's model to Pierre Bourdieu's notions of cultural capital and cultural fields, maps a network of writers as competing producers, with Paris as literary center, in *La république mondiale des lettres* (*The World Republic of Letters*). Casanova's study, while it fails to justify her claims for the centrality of Paris (or even to attend to all the groups of writers who did go to Paris, such as Arab writers, among them Tayeb Salih), is an important attempt to think beyond the paradigm of national literatures. By tracing the circulation of texts, Casanova draws attention to the strategies available to writers in the literary marketplace, and their use of languages other than their native ones, and of translation, to attract certain audiences to their work.

Alongside his definition of world literature as that which circulates beyond its point of origin, Damrosch offers a second definition which attends to the other side of circulation, reception: world literature, he writes, is "a mode of reading," a mode he describes as "detached

engagement” (303). This mode rejects intellectual domination of foreign works; its goal is “pleasure and enlightenment rather than a possessive mastery of the world’s cultural productions” (303). Damrosch’s detachment is important because it maintains an awareness of the complexities of the translation process and the alterity of foreign texts. This resistance of the urge to “master” a text recalls Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak’s distinction between an abstract, dominating globalization and an ungraspable yet paradoxically present “planetary”:

The globe is on our computers. No one lives there. It allows us to think that we can aim to control it. The planet is in the species of alterity, belonging to another system; and yet we inhabit it, on loan. (72)

Spivak’s use of “planet” here is suggestive in the way it links the “inhabited” and experienced human context with the alterity of a non-human system. The planet stands in contrast to the globe in that it is experienced through the senses, physically inhabited; yet because each body experiences only a part of the planet, the world as planet resists being known and captured in the way we map the globe. For Spivak, planetary remains an ever-receding “catachresis for inscribing collective responsibility as right,” its alterity “an experience of the impossible” (102). Paul Gilroy uses “planet” in a similar sense, though less pessimistically, in *After Empire* (2004), when he proposes a “planetary humanism” that will break down the borders of both nations and races, that “seeks to turn the tables on all purity seekers, whoever they may be” (166-7). Several critics have taken up the concept of the planetary as a focus on physical rather than geopolitical space, notably Susan Stanford Friedman in her approach to literary modernism and Wai Chee Dimock in her work on American literature. These approaches, while attentive to the movements of literary works and the ways they are read, provide more room for close readings of texts than the circulation and reception models discussed above. Friedman, for example, is interested in

planetarity as “a consciousness of the earth as planet” (“Planetarity” 495), which “requires attention to modes of local and translocal meaning-making and translation, to processes and practices of perception and expression on a global scale” (494). Wai Chee Dimock, in the introduction to *Shades of the Planet: American Literature as World Literature*, puts the idea of “planet” to work as a “cradle”: “a set that describes and redescribes its subsets” (8). The notion of the planet as cradle reflects the effort to think beyond the nation, to reread and “redescribe” national literatures as portions of larger sets, which are themselves “not self-contained, not fully sovereign, resting continually and nontrivially on a platform more robust and more extensive” (4). For both Friedman and Dimock, “planet” is invoked, following Spivak, as a way of starting out on new and more equal epistemological ground, in an effort to make space for ways of knowing and imagining practiced by those who did not draw the lines on the globe. If world literature is not an object but a problem (Moretti, “Conjectures,” 55), it is a productive one, a source of new critical opportunities, and one of these opportunities is that of developing a more balanced approach to literary space: of “moving the centre,” as Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o puts it, “between nations and within nations,” enabling engagement with “creative centres among working people in conditions of gender, racial and religious equality” (xvii). “Planetarity” has emerged in the study of world literature as an alternative to “globalization,” in terms of the way that relationships to and across space are read. These concepts differ in two important ways, the first concerning *what* is being read, and the second concerning *how*. The “what” involves a divergence in focus: globalization implies both homogenization and Western domination, what Fredric Jameson calls the “McDonaldization” of the world (“Notes on Globalization” 64), while planetarity indicates an emphasis on local ways of imagining and navigating world space, such as Arjun Appadurai’s notion of “global cultural flow” and Friedman’s “indigenization,” both of

which frame the participation of postcolonial subjects in large-scale cultural processes and forms as social agency rather than victimhood (Appadurai 328-9; Friedman, “Unthinking Manifest Destiny,” 72-3). The “how” involves the epistemological approach to what is studied. In the case of world literature, this means stepping away from the urge to “master” the text, particularly a text studied in a language not one’s own: Damrosch’s notion of “detached engagement” (*What is World Literature?* 303). The planet, invoked as both the realm of all human experience and a zone of alterity, serves as a constant reminder of the challenges and possibilities of world literature, a field of inquiry open to all and submissive to none.

Friedman advocates a new framework for modernist studies, one that embraces both the idea of spaces as distinct from nations, and the consciousness of the passage of time on a vast scale, or what Wai Chee Dimock calls “deep time.” Dimock’s reading of American literature through deep time—her gloss for Fernand Braudel’s *longue durée*—shows that that literature has been planetary rather than national in its influences and effects from its inception. Dimock’s long view of literature demonstrates the importance of the *Bhagavad Gita* to Thoreau, and traces the kinship lines between the epic and Henry James’s *The Portrait of a Lady*. By focusing on large-scale developments in time and space, Dimock provokes a reevaluation of the literature of the United States as “new.” “Literature,” she writes, “is the home of nonstandard space and time” (4).

Dimock’s interest in deep time suggests that her approach would prove useful for the study of African literature, generally considered to be even “newer” than American literature. The concept of deep time provides a framework for extending the study of narrative both beyond literacy and *before* it, into the time before writing. Such a shift in perspective holds the potential to revise the notion of African literature as “belated,” by focusing attention on the general

lateness of writing: on the fact that, as Christopher Prendergast puts it, “if we think of history on the model of a calendar, writing emerges only on the last stroke of midnight, 31 December” (x). However, although Dimock is interested in older forms such as the epic, her study’s central concern is to expand the field of American literature in *space* rather than time. Dimock’s purpose is not only, nor even primarily, to prove that American literature is old, but to prove that it is not strictly American: to uncover the fundamental links between American literature and the literatures of the wider world. Her title, *Through Other Continents*, asserts that to read American literature “across deep time” is to enable new encounters in space. This spatial concern is what makes her work germane to the study of world literature, and not only American literature. The preoccupation with space runs through the work of all the critics I have discussed here: it informs Damrosch’s emphasis on circulation and reception, Casanova’s interest in literary marketplaces and her use of Pierre Bourdieu’s fundamentally spatial concept of “cultural fields,” Spivak’s turn to the planet and its ever-receding horizon, Friedman’s efforts to expand modernist studies beyond the Euro-American canon.

In “Planetary: Musing Modernist Studies,” Friedman proposes four methods of working “within a planetary framework”: re-vision, recovery, circulation and collage. Re-vision involves seeing things new, “defamiliarizing the familiar archive” by reading “the footprints of planetarity in the local formations of the West”; recovery seeks out undiscovered archives; circulation shifts attention to global mobility and its “roots and routes”; while collage is an act of placing texts from different times and places in juxtaposition (492-3). The strategy most relevant to this project is Friedman’s “re-vision.” This is what Dimock undertakes with American literature in *Through Other Continents*: a rereading of writers such as Thoreau and Henry James within what Friedman calls a “planetary framework.” This type of emphasis has not been an important part of

the study of African literatures, or other postcolonial literatures. It is the literatures of the metropole which have been the subjects of readings intended to prove, or expose, their relationship to the wider world. Colonial discourse analysis produced lively new readings of English classics such as Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* and Jane Austen's *Mansfield Park*, which Gayatri Spivak and Edward Said, respectively, reread as documents of imperialism.<sup>1</sup> What Spivak and Said attempted to show was how "Englishness," and also "the world," especially "the Third World," as the other of that Englishness, were constructed through the exercise of imperial power. Their readings brought to the fore elements previously viewed as unimportant or peripheral: Spivak extended the world of *Jane Eyre* from Jamaica to Calcutta, while Said charted the slave trade from Antigua to the English manor house of *Mansfield Park*.<sup>2</sup> A similar project has not been viewed as necessary with postcolonial texts, because the world, for the postcolony, is inescapable. The closed national space, such as that within which *Mansfield Park* was read before Said, was never possible in the case of postcolonial texts, which are defined by having no home to which they can withdraw from the world "out there," no opportunity for constructing this soothing illusion. Defined by the experience of invasion and conquest, and often written in the language of the metropole, these texts find themselves already "worlded." Much of postcolonial criticism, then, has been characterized by a move opposite to that of colonial discourse analysis, which is the discovery of textual elements which have survived invasion: the expression of indigenous concepts, understanding or feeling. The isolation and elucidation of the local, rather than the global, has been the goal. My project begins from the position that an opportunity has been missed in the process. This is the opportunity to examine how postcolonial

---

<sup>1</sup> Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Three Women's Texts and a Critique of Imperialism," *Critical Inquiry*, Vol. 12, No. 1, "Race," Writing, and Difference (Autumn, 1985), 243-261. Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism*. New York: Knopf, 1993.

<sup>2</sup> Spivak's project had already been undertaken imaginatively by Jean Rhys, whose *Wide Sargasso Sea* is also treated in Spivak's essay.

texts construct a variety of representations of “world,” not all of which resemble the globe. The local concepts and forms of expression that have been the focus of postcolonial criticism, which in Salih’s case would include Sufism, oral poetry, and folklore, are not, because they draw from indigenous sources, concerned *only* with the local, uninterested in the world as world. On the contrary, attention to these elements in Salih’s texts shows that it is often precisely through creative engagement with Sufism, and through the use of the fantastic tropes of oral tradition, that a consciousness of the world as world finds expression.

Tayeb Salih was preoccupied with the problem of the world, posed at the beginning of this introduction as a question of scale. A Sudanese writer who spent most of his life outside Sudan, and who produced his most famous work, *Season of Migration to the North*, in Beirut, Salih wrote fiction imbued with a sometimes anguished, always trenchant planetary consciousness. Waïl Hassan has shown that the imaginary village of Wad Hamid in northern Sudan, although not always mentioned by name, is the literary location of all of Salih’s novels and most of his short stories. Wad Hamid, peripheral in many ways—rural and therefore marginalized vis-à-vis Khartoum, Sudanese and therefore marginalized vis-à-vis the rest of the Arab world, especially the Arab literary world—becomes, in Salih’s works, the center of world history, one comparable to Salih’s own home area of al-Dabbah in Sudan, as he describes it in a 1977 interview:

The village is a bit higher than the level of the Nile. The Arabs always call anything that is higher than normal el Debba [*al-dabbah*—“the hill”]. It is my belief that the height of el Debba is a result of the accretion, or accumulation of the different layers of civilizations, or historical cultures, that have existed in Sudan from the time of the ancient Egyptian civilization. As you know the Sudan was Pharaonic, heathen, Christian and then

it became Muslim. The collective, unconscious memory of these people is the thing that I would like to explore. (Berkley xxvii-xxviii)

Wad Hamid, like al-Dabbah, is a meeting-place for layers of subterranean history, a history that survives, for Salih, as “collective, unconscious memory.” This perspective is not a view from above that dissolves the signs of human activity, but a view from beneath, a way of discovering those signs. In the interview quoted above, Salih remarked of his creative method: “I am trying to work as though digging archaeologically” (Berkley xxxviii). The image of the writer as archaeologist evokes both planetarity and deep time: to dig deeply into the earth is both to concentrate on a limited area, that portion of the planet which one can approach through touch, and to uncover the remains of the past. In the passage quoted above, the excavations of the past, like Dimock’s explorations of the literary past of the United States, yield fragments of cultural understandings broadly distributed in space: Pharaonic, “heathen” (that is, practicing traditional African religions), Christian, Muslim.

This view from beneath, like the view from above, requires a shift in perspective. It requires the observer to step outside the space of everyday reality, to board a plane, to burrow into the earth. The view from these outside spaces, from the earth or the air, removed from the mapped places of human interaction, yields planetary insights. Both the view of Khartoum from the air, and the view of al-Dabbah from underground, explicitly resist the idea of a singular nation, a uniform national culture. Khartoum becomes a mark on the planet’s surface as well as a political capital, characterized not by its human elements, but by its trees and stones. The excavation of Al-Dabbah reveals it as a space made up of multiple traditions: not only an Arab Sudanese village, but a contact zone. The fact that a shift in perspective is necessary in order to gain these insights confirms that this is not the only, or even the ordinary way of looking at the

world. The world is only perceptible in this way if seen from outside. The contact zone is also the Sudanese village; Khartoum is also a national capital. This doubled vision is where I locate Salih's planetary consciousness: a way of seeing that depends on access to an alternate reality, and insists that the world is more than one at once.

The question of scale, that defining problem of world literature, is always present here. Salih's imagination draws close to his subject to focus on small details, then rapidly withdraws to take a longer view. The suddenness of the shifts in perspective in his novels produces a sense of disorientation, sometimes of terror. These moments are marked by signs of the miraculous or the fantastic: afreets, magical citadels, dream crocodiles. Consider the moment in *Season of Migration to the North* when the narrator, having returned from England to his home village in Sudan, is jolted out of his newfound sense of comfort and belonging by the sound of English words, an English poem. The narrator is drinking with a friend of his and with a stranger, Mustafa Sa'eed, who came to the village and took up farming there while the narrator was in England. Suddenly the narrator hears Mustafa Sa'eed reciting English poetry "in a clear voice and with an impeccable accent":

*Those women of Flanders*

*Await the lost,*

*Await the lost who will never leave the harbor,*

*They await the lost whom the train will never bring... (14)*

The narrator does not identify the poet or the poem's title. The poem is "Antwerp," by Ford Madox Hueffer, who changed his name, after 1919, to Ford Madox Ford. It is a poem on the Belgian resistance to the German army during World War I, but Salih's character, Mustafa Sa'eed, quotes none of the lines associating the Belgians with the heroes of Greek and Norse

legend. Mustafa Sa'eed remembers the women of Flanders, Belgian refugees in England waiting for their dead. He recalls the moment when the poet zooms in, from the Great War with its echoes of mythological battles, to focus on Charing Cross Station. A particular place, a particular time: "This is Charing Cross Station, the hour's past one." Recited in Sudan, the poem creates a shift outward, a zoom in the opposite direction. The narrator is pulled out of his comfortable home, toward England, Flanders, invasions, refugees, world war, empire, the world. "Had the ground suddenly split open and revealed an afreet standing before me," the narrator tells us, "... I would not have been more terrified" (14).

Terror accompanies the narrator's realization that even his small village on the Nile is enmeshed in a planetary system. The emergence of English poetry in the village of Wad Hamid is deeply uncanny for the narrator, who has returned home after seven years of studying English poetry, and wishes to forget his time abroad, to slip seamlessly back into life in his village. Instead, he is confronted by this intrusion of English poetry, which, like a plane journey into the sky or an excavation under the earth, creates a vision, not just of the world as other, but of the world as more-than-one. And like those other views from elsewhere, the vision produced in this nightmarish moment insists on the mutual imbrication of that which national borders would separate. Its arrival is like that of the afreet, a sudden eruption of the alien out of known, familiar ground.

The foregoing paragraphs offer an example of the method of reading at work in this study. This approach is neither traditional close reading nor the "distant reading" proposed by Franco Moretti in "Conjectures on World Literature" (57). It is, rather, a scalar reading, one that attends to the shifts in scalar perspective characteristic of fantastic literature. This type of reading allows the reader to examine the process of world-creation which is fantasy's explicit goal.

Both close reading and distant reading have their uses, but they are geared toward disciplinary and conceptual fields that are smaller than one treated here, on the one hand, and larger on the other. Close reading, with its roots in philology, focuses attention on the extremely small area of the word, and has its home in the fields of comparative literature and area studies. The importance of these fields is not in question. World literature, however, needs to work in a somewhat larger domain if it is to have any import. Indeed, part of the aim of the new world literature—and of Gayatri Spivak’s coinage, “planetarity”—is precisely to unite area studies and comparative literature, to find a larger, common ground between them. This is the goal of Franco Moretti’s influential article “Conjectures on World Literature” (2000), in which he advocates “distant reading”: a mode that depends on reading in translation and relying on the work of experts. Although Moretti has backed away from his own proposal in recent years, the idea of distant reading remains useful, as it sheds light on both the potential and the possible limitations of an approach to world literature that would seek to account for all of the world’s literary production. Moretti’s call for scholars to read more of the world’s literatures has provided the impetus for new and important studies of circulation and reception. For the purposes of this study, however, the process of circulation and reception creates too large a field: studies based in this field reveal a great deal about publication and translation practices and the teaching and criticism of literature, but they have less to say about the worlds created within the text.

Rather than investigating the very small area of the word, or the very large area of the circulation and reception of texts, this study examines how texts mediate between the small and the large, or between word and world. This scalar mode of reading involves turning inward and outward at the same time: always into the language of the text at hand, and always outward in order to trace the contours of the world according to the text. The method parallels the process

that unfolds when English poetry is recited in the village of the narrator in *Season of Migration to the North*: the recited word instigates a sudden shift in perspective that makes the world perceptible as world.

Fantasy, which creates an alternate world, emphasizes *world* as an expressive category. As Martin Puchner has observed, “one of the ways in which literature... concerns itself with our world is by constructing alternatives to it” (11); such literature, he continues, is inherently “worldly,” thus demanding the attention of scholars of world literature (12). Puchner’s observation suggests an approach to world literature that begins with the world in the text, rather than the text in the world. My study employs this type of approach, focusing on fantasy as a genre with a particular spatial quality. One of the difficulties of using fantasy is that, like “world literature,” it is a various and unstable category, with meanings that apply to psychoanalysis and, colloquially, to falsehood, as well as to the study of genre. Even within genre studies, fantasy has a multifaceted character, with so many subsets that a narrow definition is impossible. For the purposes of this study, I employ a broad definition of fantasy as the expression of an invisible, emotional reality, rather than a visible and empirical one. This is a definition that is able to embrace all the meanings of the Arabic word *wahm*, a key word for Salih. *Wahm* (pl. *awhām*) appears in the English translations of Salih’s works as “illusion,” “mirage,” “disguise,” “lie,” “fabrication,” and “phantom” (Hassan 16); it proposes an alternate reality, and works, as Wail Hassan writes, to “undermine homogenized identities and pave the way for ones that are dialogically conceived—hybrid, interdependent, symbiotic, and mutually determining” (16). Hassan’s comment on individual identities in Salih’s work can also be applied to Salih’s expression of the identity of the world. The fantasy, “mirage” or “phantom” world exists in an

interdependent, symbiotic and mutually determining relationship with the world of material reality: it marks reality as hybrid, plural, locked in communion with alterity.

Fantasy, as the expression of an invisible and intangible reality, *is* and *is not* at the same time: it is, but out of place. This idea of being “out-of-place” has a deep resonance with postcolonial experience: Homi Bhabha, for example, describes the “unhomely,” his term for the Freudian uncanny, as “a paradigmatic colonial and post-colonial condition” (13). The idea of out-of-place connotes a disturbance in spatial terms. Fantasy resonates with planetarity as a spatial concept linked to nearness—the intimate feel of a local environment, the interior experience of the fantastic as a sense of strangeness—and distance: the hugeness of the planet with all its faraway regions, the unfathomable dimensions of the supernatural. Fantasy enables a view of the world from outside, while also privileging that perspective as the source of intimate, intensely experienced knowledge. The doubled experience expressed through the fantastic, which creates a sense of the world as both close and far, both deeply felt and incompletely known, is where I locate Salih’s planetary consciousness.

The crossing over into fantasy, which produces knowledge not obtainable by ordinary means, is analogous to the experience of engaging deeply with the other. Fantasy opens a second space, a double of the world. This unfolding of a second world expresses a sense of reality as fundamentally unstable: the number of possible doubles is infinite. The engagement with alterity, as figured in the experience of the fantastic, leads to recognition that the world is beyond human comprehension, and cannot be absolutely dominated or even fully known. It cannot be fully known, because it is always more than one, at the same time. Fantasy’s insistence on the existence of more than one space prompts a recognition of synchronicity, of the world as *more-than-one-at-once*. This recognition of simultaneous multiplicity can be jarring:

acknowledgement of other worlds is also acknowledgement of the world as other. The narrator of *Season*, after hearing the recitation of English poetry, feels “that we—the men grouped together in that room—were not a reality but merely some illusion” (14-15).

The experience of a world that must be recognized as too large and varied to grasp is similar, when refigured as a reading experience, to the “detached engagement” David Damrosch advocates in his approach to world literature. Gayatri Spivak is Damrosch’s most prominent and energetic sparring partner, opposed to his project in many ways; yet her concept of planetarity, when also framed in terms of the experience of reading, involves in its own way the combination of intimacy and distance, of powerful affect and awareness of the limits of one’s knowledge. Hers is a planet that we “inhabit . . . on loan.” In this dissertation, Tayeb Salih’s work is both an object of study, and a point of departure for the examination of fantasy as the expression of planetary consciousness: as that which gives voice to a sense of the world as near and far at the same time, more-than-one-at-once, intimate and distant, inhabited on loan.

Tayeb Salih was born in 1929 at Karmakol, close to al-Dabbah in northern Sudan. He studied at Gordon Memorial College (later Khartoum University) and worked briefly as a schoolteacher before leaving for the University of London at the age of twenty-four (Hassan 14). Salih spent most of his adult life outside Sudan: he worked for the BBC Arabic Service in London and the Ministry of Information in Qatar before moving to Paris, where he worked for UNESCO during the last decade of his life. He died in 2009, leaving a massive reputation in the Arabic literary world, a reputation largely based on *Season of Migration to the North*.

Salih’s other works have also received significant attention, but it was *Season* that electrified Arab readers and critics when it was published in Beirut in 1966. Salih explained the reaction to the novel by pointing out its reframing of the relationship between the Arab world

and the West: “I have redefined the so-called East/West relationship as essentially one of conflict, while it had previously been treated in romantic terms” (in Hassan x). Appearing shortly before the 1967 war with Israel, at a time when, Wail Hassan writes, “the contradictions of Arab discourse on modernity were reaching a crisis point” (x), the novel brought latent tensions to the surface. While it now appears to participate in a conversation with the novels of crisis that followed it, from Emile Habiby’s bitterly satirical *The Adventures of Sa’eed, the Pessoptimist* to Sonallah Ibrahim’s lyrical and despairing *The Smell of It*, it is important to remember that *Season* appeared on ground prepared by a very different set of novels. The “so-called East/West relationship” had been explored through depictions of affairs between Arab men and European women, but the treatment of these relationships was in all cases, as Salih asserts, romantic. There is no direct confrontation with the colonial past, no critique of the unevenness of global structures of power, in such forerunners to *Season of Migration to the North* as Tawfik al-Hakim’s *A Bird from the East*, Suhayl Idris’s *The Latin Quarter*, and Yahya Haqqi’s *The Lamp of Umm Hashim*.

The power of Salih’s work is attributed, among critics writing in Arabic, to both political and poetic force. The emphasis on the political in Arabic criticism is generally reserved for *Season*, while essays on the other works draw attention to folkloric and philosophical (particularly Sufi) themes; but the emphasis on Salih’s expressive gifts runs through the Arabic criticism of his work. Hassan Abshar al-Tayeb, in an essay entitled “Tayeb Salih: Novelist, Poet, Innovator,” asserts that Salih’s style is “closer to poetry than prose” (172); Muhammad Mahdi Mahjoub calls him a “magnificent poet” (*shā’ir dakhm*; in Khadr 300). Because of the importance of poetry, and particularly spoken poetry, in Salih’s work, exemplified in the power

of the sound of English poetry in Wad Hamid, I would like to spend some time discussing this understanding of Tayeb Salih's prose as "poetic."

Hassan Abshar al-Tayeb emphasizes Salih's ability to show "everything, unbounded," and links this faculty to poetic language (170). Salih's language, al-Tayeb explains, stimulates the imagination, prompts insight into the depths of the self, and uses the "partial snapshot" (*al-laqtah al-juz'īyah*) to indicate the whole, all of which are characteristic of poetic expression (170). Al-Tayeb continues:

[Salih's prose is] flooded with images, rich in light and shadow, full of inspiring sympathy, elegant descriptive expressions, and choice metaphors... Everything in it cries out with an excess of life, and everything in it aims at the unity and sustenance of its subject, and the presentation of its distances and depths. (170)

As an example of Salih's poetic prose, al-Tayeb cites a passage from *Bandarshah* (*Bandar Shāh*). The Arabic text reads:

كان القمر يبتسم بطريقة ما، وكان الضوء كأنه نبع لن يجف أبدا، وكانت أصوات الحياة  
في ود حامد متناسقة متماسكة تجعلك تحس بأن الموت معنى من معاني الحياة لا أكثر . كل  
شيء موجود وسيظل موجود . لن تنشب حرب ولن تسفك دما ... وسوف تلد النساء  
بلا لم والموتى سوف يدفنون بلا بكا .

(*Daw' al-Bayt* 61-2)

The English translation by Denys Johnson-Davies reads:

It was as though the moon were somehow smiling, and the light were a spring that would never dry up, and the sounds of life in Wad Hamid were harmonious and cohesive, giving

you the sensation that death was no more than another of life's meanings. Everything is and will continue to be. No war will break out, no blood will be spilt. Women will give birth without pain, the dead will be buried without weeping... (*Bandarshah* 38-9)

The smiling moon and the inexhaustible spring of light are immediately recognizable as poetic elements common in and beyond the Arabic tradition: personification on one hand, and metaphor on the other. A closer look at the Arabic text reveals the rhythmic parallel *mutanāsiqah mutamāsikah* (“harmonious and cohesive”), a use of similar sound patterns characteristic of Arabic poetry, whose harmony underscores the harmony of Wad Hamid’s voices. The repetition of the word *mawjūd* (“present”) is also a highly significant doubling, a declaration that adds to the musicality of the passage and also suggests an attempt to will into being the stability it describes—a stability thoroughly undermined by the events of the narrative. Finally, the passage ends with a pair of symmetrical, two-part sentences, which employ a form of *thunā’iyah* or dualism, a major feature of classical Arabic poetry. This dualism is expressed in the content of the words (break out/spilt, war/blood, birth/burial, pain/weeping), and in the symmetry between their sounds (*lan tanshab/lan tustfak, sawfa...bi-lā/sawfa...bi-lā*). The pairing of *two* of these sentences creates a doubled doubling that draws on Arabic traditions of eloquence and also emphasizes the urge toward duplication that informs the whole passage. In these rhythmic repetitions, it is easy to miss the fact that one of the matched pairs—birth/burial—is a pair of opposites. Embedded among matching pairs, birth/burial becomes an apparent match, creating, like the regular and ordered voices of Wad Hamid, the sense that death is only another form of life. This is a case of “legitimate magic” (*sihr ḥalāl*), one of the names of poetry (Irwin 2). It is also an expression of longing for a communal harmony that will extend rhythmically in a ceaseless repetition. In other words, it is a utopian vision, a fantasy.

In this passage, doubled language calls into being the perfect double of a fallen world. The effect is quite different from that created by Ford Madox Hueffer's "Antwerp," which thrusts the narrator of *Season of Migration to the North* into a space of nightmare. Yet both are cases of a sudden shift in perspective, examples of what Hassan calls the quintessentially "Salihian moment": a move "outside the boundaries of time and space" (73). My study investigates such moments in order to illuminate both Tayeb Salih's planetary vision, and the richness of fantasy as a point of departure for the study of world literature. The project takes up Homi Bhabha's proposition in *The Location of Culture*:

If we are seeking a "worlding" of literature, then perhaps it lies in a critical act that attempts to grasp the sleight of hand with which literature conjures with historical specificity, using the medium of psychic uncertainty, aesthetic distancing, or the obscure signs of the spirit-world, the sublime and the subliminal. (17)

Following Dimock, one might call this a study of "nonstandard space." Dimock means physical, planetary space, as opposed to the mapped and bordered space of the nation. Literary fantasy opens a different type of nonstandard space, one with a degree of independence not only from the nation, but from the space of empirical reality. The connection between fantasy and planetarity may not be obvious, as fantasy treats the nonreal, while planetarity is meant to invoke the inescapably real, the basic common denominator of life on this planet. Yet the planet cannot be seen whole by any of its inhabitants; its size renders it invisible. This invisibility is a defining characteristic of planetarity, and an important one, as it helps preserve an awareness of alterity. Invisibility is also, of course, a defining characteristic of global systems without planetarity's positive connotations: the flow of global capital, for example, or the incremental advance of environmental degradation. Fantasy, as a mode that operates through synchronicity, through the

construction of nonstandard space, is a highly effective means of connecting locality and system: of expressing small-scale and large-scale realities in the same instant. This synchronicity works through reference to the visible and the invisible, the visible indicating the locality and the invisible the system: planet, globe, cosmos, world. The fantastic shift into nonstandard space makes the invisible system visible. Moreover, fantasy's doubled vision is able to represent the large *in* the small, compressing history into a single instant, and the terrors of global modernity into the psyche of a single individual. To investigate performances of this "sleight of hand" is indeed, as Homi Bhabha suggests, to "world" literature.

Chapter Two of this dissertation provides an overview of critical approaches to fantasy, and a deeper exploration of the three main types of commentary on fantasy emphasized in this study: Sufi theories of the imagination, the uncanny, and magical realism. Chapter Three investigates the function and significance of Sufi discourse in Salih's novella *The Wedding of Zein*, focusing on the construction of a Sufi-influenced utopia, the desired double of the village of Wad Hamid. Like the world called up by the doubled and doubling language in the passage from *Bandarshah* cited above, the alternate reality in *The Wedding of Zein* is a perfect, unified world, both a product and a source of hope.

Chapter Four treats *Season of Migration to the North*, in which fantasy articulates a logic of haunting rather than utopian desire. This introduction has touched on Freud's theory of the uncanny in relation to *Season of Migration to the North*; Chapter Four follows this thread, showing how the uncanny and two related concepts, abjection and the postcolonial Gothic, illuminate the relationship between individual psyche and the modern world-system. Chapter Five approaches the pair of linked novels that together make up Salih's final work, *Bandarshah*, through the epic, particularly the north African folk epic *Sīrat Banī Hilāl*. My discussion of the

kinship between the epic and the novel as read through *Bandarshah* draws attention to the authority claimed by both genres: the epic, as the carrier of a people's heroic past, demands special reverence, while the novel, though generally making less emphatic truth-claims than the epic, stands at the center of discussions of national literature, and is associated with the emergence of the modern nation-state. *Bandarshah's* exploration of the subject of authority is also an exploration of authoritative literary forms. The fearsome marvelous reality that bursts through the narrative at intervals comments on the process by which authority becomes tyranny, focusing attention on how discursive traditions shape the world.

Chapter Six provides a demonstration of how the linked concepts of fantasy and planetarity can be used to approach Arabic and African literature, offering readings of three works: Ibrahim al-Koni's *The Bleeding of the Stone* (Libya, 1990) Bessie Head's *A Question of Power* (Botswana, 1973), and Ben Okri's *The Famished Road* cycle (Nigeria: 1991, 1993, 1998). All three works use fantasy to overcome the problem of scale, in a way that prompts new readings of the global. *The Bleeding of the Stone* engages with Sufi discourse in a manner that picks up and expands on some of the threads in *The Wedding of Zein*, offering a vision of a world that unites three elements: human beings, animals, and the desert. For al-Koni, the use of fantasy provides a way to imagine a utopia that rejects geopolitical conceptions of place; his call to respect and protect space makes the novel a rich site for exploring both ecocritical approaches to literature and human-nonhuman relationality. In Bessie Head's *A Question of Power*, uncanny doubling juxtaposes the inner and outer realities of Head's main character, Elizabeth. The entanglement of racial and gender-based oppressions, a key concern of *Season of Migration to the North*, is asserted in *A Question of Power* through the eyes of a female protagonist of mixed race. Abjection and bodily disfigurement are also shown to play a role in both novels, yielding a

vision of global modernity as a world of cruel contacts and devastating splits. Finally, I read Ben Okri's cycle *The Famished Road* (1991), *Songs of Enchantment* (1993), and *Infinite Riches* (1998), as an epic without an end, a struggle between contradictory yet equally balanced worlds. Like *Bandarshah*, Okri's trilogy can be read as a figure for the postcolonial interregnum, an unending battle between the old and the new that prevents time itself from being born. Chapter Seven, this study's concluding chapter, addresses the criticism of fantasy as an apolitical mode, a criticism that might also be applied to the concept of planetarity, and uses the texts treated in the previous chapters to argue for the necessity of both fantasy and planetarity as important ways of conceptualizing land, language, and the relationship between them. Throughout the project, I am guided by the primary texts, and in particular by Tayeb Salih's generous and critical planetary consciousness, which offers a way of mediating between the poles of *near* and *far*, in the in-between zone where the possibility of a world literature takes shape.

## Chapter Two

### On Fantasy Worlds

This study investigates how the construction of fantastic space in literature expresses a theory of “world.” In this chapter, I explain how “fantasy” is understood in the context of this study, and offer some preliminary reflections on how fantasy enables planetary thinking.

The study of fantastic literature is notorious for producing an overabundance of terms, from romance and the Gothic to magical realism, urban fantasy, cyberpunk and slipstream. These terms are usually described as genres or subgenres. The large and ever-increasing number of such terms, which often begin as marketing categories before entering critical discourse, is enough to make the nature of something called “fantasy” difficult to describe. The problem becomes even more complicated when we consider that some critics understand fantasy not as a genre, but as an impulse (Hume) or a mode (Frye, Jameson, Hayot).<sup>3</sup> This project employs the broad term “fantasy” in order to develop an approach that makes room for comparison among a wide variety of texts, whether these texts can be situated within a genre, such as science fiction, or involve fantastic elements in a manner better expressed as an “impulse.” Fantasy, in this study, signifies a “family resemblance” in Ludwig Wittgenstein’s sense. In the *Philosophical Investigations*, Wittgenstein uses the example of games, and describes how the activities of tennis, chess and ring-a-ring-a-roses share a “family resemblance” despite their obvious differences (31-32). Wittgenstein points out that although we recognize a variety of activities as games, there is no single defining characteristic common to all games. What Wittgenstein

---

<sup>3</sup> Kathryn Hume, *Fantasy and Mimesis: Responses to Reality in Western Literature*. New York: Methuen, 1984. Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957. Fredric Jameson, "Magical Narratives: Romance As Genre." *New Literary History*. 7.1 (1975): 135-163. Eric Hayot, *On Literary Worlds*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012.

emphasizes through this example is an identity based on affinity rather than sameness. The object of this study is not to categorize certain works as fantasy based on a fixed set of characteristics, but to illustrate the affinity between texts that employ fantastic elements to articulate visions of the world.

Paul Kincaid, who works in science fiction studies, and Wai Chee Dimock, whose area is American studies, both demonstrate the usefulness of Wittgenstein's concept to the study of genre. Kincaid uses Wittgenstein's idea of family resemblance to discuss science fiction, arguing that science fiction constitutes a "web of resemblances" rather than a genre with a fixed identity. Kincaid picks up Wittgenstein's metaphor of a "thread" that is made by spinning "fibre on fibre" (Wittgenstein 32) to describe genre as a braid, "a series of strands, none of which would stand as a genre or even a sub-genre in their own right but which, braided together in any of a possibly infinite number of combinations, make what we have come to recognize as science fiction" (417). The notion of family resemblance allows Kincaid to pull away from prescriptive approaches in science fiction criticism—the most influential expressed in Darko Suvin's *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction* (1978)—toward a broader perspective that resists attempts at a fixed definition. "Any one of the threads," he writes, "might be removed from the braid and it would still be science fiction. The threads that make up the braid might be separated and then re-wound to make two separate braids, both of which are science fiction. But there is not one single thread that can be removed and which in itself is science fiction" (417). The image of a braid or web in which no single strand defines the essence of the whole represents the understanding of fantasy at work in this study.

Kincaid's discussion emphasizes one useful aspect of Wittgenstein's concept of family resemblance, which is that it precludes the elevation of a single text to the status of a fully

representative example, against which all others must be measured before admission into a particular category. The other aspect of Wittgenstein's concept with significant bearing on this study is the way it opens up space for comparison. Wai Chee Dimock employs the notion of kinship in her approach to literary genres, and demonstrates how attention to the resemblance between the novel and the epic enables new readings of American literature. Dimock stresses the flexibility of the notion of kinship in terms of scale:

Family resemblance is multilocation, multiplatform, and multidimension. Relatives might resemble one another in broad strokes, in shape and size; they might also resemble one another in some small detail, such as a stylistic tic. Kinship is not limited to one feature, one modality, or one scale. (74)

The flexibility of the kinship model increases opportunities for comparison by allowing one to trace resemblance along a particular thread, even though the feature being traced may be striking in one example and shadowy in another. When this study compares Salih's *Bandarshah*, in which a fantasy world intrudes on the protagonist through dreams and visions, with Ben Okri's trilogy, in which the fantastic second world blends almost seamlessly with the world of history, the idea of family resemblance is at work.

The application of the concept of kinship to literary forms is not without its problems. Gayatri Spivak, in her critique of Wai Chee Dimock, expresses concern about the use of "family romance" to describe relationships between texts, and proposes Édouard Glissant's notion of "creolity" as a more open type of totality, less tied to gendered notions of mother, father, sons and daughters (Spivak 449). However, the "creole," like kinship, is a biological metaphor, and cannot be considered free of gendered associations. In addition, the kinship metaphor suggests the complexity of the human genome rather than a crude "father plus mother" notion of

hybridity. This constantly-changing complexity is, as much as Glissant's "creolity," an "open totality" (Glissant 190). The idea of kinship provides an effective framework for this study, in which the goal is not to categorize on the basis of genre, but to isolate a particular feature of the texts under consideration, always assuming that these texts possess many other features which locate them in a variety of other webs of resemblance.

The notion of kinship is helpful not only in comparing literary texts, but in apprehending the critical work that has been done on fantasy. The idea of fantasy as an expression of planetary space rather than mapped political entity is supported by the writings of critics concerned with fantasy, science fiction and romance, all of whom, despite their different ways of conceptualizing the objects of their study, are preoccupied with the idea of space. It is in this concern with space that we can most easily discern a family resemblance among critical works on fantasy. For Mikhail Bakhtin, the adventure chronotope, exemplified in Greek romance, depends on the portrayal of action in an abstract expanse of space (*Dialogic* 99). Adventure requires a good deal of space: the hero crosses vast seas, pursues his beloved into strange lands, suffers exile and captivity, and so on; but adventure space is an "alien world" in which everything is foreign, and nothing reflects the author's native land (101). Northrop Frye, concerned with romance as a mode rather than a genre, also stresses the importance of space, and describes a hero who "is analogous to the mythical Messiah or deliverer who comes from an upper world," while his enemy "is analogous to the demonic powers of a lower world" (187-8). At stake is a third realm: "our world, which is in the middle" (187-8). While Frye approaches romance through myth, and particularly through the mythologized cycles of nature, his analysis shares with Bakhtin's the emphasis on space free of national associations, space which is no one's "native land." The romantic mode for Frye expresses the idea of a human world whose fate is determined by

spiritual powers, one of which is nature. Neither of these forms of nonhuman power—the power of God, the power of the natural world—can be limited to a particular native land alone. They are concepts that can only be thought large, on the scale of the world, and this is precisely why they are, in a sense, ahistorical and abstract, like the mystical realms of Frye’s romantic mode, and the alien realms traversed by the romantic hero in Bakhtin’s adventure chronotope. The discussion of Salih’s *The Wedding of Zein* and Ibrahim al-Koni’s *The Bleeding of the Stone* in this study will show how the natural and the spiritual provide ways of expressing planetary consciousness: a way of thinking on the scale of the world, which must be larger than human history.

Planetary, as formulated by Spivak, has two seemingly contradictory parts: the unknowable, and the experienced. Fantasy, too, works in these two areas, and connects them. As the non-human is an important element of fantasy, taking form as gods, natural forces, and other powers, so too the realm of human experience figures largely in fantastic texts. The spaces of romance, so readily adapted to the staging of divine battles or the expression of the cycles of nature, are equally well-suited to the depiction of psychological events, particularly extreme emotions and extraordinary experiences for which the realist mode seems inadequate. Fairy tales, for example, demonstrate the psychological expressivity of folk traditions, and often refer symbolically to rituals (Propp 114). In tales that dramatize rites of passage, the role of space, as distinct from place, is definitive. Arnold van Gennep uses the terms separation, margin (or *limen*) and aggregation to describe the three stages of rites of passage, terms which signal the workings of a spatial imaginary, in which the significance of the various spaces lies not in any quality unique to them, but in their relationship to one another (in Turner, *The Forest of Symbols*, 94). This “spatial symbolism,” as Victor Turner terms it in his work on liminality and rites of

passage, connotes a transition in social status, usually from child to adult (*Ritual* 25). Rites of passage often include a spatial dimension, “a geographical movement from one place to another” which “may take the form of a mere opening of doors or the literal crossing of a threshold which separates two distinct areas” (25). While rites of passage are associated with the transition from childhood to adulthood and other life crises, their application is broader: they “may accompany any change from one state to another, as when a whole tribe goes to war, or when it attests the passage from scarcity to plenty by performing a first-fruits or a harvest festival” (*Forest* 94-5). In fantasy, individual and social bodies are often conflated, either through metonymy, in which the hero represents the whole, as the ailing Fisher King embodies the dying land in the Grail legend, or through externalization, as when, in the *Saga of the Volsungs*, individual greed takes the form of a dragon that threatens the whole community. The lines between the hero and the world become blurred; the salvation of one is the salvation of both. Modern fantasy makes use of this flexible symbolism in a variety of narratives combining the *Bildungsroman* with the story of a threatened world: one example is Ursula K. LeGuin’s *A Wizard of Earthsea* (1968), in which a young man’s pride releases a demon which must be subdued both for the protection of others, and for the full development and successful socialization of the hero. Such narratives emphasize the period of being away from home, tested, and subjected to marvelous or terrifying experiences. Geographical movement into foreign territory expresses social and psychological liminality. Lucie Armitt, in her discussion of modern fantasy, concludes that “[fantasy’s] determining sense of the ‘outside-of-place’ confirms what we already suspect: it is the spatial that determines the realm of textual dynamics, particularly in the context of fantasy forms” (5). In Salih’s novels, liminality plays a key role: the shift between worlds creates opportunities for subversion and transformation, both for Zein, the grotesque genius and perpetual adolescent, and

for Meheimeed, the protagonist of *Season of Migration to the North* and *Bandarshah*, who strives to move from the strange, liminal “outside-of-place” into a community imagined afresh.

Though Frye and Bakhtin present similar analyses of romantic space, they differ in the way they apprehend the relationship of the hero to that space. For Frye, the hero is deeply involved in his divided world: he represents the upper world, and battles the powers of the lower. The adventurer of Bakhtin’s chronotope does not struggle with the alien world: he is not affected by it, nor does he change it in any way. The world is “abstract-alien” for the hero, permanently estranged (*Dialogic* 101). This type of adventure narrative provided an important template for modern fantasy and science fiction (Rieder 1). John Rieder locates the shift from the fantastic travel narrative to modern science fiction in the transformation of the idea of world-space instigated by the Copernican revolution (2), which infused the empty space of the adventure chronotope with the tropes of narratives of exploration. The “adventure strain of the lost-race motif” is particularly significant for Rieder:

It presents us with a plethora of widely repeated elements, including the map or document that initiates the expedition, the perilous journey to a nearly inaccessible destination, and a strictly circumscribed set of locations for the lost land itself (the underground world, the polar paradise, the isolated island, plateau, or valley). (22)

Rieder traces how the adventure narratives of early romances such as *The Odyssey*, in which the world is depicted as a series of alien realms, were developed into modern adventure fiction and science fiction. He argues persuasively that the key to the transformation is colonialism: the centrality of the map, the lost race, and the lure of treasure are marks of a genre “fundamentally grounded in and expressive of an anonymous, collective, colonialist, and imperialist ideology” (22). All of these elements stand out significantly in Joseph Conrad’s colonial romance, *Heart of*

*Darkness*: the map with its empty spaces, the “perilous journey to a nearly inaccessible destination,” the depiction of a race “lost” to history. The emptiness of Marlowe’s map, the namelessness of the regions he traverses, emphasizes the significance of space rather than place to the narrative, the central role played by an alien world that combines the foreignness described by Bakhtin with Frye’s “demonic powers of a lower world.” In the colonial adventure story or Darwinism-inspired “lost race” tale of early science fiction, the blankness of unnamed spaces becomes a way of signifying the lack of human identity, of human language, ascribed to colonized space. When Salih rewrites Conrad, he reverses the direction of colonial conquest, but retains the crucial emptiness of the alien destination, so that the avenging counter-colonizer, Mustafa Sa’eed, sets out on a migration to an abstract, de-particularized “north.”

This use of abstract space, rather than place, reveals a particular orientation toward the world: the world is alien, the other of the hero. Yet both *Heart of Darkness* and *Season of Migration to the North* are explicitly concerned with alien worlds *within* as well as without; indeed, in each case, what is really at stake is the psyche of the hero, whose tortured state takes external form in the violent events of the narrative. The psychological reading returns us to the question of emotional experience. This type of experience does not always, as in narratives that work with the rite of passage, conclude with the “happily ever after” of the fairy tale. Other types of narrative use the fantastic sense of “outside-of-place” to different purposes. Gothic fiction, for example, often uses fantasy to destabilize post-enlightenment ideas of rational subjectivity, by figuring emotion as a realm to be explored, full of the danger of the repressed (Smith and Hughes 1). The notion of the uncanny (*das Unheimlich*), from Sigmund Freud’s essay on the subject, has been so influential in Gothic criticism partly because the uncanny arises from a blurring of the familiar and the unfamiliar, and therefore provides a powerful tool for the subversion of the

binaries constructed by rationalist discourse. The uncanny terrifies precisely because of its intimate link with its own opposite, the homely and familiar, or *Heimlich* (Freud 142). Smith and Hughes observe that “[t]his conflation of opposites (which occurs because the home is also the place of dangerous ‘private’ secrets) enables a Gothic collapse between living/dead, human/non-human, and self/other” (3). The preoccupation with the dangers of the home results in a concentration of action in strictly circumscribed spaces, such as the castle, an interior space fraught with violence and haunting which, for Montague Summers, functions as the central “character” of the Gothic novel (410-11). As a mode that challenges social structures by appearing to celebrate “the irrational, the outlawed and the socially and culturally dispossessed” (Smith and Hughes 1), the Gothic makes itself available as a tool for the critique of both patriarchy and imperialism.<sup>4</sup> Critics working in this field have coined terms such as “Female Gothic,” “Empire Gothic,” and “postcolonial Gothic” in order to focus attention on various functions of Gothic narrative. Carol Margaret Davison reads both Female Gothic and Empire Gothic through the “contested, haunted” space of the manor house, which figures in works such as Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre* as a site for articulating “the complex, often vexed relationship between home and empire” (137). In postcolonial texts, the haunted house becomes, not only a space of malign family drama, to which the sins of the fathers perpetually return (Davison 138), but also, as David Punter explains, the space of history itself:

We might refer to [the Gothic], then, as history written according to a certain logic: a logic of the phantom, the revenant, a logic of haunting, and it is here that the connection with the postcolonial comes most clearly into view. The very structure of the term

---

<sup>4</sup> The caution in this phrasing (“appearing to celebrate”) derives from the ambiguity of Gothic fiction, which often concludes by laying its ghosts firmly to rest, and arguably reifies the structures it presumes to critique. See Dave Clayton, “Is Fantastic Literature Subversive?” in George E. Slusser and Jean P. Barricelli, *Genre at the Crossroads: The Challenge of Fantasy: a Collection of Essays*. Riverside, CA: Xenos, 2003.

‘postcolonial’ itself, its apparent insistence on a time ‘after,’ on an ‘aftermath,’ exposes itself precisely to the threat of return, falls under the sign of repetition... The past, on this view of history, is right in our midst. (193)

The logic of haunting works against resolution, against the “happily ever after” of the fairy tale, against the successful completion of the rite of passage. The uncanny, with its disturbing mirrors and repetitions, expresses a view of the world as perpetually haunted by its double. Salih’s *Season of Migration to the North* lends itself to a postcolonial Gothic reading through the antagonism between the homely world the narrator of the novel wishes to embrace, and the ghostly world of conflicting emotions into which he constantly plunges: a tension that posits the “unhomely,” to use Homi Bhabha’s phrasing, as “a paradigmatic colonial and post-colonial condition” (Bhabha 13).

Two different types of world relationship are at work here: the relationship of desire, which figures in *The Wedding of Zein*, in which the human world is juxtaposed against a sacred world that represents the highest possibility for its becoming; and the relationship of haunting, prominent in *Season of Migration to the North*, in which the world is made unhomely and unlivable through the corrosive presence of the ghostly realm of historical trauma. These are two very different world views: utopian on the one hand, uncanny on the other. In each case, a productive tension exists between the small and the large, an energy resulting from longing or fear: in *The Wedding of Zein*, the village of Wad Hamid is unified and renewed in the moment when that small community is revealed as the center of the cosmos, becoming fully itself and fully the world; in *Season of Migration to the North*, Wad Hamid is haunted by the wider world, by a violent and unequal world-system. In a different type of fantasy, one with particular significance for postcolonial literatures, opposing worlds are constructed only to be blended

within the text. This is the defining characteristic of magical realism, a subgenre that strives to unify the local and the global.

Magical realism is strongly associated with Latin American fiction. However, since the publication of Lois Parkinson Zamora and Wendy B. Faris's groundbreaking anthology, *Magical Realism: Theory, History, Community* (1995), criticism using the concept has become global in scope. The works of Ben Okri and Ibrahim al-Koni, two of the three authors considered in the comparative portion of this study, are often approached through the lens of magical realism. These works share with the novels of key Latin American figures, such as Alejo Carpentier and Gabriel García Márquez, the proposal and subsequent blending of apparently incompatible worlds. Of the varieties of fantasy under discussion here, magical realism is thus the type that most explicitly advances a view of the world as more-than-one-at-once. "Magical realism," Zamora and Faris write, "often facilitates the fusion, or coexistence, of possible worlds, spaces, systems that would be irreconcilable in other modes of fiction" (6). Note, again, the emphasis on the importance of space, and on space as double or multiple. "Think of it as copresence," Rawdon Wilson suggests in his essay on magical realism, "as duality and mutual tolerance, as different geometries at work constructing a double space" (210). For Wilson, this "dual worldhood" (or even "plural worldhood") emerges through a cooperation between the different worlds in the service of "what fiction does best: imagine worldhood and explore the possibilities of its variousness" (226). For other critics, the relationship between the worlds of magical realism is less amiable. Stephen Slemon, for example, attributes the entanglement of the two worlds not to cooperation, but to a struggle between adversaries of equal strength:

In the language of narration in a magic realist text, a battle between two oppositional systems takes place, each working toward the creation of a different kind of fictional

world from the other. Since the ground rules of these two worlds are incompatible, neither one can fully come into being, and each remains suspended, locked in a continuous dialectic with the “other,” a situation which creates disjunction within each of the separate discursive systems, rending them with gaps, absences, and silences. (408)

In *Magical Realism and the Postcolonial Novel: Between Faith and Irreverence*, Christopher Warnes describes magical realism as either cooperation or combat, depending on the text. He divides magical realist texts into two types: “faith-based” texts, and “irreverent” texts. He also terms the latter group “discursive” because of the way these texts assert the dependence of any version of reality on discourse (13). Warnes explains that “[w]hile faith-based approaches utilize the magical in order to expand and enrich already-existing conceptions of the real, discursive magical realism deliberately elevates the non-real to the status of the real in order to cast the epistemological status of both into doubt” (14). Warnes’s approach resembles that employed in this study in that he investigates, not just the properties of the two worlds, but the relationship between them. However, Warnes proposes that all magical realist texts can be put in one or the other category, while this project focuses on certain types of world view with the understanding that many other types exist. While Warnes’s schema is too confining for general application, his analysis is helpful to my readings of the different relationships between oppositional systems in the works of Tayeb Salih, Ibrahim al-Koni, and Ben Okri. Warnes’s work usefully emphasizes both the doubleness of space in magical realist texts, and the function of textual space as the arena in which these realms collide and merge.

The description of magical realism as the meeting of opposing systems of equal power echoes the description of another type of fantasy: the fantastic, discussed in one of the most influential texts on fantasy, Tzvetan Todorov’s *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a*

*Literary Genre.* Of all the critical works on fantasy, it is Todorov's text that exerts an influence broad and pervasive enough to be called global. The discussion that follows shows the relevance of Todorov's text to this study, and considers the interest it holds for critics working on fantastic literature in Arabic.

Todorov's concept of the fantastic is centered on the idea of hesitation: the fantastic forces the reader to hesitate between two possible explanations for the events of the narrative, one of them natural and the other supernatural (25). Among his examples, Todorov cites as "remarkable" Henry James's *The Turn of the Screw*, which "does not permit us to determine finally whether ghosts haunt the old estate, or whether we are confronted by the hallucinations of a hysterical governess" (43). The fantastic questions the idea of a singular world operating according to comprehensible laws, by proposing two different theories of the world at the same time. In each of these competing world views, events are explained according to a unique set of possibilities. By making these two world views mutually exclusive, and yet keeping them in play at the same time, the fantastic questions the validity of the opposition between the real and the unreal (167). Hesitation is key here: for a text to fit Todorov's concept of the "pure fantastic," the tension between the two proposed world views must never be resolved. If the supernatural explanation prevails, the text enters the territory of the marvelous; if the natural explanation wins out, the events cease to be fantastic and become instead merely "uncanny" (25). The fantastic, then, is not only a genre figured spatially, as a battleground between two opposing possible worlds, but is also described as existing, itself, in a space between two genres, the marvelous and the uncanny. This space is so small that in Todorov's diagram it takes the shape, not of a box, like the uncanny and the marvelous, but of a thin line between the two. "As far as Todorov is concerned," Lucie Armitt writes, "whereas the marvelous and the uncanny might be perceived as

spatial enclosures, the realm of the fantastic ... demarcates frontier territory” (32). A liminal genre, the fantastic asserts the doubleness of the world by remaining in an “in-between” which must be between two things. “Like the ghost which is neither dead nor alive,” Rosemary Jackson observes, “the fantastic is a spectral presence, suspended between being and nothingness” (20).

In Todorov’s work, the relationship between these two worlds is thoroughly antagonistic: the fantastic exists as a genre because the two world views cannot both be true. For Todorov, this conflict between the natural and the supernatural is a way of intensifying the text’s mimetic power: “the literature of the fantastic posits the majority of the text as belonging to reality—or, more specifically, as provoked by reality, like a name given to a pre-existing thing” (168). This is only one way of conceptualizing the relationship between two worlds. Todorov considers Kafka’s work as part of a new, twentieth-century way of treating the supernatural, one characterized by “adaptation” rather than hesitation (171). Kafka transcends the genre of the fantastic through a creative combination of apparently incompatible realms—a description similar to that which critics attach to magical realism, as described above. The chapters on Salih’s works will illuminate two further ways of framing the relationship between standard and nonstandard space: desire and haunting. Before discussing these relationship types further, it is important to consider how critics writing in Arabic have engaged Todorov’s concept of the fantastic, and in particular the work of Lu’ayy ‘Alī Khalīl, whose discussion of miracles underlies my chapter on *The Wedding of Zein*.

Critical work on fantasy in Arabic uses the terms *al-khurāfah* (fable, superstition, and sometimes myth), *al-uṣṭūrah* (myth), *al-adab al-‘ajā’ibī* (fantasy, literature of the fantastic) and occasionally *al-adab al-gharā’ibī* (uncanny literature). The use of the first two terms signals an interest in myth and folklore. Most often, in contemporary literary studies, critics investigating

*al-khurāfah* and *al-uṣṭūrah* are concerned to illuminate the links between modern Arabic literature and particular folk traditions: Sanaa Kamil Shaalan explains the general usage by making a distinction between *al-khurāfah* as a traditional folk genre and *al-adab al-‘ajā’ibī* and *al-adab al-gharā’ibī* as modern and experimental genres (10). The term *al-adab al-‘ajā’ibī* is of most interest here, since the work that uses this term tends toward analysis of fantastic elements in texts. The term *al-adab al-gharā’ibī* is subordinate to *al-adab al-‘ajā’ibī*, as it expresses Todorov’s notion of the uncanny, and is used to distinguish the uncanny from the Todorovian fantastic which is the primary concern of these critics.<sup>5</sup> Critics discussing *al-adab al-‘ajā’ibī* are interested in testing the usefulness of Todorov’s concept of the fantastic for the study of the literatures of the Arab world. Husayn ‘Allām, for instance, moves from a discussion of Todorov’s fantastic to an analysis of Tahar ben Jelloun’s *La Nuit Sacrée* as a fantastic text in *Al-‘ajā’ibī fī al-adab: min manzūr shi ‘rīyat al-sard*. In other cases, critics extend or expand Todorov’s concept. Kamal Abu Deeb finds Todorov’s definition of the fantastic too narrow, and proposes an approach that opens the category of *al-adab al-‘ajā’ibī* to all works engaging “the realm of the marvelous, the wonderful, the amazing” (8). In particular, Abu Deeb takes exception to Todorov’s placement of works from Arabic traditions, such as *A Thousand and One Nights*, in the category of the marvelous rather than the fantastic. Abu Deeb begins from the concept of *al-wahm* as used by the 3<sup>rd</sup>/9<sup>th</sup> century critic Abd al-Qahir al-Jurjani, for whom *al-wahm* signifies anything that is not, or is not yet, “part of human experience on the concrete level” (Abu Deeb 13). In adopting this definition of *al-wahm* for his definition of *al-adab al-‘ajā’ibī*, Abu Deeb shifts the position of Todorov’s opposing worlds. While Todorov places both of these worlds within the text, Abu Deeb opposes the world of *al-adab al-‘ajā’ibī* to an idea of “concrete”

---

<sup>5</sup> Kamal Abu Deeb, who coined the terms *al-adab al-‘ajā’ibī* and *al-adab al-gharā’ibī* for use in his Arabic translation of Edward Said’s *Orientalism*, used them interchangeably at first, but makes a distinction between them in his later work (Abu Deeb 9).

human experience. Within this framework, Todorov's distinction between the marvelous and the fantastic dissolves, as both types of literature oppose the idea of a single empirical reality. Abu Deeb's approach, which resembles the kinship model in some ways, can be seen as an attempt to detach the term *al-adab al-'ajā'ibī* from Todorov's fantastic, inviting critical explorations that engage fantasy in Arabic literature on its own terms, rather than efforts to make Arabic texts fit Todorov's concept.

A different type of expansion on Todorov takes place in the work of Lu'ayy 'Alī Khalīl, who applies the concept of the fantastic to hagiographies. Khalīl focuses on the reading experience, as distinct from the position of the writers of these hagiographies, for whom the miracles related in the texts were most likely not fantasy, but history. Khalīl's study enters into the important problematic of the relationship between fantasy and religious belief. He begins by drawing a distinction between scripture—in this case, the Qur'an and hadith traditions—and the literature that proliferates around them. His primary example is the literature of *mi'rāj* in Arabic and especially Sufi tradition. *Mi'rāj* literature is a body of work which grew up around references in the Qur'an to the Prophet Muhammad's "Night Journey," a miraculous journey on which the prophet was transported first from Mecca to Jerusalem, and then to heaven. The first portion of the journey, known as *al-isrā'*, is referred to in Surah 17 (*al-Isrā'*) in the Qur'an: "Exalted is He who took His Servant by night from al-Masjid al-Haram to al-Masjid al-Aqsa, whose surroundings We have blessed, to show him of Our signs. Indeed, He is the Hearing, the Seeing" (Qur'an 17:1). "Al-Masjid al-Haram," or the Sacred Mosque, is in Mecca; "al-Masjid al-Aqsa" is in Jerusalem, and its distance from Mecca is underscored in its name: "the Farthest Mosque." The *mi'rāj*—literally, "ladder"—portion of Muhammad's journey consists of a

journey to heaven. Muslim scholars locate a reference to the *mi'rāj* in Surah 53 (al-Najm) in the Qur'an:

And he certainly saw him in another descent,  
 At the Lote-tree of the Utmost Boundary  
 Near it is the Garden of Refuge  
 When there covered the Lote Tree that which covered [it]  
 The sight [of the Prophet] did not swerve, nor did it transgress [its limit].  
 He certainly saw of the greatest signs of his Lord. (Qur'an 53: 13-18)

The "Lote Tree" reference is to a holy tree in the seventh heaven, which even the angel Gabriel, Muhammad's guide on the Night Journey, is not permitted to pass.

Khalīl does not consider these verses on the Night Journey or the hadith traditions, which provide more details on the miracle, fantastic in themselves. Nor does he oppose a world in which miracles are possible to a realm of "concrete" human experience, in the manner of Abu Deeb. For Khalīl, the fantastic enters in the production of other accounts of the Night Journey not acknowledged as true by the religious establishment, works that exist "on the border of reality" (*'ala ḥāfiṭ al-ḥaqīqah*) (7). He applies Todorov's notion of hesitation to these texts, pointing out that while a believing Muslim reader accepts the miracles recounted in the Qur'an and hadith traditions, and therefore espouses a world view that admits of miracles, there is still hesitation around non-scriptural literature of *mi'rāj* (30). The reader hesitates between an orthodox world view, in which accounts of miracles unconfirmed by tradition are regarded as false, and a world view in which the miracles recounted in the text are part of history. Here, as with Todorov's hesitation, the two worlds are mutually exclusive.

Todorov's two worlds, as noted above, are both textual. Abu Deeb's approach concerns one textual world, and a second that is extra-textual, the world of human experience. Khalīl opposes two possible worlds of human experience: one in which miracle literature is history, and one in which it is fiction. *Mi'rāj* literature thus brings together "a system and the departure from it" (44). Khalīl's object, he writes, is "not... an examination of how certain texts express an understanding of the fantastic per se, but an examination of that understanding itself" (8). He is concerned to show how this understanding of the fantastic, characterized by a mixture of skepticism and openness to the possibility of supernatural events, is deeply entrenched in Arab and Islamic culture. Qur'an and hadith traditions of *mi'rāj*, and the many retellings and embellishments built on them, "overwhelmed the popular imagination" in the early Islamic centuries, leading to the development of fantasies such as Ibn Shuhayd's *Risālat al-tawābi' wa al-zawābi'* (*Treatise of Familiar Spirits and Demons*) and al-Ma'arrī's *Risālat al-ghufrān* (*The Epistle of Forgiveness*) (19). This "understanding of the fantastic," according to Khalīl, gave Arab/Islamic culture a special role in the creation of fantastic literature, which explains why the scholarship of critics of the fantastic such as Todorov rests on "eastern texts," such as *A Thousand and One Nights*, or texts with an "eastern quality," such as *The Manuscript Found in Saragossa* (7).

There is room for argument about the uniqueness of the understanding of the fantastic in Arab/Islamic culture: miracle tales inspired by, but not accepted as, orthodox literature, are certainly a feature of Christian and Jewish traditions, at least. Khalīl's claim is useful, however, in that it points to the richness of religious traditions as a starting point for the development of fantasy, and the manner in which accounts of miracles accepted as historical lead to the creation of new stories, not considered religious texts in themselves, yet retaining a flavor of the

traditions that inspired them. Examples of this type of literature, drawn together through a web of resemblances, would include not only hagiographies, but works such as Dante's *Inferno* and Milton's *Paradise Lost*, and modern fantasies such as the works of J.R.R. Tolkien and C.S. Lewis. The next chapter of this study examines Tayeb Salih's *The Wedding of Zein* through the framework provided by Khalīl, which distinguishes religious texts from fantasies inspired by religion. Approaching the realm of the sacred in *The Wedding of Zein* as a fantasy world does not mean equating religion with fantasy. The purpose is rather to analyze the relationship between the sacred and profane worlds within the text: a text that explores the transformative potential of religious understanding, but is not, itself, regarded as a religious text, either by its author or by its readers.

This discussion of fantasy and religion, and the distinction between them, would not be necessary were it not for the formal similarity between the two. Frye's understanding of romance as a mode derived from myth, which seeks the transformation of the flawed world of everyday life, positions romance as the offspring of religion (Frye 193). Like religion, fantasy invokes the invisible and the supernatural. This resonance can be seen in the urgency of attempts throughout history to judge between true and false prophets, the careful documentation of proofs of sainthood, and the very production of those hagiographies in which Khalīl sees the development of a fantastic sensibility in Arab/Islamic culture. It also goes some way toward accounting for pervasive preference for realism over fantasy in most academic and institutional contexts.<sup>6</sup> The condemnation of fantasy results from a narrative of progress, which represents humanity as passing from a "primitive," "magical," religious worldview to a modern, secular one, and, as the product and expression of this process, from romantic to realist literature. In other words, the

---

<sup>6</sup> This includes literary awards: for a recent analysis of the sidelining of fantasy in the history of the prestigious Man Booker Prize, see Sarah Crown's conversation with China Miéville, "What the Booker prize really excludes," *The Guardian*, October 17, 2011.

formal similarity between religion and fantasy is depicted as a relationship of causality, in which a religious worldview of necessity produces fantastic literature. This religious worldview is supposed to have been left behind in the transition to modernity, which makes the persistence of fantastic literature an anachronism, a problem (Jameson 161).

In “Magical Narratives: Romance as Genre,” Fredric Jameson mounts a materialist critique of Frye. He particularizes Frye’s universal categories, locating the development of literary forms within history, rather than viewing them as based on eternal, ahistorical principles. Jameson concludes that fantasy is necessarily “regressive and nostalgic” (160). This position, held by a number of critics, Marxist and otherwise, depends upon the conviction that realism is normative, and therefore fantasy must be explained, or more often explained away, dismissed as a leftover of the “magical” thinking of an earlier stage of human development. Thus while Jameson offers a persuasive reading of the negative possibilities of Frye’s “lower world,” and the way the romantic idea of evil powers is all too easily transferred onto social others (140), he moves from this insight to an outright rejection of fantasy, along with the religious mindset that makes it possible (hence his alarm at the “neo-Catholic” fantasies of Tolkien and Lewis) (161). Only the Todorovian fantastic, as exemplified by Kafka, is acceptable, and only because, in Jameson’s reading, it is secular, characterized by “unsentimental loyalty to those henceforth abandoned clearings across which higher and lower worlds once passed” (146). Rosemary Jackson, in her work on the fantastic, supports this position, elevating the fantastic as a “subversive” genre that “traces the unsaid and the unseen of culture” (4), while excluding fantasies such as Tolkien’s from the “pure” fantastic due to their “religious longing and nostalgia” (9). In this connection, it is worth recalling Khalīl’s work on miracles, which represents a claim to the modernity associated with Todorov’s fantastic, and locates this modern,

fantastic sensibility within a religious worldview. It thus offers, if not a corrective to the position represented by Jameson and Jackson, then an important argument with that position.

Other critics of fantasy argue with the condemnation of fantasy either by agreeing with it halfway, or rejecting it altogether. Marxist critics such as Darko Suvin tend to agree halfway, dismissing fantasy in general but preserving science fiction: Suvin considers the commercial association of science fiction with fantasy “a grave disservice and rampantly social-pathological phenomenon” (9). For these critics, science fiction, with its utopias, dystopias and technological transformations, remains both pertinent to modernity and potentially politically useful.<sup>7</sup> Those who reject the condemnation of fantasy altogether tend to argue, not for a neutrality of fantasy comparable to the perceived neutrality of realism, but for the outright superiority of fantasy. This superiority is often argued through reference to “subversion”: Lucie Armitt, like Rosemary Jackson, considers fantastic literature subversive, but applies the adjective not only to the Todorovian fantastic, but to all fantasy forms, which open up “subversive spaces” within mainstream literature and culture (3). The same claim is made in support of magical realist texts: “their in-betweenness, their all-at-onceness encourages resistance to monologic political and cultural structures” (Zamora and Faris 6). Another argument often employed in fantasy’s defense is that fantasy, by deliberately departing from any attempt to represent reality, draws attention to the process of representation, and is therefore the most literary of literatures. Brian Attebery, for example, claims that “[f]antasy, by its structure, emphasizes the difference between fiction and life, a difference which our critical tradition seemed for a long time to be determined to erase” (135). Here, fantasy is not regressive, but progressive: a step ahead of “our critical tradition.”

---

<sup>7</sup> This is Jameson’s position in *Archaeologies of the Future: The Desire Called Utopia and Other Science Fictions* (2005). It is worth noting that China Mieville, in the afterword to *Red Planets: Marxism and Science Fiction*, expresses doubt about continued condemnation of fantasy by Marxist critics, and suggests that, though critics should continue to study the red planets of science fiction, “[w]e should not neglect the red dragons” of fantasy (245).

Again, magical realism receives the same acclaim: it is “truly postmodern” (Zamora 498), and “lies close to a pure model of textuality” (Wilson 228).

The persuasiveness of the arguments on both sides of this debate suggests that fantasy is neither essentially progressive nor essentially regressive. The imagined spaces that distinguish fantasy are available for a wide variety of uses. They are also worldly, or *worlding*: as Martin Heidegger puts it, “World worlds” (in Hayot 23); as Jameson writes, “romance is that form in which the *world-ness* of *world* reveals itself” (142). The depiction of a world *as* world, worlds literature, and nothing positions the world as world more emphatically than the construction of an imaginative space outside the world, from which the world may be seen whole.

The “Salihian moment” Hassan describes, the moment of the shift to a space outside the world, makes the world visible as a system. This is a central argument of the chapters that follow. In Salih’s works, fantasy reveals the manner in which the world is both near and far, both local and global, both present in the “now” and filled with traces of other times. His work demonstrates how fantasy offers a way of conceptualizing the world that emphasizes neither the local space of nationalism, nor the larger geopolitical space of globalization. Rather, fantasy infuses the global into the local, the large into the small, in a manner that expresses the interconnectedness of the world as planet. This planetarity, expressive of a vast world-system, is also intimately concerned with the local.

In the above overview of criticism on fantasy, a consensus emerges, which characterizes fantasy, or romance, as the mode of space. The corollary is that realism is the mode of time. Yet the principle is of course far too reductive, erasing space from realism and time from romance. It forgets the usefulness of Bakhtin’s idea of the chronotope, or time-space, in the discussion of genre. It also tends to subsume the (general, abstract, eternal) material of romance to the domain

of the universal, and the (concrete, everyday, historical) material of realism to the particular. The romance/realism opposition points to one of the ways in which fantasy is analogous to planetarity: the emphasis on space rather than geopolitical place. But planetarity does not connote only a recognition of space beyond the nation, an impulse toward the large-scale view. It also describes experience, of the emotions and of the body. The planet is older and larger than human life, but it is also lived. The link between fantasy and local, lived experience comes through strongly, and perhaps unintentionally, in a late essay of Bakhtin's, an essay that aims to describe in Goethe's work, not the function of fantasy, but the triumph of realism.

For Bakhtin, realism represents the passage of life in time, and is therefore able to see the world "whole," as an event in time. In "The *Bildungsroman* and Its Significance in the History of Realism (Toward a Historical Typology of the Novel)," he contrasts the dynamism of realism to the static character of romance, and particularly of "immobile" romantic space:

The ability to *see time*, to *read time*, in the spatial whole of the world and, on the other hand, to perceive the filling of space not as an immobile background, a given that is completed once and for all, but as an emerging whole, an event—this is the ability to read in everything *signs that show time in its course*, beginning with nature and ending with human customs and ideas (all the way to abstract concepts). (*"Bildungsroman"* 25)

For Bakhtin, Goethe is the great example of this ability to see time. Bakhtin stresses the centrality of the visual to Goethe's thought and creative practice: "All other external feelings, internal experiences, reflection, and abstract concepts are joined together around the *seeing eye* as a center, as the first and last authority" (27). For Goethe, Bakhtin explains, "Anything essential can and should be visible; anything invisible is inessential" (27). Bakhtin describes Goethe's development as one of the progressive shedding of romantic fancies, a procedure that

echoes, not at all incidentally, the development of the literary arts from romance to realism. “In the process of developing a sense of time, Goethe overcomes the ghostly (*Gespenstermässiges*), the terrifying (*Unerfreuliches*), and the unaccountable (*Unzuberechnendes*)” (36). Goethe’s abandonment of fantasy represents the “positive productivity” of Enlightenment thought (45), the result of new scientific developments, such as Newtonian physics, that led to “the visual clarification of the world” (44). No longer was the world “mixed up and interwoven with other worlds—separate, ideal, fantastic, and utopian worlds,” which rounded out but also “bled” reality. The new vision of the world was “poorer and drier” for this stripping away of fantasy (44), but for Bakhtin the impoverishment is heroic, the sign of a new fidelity to historical time and the power of the seeing eye.

Bakhtin then discusses several of Goethe’s incomplete creative projects as examples of the “new attitude toward the new world” (46). Five works come under Bakhtin’s consideration: a fairy tale for children, a children’s novel, a drama inspired by Sicily, a piece called “William Tell,” and the sketch “Aufenthalt in Pymont.” With the exception of the children’s novel, every one of these projects involves fantasy, and Bakhtin singles out the fantastic elements, which rather than “bleeding” reality, are described as enabling Goethe’s deeply historical perception of concrete localities. In the fairy tale “The New Paris,” the feature which, for Bakhtin, is most typical of Goethe’s “chronotopic artistic imagination,” is the linking of the fairy-tale plot to an actual portion of Frankfurt’s city wall, so that the fairy tale seems to emerge from concrete physical markers: a fountain, hazelnut trees, and a tablet in the wall (46-7). Not only does Bakhtin admire the “unique charm” that arises from “[t]his mixing of real spatial markers with fantastic ones,” but he sees fantasy as enabling the perception of reality: “The fairy tale added a mysterious gate to the actual markers of the place, and brought the niche with the fountain, the

hazelnut trees, and the fountain closer together” (46). In this analysis, it is not visual perception that makes a specific locality emerge as a whole, but the fairy tale that makes it possible to perceive the local landmarks as a unity. Fantasy draws the disparate, individually meaningless objects closer together, and makes them a locality.

This emphasis on fantasy as a crucial imaginative tool for Goethe’s vision of the local runs through Bakhtin’s essay. So, in the plan for the drama set in Sicily, Bakhtin isolates the link Goethe draws between the landscape he observes in Sicily and the fantastic narrative of the *Odyssey*; while in Goethe’s “William Tell,” Bakhtin reads the figure of Tell, the legendary marksman with roots in Norse mythology, as “an embodiment of the people,” an image expressing the embeddedness of cultural memory in the “native mountains” where Goethe pictured his hero (48). Finally, in the “Pyrmont” sketch, which describes how a multitude converges at a miraculous spring, where a mysterious trio—a youth, a mature man, and an elderly man—materializes in order to prophesy the future greatness of Pyrmont, Bakhtin sees “not an abstract landscape” but “historical time condensed in space” (49). The idea of “condensed” time is extremely suggestive, pointing toward an apprehension of time that is particular and rooted in experience, but not linear. The portrayal of age and prophecy in Goethe’s sketch suggests that “condensed” time may be productively linked both to Wai Chee Dimock’s use of deep time, and Walter Benjamin’s concept of Messianic time. These elements are treated in the following chapters, which show how fantasy’s emphasis on space demands a consideration of apprehensions of time that tend toward the synchronic or cyclical: prophetic time, arrested time, and time-as-loop. For now, the key point is to recognize that in Bakhtin’s essay on Goethe, the imaginative production of native space, the ability to perceive the fullness of the particular, does *not* result, as Bakhtin claims earlier in the essay, from an absolute fidelity to what can be

seen with the eye. It is through the “mysterious gate” of fantasy that space perceived by the eye becomes locality: native space, filled up with the condensation of time as collective memory.

The apparent contradiction between Bakhtin’s description of Goethe’s abandonment of fantasy, and his focus on fantasy as Goethe’s means of establishing locality, is explained by the fact that Bakhtin distinguishes folklore from romance. While romance is full of “unaccountable” events and unhealthy ghosts, folklore expresses “national-historical time”: in the eighteenth century, “[t]he folksong, the folktale, the heroic and historical legend, and the saga were above all a new and powerful means of humanizing and intensifying one’s native space” (52). Bakhtin refers to the influence of Goethe’s contemporary, the philosopher Johann Gottfried Herder, whose mobilization of folk traditions for the development of nationalism reverberated far beyond his own century, creating what Pascale Casanova calls the “Herder effect” of literary nationalism: the “equivalence between language and nation” (78). The Herder effect combines the idea “that each ethnic group is endowed with a specific culture, communitarian solidarity, and shared identity” with the belief that this ethnic essence finds its purest expression in the oral folk traditions of each native language (Wimmer 245). The idea has been an important one in African literary criticism, as discussed in the introduction; yet the limitation of the signifying power of orature to the expression of national essence is distorting. The issue is not that a mistake has been made in emphasizing the specificities of different languages and narrative traditions; but the Herderian notion of the equivalence of the folk and their language elides the ways in which oral traditions spill across national and ethnic borders, and the ways in which they address the world. This study will show how Tayeb Salih uses folklore and popular Sufi Islam to express a planetary, and not only a national, consciousness. In addition, those ghosts and unaccountable terrors dismissed by Bakhtin will prove, as indicated in my discussion of the

postcolonial Gothic, a powerful means of communicating the embeddedness of local space in a vast and violent global world system.

In a 1977 interview, Tayeb Salih locates the difference between himself and major Arab writers such as Yahya Haqqi and Naguib Mahfouz in his acceptance of “the magical world” (*al-‘alam al-siḥrī*). In *The Wedding of Zein*, he explains, “the world is not secular and things do not go according to scientific facts” (in Berkeley 281). Salih tells his interviewer that he accepts science as well, but believes it is not the role of the writer to reject metaphysical forces on that account (280). The notion of two worlds that begins to emerge in these comments solidifies as Salih distinguishes the worldview he strives to express in his fiction from Western rationality, a rationality he associates with an emphasis on the importance of time:

As for ourselves, we belong to an environment which observes the universe from a different view, which—in the literal sense—is not a mythical view, it is only based upon a different conception of the universe. In this relationship the element of time does not have the importance which the rational Western civilization imposes upon it. Thus when I am writing, I start from those assumptions. I do not agree that everything is rational.  
(283)

The chapters that follow trace the process of theorizing the world which Salih describes in these comments, a process that depends on the presence of “the magical world.” Large, independent from linear-historical time, and impossible to map, this nonstandard space is not therefore an absolute abstraction removed from experiences in a particular locality. Fantasy encourages the perception of the large in the small, the global in the local. Through its mysterious gate, the world can be perceived as both a system too large for any individual to fully grasp, and a realm

of lived experience—sometimes life-affirming, sometimes brutal, but always intimately “for ourselves.”

## Chapter Three

### The Desired World: *The Wedding of Zein*

Tayeb Salih's novella *The Wedding of Zein* ('*Urs al-Zayn*, 1966; hereafter *Wedding*) operates between the microcosm and the macrocosm: its setting is doubled, consisting of a Sudanese village and also the entire cosmos. The text strives to bring these worlds—one very small, the other very large—into creative union. The unification of opposites is the work of Zein, who combines contradictions of appearance and behavior in his own body, and who unites the opposing bodies of the village, whether these are individual bodies of different genders, or “bodies” in the sense of groups with opposing viewpoints. In what follows, an exploration of the unifying function of Zein and its relationship to a Sufi conception of unity will show that Sufism, which has been addressed in terms of how it is depicted in the text<sup>8</sup>, can also be read as informing its structure at the deepest level. The use of paradox as a means toward unity in Sufi literature informs my reading of the paradoxical character of Zein. Zein's physical body, though limited, enables access to the eternal. This notion of the eternal, and the effort to unite it with the present moment, will lead into a discussion of the utopian impulse in the text, and the extent to which the idea of utopia is itself a paradox.

“Have you heard the news? Zein is getting married” (31). The message travels through the village in spoken form, passed from one body to another. This is the most mundane and ordinary way for information to travel, and in a village, it is also the most common. But the news of Zein's wedding astonishes, because Zein, the village fool, is the last person one would expect to be getting married. The incredible nature of the news works magic. Shielded by the

---

<sup>8</sup> See for example Ahmad Shams al-Din al-Haggagi's essay “The Mythmaker: Tayib Salih,” in *The View from Within: Writers and Critics on Contemporary Arabic Literature. A Selection from Alif: Journal of Comparative Poetics*. Ed. Ferial Ghazoul and Barbara Harlow. Cairo: American Univ. in Cairo Press, 1994.

outrageous story, a milk seller shortchanges a customer, a boy who is late to school escapes punishment, and a tobacco dealer gets by without paying a debt (31-2). All three events are instances of social negotiation, of the give-and-take of life in community. Yet they are also, in their own way, outrageous: each violates a social contract. The milk seller is a cheat; the schoolboy deserves punishment; the tobacco dealer ought to pay what he owes.

The magical action of Zein's news is emblematic of Zein's function in the village. He brings people together, enabling exchange and communal life in the way that laws do, but he is not the law. He is a necessary outlaw, the generator of a type of social energy that is unpredictable, mischievous, and out-of-bounds, and without which life in the village would grind to a halt. While the news of his wedding flashes through the village, Zein continues to play his ridiculous and crucial role:

Zein himself was at the well in the centre of the village, filling the women's pitchers for them and indulging in his usual antics. The children gathered round him began chanting, "Zein's getting married—Zein's getting married," while he hurled stones at them, tugged a girl's dress, prodded a woman in her middle, or pinched another's thigh; children laughed, the women shrieked and laughed, and above all this laughter could be heard the laugh that had become part of the village ever since Zein was born. (32-3)

Zein is characterized by laughter: "no sooner did he come into this world than he burst out laughing" (33). This laughter is transgressive. Zein's behavior at the village well—throwing stones at children, pinching and prodding the women—runs contrary to the most basic rules of decorum. The laughter of Zein crosses boundaries, and it is infectious. Like the news of his wedding, it is outrageous in itself, and it opens a space for boundary-crossing among others. We will see, first, how Zein crosses boundaries; then, how he inspires others to do so; then, how this

action of border crossing is shown to be both a dangerous opening for the infraction of rules, as in the events that open the novella, and also absolutely essential to life. Zein at the well is not only entertaining the women with lewd gestures, but filling their pitchers with life-giving water. Though he appears ridiculous, he is in fact fundamental: he is the true center of the village.

This role is maintained throughout the text. Zein at the well, where the tale opens, is Zein “at the heart of the circle” of dancers at his wedding, where it closes (120). The action of this text, then, does not consist in moving the protagonist from one place or stage to another. It consists rather in uncovering a new way of reading Zein’s place in the village, in transposing the expression of his role to a different key. At the well, he laughs; at the wedding, his face is “wet with tears” (120). In this repetition of the same image, but with a crucial difference in meaning, *Wedding* mirrors the action of parable. A parable contains a secret meaning that demands to be revealed. It is a genre with a particular relationship to Sufism, a tradition for which the unveiling (*al-kashf*) of hidden truth is paramount.

The relationship between two forms of knowledge—the apparent and the hidden—is famously encapsulated in the Qur’anic narrative of Moses (Musa) and an unnamed man who guides him. Commentators identify the unnamed guide as al-Khidr (or al-Khadr), an important figure in Sufi literature: several adherents of Sufism, including the Andalusian poet and philosopher Ibn (al-)‘Arabī (d. 1240), claim to have met him in visions (Ernst and Schimmel 264). Zein is explicitly linked to al-Khidr: where the English text of *Wedding* relates that the villagers wonder if Zein is “the legendary Leader, the Prophet of God,” the Arabic text has them wondering if he is “al-Khidr” (46). A brief summary of the narrative presented in Qur’an 18:60-82 will clarify the link between Salih’s character and al-Khidr.

In this narrative, al-Khidr agrees to guide Moses as long as Moses does not ask him any questions about his behavior. Al-Khidr then performs three shocking acts: he breaks the side of a ship; he kills a boy; and he repairs a wall for some townsfolk who have refused hospitality to him and Moses. After each event Moses breaks his promise, and asks al-Khidr why he has hurt the innocent (the people on board the ship, the young boy) and aided the unworthy (the inhospitable townsfolk). At last al-Khidr explains: he damaged the ship because it belonged to poor people, and he wanted to preserve it from a king who was seizing ships at sea; he slew the boy to prevent the grief he would eventually cause his parents; and he repaired the wall to keep a treasure belonging to orphans hidden until they came of age.

The story demonstrates the relationship between apparent and hidden knowledge. It is not only, as Reza Shah-Kazemi points out, a commentary on the divide between esoteric and exoteric science (84), but a meta-parable, a parable about the act of interpretation. Al-Khidr proposes a re-reading of events, one that transforms the meaning of those events. In the same way, Zein at the center of the wedding dance is a re-reading of Zein at the well. Like al-Khidr, Zein is associated with the gap between the apparent and the true, with the power of re-reading, and with abundant life—for al-Khidr’s name shares a root with the word for “green,” and his symbols are water and fish.<sup>9</sup>

The comparison of Zein to al-Khidr, a figure of paramount importance in Sufi tradition, suggests the potential of reading *Wedding* through the lens of Sufi thought. The notion finds ample support in the text, and the Sufi themes of *Wedding* have been identified by a number of writers. Zein is referred to as a “dervish” on several occasions; he has a special relationship with the mystic Sheikh Haneen; and he plays the role of *qutb* or “Pole” in the center of the circle at

---

<sup>9</sup> See the entry “Al-Khidr,” *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, Third Edition, ed. P. J. Bearman and Marc Garborieau. London: Brill 2002. Web resource.

the novella's end. The discussion that follows shows how *Wedding* engages with Sufism at both the referential level and the conceptual level.

Zein unites contradictory elements. He is both at the center of the village, and at the margins. As a habitual crosser of socially-imposed borders, he belongs to the edge of the circle as much as the center: a liminal being. His association with the liminal is signaled by the contradictions he encompasses in his body. He is both adult and child: even after he grows up, he has no beard (34). The lack of beard suggests femininity as well as childhood, and is not Zein's only feminine quality, for he ululates with joy like a woman (104). He is both puny and strong: his "emaciated body concealed an extraordinary, super-human strength" (61-2). In addition, he combines human and animal attributes. The description of Zein is crowded with imagery from the animal world: he has the neck of a giraffe, the arms of a monkey, claw-like unpaired nails, and the legs of a crane, and his "strange and singular laughter...resembled a donkey's braying" (34). His eyes are "mouse-like" (42), and under the influence of his passion for a beautiful girl he runs about "like a bitch that has lost her pups" (43). These animal-like qualities make Zein ridiculous and grotesque; they place him outside the realm of proper human appearance, and they are matched by his improper behavior: his habit of touching and teasing women, his "insatiable greed" (35), and his near-lethal attack on his enemy Seif ad-Din (61-66).

Zein's animal nature is close to the surface, both in his appearance, and in the way he acts in accordance with animal instincts—for sexual contact, for food, for his enemy's blood—uninhibited by human laws. This lack of inhibition, a quality associated with animals, children and the mad, causes people to treat him with a certain leniency, to the extent that the village Imam accuses them of "spoiling" Zein (93). Yet despite the villagers' affection for Zein, his behavior makes him an eternal outsider. If he is able to go everywhere, it is because he belongs

nowhere: among the social groups of the village, he is “a group all on his own” (93). Irregular, unpredictable and perpetually on the move, he is censured by some as a mad “dervish” (42; 84).

The framing of Zein as a dervish incorporates him into the long-lived tradition of “wise fools”: “madmen who have an intimate relationship with God but who flout the conventions of society” (Ernst 115). The dervish experiences states of ecstasy that take him outside himself; some dervishes return to a state of normal socialization afterward, while others “remain lost or mad for the rest of their lives” (Adonis 34). The dervish is thus both a traveler between states, and a space in which the play of unseen forces is enacted. From his own, subjective view, he is a traveler, while in the view of those around him he does not appear to go anywhere: his body is, rather, a site inhabited, according to the observer’s perspective, by madness or the knowledge of the unseen world.

Zein the “dervish” unites opposites, a living paradox. He is a constant reminder that the world is more-than-one. In Sufi writings, the two elements which most urgently require to be made one are the present moment, in which humanity exists, and eternity, which belongs to the divine. Every *zāhir* (outward appearance) has its *bāṭin* (inner reality). This concept is given expression through Zein, who is both the greedy wedding-crasher and, according to the mystic, Sheikh Haneen, a “blessed one of God” (64). Zein’s unification of the profane and the sacred is underscored by his relations with his two enemies, the hedonist Seif ad-Din and the village Imam. Each of these characters is truncated, missing a piece. Seif ad-Din, a gambler and frequenter of brothels, exists completely in the realm of the senses; the Imam, a rigid religious leader, inhabits only the intellectual realm. Like Zein, these characters are both inside and outside village life, but in ways that limit exchange rather than expand its possibilities. Seif ad-Din is the son of Badawi the Jeweler, a respected member of the village and its wealthiest

citizen. In this sense, he is of the village. But he is also outside of it, a stranger: he spends most of his time at a place “on the perimeter of life in the village, a place of call for those bent on pleasure and sensual enjoyment” (68-9). Known as the “oasis,” this area on the outskirts of the village is inhabited by former slave women who brew liquor and work as prostitutes. Seif ad-Din’s habit of frequenting the “oasis,” his antisocial behaviors, such as his cruelty to his father’s former slave, and his roving, unsettled lifestyle, make him an outsider, both physically and in terms of social integration: “He was a type of person the inhabitants of the village had never in their lives known and they shunned him as they would a leper; even those closest to him on both sides of his family did not feel safe having him in their homes and would shut the door in his face lest he corrupt their sons or seduce their daughters” (72).

The Imam, too, is an outsider to the villagers’ affections. Intelligent, stern and disdainful, he is interested in scholarship and international news, but not in daily village life. His religious duties make him central to that life, and he has the villagers’ respect, but his aversion to talk of rural affairs—“whether the barley in Abdul Hafeez’s field was a good crop or a bad one, whether the water-melons in Wad Rayyes’s field were large or small” (88)—also keeps him at a distance: “The people were preoccupied with the particulars of life and were not concerned with its generalities, and so an abyss had grown up between them” (88-9). The particular relates to the present moment, while the general is linked to the eternal. If the Imam is too focused on the “general”—that is, the large-scale, the eternal—to be able to connect to the villagers, Seif ad-Din is too focused on the “particular,” living only for the pleasure of the moment, a way of life the villagers find even more odious.

In the writings of one of the most influential Sufis, Ibn Arabi, the sensory and the intellectual represent two realms of truth. Seif ad-Din and the Imam respectively can be read as

representing these two realms, but they are completely cut off from one another. In Ibn Arabi's formulation, a third realm unites the intellectual and sensory realms: this is the realm of the imagination and fantasy, which is rational and sensory at the same time (Adonis 61). The imaginary forms an isthmus, or *barzakh*, between the sensory and the intellectual; it is "the site in which things are transformed; i.e. the site of images and revelations" (61). In the Qur'anic narrative summarized above, the figure taken to be al-Khidr carries out the function of the *barzakh*, linking two realms: the outward form of the events Moses witnesses, and their inner meaning. In *Wedding*, it is Zein who functions as the *barzakh* of the village, the link between its different realms, its creative space. Through Zein's fight with Seif ad-Din—a battle that releases powerful, mystical energy—Seif ad-Din and the Imam are brought together.

The fight is caused by Zein's usual practice of wandering into weddings looking for entertainment and food. When he begins his antics at the wedding of Seif ad-Din's sister, Seif ad-Din takes offense and strikes Zein on the head with an axe (72-3). This is not the only event to trouble this wedding, where Seif ad-Din spreads conflict and division in the same way that Zein spreads unity and love. Zein brings young men and women together, but Seif ad-Din quarrels with his sister's bridegroom so that the marriage almost fails to take place at all (73). At Zein's wedding, "[t]he girls of 'the Oasis' sang and danced in the hearing and under the very eyes of the Imam" without ill effect (113); in contrast, the troop of "brazen women, men with lascivious glances, vagabonds and insolent boors" who accompany Seif ad-Din to his sister's wedding are beaten and thrown into the street by the villagers, as is Seif ad-Din himself (73). The beating fails to reform Seif ad-Din. He does not change until after his fight with Zein, which takes place some days after his sister's wedding, when Zein, seeing Seif ad-Din pass, is suddenly overwhelmed with rage, and attempts to throttle his enemy. During the fight, Seif ad-Din

perceives Zein as a crocodile—the full expression of the dangerous side of Zein’s animal nature (66). The fight is more than a physical battle: it is also a spiritual struggle. Seif ad-Din believes, as do many of the villagers, that he died during the fight, and experienced, as a spirit, a brief moment outside of life:

He saw a vast crocodile the size of a large ox with its mouth agape; the crocodile’s jaws closed upon him, then came a wave so large it seemed like a mountain, which bore off the crocodile with Seif ad-Din between its jaws into the valley that was the trough of the wave, and the crocodile plunged down into a vast bottomless pit. It was then, Seif ad-Din says, that he saw Death face to face... (66)

Upon awakening, Seif ad-Din recites: “I bear witness that there is no God but God, and I bear witness that Mohammad is the Messenger of God” (66-67). The words, uttered with the first breath he takes after his “death,” are a sign of spiritual renewal and conversion (Hassan 67). Seif ad-Din is completely transformed by this experience: he cleans up, devotes himself to prayer, begs forgiveness of his father’s former slave, and is seeing walking arm in arm with the Imam (95). One of the villagers, observing the pair, remarks: “Badawi’s son has switched his allegiance from the slave-girls to the Imam” (95).

Seif ad-Din may have reformed, but the Imam has not. Throughout the text he maintains his cold nature, and plays the role of a stereotypical religious zealot. Seif ad-Din’s new piety increases the Imam’s prestige and strengthens his power, but the Imam can only benefit from the change after it has taken place: he lacks the power to institute change. The role of the creative, transforming force, the role of the *barzakh* linking matter and spirit, belongs to Zein, and to Zein’s spiritual guide, Sheikh Haneen: “The Imam paid no heed to the fact that Haneen, who

represented the mystical side of the spiritual world—a side he did not recognize—was the direct cause of Seif ad-Din’s repentance” (94).

The opposition between the Imam and Sheikh Haneen reflects a popular view of the opposition between the outward forms of spiritual practice, and knowledge of God; between the *zāhir* and the *bātin*; between Sharia, or religious law, and Sufism. Sufi literature does not generally uphold this view; rather, the forms required by Sharia, such as prayer and fasting, are essential to Sufi practice (Sells 16). *Wedding* is not, of course, Sufi literature per se, but a text informed by Sufism. This text sets up an opposition between the Sharia of the Imam, and the mystical influence of Sheikh Haneen. At the same time, as Wail Hassan remarks, Haneen and the Imam, as representatives of different elements of Islam, “are not antagonists” but “address different aspects of life” (70). Their opposition in the text works to reassert the unbounded, unstructured and naturally-occurring quality of Zein’s power, a power confirmed by Haneen, Zein’s spiritual teacher. The opposition between Haneen and the Imam marks the mystical realm shared by Zein and Haneen as outside the law and beyond the power of conventional religious authority.

Haneen’s role in Seif ad-Din’s reformation positions Haneen as Zein’s teacher and spiritual guide. While Zein, with his contradictions, expresses the relationship between *al-zāhir* and *al-bātin*, Haneen is all *bātin*, entirely absorbed in the spiritual life, in contrast to the *zāhir* of the Imam’s outwardly correct but unloving form of religion. Haneen is marked as a Sufi sheikh in several ways: he is a wanderer and an ascetic, who leaves the village for six months at a time, carrying his ablutions pitcher and prayer-rug, and is said to “meet up with a group of those itinerant holy men who wander about devoting themselves to the service of God” (44). These “itinerant holy men” are undoubtedly a Sufi brotherhood. It is also suggested that Haneen has

been graced with *barakah*, or the power to perform miracles, an attribute of Sufi saints: “No one knew where he went, though people related strange stories concerning him, one swearing that he had seen him in Merowi at a particular time, while another swore he’d caught sight of him in Karma at that very same time, though a distance of six days’ journey separates the two places” (44). This anecdote illustrates the text’s concern with a doubled world, a world which, like Haneen, is more-than-one at the same time. Haneen’s miracle demonstrates the simultaneity so important to the concept of *al-zāhir/al-bātin*, and, in taking the form of a “strange story” passed from place to place, underscores the importance the text places on orality as the medium of social exchange.

Haneen has a special relationship with Zein: on his visits to the village he will only agree to eat in Zein’s home (45). He treats Zein with affection, calling him “the blessed one of God,” while Zein, for his part, is calmed by Haneen’s presence and abandons his “horse-play and idle talk” (45). This description of their relationship, with gentleness on Haneen’s side and humility on Zein’s, suggests a teacher-student bond which becomes clearer during Zein’s fight with Seif ad-Din.

Haneen appears miraculously out of nowhere just in time to keep the fight from becoming a tragedy. His sudden appearance contributes to the “magical impression” the event leaves on its witnesses (66). These witnesses—Mahjoub and his “gang,” the secular authorities of the village—are unable to stop the “crocodile” that is the enraged Zein (66). Haneen, by contrast, stops Zein without even touching him. He stops him with words: “Zein the blessed, may God be pleased with you” (62). The key elements of this episode—the sudden frenzy and superhuman strength that overcome Zein, and the superior strength of his sheikh, Haneen—are

reflected in Sufi literature. For example, the treatise of al- Qushayrī, which Michael Sells calls “perhaps the most popular classical work on Sufism” (97), includes the following story:

Jahm ar-Raqqi in his excitement in his state of audition had taken hold of a tree with his hand and ripped it out by the roots...Jahm ar-Raqqi stood and whirled in a state of fervent excitement. Duqqi [the sheikh] said: “If he comes near me, I’ll show him.” Raqqi was weak as he came by. When he drew near to Duqqi, they said: “That’s him.” Duqqi seized Jahm by the leg and held him up, immobile. Raqqi said: “O Shaykh, I repent, I repent.” He then released him. (in Sells 115)

Al- Qushayrī includes this story in his discussion of *wajd*, or ecstasy. The frenzy that overcomes Jahm ar-Raqqi is caused by “audition” (*sama* ‘), the Sufi practice of meditation through listening to music accompanied by poetry that invokes the attributes of God (Ernst 182). Zein’s frenzy is caused by anger. Yet though his wildness does not have a spiritual source, it is a sign of his openness to feeling, and the complete honesty of his responses, in which emotion and behavior are unified. Zein’s habit of acting in accordance with his emotions, as discussed earlier, is part of his unification of *al-zāhir* and *al-bātin*. It causes the villagers to regard him as a “dervish.” There is therefore, at least in the minds of the villagers, a link between Zein’s wild behavior and the possibility that he is, as Haneen insists, a “blessed one of God”; and this link is underscored by the portrayal of Zein as possessed of superhuman strength caused by passion. Like Jahm ar-Raqqi in al- Qushayrī’s story, Zein is outside of himself, unaware of what he is doing—thus he almost kills (and according to some, does kill) Seif ad-Din. And like Jahm ar-Raqqi, too, he is rendered “immobile” by the intervention of his spiritual superior: he stops moving so suddenly that the six men trying to pull him off Seif ad-Din fall down, “taken unawares by Zein’s sudden immobility—it was as though there had been a wall in front of them that had suddenly collapsed”

(62). During the moment of calm that follows, Haneen prophesies that Zein will marry “the best girl in the village” (64). He then reconciles Zein and Seif ad-Din.

Both Zein and Haneen work to induce the transformation of Seif ad-Din. Yet it is possible to argue, as the narrator does, that it is Haneen and not Zein who plays the active role. Zein’s position is that of the beast in the fairy tale, the monster whose territory (death) must be crossed in order for the new birth of Seif ad-Din to take place, while Haneen is the spiritual helper who arrives in time to save the hero. This reading makes sense if Seif ad-Din is viewed as the hero, the one who is transformed—and this is the way the episode is interpreted by the village. But Zein is also a hero. He stands at the center of his own drama. Haneen is spiritual helper for *both* Zein and Seif ad-Din, in a double drama in which each combatant plays the monster for the other.

For Zein, in whom *al-zāhir* and *al-bātin* are one, the inner struggle is played out through an outward, physical marker: his teeth. The story of Zein’s teeth unites two moments in his life, each of which comments on the other. The first moment occurred in his childhood:

His mother...says that his mouth was once filled with pearly white teeth, but that when he was six she took him one day to visit some relatives of hers; at sunset, passing by a deserted ruin rumoured to be haunted, Zein had suddenly become nailed to the ground and had begun shivering as with a fever. Then he let out a scream. After that he took to his bed for several days, and on recovering from his illness it was found that all his teeth had fallen out—except for one in his upper jaw and one in the lower. (33)

This episode links the child Zein to hidden powers: the powers of the jinn who are popularly supposed to haunt ruins (Hassan 66). Zein’s illness is a physical manifestation of his inner battle with these invisible evil spirits. This battle mirrors his battle with Seif ad-Din: both events

involve sudden frenzy—the scream, the attack on Seif ad-Din—and immobility: Zein is “nailed to the ground” by the evil spirits just as he will be rendered motionless by the intervention of Haneen in the later conflict. The most striking shared element between the two episodes, however, is their effect on Zein’s teeth. The conflict with Seif ad-Din reverses the result of the battle with the jinn: in that first battle, Zein loses all but two teeth, while after he is struck with an axe by Seif ad-Din, he visits a hospital in Merowi, and returns sporting “a row of gleaming white teeth in his upper jaw and another row of pearly dentures in his lower” (58). “It was as though,” the narrator continues, “Zein had been transformed into another person—and it struck Ni’ma [his future bride], as she stood among the ranks of people come out to meet him, that Zein was not devoid of a certain handsomeness” (58).

Zein’s fight with Seif ad-Din takes place some time after Seif ad-Din strikes him with an axe; the precise amount of time between the two episodes is not specified, though we are told that “a long time” passes, during which Zein entertains his friends with tales of his visit to the hospital (58). Yet the time separating the two fights is deemphasized in the text, so that they seem to form a single conflict. The second fight takes place while Zein is talking about the aftermath of the first: he interrupts his own narrative to leap at Seif ad-Din, so that his recollection of his recovery at Merowi dovetails seamlessly into the moment of his revenge. The key elements of the conflict with Seif ad-Din are present in both episodes: the transformation of Zein, and the role of Ni’ma. In the first phase of the conflict, Zein undergoes a physical transformation, one that removes some of the grotesqueness of his body and endows him with “a certain handsomeness,” which is noticed by Ni’ma. In the second phase, Zein engages in a spiritual battle, a battle against himself as much as Seif ad-Din. Haneen intervenes and enables Zein to win this battle by controlling his frenzy and releasing Seif ad-Din. Zein is fully

reconciled with Seif ad-Din: in obedience to Haneen, “Zein got up, took hold of Seif ad-Din’s head and kissed him” (64). Haneen then gives his blessing to the new attraction Zein holds for Ni’ma by prophesying their marriage.

The elements of transformation followed by readiness for marriage suggest that Zein’s conflict with Seif ad-Din is a rite of passage. Wail Hassan supports this view, noting that teeth are, for Freud, “phallic substitutes” (65). Overall, *Wedding* does take the form of a puberty ritual, moving Zein from his unformed, liminal state into the full socialization of marriage: the liminal period, during which he is regarded as a “dervish,” is also the period during which he has only two teeth (Hassan 66). Yet the text resists a straightforward reading as a form of *Bildungsroman*. This is due to a resistance of the linear progress of time so crucial to the *Bildungsroman*, which finds expression in the tension between stability and change in *Wedding*, a text that is trying to represent both.

The undercurrent of Sufi philosophy in the text is linked to this tension, and can be read as a strategy employed in the effort to find a solution to it. Stability is in the domain of eternity, while change is in the present moment, in the here-and-now. One of the key discursive traditions of Sufism involves the effort to unite the present moment to eternity, to the moment of the covenant made between God and an as-yet-unborn humanity before creation (Ernst 43). This moment is described in the Qur’an (7:172):

When your lord brought out their offspring from the children of Adam, from their backs, and made them testify to themselves: “Am I not your lord?” They said, “Yes, we have borne witness.”

Sufi writers developed this theme. The twelfth-century Persian commentator, Abu al-Fadl Rashid al-Din al-Maybudi, discusses the Qur’anic text as follows:

Through understanding the language of reality, this verse has a different secret and a different taste. It is an allusion to the first states of the lovers, and the tying of the bond and covenant of love with them on the first day, in the pre-eternal covenant when the Truth was present and reality was attained... What a fine day, for it is the day of laying the foundation of love! What a wonderful time, for it is the time of seizing the bond of love! Disciples never forget the first day of discipleship. The passionate know that the time of union with the beloved is the crown of life and the most worshiped moment. (in Ernst 44)

This passage shows the centrality of love in Sufi discourse, for it is love that unites the human with the divine. Love enables the Sufi to transcend the present moment and reach the “time of union,” the time of the covenant evoked metonymically by the word “*alastu*” (“Am I not?”), the first word of the sentence “Am I not your Lord?” Carl Ernst points out the themes that are drawn together here: the primordial covenant, the union of the present with eternity, love, and the power of the voice:

Mystical speculation focused on this moment as the first time when God’s voice was heard by humanity; the reverberation of that divine voice is faintly recalled in all beautiful voices and in song. Thus, every session of Sufi music is fundamentally an attempt to return to the primordial moment of the first contact with God. (44)

The text of *Wedding* evokes these themes and the links between them. Like the tradition of Sufi thought, *Wedding* uses love in the attempt to unify the present and the eternal. Zein’s cries of love, with their unifying power, can be read as as a type of *shath*, or Sufi “ecstatic utterance.” In what follows, the effort to unify the present moment and the eternal through love, set against the

framing of Zein as a pubescent figure undergoing a transformative rite of passage, will serve to clarify the tension between stability and change in the text.

*Al-shaḥ* (sing. *shaḥ*; pl. *shaḥāt*) means “ecstatic utterance.” In Sufi tradition, *shaḥāt* are uttered during mystical experience. These utterances are often paradoxical in nature, uniting elements which appear incompatible; perhaps the most famous is al-Hallaj’s cry of “I am the Truth,” for which he was executed in 922. One of the most famous early Sufis, Abu Yazid al-Bistami, is remembered for his outrageous *shaḥāt*, such as “Glory be to me!” and commentators have both condemned and justified these statements (Sells 13). The discourse surrounding the *shaḥāt* reveals attitudes toward the outrageous behavior of dervishes. The criticisms and justifications of *al-shaḥ* place it in the same category as sudden, superhuman strength or the “whirling” for which dervishes are famous: it is a response that bursts the bonds of normalcy, justifiable because a human being cannot be expected to preserve normal behavior during an experience of the divine. Al-Haggagi quotes a verse in defense of dervishes attributed to Sidi Ahmad al-Badawi: “The secret of their madness is noble—Reason itself lies prostrate at its portals” (102).

In writings on love, Sufism makes use of the much older tradition of Arabic love poetry, infusing tropes such as the lost beloved and the lover weeping at a deserted campsite with metaphysical meaning (Sells 57). As a result, Sufi poetry is deeply intertwined with the genre of love poetry going back to pre-Islamic times. Zein’s *shaḥāt* are words of love: his shouts of “I am slain” inhabit the shared space of mystical religious poetry and love poetry, both traditions which use death as a symbol of the lover’s loss of self in his passion for the beloved. Love poetry is eminently suited for adaptation to the expression of the Sufi theme of longing for unity with the divine: “Through love,” writes Adonis, “the self goes out to the other” (90). Zein’s *shaḥāt*,

inspired by love, create opportunities for love: his voice broadcasts the glories of the girl he loves until other young men, with better prospects than the ridiculous Zein, become interested in her. Zein seems unaffected by the loss of one beloved after another to his rivals. He easily gives up each beloved and discovers an opportunity to be “slain” by a new one. This suggests that, as in the confrontation with Seif al-Din, there is a sense in which Zein is less a hero than an elemental force. He is—to invoke the literal meaning of his name—“beauty” itself. He is romance. He is love—that force through which “the self goes out to the other.” He expresses the meaning of *shāṭh*, a word derived from “movement,” which can also mean “departing from custom” (Adonis 97). In a community which offers few occasions for young men and women to meet, Zein’s cries of love create the conditions for love to arise. Love is brought forth through the cry, through speech, connecting the power of emotion and the power of language, a theme that Adonis draws out of Sufi writings. If it is through love that the self goes out to the other, he writes, it is also true that “poetry dissolves the barrier between I and Other” (118). Poetry, figurative language, forms a *barzakh*, a transformative space in which the sensory and intellectual realms meet (135). Zein, the center of village life where all things are mingled and transformed, is also the community’s preeminent poet.

Zein’s ecstatic love poetry provides the link between the Sufi subtext of Salih’s novella and its central event, a wedding. The power of Zein’s *shāṭahāt* means that his relationship to village weddings is deeper than it first appears. The wedding is first introduced as a space for Zein’s antics, and his expressions of greed for food and physical contact with women. This can be seen as the *zāhir* of the wedding, its outward appearance. The movement of the text constitutes an unveiling (*al-kashf*), a key Sufi term, in which the *bātin* or inner meaning of the wedding is revealed. The first step in this unveiling is the revelation that Zein is not only a

gluttonous beneficiary of weddings, but also their cause. Zein's place is at weddings because, as the unifying principle of the village, he both creates unity and revels in it. His own wedding, then, is a wedding par excellence, an enactment of unity which has at its center the unifying principle itself, in the form of Zein. As Ahmad Harb notes, there is a double unity here, comprising Zein's personal wholeness and the collective wholeness of the village (in Hassan 57). The combination of these two forms of wholeness makes Zein's wedding "a mystical occasion... revealing to the people themselves their own world" (Al-Haggagi 127). This is a world that, like Zein, unites sacred and profane love, symbolized by the two loosely-defined circles at his wedding, the circle of dancers and the circle of religious chanters. These two circles meet in sound, in the ecstatic ululation of the women:

The ululations of the women in the circle of chanters mingled with those of the women on the dance floor. Sometimes a group from the dance floor would move across to the chanters' circle. In the former place their feet would be set in motion, their zeal fired; in the latter their eyes would water with tears. So, too, a group would move from the chanters' circle to the dance floor, making a migration from religious rapture to clamour.

(117)

In *Wedding*, the ecstatic sound of the voice mediates between the physical (the dancers) and the spiritual (the chanters). This three-part structure—two opposing realms united by a third—is the core of the text. The focus is on the third, intermediary realm, the *barzakh*. This is the realm of Zein: the realm of *shatahāt*, creativity, transformation, poetry and love. It is also the realm of the imaginary, of fantasy, of figurative language, and of the inspiration that unveils the *bātin* behind the *zāhir*. The challenge the text sets itself is to imagine a way in which the power of this unstable, intermediary realm can be sustained over time.

One possibility is suggested by the relationship between Zein and Sheikh Haneen. This relationship is expressed through speech, through the talking and laughter of the two friends (45), and then, as we have seen, through the power Haneen's voice holds over Zein. The form of this relationship resonates with Sufi tradition, in which the spoken word plays a central role. "At the basis of being," Adonis writes in his interpretation of that tradition, "is the sweetness of speech." (84) This "basis of being" is specifically the spoken word, not the written, an idea that runs through mainstream forms of Islamic practice, as well as Sufism: the Qur'an, Michael Sells notes, "is preeminently an oral and performed text" (17). In the collection and verification of hadith traditions, too, oral transmission is a basic premise. The validity of a hadith is proven through an *isnād* or chain of narrators going back to the one who witnessed the speech or actions of the Prophet Muhammad. The same holds true for Sufi texts, in which writers are careful to verify that they heard or witnessed teachings or events. Often, pupils record the sayings of their teachers. Thus although the texts are written, they project a view of oral transmission as superior to written. This privileging of the oral form of transmission endows the teacher-student relationship with a high value in Sufi tradition, one expressed in Salih's novella through the relationship between Zein and Sheikh Haneen.

The value placed on the oral mode denotes the importance of presence, of a hearer's being in the presence of a speaker. The voice, though it produces words that may refer to things far beyond the present, is heard in the moment, in a particular time and place. In this way, the spoken word possesses a power not shared by the written text, the power of channeling large concepts and phenomena into a specific, ephemeral moment. In the case of the *isnād* tradition, the oral transmission of knowledge enables that knowledge to retain a trace of specific experience, of the particular, while also enjoying duration over time. The teacher-student

relationship links Zein to Sheikh Haneen, the holy man, who passes his teaching to Zein in a manner consistent both with Sufi practice, in which spiritual authority is passed from teacher to student, and Sufi theory, which holds that at any one time there is one leader or “Pole” (*qutb*) on earth, the pinnacle of a hierarchy of saints responsible for maintaining the world (Ernst 60). Different individuals fulfill the role of the “Pole” as time progresses, so that the figure of the pole suggests a form of eternity that is achieved through repetition: a general eternity that depends on the repeated presence of particular individuals. The individuals who have been the Pole, stretching back through time, echo the *silsilah* or “chain” through which the hadith traditions are preserved. This experience cannot be replaced by the written text: a proposed hadith that is merely read in written form, possessing no chain of *isnād*, is unacceptable.

In *Wedding*, Sheikh Haneen’s death leaves a gap that Zein is to fill. Thus it is possible to claim, with Ahmed al-Haggagi, that Zein not only repeats the role of Haneen for the village, but that in becoming the “Pole” or spiritual center of the community, he actually becomes Haneen. For al-Haggagi, the two characters are one and the same, expressions of a Sufi saint before and after his “crossover,” or full entry into sainthood: “The myth of a saint in the stage prior to the crossover is put under the name of Zein, while his myth after the crossover can be put under the name of Haneen” (130).

Al-Haggagi’s perspective accounts for the change in Zein in terms of elevation to sainthood rather than the transition from childhood to adulthood. Al-Haggagi’s argument is more satisfying in so far as it brings out the Sufi subtext underlying the novella, in which the teacher-student relationship and the continuity of the “Pole” are stabilizing forces in the midst of change. In the transition from childhood to adulthood, childhood is lost; the movement from novice to saint, however, is a completion rather than a transformation. The attributes of the novice are not

left behind, like those of a child, but flower into fulfillment. While the child-adult formulation focuses on change, on Zein's abandonment of ridiculous behavior, the novice-saint formulation privileges continuity, and accounts for the fact that Zein's unifying role in the village has not altered. Rather, it has deepened. Zein's connection to Haneen allows an unveiling (*kashf*) of the true meaning of that role. In a move reminiscent of the interpretive play of the prophet al-Khidr, the village buffoon is revealed as a holy man.

Yet within this stable framework, there is change. Zein does abandon the clownish behavior for which he was so well known. He gains a new set of teeth, and he gains a bride. The effort evident in this text to achieve a balance between stability and change is reminiscent of the writings of the Sufi theorist al-Qushayrī, whose famous treatise distinguishes the ephemeral "states" of being (*aḥwāl*) from the more stable "stations" (*maqāmāt*) (Sells 103). Al-Qushayrī quotes a verse about the ephemeral nature of states:

If it did not change  
It would not be named a state.  
Everything that changes,  
passes. (in Sells 104)

As his argument develops, however, al-Qushayrī claims more stability for the states. States attain a kind of continuity through "flashes." The flash of the state to come is present in the current state. Thus, the movement into a new state is not a complete change but a development of the earlier flashes:

[T]he possessor of such a continuous state has other states beyond those that have become a taste for him. These other states are ephemeral. When these ephemeral

happenings become continuous for him like those previous states, then he rises up to another, higher and subtler state. (in Sells 104)

This understanding of the state resonates with al-Haggagi's reading of *Wedding*, in which the flashes of Zein's true gift appear as moments of unifying power, such as his ability to bring young men and women together. These flashes develop into an ability to unite all elements of the community at Zein's own wedding. The concept of the flash and its development enables the construction of a vision of harmony that embraces both stability and change. This vision, the vision of supreme joy that is the wedding of Zein, contrives to unite this pair of opposites, whose incompatibility is a central problem of the idea of utopia.

Fredric Jameson proposes a useful division of utopian thought into two branches: the programmatic, and the impulsive (3). *Wedding*, and indeed all of Salih's work, falls into the latter category. Salih's work represents a utopian vision, but advances no program for its achievement. On the contrary, these texts suggest quite strongly that a social program which would achieve utopia is impossible. The impossibility of planning utopia and taking practical steps to achieve it is clearest in *Bandarshah*, but is also present in *Wedding*, where utopia comes into being through a miracle. Two miracles face one another in *Wedding*, like mirror images: the miracle of the period known as "Haneen's year," and the miracle of the wedding of Zein.

"Haneen's year" is the name the villagers give to the year after the reconciliation of Zein and Seif ad-Din. During this period, the village enjoys extraordinary prosperity, a sudden abundance of good things that spring up in an aura of magic. The atmosphere of mystery is maintained even in the case of practical material developments, such as the government's decision to build schools and a hospital in the village (77). That decision is inexplicable, and the attitude of the villagers toward it is the same as their attitude toward the miraculous fertility of

their fields: they make no effort either to understand the government's beneficence, or to take steps to ensure that it continues. This is a proper attitude toward miracles, but not toward a political entity to which, presumably, the villagers pay taxes. The absorption of the behavior of state officials into the natural world beyond the villagers' control precludes an engagement with the state, thus removing the possibility of a necessary first step in conceptualizing a utopian program.

Put simply, the miracle and the program are mutually exclusive, for a miracle, dependent on grace, cannot be forced into being. Like Haneen's year, the wedding of Zein is a moment of seamless collective unity that depends upon the miraculous figure of Zein. Zein, the "blessed one of God," simply *is*—he reacts instinctively to the world, and where he goes, love miraculously follows. There is no suggestion that other people can be taught to become like Zein, or would have any interest in doing so; rather, Zein's uniqueness is stressed throughout the text.

Zein's uniqueness, and his gift, which requires no effort on his part, are consistent with Sufi discourse on *barakah*, the miraculous gift attributed to saints. *Barakah*—the power to perform miracles—is reserved for the illustrious few. The saints—*awliyā'*, the "friends of God"—possess a special status. Thus the tradition of Sufism includes both an impulse toward the collective, expressed most powerfully in the communal activity of the *dhikr*,<sup>10</sup> and a concept of the existence of an elect. The idea of the "Pole," discussed earlier in terms of Zein's role in his village, is one example of the importance of the elect in Sufi tradition. The Pole is assumed by some writers to be surrounded by a whole group of elevated personages possessed of spiritual distinction. An imam stands on either side of him, one regarding the world of appearances and one the world of reality (Al-Haggagi 107). Beyond these two imams are other figures of spiritual

---

<sup>10</sup> *Dhikr* means "recollection," and refers to the Sufi meditation technique based on recitation of the names of God (Ernst 92).

distinction, whose exact number differs according to the systems devised by different writers.<sup>11</sup> Beyond these stand the ordinary people, those with the least access to the world of essences, of the *bātin*.

The framing of Zein as the Pole, then, sets up a situation in which the whole community cannot be unified, at the same time as it posits their unity around the Pole. The Pole, in order to fulfill his destiny, must be, like Zein, a person apart, possessed of special spiritual gifts. In addition, the Pole cannot be brought into being by human beings, but only by God. These elements prevent Salih's version of utopia from taking the form of a practical program.

Wail Hassan offers an insightful critique of the utopian vision of *Wedding*. For Hassan, the form of Salih's utopia, its expression as impulse rather than program, is problematic. Hassan is particularly critical of the role of the "oasis" in *Wedding*. This area on the fringe of the village, inhabited by former slaves working as prostitutes, is the only place that fails to benefit from the blessings of "Haneen's year." Rather, one of the blessings of that peaceful time is the pressure on the inhabitants of the oasis after Seif ad-Din, their former patron, turns against them (94). As Hassan points out, "[t]he oasis is not affected by the villagers' good fortune; it is only blamed for their misfortune" (78). If the Sufi concept of the elect were to be mapped onto the village, the oasis would stand as far as possible from the Pole.

It is possible to argue that Zein's wedding is fuller demonstration of unity than Haneen's year, in that it brings the prostitutes of the oasis into the communal circle. Yet here again the problem of continuity intervenes, the problem of time. Zein's wedding, joyful as it is, lasts for a limited time. The text suggests, on the one hand, that the unity experienced by the people at the wedding is the *bātin* or essence of their lives, in the Sufi sense: just as Zein, the clown, is revealed to be a blessed one of God, so the people are revealed to themselves, realizing that in

---

<sup>11</sup> For a discussion of al-Qushayrī's system in a comparative context, see al-Haggagi 108-9.

reality there is no division between them. On the other hand, however, this realization is momentary. It is an impulse, but cannot take the form of a program: the special air surrounding Zein's wedding, the miraculous quality that makes it worthy of being recorded, marks it as an event that cannot be repeated or sustained. One must assume that after the wedding the prostitutes return to the oasis, and that the villagers continue to use, harass and despise them. The role of gender in the construction of the outcast space of the oasis is important, and, as Hassan points out, it is completed by the characterization of Zein's bride, Ni'ma.

Ni'ma is the polar opposite of the women of the oasis. Serious, well-mannered and devout, she is beautiful without being coquettish ("her beauty meant nothing to her"), and her greatest joy is memorizing and reciting the Qur'an (52). Like other heroines of Salih's work, Ni'ma insists on attending a Qur'anic school, where she is "a lone girl amongst boys" (52). Yet unlike Mariam, the heroine of *Bandarshah*, who wants to continue her education, Ni'ma stops once she has learned to read and write, even though her brother encourages her to go on to become a doctor or a lawyer (53). Ni'ma rejects "that type of education": "It's quite enough," she tells her brother, "to read and write and know the Koran and the rituals of prayer" (53). Thus Ni'ma's character falls in with the text's general impulse to unite stability and change: she makes a slight alteration in tradition without challenging it on a fundamental level. Instead, she dreams "that one day she would make some great sacrifice, though she did not know what form it would take, and then she would experience the same strange sensation that came over her when reading the *Chapter of Mary*" (52).

Hassan reads the reference to the Qur'anic Chapter of Mary, and also Ni'ma's other favorites, the Chapter of the Merciful and the Chapter of Retribution, which deal in different ways with mercy, suffering and sacrifice, as signs of Ni'ma's construction as a "patriarchal

fantasy of female self-sacrifice and devotion” (78). While Hassan’s argument is persuasive, there is space for a reading of Ni’ma’s religious experience that extends beyond the construction of a “perfect woman.” Ni’ma’s reading and recitation invoke the power of the voice. The experience of reciting the Qur’an grants her a “strange sensation” that puts her in touch with the realm of the spirit, as well as the realm of patriarchal law. Ni’ma’s recitation, like Zein’s ecstatic vocalizations, acts as a *barzakh* opening a space for the creative imagination. Ni’ma’s voice, like Zein’s, possesses a unifying power: it links the restricted and particular to the eternal and general. Reciting the Chapter of Mercy, she imagines the abstract “Mercy” as “a woman of rare beauty,” and then, taking the imaginative move a step further, dreams that she could be this woman, and wishes “that her parents had named her Rahma, that is ‘Mercy’” (52). In this passage, Ni’ma engages in a type of imaginative work similar to Zein’s; if anything, she is the more active of the two characters, since Zein, as we have seen, is more often portrayed as a receptacle for spiritual forces than as a seeker after spiritual development. For these reasons, it is important not to lose sight of Ni’ma’s strength as a thinker, although it is also true that when she imagines “Mercy,” it is as a woman “dedicated to the service of her husband” (52). This dream of Ni’ma’s, Hassan points out, holds little potential for social change. It is also true that Ni’ma, far from challenging village norms, fulfills the collective ideal of womanhood. She is “the best girl in the village” not only according to Haneen, but according to everyone: the headmaster, for example, repeats Haneen’s words, and adds: “What beauty! What manners! What modesty!” (81). When this “perfect” young woman is juxtaposed with the outcast women of the oasis, we can agree with Hassan that, whatever Ni’ma’s power of creative thinking, her characterization forms “the capstone on a utopian construct that despite its satirical, carnivalesque intent, delegitimizes progressive change” (81).

To go further, we can see the characterization of Ni'ma as emblematic of the central tension of the text. Her recitation of the Qur'an, which fills her with that "strange sensation" and moves her beyond herself, is of limited duration. It is a flash of insight, a moment in which a door opens, only to be swiftly closed so that Ni'ma can continue her usual life. This flash gleams in the text as Zein's cries of love tear the air of the village, as his battle with Seif ad-Din brings life into brief contact with the afterlife, and as his wedding momentarily replaces division with unity.

Fredric Jameson's insights on utopia are pertinent here, both for their resonance with Salih's text, and for the ways in which they differ from it. Jameson, as we have seen, separates utopian thought into two branches, the programmatic and the impulsive (3). He then goes on to discuss various textual representations of utopia, and remarks on a characteristic of utopias from Sir Thomas More through contemporary science fiction: the construction of utopia as "an imaginary enclave within real social space" (15). This separation may take physical form, as in the creation of urban gardens, green spaces in the city (20); it may also be temporal, like the future utopias of science fiction, separated from us in time (23). Both are examples of "Utopia's constitutive secessionism, a withdrawal or 'delinking' from the empirical and historical world which ... uncomfortably refocuses the readerly gaze on that very issue of its practical political inauguration which the form promised to avoid in the first place" (23).

In *Wedding*, utopia is separated from the world not in space, but in time. There is, it is true, a sense in which the village is independent, a world in itself; though it receives currents from the outside world in the form of travelers such as Seif ad-Din and Haneen, or the actions of the government, it is very much an independent space, maintained by internal authorities: the Imam and Sheikh Haneen for religious matters, and Mahjoub's gang for material ones. Yet the

village does not consistently live out its utopian possibilities. These possibilities come to life under the influence of Zein. The utopian potential of the village flashes up when Zein cries “I am slain,” uniting its young people, and when he helps generate the revival of Seif ad-Din. These flashes, like the gleams of a future spiritual state discussed by al- Qushayrī, come to full strength during the wedding of Zein. Yet the utopia that coalesces at the wedding will end when the wedding ends: time separates it from the daily life of the village as surely as any sea. This temporal break, to return to Jameson, “simultaneously secures the radical difference of the new Utopian society” and “makes it impossible to imagine” (86).

It is in the domain of this dilemma that we can place the structure of *Wedding* as a whole, and the way it is organized to emphasize the moment of the wedding over the passage of historical events. The text opens as news of the wedding spreads, and culminates in the wedding itself only two days later, so that all the events discussed and remembered are compressed into a brief period of time. Zein’s transformations of himself and others are narrated within the frame of the wedding preparations, his whole life taking shape as preparation for his role as the catalyst of social transformation. This structure imbues Zein’s wedding with a sense of prophetic fulfillment. “Have you heard the news? Zein is getting married,” says Haleema the milk-seller (31); “Tomorrow you’ll be marrying the best girl in the village,” promises Haneen (64); “On Thursday they’ll marry me to you,” Ni’ma declares (103); and the wedding occurs, closing the circle. The operation of prophecy and fulfillment echoes the manner in which the flash precedes and predicts the achievement of a new spiritual state, as well as the unveiling through which Zein’s antics, which unite the village in laughter, are revealed as the *zāhir* of a deeper and more significant force. In each case, fragments indicate the whole. In this way, *The Wedding of Zein* represents a world charged with spiritual meaning, in which fragmented mundane events can be

read, by those who understand the code, as signs of a large, hidden and eternal reality. The structure of the novella, by performing this unveiling, expresses a view of the world as both small and large, both visible and invisible, both *al-zāhir* and *al-bātin*. And as the *bātin*, the essential, is more significant than the *zāhir*, the apparent, so historical time is subordinated to eternity, and *The Wedding of Zein* delineates a circle in time, an island utopia of prophecy and fulfillment. “[N]arrative time remains frozen in a seemingly eternal present,” Hassan writes, “the moment of the ‘miraculous’ event of the wedding” (53). In this way, Hassan continues, “the present is privileged at the expense of both the past and the future” (53).

For Hassan, this privileging of the present constitutes a flaw, a dangerous conceptual move through which the construction of utopia “risks entrenching obsolete social practices” (51). Jameson, on the other hand is careful not to condemn the utopian impulse outright, even as he separates it from the utopian program. “[T]he distinction between the two lines,” he writes, “threatens to revive the old and much-contested philosophical aim of discriminating between the authentic and the inauthentic, even where it aims in fact to reveal the deeper authenticity of the inauthentic as such” (4). In approaching *Wedding*, it is important to recognize the way the text comments on its own contradictions. It is through this commentary, the recognition of its own central problem, that *Wedding* achieves an “authenticity of the inauthentic.”

*Wedding*, as we have seen, posits an opposition between utopia and historical time, as it is time that separates utopia from daily life. That world, however, cannot be dismissed. Though flawed, it is necessary for community to function, and *Wedding* admits this even as it critiques the world’s divisiveness and cruelty.

The admission finds expression through the characterization of Mahjoub’s “gang,” the secular authorities of the village. This group of men serves as the government of the village: they

take care of all practical matters, from organizing weddings and funerals to negotiating with the state government (91-2). It is they, and not Zein, as Hassan notes, who manage the event of Zein's wedding (75). Hassan takes issue with both al-Haggagi and Ahmed Harb, who claim that Zein is in control of his own marriage festivities. Hassan cites the efforts made by Mahjoub and his gang to contract Zein's marriage, to determine a date for the wedding, to choose Zein's clothes, and to bring him back when he wanders off during the ceremony (75). Secular authority—that force which, unlike the utopian impulse, has the power to implement programs—is essential in order for the wedding to take place.

The utopian moment of the wedding, then, is made possible in two stages. The first stage belongs to Haneen, who teaches Zein self-control and prophesies his marriage. The second stage belongs to Mahjoub's gang, who take care of the practical details. Haneen and Mahjoub's gang can be read as representatives of Jameson's two lines of utopian thought. Their suitability for these roles is signified not only by their basic correspondence to the impulse or "flash" on one hand and material power on the other, but by the fact that they do not meet. The opposition between Sheikh Haneen and Mahjoub's gang is the one gap which even Zein cannot close.

This gap can be seen in Mahjoub's attitude toward Haneen. Mahjoub has "an innate awe of religious people, especially ascetics like Haneen," and "used to remove himself from their path and have nothing to do with them" (64). He does not completely ignore them, however; he recognizes their "mysterious powers," and when Haneen predicts Zein's marriage, Mahjoub thinks: "The predictions of such ascetics are not made fruitlessly" (64). Mahjoub's attitude toward Haneen, characterized by discomfort rooted in awe, is different from his attitude toward the Imam. For Mahjoub's gang, the Imam is "a necessary evil" (92), to whom "the requisite courtesies" must be rendered (93); he is also, as he knows very well, at the mercy of the gang,

who pay his salary and keep the mosque in good condition (93). The Imam lacks any sort of power that might threaten Mahjoub, and so Mahjoub's attitude toward him is one of contempt. The situation is very different with Sheikh Haneen, for he is, as Hassan notes, "the only person whose power [Mahjoub's gang] cannot curb; it is of an order outside their rational, ordered world" (73).

It is now possible to see that the story of how Seif ad-Din becomes a companion of the Imam, which occupies a large portion of the middle of the text, expresses a longing for a more important union which never occurs. Seif ad-Din, in his earlier, unreformed state, is a caricature of secularism, just as the Imam is a caricature of religiosity. The real centers of material and spiritual power, Mahjoub's gang and Sheikh Haneen, never come together. The closest they come to union is in their relationships with Zein, for they are his closest friends. They also make his wedding possible, though in two distinct stages, firmly separated by Haneen's death. Haneen, as a representative of the "flash" or utopian impulse, is forever at odds with the practical, nuts-and-bolts world of Mahjoub's gang, the world in which programs can be executed. Through this opposition, *Wedding* expresses its own dilemma, and fulfills what Jameson calls "the political function of the utopian genre":

[I]ts deepest vocation is to bring home, in local and determinate ways and with a fullness of concrete detail, our constitutional inability to imagine Utopia itself: and this, not owing to any individual failure of imagination but as the result of the systemic, cultural and ideological closure of which we are all in one way or another prisoners. (289)

This is where we can place the tears of Zein. Zein disappears during his wedding, and the members of Mahjoub's gang, responsible as always, search for him, eventually finding him in the cemetery (119). Zein is weeping at Haneen's tomb. When Mahjoub asks what brought him

there, Zein answers through his tears: “If he hadn’t died our reverend father Haneen would have attended the wedding” (119). If historical time had not intervened, in the form of death for Haneen’s mortal body, the wedding would have been complete: Haneen and Mahjoub’s gang would have participated together in the moment of unity they helped to bring about.

This passage leads into the triumphant celebration of the novella’s final pages, when Zein returns to “his place at the heart of the circle,” standing tall “like the mast of a ship” (120). “Make known the good news! Make known the good news!” he shouts, and his presence, in body and sound, fills the dancers with new energy. Yet his face is still wet with tears. Al-Haggagi reads these tears as a sign of Zein’s “loyalty to his master sheikh” and proof that he is “in full awareness of Being” (129). Hassan offers no interpretation of the tears as such, focusing instead on the role of Mahjoub’s gang, and the way the gang incorporates Zein into the secular world by teaching him “that there is an appropriate action for every occasion” (76). These two approaches to Zein’s tears are less incompatible than emblematic of the split between impulse and program set up by the text, a split that seems to demand either a perspective like al-Haggagi’s, reading from Haneen’s realm, or a perspective like Hassan’s, reading from Mahjoub’s. These two realms continue to await their *barzakh*. Yet if, like Jameson, we invoke Robert C. Elliott’s method of evaluating utopian texts, which attends to “their capacity to imagine properly utopian art works” (416), then we can see that for *Wedding*, that art work is the oral poem. The spoken word, in its ability to unite the present speaker and hearer with thoughts of other places and times, contains the utopian impulse like the “flash” of a future spiritual state. Powerful and transformative, yet limited and ephemeral, the spoken word parallels the bounded magic of Haneen’s year and the miraculous moment of the wedding of Zein. Zein’s tears express

mourning for the inevitable loss of the utopian world of that moment, even as he cries out the good news.

Orality features in this text as the medium of utopian art: a further paradox in a narrative full of paradoxes, as the text, of course, is written. Through the use of the colloquial Arabic of northern Sudan in the dialogue—a spoken rather than a written form—and through the emphasis on song and the ecstatic *shaṭḥ* of Zein, *The Wedding of Zein* attempts to bring the oral and the written into a productive unity. The strange yet successful unions in the novella, whether of bride and bridegroom, like Ni'ma and Zein, or of traditional antagonists like the Imam and Seif ad-Din, project the vision of a world in which the harmony of opposites is possible, arguing for the appropriateness of the hybrid text itself. Debates about orality and literacy, and the possibility or impossibility of cooperation between them, are perennial in the criticism of African literature. *Wedding* expresses a position firmly in favor of the creative union of oral and written forms.

The evocation of orality also resonates with the text's emphasis on the unseen. By privileging the speaking voice, and the hearing ear, rather than the seeing eye, *Wedding* declares the power of the unseen world. Again, as in the parable of Moses and al-Khidr, the *bāṭin* is more significant than the *zāhir*. What is invisible is not equally as important as what is visible, but more important. The invisible is the eternal, the immeasurably vast. Yet, through the human voice, this eternal and invisible reality becomes present, embodied as the chanting at Zein's wedding and his announcement of the good news. The voice is present in the moment of utterance, to the ears of the speaker and hearers, and even more intimately, as vibration within the speaker's body. The voice—embodied and ephemeral in its character as sound, eternal in terms of the words it chants, which are those of the large-scale experiences of religious ecstasy and love—takes on the aspects of planetarity, both intimate and vast, both local and global, both

now and for all time. This creative fusion of the small and the large, it should be noted, passes over the middle-sized body of the nation in silence. “Sudan” is never mentioned in *Wedding*. The nation finds shape only as a government rumbling in the background, a detached entity without meaning for the villagers and submissive both to the miracle of “Haneen’s year” and to the machinations of Mahjoub, who secures the transfer of a District Commissioner he dislikes (101). The union of oral and written Arabic in *Wedding* takes on a particular and planetary significance when read against this absence of the nation. It reminds us that Arabic is not a national language, but a planetary one: its colloquial forms, independent of government institutions, spill across national borders, while its more standard forms are self-consciously global in scope. *Wedding* weds these two forms of discourse: the language of local communal relations and the language of Arabic speakers everywhere; the language of the banks of the Nile and the language of God.

Zein’s tears serve as a reminder that the ecstatic synchronicity performed by the voice has its limits: that it is a utopian impulse, rather than a program. His tears recall the manner in which Gayatri Spivak, even as she proposes the concept of planetarity, describes the radical alterity of the planet as “an experience of the impossible” (102). Yet despite the tears, *The Wedding of Zein* ultimately stands as an expression of hope, one grounded in a Sufi philosophy of unity that makes possible not only the experience of the planet, but the experience of the cosmos. The relationship between the visible and the invisible takes on a different character, leading to a theory of the world that is anything but utopian, in *Season of Migration to the North*.

## Chapter Four

### The Haunted World: *Season of Migration to the North*

*Season of Migration to the North* is Tayeb Salih's best-known work. It was declared "the most important novel of the twentieth century" by the Arab Academy in Damascus in 2004, and forms part of university curricula in a number of countries. It has been translated into more than thirty languages, and has been discussed in high-profile theoretical works such as Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's *Death of a Discipline*. This global interest in *Season of Migration to the North* (hereafter *Season*) grows from the novel's globally-oriented themes and expression. In comparison with Salih's other long works of fiction, *The Wedding of Zein* and *Bandarshah*, *Season* is remarkable both for its use of classical Arabic in both narration and dialogue, and for its intertextual relationships with the works of Western writers such as Shakespeare, Conrad and Freud.

The almost exclusive use of *fuṣḥā* (classical or standard Arabic) implies pan-Arab concerns. These concerns have to do with colonial and postcolonial structures and relationships of power. In particular, the novel treats an Arab "crisis of modernization," the bifurcation of Arab societies along the lines of Westernized science and traditional religion that results in a "double alienation" (Makdisi 536). The ambivalence toward Western culture, whose forms of knowledge are regarded as both alien and necessary to the project of modernization, is compensated for and compounded by cultural nationalism, especially the adherence to what Abdallah Laroui has called a "quasi-magical identification with the great period of classical Arabian culture" (in Makdisi 536). *Season of Migration to the North* frames this crisis as a crisis of identity in the two main characters, the narrator and Mustafa Sa'eed, bilingual intellectuals

whose lives are caught up in global migrations and transformations. The bulk of Mustafa Sa'eed's story takes place in England, but it is related where the other events of the novel occur: in an imaginary village in northern Sudan, recognizable as Wad Hamid, the setting for all of Salih's creative works, although in *Season* the village is not named. The doubling of place is echoed by a doubled literary parentage. *Season* draws from and "writes back" to Western writers, who are at different times mocked, inverted and co-opted in the text; and it also engages with Arabic discursive traditions, both classical and colloquial. The novel therefore involves an almost constant mediation between home and away, between the familiar and the strange. The movement between these terms, and their combination and recombination, generates a disturbing and fantastic sense of the uncanny. If *The Wedding of Zein* is motivated by desire for unity with a system, for the actuation of a historical human community as an eternal and sacred one, *Season* represents individuals haunted by a system, who seek to escape it through violence and death. As in *The Wedding of Zein*, it is fantasy that makes the system visible as a system in *Season*. In the latter case, however, the system is an oppressive global modernity, and the strategy that exposes it is the uncanny.

As a critical term, the uncanny developed in fits and starts: introduced as the *Unheimlich* in a minor essay by Freud, the term was taken up by French theorists beginning in the 1960s, and then by the Anglo-American academy in the 1990s. Appearing as "the unhomely" in the work of Homi Bhabha, it has been used to comment metaphorically on postcolonial experience. These different critical engagements with the uncanny will inform the following discussion. Of particular importance is Freud's link between the uncanny and the return of the repressed: "this uncanny is in reality nothing new or alien, but something which is familiar and old-established in the mind and which has become alienated from it only through the process of repression" (142).

While an uncanny object or event may be regarded as unfamiliar, the uncanny feeling stems precisely from the fact that it has been experienced before. Thus the uncanny is what is known and *undesirable*, that part of reality one recognizes, but wishes to eliminate. One of the definitions of uncanny listed by Freud is “the name for everything that ought to have remained ... secret and hidden but has come to light” (125). Figures such as that of the double, and repeated events amounting to “the constant recurrence of the same thing,” (125) share this feature of undesired and therefore frightening return. Bhabha’s discussion of “unhomeliness” emphasizes the blurring of the border between public and private embedded in the passage from “hidden” to “coming to light,” and redirects it toward a discussion of invasion and the breakdown of borders in a context of “extra-territorial and cross-cultural initiation”:

The recesses of domestic space become sites for history’s most intricate invasions. In that displacement, the borders between home and world become confused; and, uncannily, the private and the public become part of each other, forcing upon us a vision that is as divided as it is disorienting. (13)

This is the vision of *Season*, with its disorienting shifts between inner and outer, between home and away. It is a fantastic vision, which portrays the characters as “outside-of-place” (Armitt 5). The border between reality and illusion, or “lies,” is porous, leading to an apprehension of the world as fundamentally untrustworthy, a haunted place. The use of fantasy, and particularly its uncanny form, to express the postcolonial condition, has been explored during the past two decades through the concept of “postcolonial Gothic.”

Judie Newman, one of the first to engage the notion of postcolonial Gothic, identifies in the texts she places under this rubric the unspoken and the “spoken for”: “on the one hand the silenced colonial subject rendered inadmissible to discourse, on the other that discourse itself

which keeps telling the story again and again on its own terms” (in Rudd 5). Here, speech and silence conspire against the “colonial subject.” The dynamic of apparent opposites in secret collusion echoes the workings of Freud’s uncanny, as does the relationship between repression and repetition. In *Season*, these two terms are associated with the two main characters, the unnamed narrator and Mustafa Sa’eed. The narrator has been identified with Meheimeed, the main character in Salih’s final long work, *Bandarshah* (Hassan 15), but he is not named in *Season*, a form of silence in keeping with his passive and repressed character: he embodies the “unspoken.” His refusal to acknowledge the deep traumas of colonial history associates him with “the wishful dream of the *Nahda*” (Hassan 82), the Arab literary and cultural movement of the nineteenth and early twentieth century whose members imagined an uncomplicated partnership between East and West (Makdisi 536). Mustafa Sa’eed, unlike the narrator, recognizes that Western Enlightenment is inseparable from Western imperialism. He acts out the racist stereotypes of colonial discourse, believing that he is avenging himself on England; but in fact he is trapped in the lies he perpetrates endlessly: he is continually “spoken for.” The challenge for Mustafa is to find a way out of his own illusory, spoken-for existence; for the narrator, it is to speak, to act, to divulge what has been repressed, and to tell the story which is the novel *Season of Migration to the North*.

*Season* accumulates repetitions of the elements associated with the uncanny: uncertainty, ambivalence, reversal, the Eros and death drives, and doubling—that is, repetition itself. These repetitions cluster around Mustafa Sa’eed, who generates much of the text’s uncanny force, both in his play as a double of racist stereotypes in England (the double of a repetition—of repeated, received ideas), and in his effect on the narrator in Sudan. The first part of this essay explores Mustafa Sa’eed’s uncanny role, and traces two possible functions for the uncanny that are treated

in Salih's text. There is, first, the uncanny as negative repetition, expressed through the reproduction of abuses of power, the proliferation of racial stereotypes, and the metaphor of disease. And there is also a more affirmative function for the uncanny, the use of the uncanny as a critical tool. The first function belongs to Mustafa Sa'eed, Salih's seductive anti-hero. The second function is expressed through the narrator of the text, for whom the uncanny presence of Mustafa Sa'eed instigates a process of reeducation and transformation from a passive to an active character. The function of the uncanny with regard to these two characters is the focus of the first part of the essay. The second part examines the temporal quality of the uncanny, its expression through rapid and destabilizing shifts in space and time—a temporality intimately linked to modernity. Finally, I use Julia Kristeva's concept of abjection, an idea closely connected to the uncanny, to show how, for both the narrator and Mustafa Sa'eed, the way out of the "unspoken/spoken for" trap of the postcolonial condition lies through what cannot be spoken.

Tayeb Salih remarked in a 1980 lecture at the American University in Beirut that he was reading Freud while writing *Season* (Amyuni 15); while it is uncertain whether he read the essay on "The Uncanny," the influence of Freud is certainly perceptible in the novel, and critics have mapped it in several ways. John and Tarawneh, for example, provide a useful investigation of Freudian theory in the novel, and Musa Al-Halool focuses more specifically on the question of the uncanny. My reading departs from Al-Halool's in that it is less strictly psychoanalytical: while his treatment of the uncanny results in a Freudian analysis of the novel's major characters, this chapter treats the way the uncanny is used not only to illuminate the narrator's psyche, but to transform it. In addition, this discussion will address the manner in which, through signs of the uncanny outside the human characters—for example, in the germ that spreads, repeating itself, and also remains latent, like repressed material in the unconscious—*Season* portrays the world as

uncanny, an example of Bhabha's formulation of "the unhomely" as "a paradigmatic colonial and post-colonial condition" (13).

The narrator of *Season of Migration to the North* is a well-to-do Sudanese man, describing his experiences after his return from a seven-year education in England. His will to repress certain parts of his experience emerges in the novel's first lines:

It was, gentlemen, after a long absence—seven years to be exact, during which time I was studying in Europe—that I returned to my people. I learnt much and much passed me by—but that's another story. The important thing is that I returned with a great yearning for my people... (1)

While this tale starts with a return from abroad, it neatly sidesteps that foreign experience: "that's another story." The return home is "the important thing." These opening lines of the novel set up very deliberate boundaries to the narrator's story. It is emphatically not the story of his education abroad—in England, the former colonial power in Sudan. It is the story of his longed-for return to Sudan (in the Arabic text, the first word is "I returned"), and denies any connection between this return and his sojourn in a vague and featureless Europe. Yet the events of the novel drive relentlessly toward the opposite conclusion: that the narrator's experiences cannot be so easily disentangled from one another, and nor can individual human beings, societies, cultures or the movements of history.

*Season* depicts a process of education, or more specifically reeducation, for the narrator. Although he is freshly educated, his essentialist view of the world, which makes his home the center of peace and joy and represses any disturbing elements to be found there, needs to be broken down in order for him to become an active member of his own society. His reeducation progresses through a series of moments evoking a sense of horror, frightening disorientation or

foreboding: uncanny, fantastic moments in which he is outside-of-place. The narrator's dislocation is instigated by Mustafa Sa'eed, a new inhabitant of the village, a stranger.

Mustafa Sa'eed disrupts the narrator's feeling that he is "a being with a background, with roots, with a purpose" (2). He creates this disturbance through his silence during the narrator's triumphant return to the village, his criticism of the narrator's decision to study English poetry, and his "mysterious" smile (4). This smile returns on their next meeting: "Then I saw the mocking phantom of a smile hovering round his eyes exactly as I had seen it on the first day" (10). Again, on the following page, the "mocking phantom" is "still more in evidence round his eyes" (11). And finally, when Mustafa Sa'eed begins to tell his story: "I saw the mocking phantom around his eyes, more distinct than ever before, something as perceptible as a flash of lightning" (17).

The "phantom," like the repetitive phrases that invoke it in the novel, is a repetition, a revenant, something that returns. The word *tayf* ("phantom") indicates a specter that appears in dreams: its insistent return calls the narrator toward the outside, fantastic, non-rational space. Its "mocking" character signifies Mustafa Sa'eed's role as the narrator's uncanny double. The mocking look expresses both the presence of shared knowledge between the narrator and his double, and the power the double holds over the narrator, as the figure who, against the narrator's will, brings his repressed fears to the surface. Three types of repetition coincide here to create an uncanny effect. There is, first, the repeated return of the mocking phantom, the use of the same phrase provoking a sense of *déjà vu*; second, there is Mustafa Sa'eed's presence as the narrator's uncanny double; third, there is the shared quality between Mustafa Sa'eed and the narrator, that which makes them similar: their having returned to Sudan from England.

This disturbing quality of Mustafa Sa'eed's intensifies and becomes fully uncanny when, over drinks with the narrator, he suddenly begins quoting English poetry. The narrator reacts with superstitious dread: "I tell you that had the ground suddenly split open and revealed an afreet standing before me, his eyes shooting out flames, I would not have been more terrified" (14). His terror is specific: "All of a sudden there came to me the ghastly, nightmarish feeling that we—the men grouped together in that room—were not a reality but merely some illusion" (15). The cause of this feeling is the intrusion into a rural Sudanese setting of English poetry, the subject of the narrator's study. His momentary sense of unreality is an enhancement of perception, not a loss: he perceives his setting to be an illusion, and in fact his whole return is an illusion, as is the eternal, unchanging nature he attributes to his home village.

As Al-Halool notes, Mustafa Sa'eed represents the narrator's "European 'ghost'" (35); he will not allow the narrator to shake off his experience in England and settle happily at home. The poem Mustafa Sa'eed recites, Ford Madox Hueffner's "Antwerp," underscores this uncanny role:

*Those women of Flanders*

*Await the lost,*

*Await the lost who will never leave the harbor*

*They await the lost whom the train never will bring. (14)<sup>12</sup>*

The lost—those who have traveled to other lands—will never return, nor will the youth who left home seven years ago return as he was, to the home he left behind. The poem speaks to the impossibility of a full, seamless return; every return of the "lost" must be uncanny. The English poem brings England across the border into Wad Hamid: an act the narrator wishes to consider

---

<sup>12</sup> These are the words of Salih's translator Denys Johnson-Davies. In an appropriate literary migration, the lines were translated into Arabic by Salih and then back into English by Johnson-Davies. Hueffner's English lines read: "These are the women of Flanders:/They await the lost./They await the lost that shall never leave the dock;/They await the lost that shall never again come by train." (Monroe 208)

impossible. Mustafa Sa'eed recites the poem in English, "with an impeccable accent": this gift for mimicry characterizes the double. Mustafa's perfect accent calls into question the narrator's belief that a Sudanese student can remain unaffected by seven years in England: here, the narrator's double (the Sudanese man returned from England) is also, through his English speech, the double of an Englishman. In addition, the poem appears in the text in Arabic, recalling the uncanny doubleness inherent in translation. Like a ghost, the poem is present and absent at the same time. "In the act of translation," Bhabha writes, "the 'given' content becomes alien and estranged"; the language of translation is "always confronted by its double, the untranslatable—alien and foreign" (235).

The lines Mustafa quotes are charged with significance for the narrator and for Mustafa himself. Hueffner's poem mourns the lost; its subject is the First World War, a war fought, as Benita Parry emphasizes, "amongst the capitalist nations of Europe over the spoils of overseas empire and the exercise of global power" (83). This imperialist violence will provide a background to Mustafa Sa'eed's story of seduction and death in London. Through the evocation of that violence, the poem he recites challenges not only the possibility of the narrator's full return to Sudan, but his entire journey to England, his education there and the innocuous nature of the study of "an obscure English poet" (Salih 9). Mustafa Sa'eed's sudden utterance of English poetry raises the phantom of the narrator's English past, and foregrounds the connection between the narrator's migration and Sudan's colonial history, an association the narrator wishes to repress.

Mustafa Sa'eed's story is characterized in part by the repetition of violent death. His pursuit of English women leads directly or indirectly to their deaths: three of his lovers kill themselves, and the fourth, his wife Jean Morris, he murders. As he describes his seduction of

women he uses the imagery of hunting and warfare: Isabella Seymour is his “prey” (37), a bird that has “fallen into the snare” (39); his nights with Jean Morris are a “war with bow and sword and spear and arrows” (34). These combative seductions are not random, but calculated. Laced with images of Arabs and Africans borrowed from European fantasies of the East, they take on the qualities of a return, a revenge: “The Nile, that snake god, has gained a new victim,” Mustafa exults with heavy irony as he seduces Isabella Seymour, comparing her a few lines later to “Carnarvon when he entered Tutankhamen’s tomb,” contaminated by “a deadly disease which has come from you know not where and which will bring about your destruction, be it sooner or later” (39). In describing himself to Isabella as an inhabitant of “deserts of golden sands and jungles where non-existent animals called out to one another” and as “like Othello—Arab-African” (38), he makes use of a tradition of racist discourse analyzed in Edward Said’s classic *Orientalism*, published just over a decade after *Season*. The mythological animals, fantastic gods and picturesque Andalusians that cavort through his speeches to English women are drawn from the same imaginary “repertoire” described by Said as having taken shape in Europe between the Middle Ages and the eighteenth century:

In the depths of this Oriental stage stands a prodigious cultural repertoire whose individual items evoke a fabulously rich world: the Sphinx, Cleopatra, Eden, Troy, Sodom and Gomorrah, Astarte, Isis and Osiris, Sheba, Babylon, the Genii, the Magi, Nineveh, Prester John, Mahomet, and dozens more; settings, in some cases names only, half-imagined, half-known; monsters, devils, heroes; terrors, pleasures, desires.

(*Orientalism* 63)

Without that tradition, without the images of Arab and African exoticism, sensuality and savagery which flooded the libraries of Europe, Mustafa Sa’eed could not have achieved his

sexual successes in the same way. “The infection had stricken these women a thousand years ago,” he tells the narrator, “but I had stirred up the latent depths of the disease until it had got out of control and had killed” (34).

Mustafa’s story is punctuated with repeated phrases. Almost all the cases of repetition at the sentence level in the novel are his. The following examples are illustrative:

A. “... I was as taut and firm-looking as an inflated waterskin” (26). “... the waterskin had distended further...” (28). “It was with air that my waterskins were distended...” (33).

B. “The string of the bow is drawn taut and the arrow must needs shoot forth” (27). “... the bowstring had become more taut. The arrow will shoot forth towards other unknown horizons” (28). “Every day the string of the bow became more taut ... the arrow’s target had been fixed and it was inevitable the tragedy would take place” (33).

C. “And the train carried me to Victoria Station and to the world of Jean Morris” (29). “The train carried me to Victoria Station and to the world of Jean Morris” (31; 33).<sup>13</sup>

D. “I am the South that yearns for the North and the ice” (30; 142).

E. “... my caravans were thirsty, and the mirage shimmered before me in the wilderness of longing ... ‘You’re a savage bull that does not weary of the chase,’ she said to me one day. ‘I am tired of your pursuing me and of my running before you. Marry me.’” (33; 157).

F. “... my storehouse of hackneyed phrases is inexhaustible” (35). “My store of hackneyed phrases is inexhaustible” (39).

Many of the phrases evoke a sense of inevitability, of fate: “The string of the bow is drawn taut,” “The train carried me to Victoria Station...” Mustafa’s story is laden with indications that it could not have been otherwise. He compares his seductions, which will lead to

---

<sup>13</sup> The phrases in C and F differ slightly from one another in the English translation. In Arabic they are repeated word for word.

his lovers' annihilation, to unavoidable processes of nature: "Thus I mean you no harm, except to the extent that the sea is harmful when ships are wrecked against its rocks, and to the extent that the lightning is harmful when it rends a tree in two" (41). His repetition of words resonates with the other repetitions in his life: movement from place to place, the pursuit of women, death. Fate is scripted, inevitable; he goes through the same motions over and over again, accompanying them with "hackneyed phrases." His helplessness in the grip of his own obsession recalls the sensations, described by Freud in "The Uncanny," of a man who has lost his way and continues to find himself in the same square: "... it is only this factor of involuntary repetition which surrounds what would otherwise be innocent enough with an uncanny atmosphere, and forces upon us the idea of something fateful and inescapable" (138). Mustafa Sa'eed's description of his fate as inescapable and natural suggests the presence of what Freud calls "repetition compulsion" (Masschelein 38). In *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, Freud analyzes repetition compulsion as a feature of traumatic neurosis (39). In Mustafa's case, the source of the trauma is the history of colonization. The compulsion that involves him in constant returns to battle, death and the figure of the primitive "Arab-African," is the labyrinth of colonial and postcolonial history.

The repeated phrase "my storehouse/store of hackneyed phrases is inexhaustible" is particularly significant here (35; 39). "Hackneyed phrases" is Johnson-Davies' rendition of the Arabic *amthāl*, a word that does not have the negative connotations of the English "hackneyed" ("trite, uninteresting, or commonplace through familiarity or indiscriminate and frequent use," according to the *The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary*, vol. 1). The dictionary *Lisan al-'Arab* defines *amthāl* as examples, proverbs, models, or precepts to be followed (612); far from carrying the implication of triteness and tediousness in "hackneyed phrases," the word *amthāl*

has a positive meaning, suggesting an ideal model or an example used to support an argument. It shares with “hackneyed phrases” the idea of repetition and familiarity, but implies esteem for what is being repeated. In Mustafa Sa’eed’s case, the *amthāl* collected in his “storehouse” (*dhākirah*) concern the proverbial simplicity and sexual prowess of the “Arab-African.” They are common currency among the women he seduces. The word *amthāl* suggests, more powerfully than “hackneyed phrases,” the presence of an established tradition upon which Mustafa Sa’eed draws for his own purposes. “There came a moment when I felt I had been transformed in her eyes into a naked, primitive creature, a spear in one hand and arrows in the other, hunting elephants and lions in the jungles,” he says of his encounter with Isabella Seymour, adding laconically: “This was fine” (38). In order to accomplish his seductions, Mustafa makes himself a stereotype, becoming a copy of a copy, the double of a repetition.

Homi Bhabha’s elaboration of the stereotype as an uncanny repetition is highly relevant here. The stereotype, used to bolster the “fixity” of otherness in colonial discourse, is “a form of knowledge and identification that vacillates between what is always ‘in place,’ already known, and something that must be anxiously repeated” (94-5). Ambivalence is central to the stereotype (95), which enables the production of “the colonized as a social reality which is at once an ‘other’ and yet entirely knowable and visible” (101). The stereotype proclaims the fixity of otherness, but betrays anxiety about that fixity because it must always be repeated. Through a quote from Said, Bhabha also moves his discussion of the stereotype to pleasure and the erotic. Said writes: “The orient at large, therefore, vacillates between the West’s contempt for what is familiar and its shivers of delight in—or fear of—novelty” (in Bhabha 105). Bhabha relates this to “the Freudian fable of fetishism (and disavowal)” (105), a vacillation between the affirmation of wholeness/similarity and the anxiety of difference/lack, which becomes, in colonial discourse,

the vacillation between “All men have the same skin/race/culture” and “Some do not have the same skin/race/culture” (106-7). These two poles of fetishism are available to Mustafa Sa’eed, part of the contents of his “storehouse of hackneyed phrases.” If he is at one time, for Isabella Seymour, the absolute other, “a naked, primitive creature,” he is at other times a blood relation: when she tells him her mother is Spanish, he builds a fairytale whose rhythmic cadences cast a seductive glow over a history of conquest:

Doubtless one of my forefathers was a soldier in Tarik ibn Ziad’s army. Doubtless he met one of your ancestors as she gathered in the grapes from an orchard in Seville. Doubtless he fell in love with her at first sight and she with him. He lived with her for a time, then left her and went off to Africa. There he married again and I was one of his progeny in Africa, and you have come from his progeny in Spain. (42)

Here Mustafa frames his seduction of Isabella in terms of the Arab colonization of the Iberian peninsula. Love masks violence, and produces people of different nations who belong to the same family: an ironic commentary on a certain type of careless cosmopolitanism. Isabella is helplessly drawn to Mustafa’s heady mix of familiarity and strangeness, like an obsessive to a fetish. A similar scene is played out with Ann Hammond, though this time it is she, dressed in “an Arab robe and head-dress,” who insists on likeness, becoming herself the double of a stereotype of the submissive Arab woman (142). Ann Hammond throws her arms around Mustafa after a lecture, and the two enter instantly into an erotic performance: “At last I have found you, Sausan,” Mustafa says, and the young woman answers: “How can I forget our house in Karkh in Baghdad on the banks of the river Tigris in the days of El-Ma’moun” (143). The relationship between the two takes place on a stage in which the protagonists are doubled, both actors and audience. The elaborate trappings of what Mustafa calls his “den of lethal lies”—“the

sandalwood and incense; the ostrich feathers and ivory and ebony figurines; the paintings and drawings of forests of palm trees along the shores of the Nile” (143)—play a role similar to that of a fetish. They fill in the blanks, compensating for a lack: the absence of an actual relationship between Mustafa and Ann. For Ann, Isabella and Mustafa’s other self-destroying lover, Sheila Greenwood, the ultimate fetish is Mustafa himself: “You are my god and there is no god but you,” Isabella tells him (108). The narrator reflects on the women’s fervor: “How strange! How ironic! Just because a man has been created on the Equator some mad people regard him as a slave, others as a god” (108). Bhabha, explaining how the fetishized figure of the colonized can function as both a “good object” and an object of hate, quotes Freud: “affection and hostility in the treatment of the fetish...are mixed in unequal proportions in different cases, so that the one or the other is more clearly recognizable” (Bhabha 112).

The power of Mustafa and Ann’s performance, or “lie”—“lie upon lie” (146)—is such that, while they cannot be said to be fully present, they are not wholly absent either. “Though I realized I was lying, I felt that somehow I meant what I was saying and that she too, despite her lying, was telling the truth” (144). What keeps this performance from being merely a game is the way it involves the characters emotionally and psychologically. They are not absent, but multiplied, or rather, split. “[O]n the walls were large mirrors,” Mustafa Sa’eed tells the narrator, “so that when I slept with a woman it was as if I slept with a whole harem simultaneously” (31). The Arabic text intensifies the doubling with a pun on “Ann” and “*ān*” (moment or time): Mustafa’s mirror allows him to sleep with a whole harem at one time, or in one Ann. The sexual fantasy bears a family resemblance to literary fantasy as discussed in the first two chapters of this study: a multiplying function, expressing synchronicity, the more-than-one-at-once. In *Wedding*, fantasy enables the representation of unity: Zein is both village fool and Sufi Pole. In *Season*,

Mustafa's fantasy represents disintegration: two subjects shattered into multiple reflections. The first case articulates a world view in which every mundane *zāhir* possesses a spiritual *bātin*, and local, everyday space is filled up with the presence of the sacred. The concern for the small and ordinary, and the linking of this local reality to the larger system of Sufi Islam, is a version of planetary thinking. In the second case, synchronicity represents the production of more and more of the same thing, a gallery of empty reflections like a storehouse of hackneyed phrases. The flat, repeated images and dead, repetitive language suggest mass production, homogenization, globalization.

This split or rupture is also expressed in temporal terms, in the way Mustafa and Ann play out a scene from the imagined past. "I took her and she accepted," Mustafa tells the narrator, "for what happened had already happened between us a thousand years ago" (146). In this repetition, the past interrupts the present: the labyrinth is made up of multiplied selves and also of multiplied times. The phrase "a thousand years ago" is linked, in the context of Mustafa Sa'eed's compulsive seductions, to the notion of disease. During his trial, his lawyer defends him by insisting that "These girls were not killed by Mustafa Sa'eed but by the germ of a deadly disease that assailed them a thousand years ago" (33). Mustafa knows this is untrue: "It was I who killed them" (33). Yet the lawyer's defense clarifies the nature of Mustafa's weapons. Mustafa's drama with Ann Hammond is an ecstatic embrace of stereotypes, a love affair between the fetishistic ebony and ivory figurines that conceal the absence of the other. Sheila Greenwood, another of his lovers, laughs at her reflection in the mirror, fondling "the ivory necklace I had placed like a noose around her beautiful neck" (35). She leaves the bedroom "carrying the germs of self-destruction within her": the germs of stereotypes, "so novel" yet so thoroughly known

(35). Mustafa's description of Sheila's death brings her silence together with his "hackneyed phrases":

She died without a single word passing her lips—my storehouse of hackneyed phrases is inexhaustible. For every occasion I possess the appropriate garb. (35)

In the Arabic text, the second sentence is a proverb: *Shannā ya 'rif matā yulāqī Ṭabaqah*, "Shannā knows when to meet Ṭabaqah," a reference to a pair of lovers in a folktale. The power of Mustafa's storehouse of the proverbial is illustrated with a proverb. As Franco Moretti writes of the deadening commonplaces of Bouvard and Pécuchet, this is "murder by pat phrases" (*Modern Epic* 71).<sup>14</sup>

In *Season*, the life of divisive and deadly stereotypes is imagined in deep time. The thousand-year history of cross-cultural violence stretches back past the era of north-south colonization to include the south-north colonization of Al-Andalus, which Mustafa replays with Isabella Seymour. The spread of the disease, its ability to reproduce itself everywhere, means that both Mustafa and his lawyer are correct: Mustafa is responsible for his lovers' deaths, but these women, infected with the deadly stereotypes of racist discourse, are his accomplices:

My bedroom was a spring-well of sorrow, the germ of a fatal disease. The infection had stricken these women a thousand years ago, but I had stirred up the latent depths of the disease until it had got out of control and had killed. (34)

Latency operates like repressed material in the unconscious: that which surfaces at the moment of the uncanny. Mustafa Sa'eed, around whom the marks of the uncanny are clustered—repetition, the Eros and death drives, and (in Bhabha's formulation) the power of the fetish—brings the repressed disease up from the depths. His role in England is that of the "avenging

---

<sup>14</sup> Moretti borrows the expression from Karl Kraus, whose *The Last Days of Mankind* exposes, Moretti writes, the "murderous idiocy" of the language of newspapers (71).

migrant” (Bhabha 242), his function “the return of the oppressed” (104). Yet the deadly disease that takes, in England, the form of stereotypes about Arabs and Africans, cannot be reduced to that form alone. Mustafa’s seduction of Isabella Seymour, carried out with the aid of fantasies of the conquest of al-Andalus, portrays conquest as a feature not of Western imperialism, but of contact zones. This important conceptual move places Salih’s critique of the modern world-system in the domain of planetarity rather than anti-colonial nationalism: it is a critique that bears on the topic of invasion anywhere on the planet and at any time in history. Nor does the critique stop here. Rather, it is addressed to those two areas for which fantasy is so well-suited: the very large and the very small, the world and the body. The body, too, is a contact zone.

There is a suggestion in *Season* that Mustafa Sa’eed transfers some of his destructive potential, like a germ, to his Sudanese wife, Hosna Bint Mahmoud. The narrator’s friend Mahjoub describes her as having undergone “an indescribable change” after her marriage, becoming “like a city woman” (101). In the section of the text dealing with Hosna, the “fatal disease” becomes so vast and diffuse that it needs a larger name, like desire. When the narrator falls in love with Hosna, he reflects that he, like “millions of others,” is “not immune from the germ of contagion that oozes from the body of the universe” (104). This use of the trope of the germ expands its force beyond the notion of the reproduction and circulation of stereotypes. It directs it into the territory of desire, which, in the narrator’s patriarchal society, figures as a disease from which no one is “immune.” In both Sudan and England, the germ is the sign of a diseased social intimacy. Sex is poisoned by it: in England through the “deadly” fetish of the stereotype, and in Sudan through the equally fatal curtailing of women’s agency.

After Mustafa Sa’eed’s mysterious disappearance during a flood, Hosna Bint Mahmoud is forced by her family to marry Wad Rayyes, a septuagenarian lecher. On their wedding night,

she kills him and then herself. The narrator, who loves Hosna, thinks of her as the last of Mustafa Sa'eed's "victims" (141): "She killed poor Wad Rayyes and killed herself because of Mustafa Sa'eed" (142). It is difficult to account for the connection the narrator draws here, except through the logic of desire-as-disease, which in a patriarchal context makes every man an aggressor and every woman a victim. That context is indicated by the banter of the narrator's grandfather and his friends, in which a rape is related as an amusing story (74), and the words of the Qur'an are deliberately misquoted in order to support the patriarchal structure (78).

Hosna's story interrupts this systemic violence with a violent act of her own. This murder-suicide provides the novel's most striking example of that which "ought to have remained secret and hidden but has come to light" (Freud 126). Her act horrifies her community, who regard it as utterly alien and new: "[I]t's the first time anything like this has happened in the village since God created it," says the narrator's grandfather (124); "It is something we have never seen or heard of in times past or present," says the outspoken matriarch Bint Majzoub (124). Yet in fact the narrator has heard some very similar stories. One is told by Wad Rayyes, Hosna's victim, himself: with much laughter, he recounts his abduction and rape of a slave girl to a circle of friends (including the narrator's beloved grandfather) who are all respected members of the village (74). A story even more similar to Hosna's is told to the narrator on his journey from his village to Khartoum: "They said that a woman from the tribe of El-Mirisab had killed her husband..." (110). Hearing the story, the narrator imagines how this unusual news will travel:

[T]hey would know it: the tribes of El-Mirisab, El-Hawaweer and El-Kababeesh; the judges, resident and itinerant; the Commissioner of North Kordofan, the Commissioner of the Southern North Province, the Commissioner of East Khartoum; the shepherds at

the watering places; the Sheikhs and the Nazirs; the bedouin in hair tents at the intersections of the valleys. All of them would know her name, for it is not every day that a woman kills a man, let alone her husband, in this land in which the sun has left no more killing to be done. (110)

The specificity of this list of those who will hear the woman's story is suggestive. Her victim was her husband; her act took place in the domestic sphere. Yet the news, thinks the narrator, will travel into the world of officialdom; the woman's name will be known not only by ordinary people throughout the land, but by those in power, both religious and political; "the government was in the process of arresting her" (110). The result of the woman's act stands in stark contrast to the aftermath of Hosna's murder of her husband and suicide. In her case, the story is not circulated, but hushed up swiftly and thoroughly, unmarked by obsequies: "Some of the women started to hold a funeral ceremony but Mahjoub, God bless him, shut them up and said he'd break the neck of anyone who opened her mouth," Bint Majzoub tells the narrator (128). Only Bint Majzoub, a non-conformist (within limits) here as elsewhere, has agreed to tell him the story; no one else will give him the details.

The case of Hosna and that of the woman of El-Mirisab differ in that Hosna removed herself from the scene through suicide, enabling the concealment of the story. The woman of El-Mirisab, still living, must be brought to justice. This difference, however, does not remove the contrast between the two episodes, or the emphasis placed on it by the detailed list of those who will hear of the woman of El-Mirisab. "It is not every day that a woman kills a man, let alone her husband," the narrator says, but Hosna's story is evidence that he does not and cannot know whether this happens "every day." He cannot know, because the sufferings and even the actions of women like Hosna are concealed by common consent. "A murder happens next door to you,"

the narrator's uncle complains to a friend of the murdered man, "and you sleep right through it?" (129). But in fact the whole village is willfully sleeping through the daily violence that drove Hosna to desperation.

Hosna's story is not only a repetition of the story of the woman of El-Mirisab, but also, of course, of the story of her first husband, Mustafa Sa'eed, who stabbed his English wife Jean Morris to death as Hosna stabbed Wad Rayyes and herself. The return of gendered combat, suicide and murder has a particular meaning for the narrator. This type of violence is no longer only "out there," far away, in Mustafa's room in London. And the narrator, as an influential Sudanese man with an English education, is not innocent of this violence. He possesses power both as an educated civil servant in Khartoum and as a male from a respected family in his village. And that village, the site of his deepest love and longing, is, like London, a place of peril.

A repeated line serves to draw together the strands of violence in different contexts: "...two thighs, opened wide and white" (48); "... two white, wide-open thighs..." (87); "two wide-open white thighs" (111).<sup>15</sup> The repetition of this sexual image is expressed in the mind of the narrator and not, like the other repeated phrases, in the story of Mustafa Sa'eed. It is the sign of his own labyrinth, the repressed element to which he habitually and involuntarily returns.

The last time the phrase occurs it again recalls his walk home through the village before dawn, but this time he is on his journey to Khartoum and has just been told the story of the woman of El-Mirisab which prefigures the death of Hosna. The passage, with its dazzling play of images, is worth quoting at length:

An idea occurred to me; turning it over in my mind, I decided to express it and see what happened. I said to them that she had not killed him but that he had died from sunstroke

---

<sup>15</sup> Again, the phrase is repeated word for word in Arabic.

just as Isabella Seymour had died, and Sheila Greenwood, Ann Hammond, and Jean Morris. Nothing happened.

“We had a horrible Commandant of Police called Major Cook,” said the sergeant. No use. No sense of wonder. They went on their way and we went on ours.

The sun is the enemy. Now it is exactly in the liver of the sky, as the Arabs say. What a fiery liver! And thus it will remain for hours without moving – or so it will seem to living creatures when even the stones groan, the trees weep, and iron cries out for help. The weeping of a woman under a man at dawn and two wide-open white thighs. They are now like the dry bones of camels scattered in the desert. No taste. No smell. Nothing of good. Nothing of evil. The wheels of the car strike spitefully against the stones. “His twisted road all too soon leads to disaster, and generally the disaster lies clearly before him, as clear as the sun, so that we are amazed how such an intelligent man can in fact be so stupid. Granted a generous measure of intelligence, he has been denied wisdom. He is an intelligent fool.” That’s what the judge said at Old Bailey before passing sentence.

(110-11)

Here the husband of the unknown murderess joins the ranks of Mustafa’s dead lovers, another repetition, another victim—of “sunstroke,” says the narrator, echoing the language of Mustafa Sa’eed: “Is the sun wicked when it turns the hearts of millions of human beings into sand-strewn deserts in which the throat of the nightingale is parched with thirst?” (43). Mustafa’s apparent self-justification and the narrator’s attempt to normalize violence by linking it to natural processes will be repeated in the villagers’ rapid concealment of the deaths of Wad Rayyes and Hosna Bint Mahmoud to preserve the appearance of “natural,” “normal” life, and in Mahjoub’s claim that Hosna was abnormal: “The thing she did wasn’t the act of a human being—it was the

act of a devil” (132). All are behaviors in the face of violence which avoid an actual response. The passage above suggests that the narrator does not believe that sunstroke killed either the English women or the husband of the woman of El-Mirisab; he decides to voice his thought in order to “see what happened.” Significantly, “Nothing happened.” The people around him are unaffected by his strange assertion; they possess “no sense of wonder.” In place of a response to the narrator is the apparently random mention of a “horrible” English Commandant of Police—a remark that brings the echo of colonialism into a meditation on violence, particularly gendered violence, and the problem of human apathy toward it. The image of Wad Rayyes and his wife returns, but is stripped of life, reduced to bone, termed neither good nor evil, like sunstroke. And finally we return to the trial of Mustafa Sa’eed, the result of the suicides and murder alluded to at the beginning of the passage, and the comment of the judge, surely not entirely trustworthy, but insightful in its mention of Mustafa’s “twisted road.” The whole passage, with its back-and-forth movement between a desire and a reluctance to examine the roots of oppression, resembles such a road.

Hosna’s death breaks the wall of this labyrinth for the narrator. He is no longer willing to accept human violence as an amoral, or at any rate unavoidable, process of nature. In his recital of the struggle between Hosna and Wad Rayyes he focuses on the people involved as actors and insists on speaking the details of their acts: “‘She killed him and killed herself,’ I said as though talking to myself. ‘She stabbed him more than ten times and – how ghastly! ... He bit off her nipple... and bit and scratched every inch of her body. How ghastly!’” (131). His words are ostensibly addressed to his friend Mahjoub, whom he accuses a moment later of having done nothing to save Hosna, but his description of the event is itself a case of “talking to myself.” He realizes how deeply implicated he is in Hosna’s death. She begged his mother and Mahjoub to

ask him to marry her and prevent the marriage to Wad Rayyes; he loved her, and might have saved her life. “All my life I had not chosen, had not decided” he realizes (168).

All his life—through his study in England, his return to the village, his entrance into a government job in Khartoum—he has not decided, but followed the path expected of a man with his background and opportunities. He has done what is as natural as the heat of the sun, as natural as the migration of the birds. The intrusion of the uncanny reveals that much has been repressed in the construction of what is “natural,” producing a sense of fantastic unreality in the narrator, a loss of direction, as if some internal compass has gone awry. Recall that when Mustafa Sa’eed recites “Antwerp,” the narrator feels as if he and those around him are unreal, a nightmare (14). Similarly, after he hears the first part of Mustafa’s story, his whole village takes on a quality of unreality, “suspended between earth and sky” (48). His own being seems to be dissolving: “[Mustafa Sa’eed] had said that he was a lie, so was I also a lie?” (49).

This passage describing the narrator’s walk home after listening to Mustafa’s story also contains his only direct reference, save for the initial mention of an absence of seven years, to his own experience abroad. Though framed as a recollection, it presents few images of Europe; indeed, it is less a memory of England than a memory of the memory of Sudan:

I used to treasure within with the image of this little village, seeing it wherever I went with the eye of my imagination... At the latter end of the night the foreign voices would reach my ears as though they were those of my people out here. I must be one of those birds that exist only in one region of the world. True I studied poetry, but that means nothing. I could equally well have studied engineering, agriculture, or medicine; they are all means to earning a living. I would imagine the faces over there as being brown or black so that they would look like the faces of people I knew. Over there is like here,

neither better nor worse. But I am from here, just as the date palm standing in the courtyard of our house has grown in *our* house and not in anyone else's. The fact that they came to our land, I know not why, does that mean we should poison our present and our future? (49)

Unsettled by Mustafa's story and by the fear that he too may not have returned unscathed from his English migration, the narrator takes refuge not in the memory of what happened to him in England, but of what did not. He did not see his village, he did not breathe in the smell of it, he did not recognize his people or hear their voices. All of this was imagined, a ghost, a *tayf*: a specter seen in a dream. Now at home in Sudan, the narrator continues to avoid facing the meaning of his journey, the tacit acceptance of the colonial past inherent in his study at the imperial center and his alliance with the structures of power. He fends off such a realization with his own hackneyed phrases: it doesn't matter what I studied; I just want to earn a living; over here is like there; I don't know why they came to our land.

The narrator refuses to contemplate the implications of the question: "Was I also a lie?" The question points to an uncanny "doubling, dividing, and interchanging of the self" (Freud 135). The narrator is in some sense, or is in danger of becoming, Mustafa Sa'eed—a danger explicitly revealed when he enters Mustafa's private room and mistakes his own face in a mirror for Mustafa's ghost (Salih 135). When he fails to save Hosna, he becomes at some level, like Mustafa Sa'eed, a murderer. His guilt is double. His repetitive imagining of the "white, wide-open thighs" signals his desire and fear toward Hosna. He is guilty of having desired her: his desire implies that he is another Wad Rayyes. At the same time, he is guilty of having failed to act upon this desire, a failure perhaps brought about by the fear of stepping into Mustafa Sa'eed's shoes, of becoming Mustafa Sa'eed. The narrator is not alone in his guilt. The whole

village is tacitly involved: Hosna's father who forced her to marry, the narrator's mother and Mahjoub who failed to deliver Hosna's message that she wished to marry the narrator, all those who heard her screams and did nothing, all those who rushed through her burial. This tragedy was the result of ordinary, "natural" behavior by all parties except Hosna, who chose to act.

The narrator's education in England is ultimately represented as a failure. It has allowed him to preserve a sanitized vision of his home, the view of "those who see with one eye, speak with one tongue and see things as either black or white, either Eastern or Western," to whom Mustafa Sa'eed dedicates his empty autobiography (150-51). It is not, therefore, "another story," but part of this same story. The narrator's nostalgia for his village, his will to regard it as an unchanging paradise, has blinded him to flaws in its fabric he might have tried to mend. He has reduced it as surely as Mustafa Sa'eed and his English lovers reduced the North and the South, and with results just as terrible. The fog between himself and his community on the day of his return was the effect, we are told, of "having thought about them so much during my absence" (1). The repeated image in "the eye of my imagination" (49) hung like mist between himself and those he loved, preventing him from seeing them clearly or understanding his own place among them. The uncanny presence of Mustafa Sa'eed, the haunting tale he tells, and the death of Hosna Bint Mahmoud provide an education, opposed to the education the narrator received in England, which succeeds at last in lifting that fog. This education involves such a violent dislocation that the narrator barely survives it—a subject to which I will return. Although it is dangerous, the uncanny also functions as a critical tool: the moments the narrator passes "outside-of-place" give him insight into his place, insight he passes on, through his story, to the "gentlemen" addressed at the beginning of the novel (who must be a mostly—though not necessarily an entirely—male group).

For Mustafa Sa'eed, as we have seen, the force of uncanny repetition is a trap and not a tool: though he applies *amthāl* as weapons, he cannot use them to escape from the labyrinth. He repeats phrases from the colonial tradition his victims understand, but does not therefore overcome or even disrupt that tradition; on the contrary, his trial shows that his actions are interpreted through the very perception of Arabs and Africans he attempted to subvert. His lawyer describes him as “a noble person whose mind was able to absorb Western civilization but it broke his heart” (33). Mustafa considers standing up and denouncing his own defense as a “fabrication,” but does not do so. After describing how his lawyer “turned the trial into a conflict between two worlds, a struggle of which I was one of the victims,” he adds: “The train carried me to Victoria Station and to the world of Jean Morris” (33). The action circles back to a time before the trial. What has already happened—his entry into the world of Jean Morris—becomes what *will* happen. The labyrinth is closed.

Time here is a loop spun out between the past and the present: there is no future outside of it. This circuitous temporality characterizes *Season*. Loops in time appear as leaps, a telescoping of past and present so as to combine them in a single instant. Here Mustafa Sa'eed describes his pursuit of Jean Morris:

My bedroom became a theatre of war; my bed a patch of hell. When I grasped her it was like grasping at clouds, like bedding a shooting-star, like mounting the back of a Prussian military march... It was as though I were a slave Shahrayar you buy in the market for a dinar encountering a Scheherazade begging amidst the rubble of a city destroyed by plague. By day I lived with the theories of Keynes and Tawney and at night I resumed the war with bow and sword and spear and arrows. I saw the troops returning, filled with terror, from the war of trenches, of lice and epidemics. I saw them sowing the seeds of

the next war in the Treaty of Versailles, and I saw Lloyd George lay the foundations of a public welfare state. (33-4)

The rapid succession of images produces the effect of what David Harvey calls “time-space compression,” referring to modern “processes that... revolutionize the objective qualities of space and time” (240). These processes are technological, economic, political and cultural: they incorporate railroads, newspapers, colonial and class conflict, and above all “an ever-expanding world market, embracing all, capable of the most spectacular growth, capable of appalling waste and devastation, capable of everything except solidity and stability” (Berman 18-19). In the passage above, the growth of this world market is evoked by the names of Keynes and Tawney, while Lloyd George and the Treaty of Versailles pull colonial power and transnational conflict into the whirl of images. The rapidity of these images, their status as flashes or blips, expresses the vertiginous process of modernity, in which “all that is solid melts into air” (Marx and Engels 4). The world becomes inconceivable, ungraspable, like Mustafa’s desired antagonist, Jean Morris. Time-space compression makes Mustafa’s bedroom a theatre of war: he is a warrior of an earlier time, fighting with sword and spear, in the midst of the unfolding horror of modern trench warfare. At the same time, he and Jean Morris are the iconic figures of *A Thousand and One Nights*, Shahrayar and Scheherazade, impoverished and degraded in the ruins of a plague-ridden city. The world is that city, and the city is the bedroom. The motif of disease, woven through the passage as plague, epidemic and the seeds of war, connotes the fundamental sickness of both Mustafa’s relations with Jean Morris and the modern world system indicated by the shorthand “globalization.” In this dizzying passage, Salih constructs a vision of the modern world, a world in which inside is outside, private is public, the familiar tale reappears in the form

of a disease-ridden double, and the subject is both warrior and slave, trapped in an endless conflict. It is an uncanny vision, “as divided as it is disorienting” (Bhabha 13).

Mustafa does escape from the labyrinth, and Jean Morris holds the key. Yet before moving to a discussion of Mustafa’s transformation into an active and respected member of society, it is necessary to point out the limits of his rehabilitation. Mustafa does not entirely escape his past, but carries it inside him, as repressed material is closed in the unconscious. This secret enclosure takes physical form in his private room, to which he gives the narrator the key. After Mustafa’s disappearance, the narrator enters that room, where he comes face to face with his double, in an uncanny moment that blurs the border between the familiar self and the stranger, the adversary:

I struck a match. The light exploded on my eyes and out of the darkness there emerged a frowning face with pursed lips that I knew but could not place. I moved toward it with hate in my heart. It was my adversary Mustafa Sa’eed. The face grew a neck, the neck two shoulders and a chest, then a trunk and two legs, and I found myself standing face to face with myself. This is not Mustafa Sa’eed—it’s a picture of me frowning at my face from a mirror. Suddenly the picture disappeared and I sat in the darkness for I know not how long... (135).

This moment of displacement, in which the border between inside (self) and outside (other) is erased, parallels the disorienting action of time-space compression, which makes the intimate global, the private public, the bedroom a theater of war. Mustafa’s secret room is a receptacle for the concentrated force of this dynamic. An inner sanctum, it contains the world. It forces England across the border into Sudan, a reversal of Mustafa’s intimate invasions in London:

A fireplace—imagine it! A real English fireplace with all the bits and pieces, above it a brass cowl and in front of it a quadrangular area tiled in green marble, with the mantelpiece of blue marble; on either side of the fireplace were two Victorian chairs covered in a figured silk material, while between them stood a round table with books and notebooks on it. (136)

The narrator spends a full page listing the titles of Mustafa Sa'eed's books, a litany of names invoking Western philosophy, literature, and economic and political theory, ending with Mustafa's own books on colonial history:

*The Economics of Colonialism* Mustafa Sa'eed. *Colonialism and Monopoly* Mustafa Sa'eed. *The Rape of Africa* Mustafa Sa'eed. *Prospero and Caliban*. *Totem and Taboo*. Doughty. Not a single Arabic book. A graveyard. A mausoleum. An insane idea. A prison. A huge joke. A treasure chamber. (137-8)

The joke, the prison, the insane idea, are all ways of conceiving of Mustafa Sa'eed's relationship to Western modernity. The "treasure chamber" invokes the admiration of *Nahda* intellectuals for Enlightenment thought, while the titles of Mustafa's books point toward what those intellectuals failed to recognize: imperialism, the "graveyard," the "mausoleum." The books are placed against one another, touching one another, yet their contradictions, like the bindings that separate them, prevent them from forming a cohesive whole. The impulse toward a wholeness that would make the world canny and explicable is always frustrated. This impulse and its failure are repeated in the pages of the newspaper the narrator finds in the library, an issue of *The Times* from September 26, 1927. In this newspaper, heterogeneous pieces of news—drawn from actual news reports, according to Hassan (109)—are piled together with advertisements, letters, and announcements of marriages, births and deaths: a catalogue of the private made public, mixed

together with sinister reports on war and innocuous weather predictions (Salih 149-50). The barrage of information is meant to represent and capture a whole entity, a single day, yet it emerges in *Season* as confusion, almost nonsense. If Benedict Anderson posited the newspaper as that which enables the cohesion of a nation, its unified march through homogenous empty time (25), Salih picks at that notion, pulling out the threads so that the apparent whole threatens to unravel. Mustafa Sa'eed himself also appears in his room as something in pieces, something pulled apart through the modern technology of the photograph:

Mustafa Sa'eed laughing; Mustafa Sa'eed writing; Mustafa Sa'eed swimming; Mustafa Sa'eed somewhere in the country; Mustafa Sa'eed in gown and mortar-board; Mustafa Sa'eed rowing on the Serpentine; Mustafa Sa'eed in a Nativity play, a crown on his head, as one of the Three Kings who brought perfumes and myrrh to Christ; Mustafa Sa'eed standing between a man and a woman. (138-9)

This list brings out the uncanny aspect of photography, which creates doubles. As in his room in London, where his image multiplied in the mirrors, Mustafa Sa'eed is represented as split into copies of himself. "Mustafa Sa'eed had not let a moment pass without recording it for posterity" (139); but these moments, like those recorded in the newspaper, do not create wholeness, but a posterity in pieces.

What makes these leaps so dizzying is the way they give the impression, but not the reality, of containing the world. The leap represents an attempt to make the world whole, to bring it together: its model is simultaneous translation. Yet this moment of translation—Mustafa Sa'eed's perfect English, his perfect English library—is always uncanny, haunted by what has been leapt over and left out. This leftover, this remainder, cannot be directly expressed in the leap. It is translation's double, the untranslatable.

Jean Morris is, for Mustafa Sa'eed, the ultimate expression of the impossibility of translation, and the nadir of the uncanny. She is a difficult and dangerous character, and marks a split in the criticism of the novel. Where Jean Morris appears in the critical work on *Season*, the approach tends strongly toward the psychoanalytical, toward analysis of the character of Mustafa Sa'eed and also of Jean Morris herself (see for example Al Halool, John and Tarawneh). Readings that start from postcolonial theory, attending to the historical dimensions of the text, tend to pay little attention to Jean Morris, or to reduce her in ways that fail to account for her behavior: she is completely elided from Saree Makdisi's analysis, for example, while Waïl Hassan's discussion of Jean's "struggle for imperial power and hegemony" (102) leads to the odd claim that she dies in order to fulfill a stereotypical role (107). Jean Morris disturbs because she is not, like the silly Ann Hammond or the rather sympathetic Isabella Seymour, immediately recognizable as human. Heavily marked as cold and violent, devoid of family or community, she has something of the automaton about her. It is only in the moments before her murder, when she opens her thighs, kisses Mustafa's knife, and begs for both sex and death, that she appears human, but she does not become less dangerous. The reader becomes a voyeur at the scene of her death, and also a sadist, through the first-person perspective of Mustafa Sa'eed:

I leant over and kissed her. I put the blade-edge between her breasts and she twined her legs round my back. Slowly I pressed down. Slowly. She opened her eyes. What ecstasy there was in those eyes! (164)

Jean Morris, a perverse Desdemona, begs both Mustafa and the reader to accept her death. She wants to die, and, as the emblem of the cold north, linked to the imperially-named Victoria Station, she "deserves" to die. Yet acceptance of Jean Morris's death is acceptance of a woman's murder, and acceptance of the idea that the murder is correct, "deserved," that no one is

responsible for it but the victim. To be pushed toward this acceptance in a text that critiques not only colonial discourse, but also patriarchal structures, is intensely destabilizing. In contrast with the murder of Jean Morris, the murder-suicide of Hosna Bint Mahmoud is easy reading: graphic and tragic, it elicits strong emotion, but this emotion can be transformed into outrage and actively employed in the condemnation of patriarchy. This is not the case with Jean Morris. Her death elicits a fugitive, shameful emotion, a nameless feeling that does not know where to go. Both the chilling effect of her robot-like, unfeeling character, and the need for readerly distance from the disturbing scene of her *liebestod*, place her at a remove beyond the uncanny, in the territory of what Julia Kristeva calls abjection.

In *Powers of Horror: An Essay*, Kristeva distinguishes the object, which is other, but can be approached by the subject, from the abject, which is violently rejected:

If the object, however, through its opposition, settles me within the fragile texture of a desire for meaning, which, as a matter of fact, makes me ceaselessly and infinitely homologous to it, what is *abject*, on the contrary, the jettisoned object, is radically excluded and draws me toward the place where meaning collapses. (2)

Meaning collapses on Jean Morris's deathbed, in the "hot blood gushing from her chest" (164-5), in the revelation of what is "permanently thrust aside in order to live" (Kristeva 3). Abjection is linked to the uncanny, but its effect is "more violent" (5): "A massive and sudden emergence of uncanniness, which, familiar as it might have been in an opaque and forgotten life, now harries me as radically separate, loathsome" (2). The uncanny disturbs through recognition: strangeness is revealed in the known, the familiar. This is not the case with the more violent and radical abjection, which "is elaborated through a failure to recognize its kin" (5). The kinship exists in both cases, but while in the uncanny moment the subject is overwhelmed by the truth of that

kinship, the moment of abjection is characterized by radical expulsion and refusal of kinship.

Abjection recalls the earliest moment of subject formation, separation from the mother's body:

Abjection preserves what existed in the archaism of pre-objectal relationship, in the immemorial violence with which a body becomes separated from another body in order to be—maintaining that night in which the outline of the signified thing vanishes and where only the imponderable affect is carried out. (10)

Sara Beardsworth writes in her discussion of Kristeva's work: "'Abjection,' then, captures a condition of the subject that is sent to its boundaries, where there is, as such, neither subject nor object, only the object" (83). The distance between the uncanny and the object is the distance between instability and collapse.

*Powers of Horror* forms part of Kristeva's broader investigation of psychoanalysis, aesthetics, and religion, what Sara Beardsworth has called "the trilogy of the 1980s": *Powers of Horror*, *Tales of Love*, and *Black Sun* (Beardsworth 2). The ideas Kristeva elaborates in these works, particularly concerning semiotics and the structures of narcissism, are too involved to receive adequate treatment here. The risk of oversimplifying the concept of abjection in isolating it from Kristeva's oeuvre as a whole is, however, worth taking for striking resonance between Kristeva's thought and Tayeb Salih's, which makes abjection an instructive paradigm for reading the character of Jean Morris.

The strength of such a reading becomes clearer when Jean Morris is related to Kurtz's African mistress in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*. *Season* explicitly parallels Conrad's novella, through Mustafa Sa'eed's conquering voyage northward rather than southward, through the relationship between Mustafa and the narrator, which reflects that between Kurtz and Marlow, and even through the Nile, which acts as a double of the Thames. "So deliberate are Salih's

mimetic reversals,” writes Edward Said, “even Kurtz’s skull-topped fence is repeated and distorted in the inventory of European books stacked in [Mustafa] Said’s secret library” (*Culture and Imperialism* 211). If Hosna Bint Mahmoud stands in the place of Kurtz’s “Intended,” it is Jean Morris, the foreign mistress, who parallels Kurtz’s African lover. The significance of that parallel lies in the characterization of Kurtz’s mistress, who is “wild and gorgeous,” “savage and superb,” the expression of the African landscape itself, “the image of its own tenebrous and passionate soul” (60). Kurtz’s relationship with this woman raises the specter of miscegenation and of a civilized man’s descent into primitive darkness, of the participation in “unspeakable rites” Marlow shudders to contemplate (50). Marlow recoils from the thought of that intimacy, which represents a return to the waste material that has been purged from civilized nations, or, to put it another way, the material which has been made waste in order to construct the notion of “civilization”—a civilization through which the African continent is laid waste. Marlow’s gaze on the African woman brings together fascination, guilt, and of course “the horror.” The woman, like the landscape, remains mute; she expresses herself through gesture, like the movements of wind and shadow. “Suddenly she opened her bared arms and threw them up rigid above her head, as though in an uncontrollable desire to touch the sky, and at the same time the swift shadows darted out on the earth, swept around on the river, gathering the steamer into a shadowy embrace” (136). Earth and sky are united in an embrace filled with the erotic and frightening overtones of Kurtz’s “unspeakable” acts with this woman. If the African woman is the savage counterpart to Kurtz’s refined, European Intended, Jean Morris is the savage counterpart to Hosna Bint Mahmoud: Jean chews up a rare Arabic manuscript of Mustafa’s and burns his prayer-rug (*Season* 157). In *Heart of Darkness*, Kurtz’s unspeakable acts remain invisible, off-stage; in *Season*, the unspeakable meeting of sex and murder, takes place before the reader’s

eyes. The gush of blood is also an embrace. “‘I love you,’ she said to me, and I believed her. ‘I love you,’ I said to her, and I spoke the truth” (165). The moment of abjection is the moment when the lies are cleared away to reveal the horror of a love that has no expression but violent death. Rather than trying to pull away from the labyrinth, Mustafa has gone toward its center, into the very heart of darkness. He passes through the moment of abjection and emerges on the other side, able to break his cycle of seductions and return to Sudan at last. There is a sense, then, in which his murder of Jean, and his refusal to die with her, as she asks, are essential to his development. “By killing her, he is trying to rid himself of stereotypes,” writes Wail Hassan: “by refraining from suicide, he is repudiating Othello” (107). But the murder of Jean Morris is not a solution. It takes the form of a rite of passage, but this heart of darkness cannot be simply passed through: it clings. It clings to Mustafa in the form of his secret English library, a past he must carry everywhere. It clings to the narrative and resurfaces in the death of Hosna Bint Mahmoud. And it clings to the text in the form of a lingering unease, the unease of the reader forced to swallow a needful murder. The excision of Jean Morris, the locus of abjection, follows the logic of Kurtz’s scrawled note, “Exterminate all the brutes” (Conrad 51): an act at once necessary, within the framework of the text, and unacceptable. When the narrator learns that Wad Rayyes wants to marry Hosna, two “obscene pictures” merge in his mind: “I imagined Hosna Bint Mahmoud . . . as being the same woman in both instances: two white, wide-open thighs in London, and a woman groaning before dawn in an obscure village on a bend of the Nile under the weight of the aged Wad Rayyes” (87). The narrator’s difficulty in deciding how to read this “obscene” picture is also the difficulty of the reader: “If that other thing was evil, this too was evil, and if this was like death and birth, the Nile flood and the wheat harvest, a part of the system of the universe, so too was that” (87). Eventually, the narrator will decide that Hosna’s

experience is, in fact, the product of evil; this means that “that other thing,” which gives Mustafa Sa’eed his freedom, is also “evil,” irredeemable, abject.

The abject functions here as a space beyond the uncanny, the place where meaning collapses in a shattering instant. If the energy of *The Wedding of Zein* flows toward unity, toward the creation of an earthly paradise, the energy of *Season* flows in the opposite direction: toward oblivion. Yet this oblivion is not an end: rather, abjection, the violent embrace of the heart of darkness, offers the only way out of the spoken for/unspoken trap of the postcolonial Gothic. It is as if speech itself, poisoned by the atmosphere of the storehouse of hackneyed phrases, must be wiped out in order for narrative to begin. For the narrator, this psychological end point is represented by his near-drowning at the end of the novel. The river is a middle place, a site of ambivalence forces: “The objects on the two shores were half visible, appearing and disappearing, veering between light and darkness” (166). The instability of the Nile seems to hold a promise, like the force of the uncanny, which, as we have seen, is employed in the novel as a source of demystification and learning. “The plunge in the river,” writes Gayatri Spivak, “is an uncanny space of time” (*Death of a Discipline* 79). Yet the narrator’s experience there moves beyond the uncanny, beyond the postcolonial Gothic dichotomy of unspoken/spoken for, into the abject, which cannot be spoken. There is, first, an evocation of the “uncanny space of time,” a nameless zone “half-way between north and south” (*Season* 167):

The shore rose and fell. The reverberation of the river faded and overflowed. In front of me I saw things in a semicircle. Then I veered between seeing and blindness. I was conscious and not conscious. Was I asleep or awake? Was I alive or dead? (167)

The question asked by “one beset by abjection,” Beardsworth writes, is not “*Who* am I?” but “*Where* am I?” (90). In the river, the narrator experiences this spatial confusion. His difficulty in

apprehending his body's "relationship to the river" (168) suggests a not-yet-differentiated, pre-objective condition, the condition of an infant in the moment of separation from the mother. The narrator is pulled from his deadly lassitude by a sudden enigmatic force, "a piercingly loud roar" from the river, and, "at the very same instant," "a vivid brightness like a flash of lightning" (168). Silence and darkness follow this burst of light and sound, and then the narrator feels "a violent desire for a cigarette"—his body's first impulse toward something other than death (168). The flash and the roar seem to come from outside the narrator, from the world, but in the context of the novel, where inside and outside blend into one another, it may well be a flash from the inside, from the narrator's unconscious. What is certain is that it comes from "outside the sentence" (Barthes 49), from the realm of the inexplicable, the untranslatable, the inexpressible. The burst of thunder and lightning is followed by the narrator's return to his own body: "Then my mind cleared and my relationship to the river was determined. Though floating on the water, I was not part of it" (168). The narrator is differentiated from the river, separate and reborn.

The narrator's experience in the water parallels Mustafa Sa'eed's experience during the murder of Jean Morris. For Mustafa, the maelstrom of modern life stops there, at the point of the knife: "the universe, with its past, present and future, was gathered together into a single point before and after which nothing existed" (165). For the narrator in the river, too, the world stops "[i]n an instant—I know not how long or short it was," the instant of the powerful thunder and lightning (168). There is in this moment a striking symmetry with Kristeva's formulation of the time of the abject as composed of "forgetfulness and thunder" (8). Abjection is different from uncanniness, "more violent": "nothing is familiar, not even the shadow of a memory" (5). The abject is "blotted out," but its absence is "constantly remembered" (8):

Then, forgotten time crops up suddenly and condenses into a flash of lightning an operation that, if it were thought out, would involve bringing together the two opposite terms but, on account of that flash, is discharged like thunder. The time of abjection is double: a time of oblivion and thunder, of veiled infinity and the moment when revelation bursts forth. (8-9)

This time of oblivion and thunder is also *jouissance*, the moment of murder and ecstasy in which Mustafa and Jean become “a torch of flame” (165). “It follows that *jouissance* alone causes the object to exist as such,” Kristeva writes. “One does not know it, one does not desire it, one joys in it. Violently and painfully” (9). “Suddenly,” the narrator tells us, “I experienced a violent desire for a cigarette. It wasn’t merely a desire; it was a hunger, a thirst. And this was the instant of waking from the nightmare” (168). He begins to move, “violently and with difficulty” (169). Oblivion and thunder, violence and desire, characterize the moment of abjection, which is, it must be noted, a moment of unity, of “the universe, with its past, present and future... gathered into a single point” (165). The spatial and temporal fragmentation of Mustafa Sa’eed’s existence in England is gathered into the point of the knife that penetrates Jean Morris. Unity is the necessary precursor of abjection, of that moment which is “the attempt to secure a space for the ego” (83). In this sense, abjection functions in Salih’s narrative as a means of starting over, of going back to the moment of primal separation, and it does, in fact, lead to rebirth, both for the narrator and for Mustafa Sa’eed. Cecilia Sjöholm summarizes the process in her reading of Kristeva:

The term of abjection is not simply synonymous with expulsion. Contamination must be avoided. At the same time, however, we carry a secret desire within us to erase borders.

Abjection is produced in search of a new kind of knowledge and therefore a motor of social transformation. (97)

In *Season of Migration to the North*, which revolves around ideas of border-crossing and contamination, sex and disease, abjection is the key to a new beginning for individuals, and the attempt to clear space for a new world. Beardsworth writes: “There is an upsurge of abjection, then—of a subject uncertain of its borders—wherever there is a looming of the abject in a breakdown of not only the ‘other’ but the world” (84).

For Mustafa Sa’eed, the moment of abjection was a turning point, bringing him back to Sudan, where he was able to live in community for a time, though always holding his past in a secret inner room. We cannot know what repressed material will continue to haunt the narrator. We only know that the moment of abjection pushes him toward shore, and that he lives: the novel, his story as addressed to the “gentlemen,” is proof of that. His cry of “Help! Help!”, which ends the novel, signals his desire for life, without hinting at what sort of life he will live. The novel, Saree Makdisi writes, “leaves us floating uneasily in the present, waiting for a resolution that does not come” (538). The resolution is held in abeyance. But a further shift in perspective follows, in which the narrator is displaced from his body, and views himself from a distance, comparing himself to “a comic actor shouting on a stage” (169). The possible shade of contempt in this view of the self as a comic actor, alone on a stage, in a theater where an audience may not even be present, casts doubt over the gesture toward community represented by the call for help. Still, it is perhaps a sign of hope that the novel ends with a sound, a cry, considering the importance of orality in Salih’s work; the framing of the whole novel as a spoken narrative, too, recalls the function of the voice as the vehicle of social and spiritual transformation in *The Wedding of Zein*. Mustafa Sa’eed’s autobiography remains unwritten

(151), but the narrator is able to communicate Mustafa's story, and his own, through speech.

Both texts privilege speech as the means of connecting the body and the world. In *Bandarshah*, Salih's final long work of fiction, orality, too, is critiqued: it, too, is exposed, through fantastic visions, as the mechanism of an extensive and oppressive system.

## Chapter Five

World-Making: *Bandarshah*

*Bandarshah* is Tayeb Salih's final work of long fiction. It appeared in two volumes, the first published in 1971 and the second in 1976. These two novels, *Ḍaw' al-Bayt* and *Maryūd*, were presented as the first sections of a larger work entitled *Bandarshah*; the English translation of 1996 combines them into a single volume under that title. This work was to have had at least four parts: "It may reach five parts... God knows," Salih said in a 1977 interview (in Berkley lxxix). Salih, who died in 2009, never published the rest of *Bandarshah*, nor has any information regarding a possible manuscript version come to light since his death. *Bandarshah* must be taken at face value then, as a pair of linked novels. It is Tayeb Salih's most ambitious work, his most passionately archaeological, his most fervently anti-nationalist. It is also the least read and discussed of all his fiction.

This is due in part, no doubt, to the perception of *Bandarshah* as an unfinished text. It may also be related to the text's strong anti-nationalist current, or to the demands it makes on its readers. *Bandarshah* is exceedingly episodic and disjunctive, employing different narrators, switching between first and third-person point of view, and leaping back and forth in time. Though the text's fragmented character has been related to similar structures in Arabic novels following the 1967 war with Israel, it seems more useful in this case, considering *Bandarshah*'s subject matter, to relate its fractured narrative to the politics of Sudan, as *Bandarshah* delves into the question of Sudanese national identity.<sup>16</sup> It does so through an exploration of the relationship between community and authority, a preoccupation expressed in its title, as Salih explained: "I

---

<sup>16</sup> For a discussion of *Bandarshah* in relation to post-1967 literature, see Hassan 104.

have chosen the name...because our problem is the search for the City (*bandar*), and also the search for a form of government that suits us—authority (*shah*).” (in Hassan 134). The goal of the quest is a unified social body; the central dilemma is how to find a single ruler or system of rule that can unite the diverse Sudanese people, while respecting the rights of all. In Sudan, this quest was already hampered by grave difficulties in the 1960s and 1970s, when *Bandarshah* was conceived and written. The challenge of reaching consensus on national identity among the population of the south, most of whom practiced Christianity or traditional African religions and identified themselves as African, and the largely Muslim population of the north, who identified themselves as Arab, led directly to a second problem: the development of a constitution and system of law which would be acceptable to all Sudanese (Lesch 3). These intertwined problems, which concern community (*bandar*) on the one hand, and state and civil authority (*shāh*) on the other, are approached in Salih’s text through a family drama. Through the representation of three generations, Salih reveals the manner in which the construction of an Arab-Muslim Sudanese national identity, a project launched from a subordinate position vis-à-vis colonial authority, became an oppressive authority in its turn. Excavating fragments of black African identity from his northern Sudanese setting, Salih attempts to trace a buried genealogy of Sudan, and to propose an alternative and more pluralistic “narrative of community” (Chatterjee 238).

This essay examines the representation of authority in *Bandarshah* by tracing two of its major symbols: the name, and the whip. Two types of difference emerge as the victims of authority: one based on gender, and the other on ethnicity. The text is organized so that these two forms of difference must be discussed together, but this reading will focus more on the issue of ethnicity, as it has not been addressed in the English and Arabic sources I’ve consulted. By focusing attention on the antagonism between a heterogeneous community and an authority that

insists on the suppression of difference, my reading reveals how Salih's text represents, equally with a rich cultural diversity, the violence of the dominant *shah*, whose victimization of the nation's unassimilable fragments relegates the *bandar* to an ever-receding horizon. As with *The Wedding of Zein* and *Season of Migration to the North*, the emphasis is on a vast, unseen system maintaining and controlling daily life, in this case a system of oppressive authority operating in deep time. The unseen is made visible in dreams and visions, and in speech. In *Bandarshah*, however, two oral forms confront one another: the gentle preaching of Sufi mysticism, and the epic, which is the voice of authority, the authoritative narrative form. If the energy of *Wedding* is directed toward making a fragmented world whole, and the energy of *Season* toward unmaking a diseased world, the primary project of *Bandarshah* is to illuminate the role of narrative in the world-making process.

To begin with the name: the title of the text, *Bandarshah*, is the name of the grand figure of the village of Wad Hamid, a formidable and ultimately tragic man, the father of eleven sons. The name "Bandarshah" is not Arabic in origin, but Persian, a childhood nickname attached to the character: the village children called him "Bandarshah" because of his fine clothes, and also perhaps because his father was a foreigner of unknown origin. The name of Bandarshah's father is Dau al-Beit; this name serves as the title of the first volume of *Bandarshah*.<sup>17</sup> The title of the second novel, *Maryūd*, is the name of Bandarshah's grandson. These titles frame the text within Bandarshah's genealogy. It is a genealogy marked by violence, prefigured by the Oedipal drama that introduces the narrative. The main character, Mehmeed, returns to his home village of Wad Hamid, to find that his friend Mahjoub, once the head of the village cooperative, has been deposed by his own nephew. Mahjoub opens the novel, seated in the first sentence "like an old

---

<sup>17</sup> I use Denys Johnson-Davies' spellings, "Dau al-Beit" and "Meryoud," for the names of the characters, and follow the standard transliteration for the Arabic titles of the novels: *Ḍaw' al-Bayt* and *Maryūd*.

tiger” (3). This tiger is toothless, rendered obsolete by the group known as “Bakri’s boys.” “From that day on,” a friend of Meheimeed’s informs him, “[Mahjoub] walks the face of the earth as though dead” (29).

The new generation leaves its elders “dead”: at first glance, a rather banal occurrence, painful to those on the losing side of the Oedipal struggle, but natural enough. Yet at the heart of *Ḍaw’ al-Bayt* lies a most unnatural murder, an event so appalling that it is covered with a veil of allusive language. It is a “catastrophe that defies description, be it in a single journey or in several,” (9) the deep event below the surface event of the battle for the village cooperative. This “catastrophe” is mentioned in Chapter Two, but its details are not revealed until Chapter Seven, and even then the facts are stated in the gnomic language of fable, so that it is easy to miss the actual deaths that have occurred in the village:

They were eleven brothers, slaves to what had passed and to what would not come about in a clearly defined form. One day they rebelled and destroyed the two of them together. Houses were made desolate, tracks were obliterated, and the soldiers came and led them off to prison. (35)

This is the catastrophe that defies description: the obliteration of three generations overnight. The eleven brothers are Bandarshah’s eleven sons. They are enslaved to “what had passed”—Bandarshah himself—and “what would not come about in a clearly defined form”—Bandarshah’s grandson, Meryoud. The image of a future infinitely deferred recalls Gramsci’s interregnum, in which “the old is dying and the new cannot be born” (Gramsci 276); the rebellion of the eleven brothers, a “morbid symptom” of apocalyptic proportions, destroys grandfather and grandson together. *Ḍaw’ al-Bayt* is subtitled “A Tale of How a Father Becomes a Victim of His Father and His Son,” but this is more than a tale of the father’s victimization. It

is a tale of the father's counterviolence, of the brutal and fruitless—because eventually “led off to prison”—revenge of the present.

Gramsci's interregnum describes a “crisis of authority,” in which the popular masses have grown apart from the ruling ideology, so that this ideology can only be maintained through force (276). The description resonates with *Bandarshah*, in which the interregnum takes the form of a closed circle created by Bandarshah and Meryoud. Meryoud is “a complete replica of his grandfather,” we read, so that “when you stood between them, it was as though you were standing between two mirrors placed opposite each other, each reflecting the same image in an endless extension” (10). This continuity is introduced as positive, as the villagers admire Bandarshah's powerful and successful family, but it also has a sinister side, expressed in the scene immediately following the above quotation, when Meryoud, “the complete embodiment of [Bandarshah's] authority,” bullies Meheimeed's grandfather into selling him a calf at a low price (10-11). Meheimeed's grandfather easily acquiesces to the demands of Meryoud, a fifteen-year-old boy, and accepts being greeted by name rather than addressed as Uncle or Grandfather. “At any rate,” he reflects philosophically, “dealing with the boy is better than dealing with his grandfather” (11). This scene introduces the idea that the authority of Bandarshah/Meryoud is in fact tyranny—that is, authority in crisis. It also hints at an affinity between Bandarshah and Meheimeed's grandfather, who is “happy at that abnormal event,” and whose companions express “reverence” and gaze at Meryoud as if at “an angel that has descended from above” (11). Hassan notes how the unexpected delight of the elderly men at Meryoud's insolence reveals a desire for power: “As the mirror image and extension of his grandfather—a ‘reconciliation’ between past and future—Meryoud is the embodiment of the elders' desire for continuity, free from the threat of their sons' Oedipal impulses” (151). Meheimeed, too, is drawn to this idea of a

“reconciliation” with the past, but is overcome by an otherworldly vision that emphasizes its dangers: amid howling winds, leaping affreets and images ephemeral as “specks of dust,” he observes one striking sight, and the tense of the paragraph shifts from past to present:

Then, with a rushing and a roaring, the images are welded together, mingle and form a tangible shape, that of Bandarshah in the form of Meryoud; or Meryoud in the form of Bandarshah; and it is as though he is sitting on the throne of that hubbub, gripping the threads of chaos in both hands, amidst it and above it at one and the same time, like a resplendent and destructive ray. (12)

In this vision, the past and the future, represented by Bandarshah and Meryoud, become one, and claim an unnatural and paralyzing authority over the present. The stasis of the “destructive ray,” untouched by the chaos it controls, recalls the shining, closed circle of the doubled mirror. The present is trapped in that circle. It is like Bandarshah’s eleven sons, observed by Meheimeed in another waking dream: he enters a magical citadel in the desert where he sees Bandarshah, seated on a throne, ordering Meryoud to flog the eleven brothers. Here the whip figures as a symbol of oppressive authority: “The universe was silent: deaf, dumb and blind but for the whipcracks on the backs of Bandarshah’s sons, within sight and earshot of their father, and performed by the grandson on behalf of the grandfather” (31).

What is the origin of this terrifying authority? Despite his foreign nickname, Bandarshah was born in Wad Hamid; yet his father, Dau al-Beit, was a stranger to the village, and there is much to suggest that he was a soldier in the Ottoman army. Wounded and suffering from memory loss, Dau al-Beit was cast up from the Nile near Wad Hamid, dressed in the uniform of a Turkish soldier (62), and the villagers, choosing to believe that his presence would bring them prosperity, gave him an Arabic name which means “The Light in the House.” Dau al-Beit’s

wedding to a daughter of the village is a key moment in the text, a lyrical expression of communal joy:

Tonight every old man is young, every young man is infatuated with love, every woman truly feminine, every man an Abu Zeid al-Hilali. Tonight everything is alive.... Every limb walks with a swinging gait, every breast trembles, every buttock quivers, every eye is darkened with kohl, every cheek is smooth, every mouth is honeyed, every waist slim, every action beautiful—and all the people are Dau al-Beit. (76)

As in the earlier passage describing Meheimeed's vision, there is a shift into the present tense here, but while the earlier unity that present-tense language evoked was that of Bandarshah and Meryoud alone, the unity here is that of Dau al-Beit and "all the people." The eroticized language of the passage, employing well-known tropes of Arabic love poetry (the slim waist, the honeyed mouth), celebrates Dau al-Beit's physical union, through his bride, with the Arabic-speaking people of Wad Hamid. It is a joyful absorption of his foreign body, through which all the men in attendance become Abū Zayd al-Hilali, the hero of the famous Arabic folk epic. Yet this wedding will produce tragedy, and the tragedy is embedded, like a portent, in the wedding ceremony itself. Immediately following the statement that "all the people are Dau al-Beit," the bridegroom is represented as "standing in the center of the circle brandishing a whip of hippopotamus hide above the women dancers, while the men sprang one after another into the circle to vie with one another, and he would strike about him as he pleased" (76). The scene represents the practice of *al-butān*, the whipping ceremony of traditional northern Sudanese weddings, in which male guests remove their upper garments in order to be whipped by the

groom.<sup>18</sup> A test of endurance and fearlessness expressive of a masculine ideal, *al-butān* requires men not to flinch under the lash. It is linked to the ethos of chivalry and physical prowess expressed most richly in the pre-Islamic poetry of Arabia, which is considered the highest moment of Arabic literature (Jayyusi 2).

By taking up the whip at his wedding and lashing the men of Wad Hamid, the foreigner Dau al-Bait confirms his kinship with them, and becomes heir to their traditions. Yet his participation in *al-butān* cannot be read as merely an expression of his new communal ties. The joy of the moment is compromised by two earlier whipping scenes: Meheimeed's vision, which we have read, in which Bandarshah's sons are whipped by his grandson; and the whipping contest among the boys of Wad Hamid, including the young Bandarshah.

The story of the boys' whipping contest is related in the fourth chapter of *Ḍaw' al-Bayt* by Hamad Wad Haleema, a childhood friend of Meheimeed's grandfather. In this chapter, the tropes of the name and the whip are woven together, beginning with a reflection on the process of naming. "This business of names is extraordinary," Hamad says (20). He lists a number of village nicknames, including Bandarshah's, and then moves on to the story of his own name, which was given to him by the bully Mukhtar Wad Hasab ar-Rasoul. Hamad, the narrator of the chapter, is known as "Wad Haleema," a derogatory appellation, as it names him "son of Haleema," his mother, rather than "son of Abdul Khalek," his father. Hamad recounts how the boys of Wad Hamid used to take turns whipping one another, to see how long each of them could stand it, and how the bully Mukhtar habitually mocked Hamad, who feared the lash: "Whenever he met up with me," Hamad says, "he'd make fun of me, calling me by my mother's

---

<sup>18</sup> Long associated with rural weddings, *al-butān* has moved into the cities of Sudan, including the capital, Khartoum, according to a 2010 Reuters report: <http://www.itnsource.com/en/shotlist/RTV/2010/09/29/RTV2470710/?v=1&a=0>

name because of the great contempt he had for me” (21). Finally, Hamad relates, he avenged himself by numbing his body with red pepper before the whipping contest. He was then able both to bear the lash and to whip Mukhtar senseless, as well as humiliating him by calling him by *his* mother’s name: “Wad Maymouna” (22).

This anecdote introduces the name of the mother. In so doing, it emphasizes the fact that authority in Wad Hamid is under the male name. The perfect symmetry of Bandarshah and Meryoud, a symmetry enabling, as we have seen, a closed circle of oppression, is only possible because both characters are male. The whipping contest extends the problem of the doubled maleness of Bandarshah and Meryoud into the lives of other characters. It shows how the dangerous Bandarshah/Meryoud continuity, characterized by coerciveness, violence and an absolute maleness in which the mother’s name has no place, is not only accepted but actually lived by the community. Both Meheimeed’s vision of the whipping in the citadel, and the whipping contest among the boys, comment on the whipping ceremony during the ecstatic moment of Dau al-Beit’s wedding. The whip moves from the outside (a fantastic vision out in the desert), to the fringe of the community (boys playing games), to the heart of the village: the wedding, the greatest celebration of the continuity of Wad Hamid. Its significance also expands, from the Bandarshah family, a particular group of individuals, to the village boys, to “all the people.” That double movement, from outside to inside, from the particular to the general, undoes the uniqueness of Bandarshah and his sons, the special status claimed for them in Chapter Two by the admiring villagers, who declare: “Bandarshah and his sons aren’t like us” (10). This putative difference is challenged by the implied symmetry between Bandarshah and Meheimeed’s grandfather, and also by the practice of naming grandsons for grandfathers, which is common in the village, and results in what Hassan calls a “monotonous pattern of names”

(151). These hints that Bandarshah's family is not outside the culture of the village, but emblematic of it, are confirmed in the wedding scene. The ceremony of *al-butān* both prefigures the violent future of Dau al-Beit's family, and marks that future as socially sanctioned.

There is a critique of gender norms here, a critique of the privileging of an aggressive masculinity and the absence of the female name. This critique is clarified through the character of Maryam, Meheimeed's childhood sweetheart. Maryam is an energetic character, unintimidated by traditional mores, who once disguised herself as a boy in order to go to school; Hassan notes that it is Maryam who speaks most passionately of the *bandar*, the city, as the site of a liberating modernity (Hassan 167). Hassan also notes that it is unfortunate for the text, in ideological terms, that by the time of Meheimeed's return to his village, Maryam is dead. Her death, Hassan writes, is "the death of a dream for a better future" (168).

Hassan reads the critique of the Bandarshah/Meryoud continuity as directed toward "the fundamentalist or nativist stance" (143). Maryam, with her dreams of an active future in society, is a logical opposition to this fundamentalist stance, and forms part of a present moment victimized by a conspiracy between the past and the future. There is, however, another possibility for a victimized present here, one that is equally as important as gender in the text, and that is ethnic difference. This possibility is suggested during that pivotal moment, the celebration of Dau al-Beit's wedding, through two statements: the claim that "all the people are Dau al-Beit," and that "every man [is] an Abu Zeid al-Hilali."

To claim that "all the people are Dau al-Beit" is to claim that all the people are foreigners with amnesia. Dau al-Beit, after all, is a foreign invader and colonizer; he is able to integrate himself into Wad Hamid only because he has lost his identity. The reference to Abū Zayd al-Hilali emphasizes the condition of the amnesiac foreigner: Abū Zayd is the hero of the famous

Arabic folk epic, *Sīrat Banī Hilāl* or “the saga of the tribe of Bani Hilal,” which is based on the invasion of the Maghreb by a tribe of Bedouin Arabs in the eleventh century.<sup>19</sup> The Bani Hilal, Susan Slyomovics writes in her study of the epic, had migrated to Egypt from Arabia during the eighth and ninth centuries, and were mobilized by the Egyptian Fatimid leaders in the eleventh century against the ruler of the Tunisian littoral (1). The fourteenth century historian, Ibn Khaldūn, writes that the Banū Hilal arrived “like a cloud of locusts” (in Slyomovics 1). This historical incident provides the raw material for a cycle of tales known throughout the Arabic-speaking world, where it continues to circulate both in the cheap, printed “yellow books,” and in oral performance.

Abū Zayd, the hero of the epic, is black. His blackness is essential to the workings of the narrative, for the drama of *Sīrat Banī Hilāl* turns on the refusal of Abū Zayd’s Arab father to accept his black son, and the eventual rise of this black Arab outcast to the leadership of the tribe. The story of Abū Zayd al-Hilālī expresses, Bridget Connelly writes, “the traumas still fresh in Arab-African identity” (220)—what Sayyid Hurreiz has called “the dilemma of the Sudanese” (161). In the many versions of the epic that proliferate across northern Africa, Abū Zayd’s physical description signals his mixed heritage: he may be black with blue or green eyes, or black with “white features” (Connelly 196) or even “piebald” (301). This description is almost precisely that of Bandarshah, Dau al-Beit’s mixed-blood son: “black of face like his mother, his eyes green like those of his father: a person apart, resembling neither this nor that” (77).

---

<sup>19</sup> I use the standard transliteration “Abū Zayd” except when quoting from *Bandarshah*.

It is worth noting that of all the Arabic folk epics or romances featuring black heroes, *Sīrat Banī Hilāl* is the most amnesiac.<sup>20</sup> ‘Antarah, for example, the other widely-known black hero of the genre, is the son of a black slave woman, while Abū Zayd’s tale avoids the admission of black ancestry by invoking a miracle. According to the story, Abū Zayd’s mother, Khadra, went down to the river with ninety maidens to bathe, and saw a powerful black bird scattering all the other birds away from the water. She wished for a son as powerful as that bird, and Abū Zayd was the result (Slyomovics 39). Khadra is the daughter of the Sharif of Mecca, and her husband, Abū Zayd’s father, is a Hilali, the leader of the Bani Hilal. Abū Zayd, then, is black by accident. He is Arab on his father’s side, and on his mother’s side he is not only Arab, but a descendent of the Prophet Mohammad.

This story, based on an Arab movement into Africa, featuring a black hero, and insisting that this hero is not African, but Arab, does indeed express a Sudanese dilemma. This dilemma is bound up with the history of slavery in Sudan and its effects on Sudanese national identity, a fragment Salih excavates in *Bandarshah*. In Chapter Four of *Maryūd*, Meheimeed gathers a number of folk histories which yield conflicting versions of Bandarshah’s genealogy: Bandarshah is declared to be a Christian king, then a pagan king, and then an Abyssinian prince. A fourth version, the most detailed, calls him “a man of fair complexion who had arrived in Wad Hamid—no one knows from where” and built a marble palace similar to the marvelous structure observed by Meheimeed in his vision (105). The story continues:

[T]his Bandarshah’s greatest pleasure was to sit on the throne of a night, after eating his fill and drinking till he was drunk, then order his slaves to be herded in, shackled in irons.

---

<sup>20</sup> There are several black heroes of the *sīrah* genre: Peter Heath writes that “the Arabic *sīra* seems to have become infatuated with the idea of the black hero.” Peter Heath, *The Thirsty Sword: Sīrat ‘Antar and the Arabic Popular Epic* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1996), 272.

He would order his executioners to flog them with thick whips made of hippopotamus hide until the blood flowed down their backs and they fainted... This went on till the night they rebelled as one man and fell upon him and killed him, then they hacked him to pieces and threw them into the palace well. (106)

Bandarshah's sons are, in this episode, his slaves. This version of his story reveals a new layer in Salih's tripartite Oedipal drama. The oppressed present, formerly the space of the son, now becomes the domain of the slave, and the role of Bandarshah's grandson and proxy is played by the executioners. It is here that ethnic difference is explicitly brought into play, for "slave" is a racialized insult in Sudan (Sharkey 28). Through the story of Bandarshah and his sons, the text represents the black "slave" as an element which must be continually flogged in order for Bandarshah to maintain his supremacy. The repeated flogging, which cannot be stopped except through even more extreme violence, is a continuity of the perverse: a morbid symptom. Its location in the magical space of the palace allows it to function in both the historical and the psychological domains. In terms of the oral histories collected by Meheimeed, the flogging serves as evidence, drawn from the collective memory, of the Sudanese slave trade which, during the second half of the nineteenth century, was one of the most intense in Africa (Sikainga xi). In the psychological domain, which the text invites us to consider through the similarity of this story to Meheimeed's vision, the flogging represents the suppression of black African identity.

These two domains are of course intertwined, and the period of their most powerful mutual reinforcement is also the time in which *Bandarshah* is set, that is, from the Turco-Egyptian period (1821-1884) through the post-independence era. The use of slaves in Sudan predates the Turco-Egyptian period, as does the association in Arabic discourse of blackness with servility (Sikainga 5; Sharawi 106). However, before the nineteenth century, slave

ownership was the privilege of the nobility in the Fur and Funj kingdoms that would become modern Sudan, as Ahmad Sikainga writes in his important history, *Slaves into Workers: Emancipation and Labor in Colonial Sudan* (5-6). The use of slaves did not become pervasive and general until the Turco-Egyptian period. Significantly for this reading of *Bandarshah*, one increase in slave use during this time was in the military: Mohammed Ali of Egypt used Sudanese slave soldiers in Sudan as replacements for Egyptian and Turkish troops, among whom there was a high rate of death and desertion (Sikainga 16). It is likely that we see one of these deserters in Dau al-Beit. Certainly his Turkish uniform dates his appearance to this period, when Sudanese slave labor not only buttressed the ruling military, but also became the dominant source of agricultural labor in Sudan (19). Dau al-Beit represents not only cultural hybridization, but also a specifically modern colonial legacy, one that directly engenders the tyrant Bandarshah.

The link between slavery and ethnicity in this context arises from the fact that Muslim law prohibits the enslavement of freeborn Muslims: slaves must be either the children of slaves or non-Muslims captured in war (Sikainga 5). As Islam and Arabic spread in northern Sudan, slaves were obtained from further south, in Dar Fertit, the Nuba Mountains and the Upper Blue Nile (8). The slave-raiding frontier was not only geographical, but also ethnic and ideological: as such, it was moveable. Ahmed Sikainga describes Dar Fertit as a “state of mind”: “[a]s the slave raiders moved southward, Dar Fertit was pushed further south” (8). The ethnic and ideological factors determining who was, and who was not, enslavable, greatly increased the importance of genealogy. The preoccupation with genealogy in *Bandarshah*, the high value placed on Muslim names “handed down from father to son,” reflects the immense symbolic capital invested in Arab-Muslim heritage. From the time of the eighteenth-century Funj kingdom, when contact with Egypt and the Middle East increased—partially, of course, through the slave trade—the

indigenous merchant class had been claiming Arab identity “by constructing genealogies tracing their origin to an Arab ancestor” (Sikainga 6-7). The importance of Arab-Muslim identity intensified even further in nineteenth-century Sudan, where slave usage was so prevalent that, according to the report of the Swiss traveler John Lewis Burkhardt, “there is scarcely a house which does not possess one or two slaves, and five or six were frequently seen in the same family” (in Sikainga 9).

This ethnic division was further exacerbated during the period of British rule. Although during this period the slave trade, if not the use of slaves, was suppressed, labor remained divided along ethnic lines: “British officials,” writes Sikainga, “conceived of labor in ethnic terms” (xiii) considering the Arabic-speaking slave owners lazy and the slaves, or ex-slaves, “suitable for hard and unskilled labor” (68). Colonial policy established educational projects that focused on northern and central Sudan, with the result that most postcolonial elites were Arabic-speaking northerners (167). Upon decolonization, these elites promoted an Arab-Muslim Sudanese identity, regarding the southern Sudanese as a “lost brother” seized by the British who could now be returned to the fold (Lesch 22). This repressive interpretation of kinship surfaces in *Bandarshah* in the form of the whip Meryoud brings down on the backs of his uncles, under the watchful and approving eye of his grandfather. A future generation, in order to mirror one chosen part of its heritage, beats down a rejected part—the part which is in fact closer to it in time.

The promotion of Arab-Muslim identity in postcolonial Sudan focused on education and language, and implemented the *ta'rib*, or Arabicization, of administrative and school systems (Lesch 22). The policy, which had been officially adopted upon decolonization, was widely enforced in the mid-1960s and 1970s, when *Bandarshah* was conceived and written. Its purpose

was to spread the Arabic language, and with it Islam and a Sudanese Arab identity, as quickly as possible through a vast territory where multiple languages are spoken (Sharkey 21). The program was intended to reverse the imposition of an English-language school system during the colonial period, but it was also an attempt to absorb the “lost brother” of southern Sudan, where an armed struggle for a political voice had continued sporadically since independence. The explicit goal of *ta’rīb* was to foster an Arab-Muslim Sudanese identity. Qasim Uthman Nur, writing favorably of the program in 1988, notes among its benefits the “development of national feeling and strengthening of cultural ties between students” and the “attention to the Arab culture and literary heritage,” and stresses that the use of Arabic in schools is important “especially in the regions of linguistic interference” (33). On the linguistic front, the program was quite successful: Arabic remains a lingua franca even in South Sudan. As a postcolonial policy of national integration, *ta’rīb* was clearly a failure: especially after 1983, bilingual or multilingual education became a rallying point for anti-government struggle in the south, among the very “regions of linguistic interference” where national feeling was meant to develop through Arabic-language education (Sharkey 25). The issue was not the imposition of the Arabic language per se—after all, English had been imposed by the British—but the link between the Arabicization of the schools and a nationalist discourse that strongly privileged Arabness and rejected Africanness. Al-Baqir al-Afif Mukhtar describes this nationalist perspective, in which the adjective “Sudanese” is inseparable from “Islamic and Arabic culture,” as simultaneously “exclusionist” and “assimilationist”: “Those who misfit the new definition of Sudani [Sudanese] are either to be cut off from the body politic... or to be changed in order to fit (i.e. to be turned [into] Northerners)” (224).

The *ta’rīb* of administrative and education services, a policy designed to make Sudan into an Arab country by rejecting the notion of an African Sudan, amounts to an officially sanctioned

and indeed enforced amnesia. It echoes the miraculous conception of the hero Abū Zayd, an Arab who just happened to be black. Both types of amnesia erase, not only difference, but the violence by which difference is assimilated. In *Bandarshah*, too, a violent history is forgotten: Dau al-Beit forgets that he is a colonizer, and the inhabitants of Wad Hamid, in identifying themselves as Arab, forget their own history of violent cross-cultural contact. *Bandarshah* exposes these shards of history. These shards interrupt the moment of highest joy, the wedding scene, when a marriage between two people of different ethnic backgrounds is solemnized with a whip; and they resurface in Bandarshah's palace, a site of torture. Dau al-Beit produces Bandarshah, and Bandarshah produces Meryoud, suppressing the memory of the link between them: Bandarshah's slave sons.

The text unifies patriarchy and conquest through the image of the whip, which is at one time an instrument of the torture of slaves, and a symbol of an idealized masculine spirit of conquest, raised in celebration of the taking of a bride. However, the issue of the marginalization of black Sudanese is arguably more significant in *Bandarshah*. Women are shown to participate in the modern governing structure of Wad Hamid: one of the primary differences between "Mahjoub's gang" and "Bakri's boys" is that the latter group admits the participation of young women (*Bandarshah* 29). This suggests that Maryam's dream of sharing fully in the modern *bandar* lies within the realm of possibility. There is no comparable model of participation for any slave or descendant of a slave in *Bandarshah*. This absence of a model is in keeping with history: both during and after the colonial period, urban centers in northern Sudan served as sites for the transmutation of former rural slaves into modern rural laborers (Sikainga 94). People who fled the countryside to escape hardships such as famine and slavery flocked into Khartoum and Omdurman, where they were redeployed to the rural areas as farm labor. For the slave-sons of

Bandarshah, then, the *bandar*, far from offering fresh possibilities, produced a future that mimicked the past with dismal accuracy. The repetition of Bandarshah/Meryoud comments allegorically on this historical repetition. Meryoud carries on the work of Bandarshah, as, after the end of slave trade, the postcolonial state continues its repression of black Sudanese, who remain closed in the circle through which the future repeats the past. Whether Bandarshah or Meryoud is in control, whether “Mahjoub’s gang” or “Bakri’s boys” run the government, there will be no significant change for the slave-sons of Bandarshah. Unless they revolt, their present will remain eternal, as inescapable as Bandarshah’s magical palace. Sikainga informs us that as late as the 1970s—that is, at least up to the time *Bandarshah* was published—manumitted slaves “continued to maintain social obligations toward their former masters” (xxv).

The tale of Bandarshah and his slaves, which surfaces like a flash of insight only to sink again instantly, shares an affinity with the power of love as represented in *Bandarshah*. The tale of the slaves momentarily overcomes the collective amnesia, just as love is able—again, only momentarily—to escape the circle of Bandarshah/Meryoud. Two types of love figure significantly in the text: human love, expressed through the character of Maryam, and divine love, expressed through the character of Bilal. Bilal’s story immediately follows the tale of Bandarshah and his slaves, and carries the motif of the oppressed slave-sons into new territory. In this version of Bandarshah’s story, Bandarshah again has eleven sons, but this time he also has a twelfth son, a black son: Bilal, his child with a black slave woman.

Bilal, a mystic inspired by divine love, is the counterpart to Maryam. Like her, he is both a representation of difference and an idealized, flawless character. Unacknowledged by his father and brothers, he is blessed with a spiritual father, a sheikh who declares that Bilal is no one’s slave; he is the slave of God (109). Bilal embraces the life of a mystic, and becomes a muezzin,

like the Bilal for whom he is named, the Abyssinian freed slave whom the Prophet Mohammed made the first muezzin. “I am walking in the paths of the people of the Presence,” he says, not “the people of this world” (112).

The vision of the desired *bandar* is carried by Bilal, who, with his mixed heritage and Sufi Islam, expresses “the fermentation of the Sudanese consciousness . . . born from the seed of two cultures, Islamic and African” (Bushrā 335). Bilal’s function as an alternate imagined Sudan, positioned outside and in opposition to Bandarshah/Meryoud, is indicated by his separation from their tyrannical continuity. Bilal is removed from the signs of authority which are so prevalent in the text: he rejects the whip, symbol of conquest, in his embrace of divine love; and his position as an unacknowledged son of a slave woman leaves him no access to the power of the male name. Absorbed in spiritual matters, Bilal offers no direct confrontation to the tyranny of Bandarshah. However, in his separation from the domain of state power as represented by the struggle between “Mahjoub’s gang” and “Bakri’s boys,” Bilal does hold out the possibility of a type of community rooted not in law, either secular or religious, but in a Sufi concept of unity that forms an important current throughout Salih’s work. This current resonates with Partha Chatterjee’s explication the “narrative of community” which is “not domesticated to the requirements of the modern state, and yet persistent in its invocation of the rhetoric of love and kinship against the homogenizing sway of the normalized individual” (238-9). Bilal’s doctrine of love takes shape in the same spiritual domain as the nationalist discourse that privileges Arab identity and demands Islamic law, but it opposes these terms with African identity and popular, Sufi Islam. Bilal’s role as the source of an alternative to the Bandarshah/Meryoud narrative is confirmed by his son Taher, whom Bilal engenders in the one night he spends with his wife before dissolving the marriage in favor of spiritual contemplation. The relationship between

Bilal, his wife Hawwa, and their son Taher is the only wholly positive example of kinship in the text. It constitutes a new genealogy, one characterized by acceptance and love rather than repression and violence. Where Meryoud flogs the previous generation, Taher embraces it: significantly, that embrace includes both his father and his mother, and both are mentioned by name. Taher assures Meheimeed that on the Day of Judgment he will tell God: “Your wretched servant, Taher Wad Bilal, the son of Hawwa bint al-Oreibi, stands before You empty-handed, devoid of merit, having nothing to place in the scales of Your justice but love” (113). Taher, whose identity is both “Wad Bilal” (“son of Bilal”) and “son of Hawwa,” is also in a sense the father of *Bandarshah* the text: it is he who convinces Meheimeed to begin collecting oral histories, to “get down to work and record” the life stories of the villagers (100). Thus *Bandarshah*, the record of Meheimeed’s explorations among the buried histories of Wad Hamid, can be seen as the continuation of a new “narrative of community” positioned as an alternative to the reigning national narrative.

And yet it seems that Meheimeed has not done enough. A call to action concludes the second novel, *Maryūd*. In this final scene, Meheimeed mourns the dead Maryam. He recalls her funeral, and a vision in which she spoke to him from beyond the grave, exhorting him to answer the call of life. In this passage, Meheimeed and his grandfather are equated with Meryoud and Bandarshah. Maryam in fact addresses Meheimeed as Meryoud, her nickname for him, which means “beloved.” We read:

“O Meryoud. You are nothing... You have chosen your grandfather and your grandfather has chosen you because the two of you are most weighty in the scales of the people of the world. And your father is greater than both of you in the scales of justice... He dreamt the

dreams of the meek, and he partook of the provisions of the poor; he was tempted by glory but he restrained himself, and when life called him—when life called him—”

I said yes. I said yes. I said yes. But the way back was harder because I had forgotten. (122)

This is where the text stops. Waïl Hassan writes: “Meheimeed cannot be saved until he remembers—but that event does not occur in *Maryūd*. The last word in the text, ‘forgotten,’ confirms the condition of amnesia from which he and his society continue to suffer” (168).

Hassan, continuing his tracing of the critique of Islamic fundamentalism, reads *Maryūd* as a condemnation of patriarchy. *Maryūd*, he writes, “counters the paradigm of patriarchal tyranny and violence with a mystical one based on love” (162). Meheimeed must remember his own complicity with patriarchy—something which he fails to do, as is clear from the reference to his career as a browbeaten schoolteacher forced against his will to teach girls (*Bandarshah* 51).

This analysis is suggestive, but a crucial piece is missing, a piece suggested by the recurring trope of the whip. Maryam’s call asks Meheimeed to remember his *father*. It equates Meheimeed with the Meryoud who carried out the whipping in Meheimeed’s vision. It equates Meheimeed’s father with Bandarshah’s eleven sons, who are described in one version of the story as eleven slaves. Meheimeed is complicit with a patriarchal system, and also with the oppression of his own “slave” father—a figure who, locked away in the inner world of the vision, may be read as Meheimeed’s own African heritage, his own black self. Maryam’s words, like the whipping scene in *Dau al-Beit*’s wedding, extend the significance of Bandarshah’s family drama, allowing it to comment on Meheimeed and through him on his whole community. The challenge to Meheimeed is that he refuse to become the Meryoud who is a mirror image of Bandarshah, the “man of fair complexion” who, to maintain his identity as a slave owner, must

violently suppress the slaves who are his kin. Bilal, Bandarshah's unacknowledged son, is also Meheimeed's unacknowledged father. Here Salih uncovers a buried genealogy, referencing a history of oppression based in both gender and ethnicity. Slave women in Sudan were used for sexual services and valued for biological reproduction: female slaves were often hired out as prostitutes, and the children of these women, lacking legitimate fathers, were also considered slaves, thus increasing the master's holdings (Sikainga 23). *Bandarshah* references these actual unacknowledged descendants through the character of Bilal, and also transforms them into metaphor. The unacknowledged and oppressed slave son becomes a figure for an African fragment in Sudanese identity, one that must be recognized and reclaimed in order to break a cycle which does violence both to the nation and to the self.

Just as there are two ways of being Meryoud—the tyrant grandson, or the beloved of Maryam—there are also two ways of being Bandarshah's son: the gentle mystic, like Bilal, who dreams the dreams of the meek, or the rebellious and violent slaves. The revolt of Bandarshah's sons is represented as fruitless, leading only to the dead end of prison; but Bilal's answer to the tyranny of Bandarshah/Meryoud is also problematic. It, too, is a political dead end, and the reasons for its failure can be clarified through a closer look at the oral genre evoked by the text: the epic.

The epic employs the opposing forces that create the motion of *Bandarshah*: difference and authority. Anny Wynchank draws from Isidore Okpewho's *The Epic in Africa* (1979), Lilyan Kesteloot's *L'épopée traditionnelle* (1971), and Samuel-Martin Eno Belinga's *La littérature orale africaine* (1978), in order to outline the fundamental shared elements of the oral epic in Africa. Briefly stated, these elements are: a multi-generic texture, borrowing from mythology, legends, panegyrics, laments, and historical events; the representation of a period of transition,

often “war or upheaval”; the transfer of an individual hero’s predicament to an entire community; a noble and exemplary hero, whose genealogy is usually stated; recurring themes, often involving the use of fantasy; a didactic function; and a linear structure, following the hero from birth to death (Wynchank 1-2). Wynchank’s first five elements are of interest to a reading of *Bandarshah*. Moreover, attention to the forces of authority and difference allows us to connect them: the individual and exemplary hero, by standing for the community, channels a heterogeneous body of people into a single, heroic body. The epic’s setting in a time of transition, usually war, suggests both contact with foreign peoples, and the need to repulse or control them; decisive action by a larger-than-life authority is required in order to strengthen and sustain a weakened community. Finally, the formal heterogeneity of the epic expresses both the influence of a variety of genres, and the triumph of the master genre, the epic, which marshals artistic plurality in the service of the story of the hero. For Wai Chee Dimock, the epic is the genre of contact: “the proximity of the alien is its genetic condition” (83). The proximity of the alien sets the epic in motion, a genesis entirely in keeping with the epic’s character as the genre of totality, as defined by Hegel, for whom epic action is “a rich event connected with the total world of a nation and epoch” (in Moretti 11). Both *Bandarshah* and the epic it invokes, *Sīrat Banī Hilāl*, are instigated by the proximity of the alien, and both require that the alien be subsumed into a dominant community, a totality. Salih’s creative method of excavation, discussed in the introduction to this study, is most striking in *Bandarshah*, a text whose narrative fragments are “Pharaonic, heathen, Christian and . . . Muslim” (Salih, in Berkley xxviii). *Bandarshah* brims with the results of this imagined excavation. Its epigraphs include quotations from the Arab-Persian poet Abū Nuwās and from *Kalīlah wa Dimnah*, an Arabic version of an Indian collection of fables, emphasizing the links between the Arabic literary tradition and a

larger Asian culture. The different tales centering around the text's eponymous hero reveal further cultural variety: Bandarshah is not only a powerful personality of Wad Hamid, but also, in the different accounts, a Christian Nubian king, a pagan king, and an Abyssinian prince (*Bandarshah* 104). This expression of diverse cultural elements in a single text seems to promise their happy absorption into a national identity that can be embraced by all Sudanese.

*Bandarshah* rejects the last element of Wynchank's schema, linear narrative structure. This rejection is in keeping with the sympathy for difference in the text, which emerges in the positive portrayal of Bilal and Maryam and the construction of the tyrannical Bandarshah as an anti-hero. Yet despite the choice of disjuncture over linearity, the narrative techniques employed in *Bandarshah* are in keeping with epic form. The text's digressions, repetitions, and juxtaposition of actions unlinked by any indication of causality, are in fact typical of the epic, though in the epic these techniques are employed at the sentence level, rather than at the level of the episode or scene. Erich Auerbach, for example, writes of the prevalence of parataxis in the epic in Western literature, a juxtaposition of clauses also characteristic of Arabic epics such as *Sīrat Banī Hilāl*. In *Bandarshah*, this parataxis is expressed not through the sentence, but through the scene: it is scenes rather than clauses that are set beside each other, usually without any commentary to show whether one scene has caused the next to occur, or even how the two scenes are related temporally. This disjunctive structure appears to privilege heterogeneity, to resist the control of a single, central narrative. Yet that controlling narrative is worked into the form of the text, as a brief examination of epic parataxis will show.

Auerbach's reading of the 11<sup>th</sup>-century *Chanson de Roland*<sup>21</sup> draws out the relationship between epic structure and temporality. He draws attention to the repetitions in the text: King

---

<sup>21</sup> The *Chanson de Roland* is the oldest extant major work of French literature. It is based on a battle between Charlemagne's army and the Basques, fought at Roncesvalles in 778. In the *Chanson*, written down during the

Marsilius' repetition of the same question three times (103); Oliver asking Roland to blow his horn three times, with Roland's three refusals; and then the reversal of this series, in which Roland proposes to blow his horn three times, and Oliver replies three times in the negative (104). While the technique of repetition goes back to "antique rhetoric," Auerbach says, something more deliberate is at work here: "It would seem that the series of similar events and the resumption of previous statements are phenomena related in character to the parataxis of sentence structure" (105). The discussion that follows describes the surface discontinuity shared by *Bandarshah* and *Sīrat Banī Hilāl*:

Whether one comprehensive representation is replaced by a reiterative enumeration of individual scenes similar in form and progress; whether one intense action is replaced by a repetition of the same action, beginning at the same starting point time and again; or whether finally, instead of a process of complex and periodic development, we have repeated returns to the starting point, each one proceeding to elaborate a different element or motif: in all cases rationally organized condensations are avoided in favor of a halting, spasmodic, juxtapositive, and pro- and retrogressive method in which causal, modal, and even temporal relations are obscured. (105)

In the case of *Sīrat Banī Hilāl*, some of these features can be attributed to the performative nature of the *sīrah* genre. Susan Slyomovics, who recorded thirty-five hours of *Sīrat Banī Hilāl*, as performed by Awadallah Abd al-Jalil Ali, in Upper Egypt in 1983, lists over one hundred "oral-formulaic" phrases and epithets. The use of such phrases—for example, "rose-colored cheeks" and "kohl-darkened eyes" to describe a woman—is standard to the oral epic in a variety of

---

height of Muslim power in Spain, the historical battle is reimagined as a conflict between Christian and Muslim armies.

contexts,<sup>22</sup> and contributes to the sense of repetition in the narrative. This type of repetition, however, differs from the “halting, spasmodic” progression described by Auerbach, in which the repeated actions are not formulaic, but work both to increase the intensity of a scene, and to delay its outcome. In the *Chanson de Roland*, the repetitions surrounding the blowing of Roland’s horn intensify the moments leading up to the death of the hero, who blows the horn with such force that his temples burst. In the following scene from the Slyomovics transcription of *Sīrat Banī Hilāl*, repetition emphasizes the moment when the hero Abū Zayd suffers a grave insult, as Amir, King of Iraq, takes him for a servant because he is black, and fails to greet him properly:

Awadallah: Amir went towards the horsemen,  
 To courageous ones heading for Tunis,  
 He gave greetings to the youths in front,  
 To Yayha, Mari’ and Yunis.  
 (Here is the disgrace, O my brother, here is the great disgrace which takes place)  
 He gave greetings to Abu Zayd afterwards  
 He gave greetings to Abu Zayd afterwards  
 The one in the vanguard, harsh in encounter,  
 He became a lion, at full stretch  
 Against men, he is harsh in encounter,  
 He became a lion, at full stretch  
 The one in the vanguard, of sterling qualities  
 He gave greetings to Abu Zayd afterwards,

---

<sup>22</sup> Examples include what Wynchank calls the “incantatory repetitions” of the *Sundiata* epic (5); the formulaic phrases of Anglo-Saxon epic poetry, for which see Andy Orchard, *A Critical Companion to Beowulf* (D.S. Brewer, Cambridge, 2003); and Homer’s “rosy-fingered dawn” and “wine-dark sea.”

This is a story from my art, we shall complete  
 He takes him for a lion, at full stretch,  
 Whoever opposes him orphans his own children  
 He gave greetings to Abu Zayd afterwards,  
 Over all his will prevails  
 He takes him for a lion, at full stretch  
 His small fingers dried up  
 His two fingers and hands stiffened,

Audience: Stiffened

Awadallah: His breath caught in his throat,

The Arabs said, “See the mighty hero—

Abu Zayd butting his head against the Iraqi, butting his head against the Iraqi.

(100-103)

Three elements of this scene are relevant to this discussion. First, there is the striking repetition of lines, particularly the line describing the insult—“He gave greeting to Abu Zayd afterwards”—and the line describing the hero’s fierce response: “He became a lion, at full stretch.” Second, there is the paratactic juxtaposition of lines, with hardly any explicit temporal or causal linkages between them. The poet does not inform the audience that Abū Zayd became like a lion because he had been insulted; the causal relationship between the two lines must be inferred. Similarly, there are few temporal clues. The audience is not told that Abū Zayd’s breath caught in his throat, *and then* he attacked the Iraqi, *upon which* the Arabs said, “See the mighty hero.” Rather, the poet leaps from “his breath caught in his throat” to the reaction of the Arabs, which signifies that the attack has taken place. The only temporal clue in the passage is the word

“afterwards,” which is of course deeply significant to the action, as the fact that Abū Zayd was greeted *after* the younger men, his nephews, is the essence of the insult.

In Auerbach’s analysis of the *Chanson de Roland*, paratactic repetition is described as “obscuring” causality. The above passage from *Sīrat Banī Hilāl* permits a different view of the relationship between repetition and causality. Despite the poet’s use of paratactic juxtaposition, the audience has no trouble understanding that Abū Zayd’s leonine anger is the result of the Iraqi’s insult. The connection between the two events is clear, even in the absence of conjunctions between the clauses, because the lines are repeated. It is repetition that draws attention to the two lines, and their causal relationship can be inferred because they are so heavily underscored by repetition. To make the connection even more emphatic, there is a phonetic repetition in the form of a pun between “afterwards” (*ba ‘dayn*) and “at full stretch” (*bā ‘idayn*). In this passage, then, repetition does not obscure causality. Repetition is, itself, the marker of causality.

Auerbach reads the paratactic sentence structure of the *Chanson de Roland* as a symptom of cultural rigidity. He contrasts the “impressive brevity” and “grandeur” of the Biblical Genesis, in which parataxis possesses “a note of obscurity which fills the listener with a shuddering awe,” with the narrowness of the *Chanson de Roland*, in which “[a]ll the categories of this life and the next are unambiguous, immutable, fixed in rigid formulations” (110). *Sīrat Banī Hilāl*, with its intense wordplay and dramatic staging of ethnic anxieties, cannot be so summarily dismissed. Yet to read the *sīrah* in tandem with *Bandarshah* suggests that there is a force in the epic which does tend toward rigidity and fixity of terms: it is, after all, the relentless and unchanging continuity of cultural forms that *Bandarshah* expresses and confronts through an engagement with epic. This use of epic is in part referential: as we have seen, *Bandarshah*’s black skin and

green eyes recall the hero Abū Zayd. It is also formal: certain lines concerning Bandarshah are repeated word-for-word in the text, in mimicry of the oral-formulaic language of epic: examples include the “destructive ray” (12, 89) and “from darkness to darkness” (37, 79). Most significantly, on a larger level, it is structural. The parataxis of scene employed in *Bandarshah*, by eschewing explicit markers of causality, forces the reader to rely on the clues marked out by repetition, such as the recurring tropes of the name and the whip, for interpretation. As with the epic, it is repetition that makes meaning.

Maryam and Bilal stand as a critique of the authority of Bandarshah/Meryoud by remaining outside of it—Bilal is, after all, Bandarshah’s unacknowledged son. Yet precisely because they claim no authority beyond themselves, these characters are unable to confront authority in any sustained fashion. Maryam’s gift of romantic love, and Bilal’s blessing of divine love, are momentary and limited flashes of hope, lacking the power to combat the force of Bandarshah/Meryoud. Neither form of love is amenable to deliberate reproduction. They retain the transformative potential of miracles, but a miracle is always an exception to the rule. The rule—and the power *to* rule—remains in the hands of Bandarshah, who is able to project his image into the future.

The exposure of the shards of black African identity marks an important development in Salih’s oeuvre: while ex-slaves and the children of slaves figure in both *The Wedding of Zein* and *Season of Migration to the North*, *Bandarshah* is the only one of Salih’s works to elaborate a sustained critique of Sudan’s slave-owning history and its effect on national consciousness. *Bandarshah*—especially the second part, *Maryūd*—proposes a narrative of community that will gather the broken shards of Sudanese history and identity. Yet ultimately the narrative of *Bandarshah* remains suspended, cut off in midair, an image of permanent crisis. In its unfinished

state, the text is more resistant to closure than even that paragon of delayed action, *A Thousand and One Nights*. It is worth noting here that while the text insists that any viable Sudanese community must, like Bilal, claim a mixed, black heritage rather than a strictly Arab one, it also imagines that community through Islam. In this sense, it stops short of advocating a community that would embrace all the shards it unearths.

*Bandarshah* remains unfinished. And perhaps its expressive power is heightened, rather than damaged, by this apparent flaw. If “[t]o make a claim on behalf of the fragment is also ... to produce a discourse that is itself fragmentary” (Chatterjee 13), then the “incomplete” text may signify a particularly uncompromising engagement with a situation that does not admit of closure. Be that as it may, the fractured, unfinished narrative of *Bandarshah* effectively represents that nation which became two nations two years after Salih’s death: a region whose future has been determined by what, in this text, an unusually perceptive writer named the revenge of the present.

## Chapter Six

### Fantasy in the Works of Ibrahim al-Koni, Bessie Head, and Ben Okri

This chapter branches from Tayeb Salih's novels into a consideration of three other works: *Nazīf al-ḥajar* or *The Bleeding of the Stone* by Ibrahim al-Koni (Ibrāhīm al-Kūnī, Libya, 1990); *A Question of Power* by Bessie Head (Botswana, 1973); and Ben Okri's *The Famished Road* trilogy (Nigeria, 1991; 1993; 1998). The treatment of each work takes up threads from the analyses of Salih's works. The Sufi subtext of *The Wedding of Zein* leads into the Sufi-inflected ecological vision of *The Bleeding of the Stone*; the uncanny doublings around race and gender in *Season of Migration to the North* connect to the hallucinatory torments of *A Question of Power*; and the cyclical structure of *Bandarshah*, as well as its use of the stalled epic as a figure for the postcolonial interregnum, find echoes in Okri's *The Famished Road* trilogy. Throughout this comparative exercise, I maintain a focus on fantasy as nonstandard space, and on the way the use of fantastic spaces in the texts expresses a consciousness of the world as a system that is anchored in intimate local space.

#### **Wild Space: Ibrahim al-Koni's *The Bleeding of the Stone***

*There are no animals on land or birds flying on their wings, but are communities like your own.*

—Qur'an 6:38, quoted in al-Koni, 1

*The Bleeding of the Stone*, like all of Ibrahim al-Koni's fiction, is set in the Sahara. Al-Koni's concentration on remote desert regions, like Salih's on the imagined village of Wad Hamid, makes marginalized space the center of the world, and more importantly the center of

world-making: the place in which the idea of the world takes shape. Even more than Salih, al-Koni comes to Arabic literature from the margins. An ethnic Tuareg, he grew up speaking not Arabic, but Tamashek, and did not gain literacy in Arabic until the age of twelve (Hutchins 9). His fiction concerns the economically and politically marginalized Tuareg community, and his characters' dialogue is sprinkled with Tamashek words. While he always provides the Arabic translation in a footnote, the use of Tamashek asserts the presence of another linguistic world in his texts, and creates a reading experience that may be startling or even "jarring" to Arabic readers (Rossetti 50). The use of two languages parallels al-Koni's consistent use of two worlds. His fiction's deep concern with mysticism and magic has led to his reputation as Arabic literature's preeminent practitioner of magical realism (Cooke 10).

Magical realism, as discussed in chapter two of this dissertation, depends on the merging of two worlds, the world of material reality and the world of the supernatural. Most of the texts read as magical realism come out of postcolonial contexts, in which the blending of reality and magic is used to express, negotiate or comment upon the relationship between modernity and tradition. In some ways, *The Bleeding of the Stone* fits easily into this picture of magical realism. The story of the nomad Asouf, who sees the wildlife of his desert home devastated by hunters with modern weapons, *The Bleeding of the Stone* portrays a familiar struggle between a way of life practiced for centuries and a new, fast-paced and destructive human stance toward the natural world. Asouf is firmly on the side of, and in fact a part of, the animal world, the polar opposite of Cain the hunter. In a key episode, which scholars point to as the clearest evidence of the text's magical realism, Asouf transforms into a *waddan*, a nearly extinct wild sheep, in order to escape conscription into the Italian colonial army (Al-Koni 73-4). The transformation of Asouf exemplifies the fluidity of borders that characterizes magical realist texts (Faris 172). "In

this passage,” writes Miriam Cooke, “Asuf is at the same time a prisoner, a quasi-mythological beast, a saint whose saintliness is soon proved by the blessing of rain but—and this is crucial—he is also a real herder of camels” (15).<sup>23</sup>

The doubled space of this novel—myth and material reality, in magical realist terms—underlies, in palimpsestic fashion, two versions of the desert: the desert of the mountains, and the desert of the sands, both infused with the spirits of sentient animals and jinn. Asouf and Cain are associated respectively with tradition and modernity, but the association does not depend on Asouf being of the desert and Cain of the city. Both men are of the desert; both belong to animal families. The difference between them, which creates the drive and tragedy of the narrative, lies in their different relationships to the desert. Asouf recognizes his connection to desert animals, while Cain merely strives to dominate the animal world, in the role of supreme predator. To recognize animals as kin is to perceive the hidden nature of one’s relationship to the world, a relationship that is as deep for Cain as it is for Asouf. This idea of hidden truth, and the novel’s emphasis on secrets, evokes the concept of *al-zāhir* (outward reality) and *al-bātin* (essential reality) so prominent in Sufi discourse. If Asouf is indeed a saint, as the Sufi dervishes in the novel claim (74), it is because he is able to perceive the inner reality, the unity of humans and animals: he is able to interpret the language of his animal kin, which is spoken in silence, through the gaze. Rather than reading Asouf’s transformation into a *waddan* as a “blending” of two different worlds in the magical realist sense, I read it as an unveiling of a larger reality, similar to that which occurs during the wedding of Zein. Asouf has always been *waddan*; the human has also always been the animal, which has also always been the divine. *The Bleeding of the Stone* asserts this fundamental unity, and by doing so, it advocates for the preservation of the

---

<sup>23</sup> Cooke uses the phonetic spelling of Asouf’s name. I use the spelling from May Jayyusi and Christopher Tingley’s English translation of the novel.

wilderness: for a reverent attitude toward a wild, unconquerable, physical space, teeming with life, larger and older than humans, which we might call the planet.

Like *The Wedding of Zein*, *The Bleeding of the Stone* is a parable, a form which, in its demand for interpretation, affirms the primacy of the hidden world. In order to investigate al-Koni's use of space in this novel, I will spend some time exploring the meanings of the name *Asouf*, a profoundly significant term in Tuareg cosmology, which in the Tamashek language connotes a type of space. In an essay on the concept of *asouf* (which she spells *essuf*), Susan J. Rasmussen explores the term's roots in cosmology and healing practices, and discusses how a number of Tuareg artists, among them Ibrahim al-Koni, use the term to express and reflect on changing social realities (609). Rasmussen describes *asouf* as follows:

In ritual healing and cosmology, this denotes approximately “the wild” or “solitude”; it is at once a mental state, a place where the soul of a possessed person travels, and also a literal remote space, far from the nomadic tent and camp... Paradoxically, it is a place to which some are tempted to travel, but also an abyss of suffering.

In other contexts—for example, in modern literature, poems, and songs—many Tuareg artists and intellectuals translate *essuf* as nostalgia... Some contemporary writers and performers use this image to convey a remote vastness, but reverse its older “wild” connotations, associating this space with the sheltering, enveloping haven of their desert home, for which they yearn. (609)

The story of the herdsman Asouf is charged with these various, sometimes contradictory meanings of *asouf*. Like Zein in *The Wedding of Zein*, Asouf is in some ways a personification of space: for other characters in the novel, contact with him means access to wild space. Asouf knows the desert intimately, and acts as a guide for foreign tourists who wish to view the ancient

rock paintings of the Sahara (9). The hunters in the novel—the vicious Cain son of Adam who decimates the gazelles, and the American John Parker who provides Cain with guns—also use Asouf as a guide. Asouf functions as *asouf* by providing these characters with an experience of the wild which is also a spiritual experience, whether for the tourists who kneel before the great rock paintings (9), or for Cain, whose craving for meat signals an increasingly desperate desire for spiritual fulfillment (129). By providing these experiences, Asouf embodies *asouf* as the space of ritual trial, catharsis and healing. He also embodies a more contemporary meaning of *asouf*: *asouf* as endangered space, as the desert haven no longer available to many Tuareg (Rasmussen 609). Yet, like Zein, Asouf is more than merely the expression of a certain type of space: he also undergoes the experience of space, and specifically of *asouf*. As other characters find wild space through him, so he discovers wild space through that legendary, near-extinct creature, the *waddan*. Asouf's changing relationship to the *waddan*, and to the perilous mountain desert it represents, expresses the changing meaning of *asouf* charted by Susan Rasmussen (609). In this shift, *asouf* changes from a space of psychological displacement, a wild region of isolation and suffering, to a site of cultural emplacement, a focal point from which to advocate for the protection of endangered spaces and an endangered way of life.

Asouf's father tells him an origin myth that asserts the doubled nature of the desert. "Once long ago, he said, the mountain desert waged constant war with the sandy desert, and the heavenly gods would descend to earth to separate the pair" (20). Eventually, the gods tired of sending down rain to calm the battle, and stopped the two deserts in their places. "Then the sands found a way to enter the spirit of the gazelles, while the mountains found a way into the spirit of the *waddan*. And from that day on, the *waddan* was possessed by the spirit of the mountains" (20-21). The *waddan* stands in a special relationship to both Asouf and his father: both men

choose, like the *waddan*, to live in the desert, far from human settlement, and both are hunters of the creature, who eventually finds themselves in need of its help, after slipping on the treacherous rocks of the mountains (40; 60). Both are saved by the *waddan*, and vow afterward not to eat its meat. Asouf's father, driven by hunger, breaks his vow; then, on a hunting trip, he falls and breaks his neck in a chasm, as he had forced a desperate *waddan* to do years before (26). Asouf keeps his vow, and becomes one with the *waddan*, which allows him to use transformation to escape the Italian army, and also gives him the power to serve as a sacrificial lamb, dying at the hands of Cain the hunter, and cleansing the desert with his blood (135).

This achievement depends on Asouf's recognition of the kinship between himself and the *waddan* during his own experience of wild space. The *waddan*, as representation of *asouf*, is both dangerous and attractive: although Asouf knows how his father died, and has been cautioned not to hunt the creature, he pursues it, succumbing to a power linked to ritual possession and transformation:

Wonderment, beyond his power to resist, drove him on. His father had said, and so had his mother, that the spirit of the *waddan* attracts, stupefies, robs a man of his mind, takes all his will away. Then the hunter finds himself dispossessed, led away, haunted, leaping on his own four limbs as he chases the beast over the smooth, hard rocks. (46).

Asouf manages to throw a rope around the *waddan*, but then the creature drags him up into the mountains, lacerating his body on the stones, before flinging him off to dangle over a chasm, clinging to the rocks. Asouf's trial above the pit is the longest and most detailed episode in the novel. He experiences terror and exhaustion, thirst so powerful he licks at his own tears and blood, and the torment of hesitation between whether to hold onto life or let go and end his sufferings (50-59). He passes a whole night in this state, in *asouf*, both the literal wild space of

the mountains and the psycho-spiritual wild space of the ritually isolated, an experience strongly suggestive of a rite of passage: Asouf's night in the mountains is the first he has spent away from his mother (64). *Asouf* is a no-place, a fantastic region "between earth and heaven" (51).

Eventually, Asouf is saved, like his father before him, by the creature he meant to destroy. Yet his experience is different, for it involves a moment of recognition. Asouf sees his father in the *waddan*: "[t]he sad, benevolent eyes of his father, who'd never understood why man should harm his brother man..." (61). The *waddan* is Asouf's "brother man"—human, animal and divine all at once:

From his place, covered with its greedy stones, [Asouf] cried out in a choked voice, as if communing with his God.

"You're my father. I recognize you." (61)<sup>24</sup>

From this moment, Asouf's relationship to the *waddan* changes: he is no longer the creature's adversary, but its ally. He refuses to show the insatiable Cain where to find the creature, answering Cain's demands only with the *hadith* of the Prophet Muhammad: "Only through dust will the son of Adam be filled" (132). Asouf's trial in the no-place of *asouf* instigates a shift in the meaning *asouf* holds for him, from "abyss of suffering" to "sheltering, enveloping haven" (Rasmussen 609).

Asouf's opposite, his perverted double, is the flesh-craving Cain son of Adam, who enlists Asouf's aid as a guide in the desert. Just as Asouf has a special relationship to the mountain desert, which inhabits the spirit of the *waddan*, so Cain has a special relationship to the sandy desert, which inhabits the spirit of the gazelle. Each desert stands in a particular relationship to human beings: while the *waddan* represents *asouf*, or wild nature—nature as

---

<sup>24</sup> "عرفتك." The line may be rendered as either "I recognized you" or "I recognize you" (in the sense of the perfect, "I have recognized you"). Jayyusi and Tingley use the former; I prefer the latter, which conveys the significance of the moment of recognition, and have modified the translation accordingly.

physical danger and spiritual testing ground—the gazelle represents tender nature, nature that protects human beings and requires their protection in turn. Cain, like Asouf, was saved from death by the beast he hunts: his family died of thirst in the desert, but a caravan rescued the infant Cain, picking him up “as he was thrusting his head into the open belly of a gazelle, licking at the blood and dung” (81). The details of this story are provided by the daughter of that gazelle herself, who relates it to her own fawn in a chapter called “The Covenant,” the only chapter in the novel in which animals speak. According to the gazelle, her mother willingly sacrificed herself to give life to the human child, to form a bond of kinship between them, making gazelle meat “forbidden” to the child (103). But Cain, who craves not only meat, but murder, uses modern weapons obtained from John Parker, a captain at the American military base, to slaughter the gazelles in droves. When Cain comes face to face with his animal kin, the daughter of the gazelle who saved his life, he pauses for a moment, arrested by her gaze: “Her eyes were big and black and intelligent, speaking some unknown language, saying something to him, revealing a secret. A secret, yes, one he sensed but couldn’t quite grasp” (116). The secret is never transmitted, and both the gazelle and her fawn are killed. “That night, Cain, son of Adam, didn’t just kill his sister. He ate her flesh too” (119).

The opposition of Cain and Asouf creates an ecological parable, one that draws on the spatial concept of *asouf* to express the kinship of land, animals and human beings. It culminates in violence and redemption: driven mad by his craving for meat and Asouf’s refusal to lead him to the *waddan*, Cain cuts Asouf’s throat, an act that calls down a miraculous rain. Cain’s murder of Asouf echoes the murder of the herdsman Abel in Abrahamic traditions. Yet it fulfills the prophecy of a different tradition, a prophecy written in the stone “in the mysterious Touareg alphabet resembling the symbols of Kano soothsayers”:

I, the High Priest of Matkhandoush, prophesy, for the generations to come, that redemption will be at hand when the sacred *waddan* bleeds and the blood issues from the stone. It is then that the miracle will be born: that the earth will be cleansed and the deluge cover the desert. (Al-Koni 135)

The echo of Cain and Abel in the story of Cain and Asouf expresses a syncretistic blending of prophetic traditions, one that underscores the nature of the desert as a contact zone. Ibrahim al-Koni is a Libyan writer, but his fiction does not emphasize the bordered Libyan nation-state. Rather, it emphasizes the Tuareg nation, a nomadic nation dispersed in space from Libya to Mali (Rasmussen 610). Al-Koni's fiction, like that of Tayeb Salih, rejects the notion of a division between African and Arab worlds; *The Bleeding of the Stone* makes this explicit by portraying a blend of Islam and traditional African religious practices in the life of Tuareg nomads. Thus Asouf's father, before he hunts the *waddan*, "recited all the Quranic verses he'd memorized," and also "repeated, in Hausa, all the spells of the African magicians, then hung around his neck all the snakeskin amulets he'd bought from soothsayers traveling in caravans from Kano" (23-4). These "African magicians" are not only a passing influence in Asouf's life, for his own Tuareg alphabet, the language of prophecy, "resembl[es] the symbols of Kano soothsayers" (135). The prophecy in the ancient stone invokes deep time, which allows a connection in space, suggesting a common ancestry for Tamashek- and Hausa-speaking people.<sup>25</sup> The prophecy, then, draws together a number of different sets of threads, proposing different types of unity. There is the philosophical unity of human/animal/desert, discussed above. There is also the kinship of desert people, of those who move back and forth, meeting and departing from one another, in the culturally rich space of the desert. This social unity, it should be noted, extends beyond the

---

<sup>25</sup> Tamashek is a Berber language and Hausa a Chadic one; however, both belong to the Afro-Asiatic language family (Austin 72).

desert: trade routes are evoked by the “old hunters,” the “desert people” who “would meet in the wild and sit around their green Chinese tea, talking and consoling one another” (90-91). The Chinese tea indicates a trade-based cosmopolitanism older and far less disruptive than the modern cosmopolitanism enjoyed by John Parker, who comes to the desert with religious yearning and machine guns. Yet John Parker, who has studied Zen Buddhism, contributes to the emergence of a third type of unity in the text, a unity of faith traditions. Whatever John Parker’s personal failings (and Cain mocks his hypocritical spiritualism, calling him “the biggest criminal of the lot”, p. 110), the connection he draws between Sufism and Buddhism should be taken seriously. The “dervish” who mentors him eats no meat, “like the Buddhists of Tibet and the Himalayas” (109), and like Asouf, whom Cain sneeringly compares to the “phantoms” of the Himalayas (33). These connections between Buddhism and Sufi Islam, centered on ideas of solitude, silence, and a reverent attitude toward animals, assert, in spiritual rather than economic terms, the broad Asian unity suggested by the Chinese tea. Further, the references to Buddhism join the references to Islam and traditional African belief systems, as well as the references to Christianity in the epigraphs from the Bible that preface some chapters of the novel, to raise the notion of the unity of faith. This notion is famously expressed in these lines by the Sufi poet and philosopher Ibn Arabi:

My heart has become capable of every form: it is a pasture for gazelles and a convent for Christian monks,

And a temple for idols and the pilgrim’s Ka’aba and the tables of the Tora and the book of the Koran.

I follow the religion of Love: whatever way Love’s camels take, that is my religion and my faith. (Knysh 26)

Within the framework of this Sufi understanding, Asouf commits no sin when he accidentally prays toward the rock painting rather than the Ka'aba (7). The references to Buddhism in the novel have the important effect of broadening the idea of unity beyond notions of the syncretistic practices of African Islam, and making a statement not about the oneness of faith traditions, but about the oneness of faith itself. Faith is one, whether expressed in the reverence for “idols” or the Ka'aba, or, as the text makes clear, for the desert, that “pasture for gazelles.” Faith links the desert to the world, proposing a different type of global connectivity than the exchange of money, meat and weapons that binds John Parker and Cain.

Asouf's death creates another type of unity: a unity of time and space. His blood drips on the half-buried stone, on the words of the prophecy he is fulfilling as the sacrificial *waddan*. The words in the “mysterious Touareg alphabet,” embodied in space as a carving in stone, link the rituals of the past to Asouf's present, when he becomes *waddan* not in order to escape, but to serve as a sacrifice. The moment of Asouf's death is depicted in time, as narrative, but it is also lifted out of linear time, linked back to the moment when the words of the Tuareg prophet were carved in the stone. Asouf's death affirms what Walter Benjamin calls “Messianic time,” time as a cluster or constellation rather than a line (Benjamin 263). As in Goethe's “Pyrmont” sketch, where prophecy humanizes space, filling it with “condensed” time, the prophecy in *The Bleeding of the Stone* makes space human, intimately bound up with human destiny (Bakhtin 52). Asouf's human body bears the name of “wilderness”; the stone, a fragment of the wilderness, bears human language and bleeds human blood. Asouf's crucifixion and slaughter bring together the human, the sacred animal, and the stone of the desert in a moment of prophetic fulfillment that yields the life-giving blood of the heavens: rain (Al-Koni 135).

*The Bleeding of the Stone* is, like *The Wedding of Zein*, a fantasy with a strong undercurrent of Sufism. In both texts, a shift in perspective is required in order to bring the large world, the eternal world, into view. In Sufi discourse, this shift is referred to as “unveiling” (Sells 131). Al-Koni puts this idea to work together with the Tamashek notion of *asouf*, attempting to unveil the relationship between human beings and their landscape, to see the natural world as kin. Fantasy enables this imaginative leap: it is the *barzakh*, the isthmus, connecting intellectual knowledge and the body. Although the story of Asouf is harsh and tragic, the gesture it makes is utopian: its representation of prophetic time expresses not only, as Sa‘īd al-Ghānimī writes, “the desire for control over time” (45), but the desire to wrest that control from the forces of globalization. Like *The Wedding of Zein*, *The Bleeding of the Stone* expresses an impulse toward a perfect world: not toward a unity of human beings, animals, and land, for this already exists, but toward the recognition of that unity.

### **Dead Worlds, New Worlds: Bessie Head’s *A Question of Power***

*The Wedding of Zein* and *The Bleeding of the Stone* end in fulfillment: an instant of unity in which the protagonist enters fully into his destined role, revealing that this role has been his all along. The conclusion of *Season of Migration to the North* is far less certain. The narrator’s cry for help signals his desire for community, and we can infer that he achieves some sort of social integration from the fact that the whole narrative of *Season* is related to a group of listeners. However, a silence covers the terms of that integration, of the sacrifices and compromises the narrator may have had to make, material that rises to the surface in *Bandarshah*. Bessie Head’s *A Question of Power*, like *Season*, concludes with an impulse toward integration. Elizabeth, the novel’s tortured protagonist, having survived two serious mental breakdowns, expresses

tenderness toward her adopted country, Botswana: “As she fell asleep, she placed one soft hand over her land. It was a gesture of belonging” (206). The gesture represents the beginning, rather than the fulfillment, of a destiny left in abeyance. In their small, ordinary gestures—the narrator’s “comic” shouting, Elizabeth’s sleepy turn toward the country around her—these characters act on the level of the realist rather than the mythic hero. Yet their simple gestures are dearly bought. Both protagonists have endured harrowing experiences; both have been haunted by a traumatic past, a ghostly terror that has almost succeeded in preventing them from making any gesture of belonging to the present. *The Wedding of Zein* and *The Bleeding of the Stone* are animated by the desire for a unity that will bring the past and present into a constellation, one that illuminates the path to the future. In *Season* and *A Question of Power*, the inseparability of past and present is a curse. The protagonists cannot belong to the present until they are freed from the ghosts of the past, and only from the present can they begin to imagine the future. Like *Season*, Bessie Head’s novel interrogates the double bind of the postcolonial Gothic, the “unspoken” and “spoken for” (Rudd 5): Elizabeth is constantly “spoken for” by the voices in her head, in scenes of fantastic horror that expose the violence of the Apartheid system; she is also trapped in the “unspoken” through her lack of an African mother tongue. In *A Question of Power*, as in *Season of Migration to the North*, it is the fantasy world that unveils the vast, hidden power of the modern world-system. Yet, more than *Season*, *A Question of Power* evokes a different system, the planet, which offers Elizabeth a promise of belonging and renewal.

Bessie Head (1937-1986) was born in an asylum in South Africa, where her white mother was incarcerated because she was pregnant by a black man (Fido 332). By the time she was thirteen years old, Head had lived with two different sets of foster parents and in an orphanage as a ward of the South African state, an upbringing that helped create the “estrangement” which,

Rob Nixon writes, “placed her under relentless pressure to improvise a sense of community and ancestry, in her life and writing alike” (107). Elizabeth in *A Question of Power* is closely modeled on Head: like Head, Elizabeth is a single mother, a refugee from South Africa living in Botswana, a former city-dweller striving to create a new life in a rural setting, and a woman struggling with mental illness. Head claimed to have written the novel both as a form of therapy, and as a “record” of the suffering that led to her being hospitalized in a mental institution for several months (Brown 89). Yet though she spoke of the novel as an autobiographical record, Head takes pains in the text to connect Elizabeth’s personal illness to broader social ills. Elizabeth’s terrors are centered around race and sex, enabling *A Question of Power* to interrogate, as does *Season of Migration to the North*, how notions of race and gender operate as systems of power. The link between Elizabeth’s inner devastation and the brutality of the Apartheid system confirms Jacqueline Rose’s assertion that “fantasy, even on its own psychic terms, is never only inward-turning; it always contains a historical reference in so far as it involves, alongside the attempt to arrest the present, a journey through the past” (5). *A Question of Power* makes use of autobiographical material, but it is far from being only a record of madness. Elizabeth’s inner struggles critique an intolerable social order. Life in South Africa, Elizabeth recalls, “was like living with permanent nervous tension” (19). After her first collapse, a fellow exile from South Africa informs her that “[a] lot of refugees have nervous breakdowns” (52). These references connect Elizabeth’s sufferings to two common experiences: life under a system of racial segregation and oppression, and the life of a refugee. Both are experiences of contact zones, and express the conditions of unequal power forming the phenomenon of globalization. Elizabeth’s mental illness, addressing the situation of marginalized people under

these conditions, is both personal and global. As Rose reminds us: “That fantasy is only a private matter is perhaps the supreme fantasy, fantasy *par excellence*” (79).

Many of the preoccupations of *Season* also figure in *A Question of Power*: the quest for belonging, the ghostly persistence of historical trauma, the role of masculinist discourse in racial oppression, and the destruction or disintegration of the body, particularly the female body. Yet here, the protagonist is herself female. She is also, as the child of a white woman and a black man under Apartheid, uncanny: the ultimate example of what “ought to have remained . . . secret and hidden but has come to light” (Freud 125). As a person of mixed race, she is “impossible” (Young 66); in order to survive, she must create new possibilities for her world. “Oh God,” Elizabeth prays after her first breakdown, “[m]ay I never contribute to creating dead worlds, only new worlds” (100). This reading traces how the “dead world” of racial segregation and oppression haunting Elizabeth functions as a torture chamber in which she repetitively rehearses her traumas, while at the same time, in her waking life, she constructs, in fits and starts, a “new world” for herself, a unique possibility, both rural and cosmopolitan. I pay particular attention to the figure of the mother in Elizabeth’s inner life: her “good” white mother, who died in a mental hospital in South Africa, and her “bad” African mother, the Medusa. The mother figure embodies the intersection of race and gender, and acts as a focal point for Elizabeth’s anxieties (motherland, mother tongue). An examination of this figure will draw out both the way the quest for belonging in *A Question of Power* resonates with a similar quest in *Season of Migration to the North*, and how Elizabeth’s quest foregrounds a different set of complications. *A Question of Power* is, like *Season*, deeply concerned with repression and repetition: Elizabeth’s inner life teems with material she must repress in order to survive, grotesque visions endlessly repeated. The discourse that silences Elizabeth is framed as indigenous rather than colonial—it advocates a

“pure” Africa to which Elizabeth cannot belong—but it derives from the segregation of the Apartheid system, and is therefore one of colonialism’s ghosts. As in *Season*, it is fantasy, in the form of terrifying visions, that makes system visible as system, the “dead world” visible as world.

*A Question of Power* tells two stories at once: an internal one and an external one. In Elizabeth’s external life, she leaves her teaching job for an agricultural project, interacts with people in the village and on the farm, cares for her son, and is hospitalized twice. Her internal life unfolds under the gaze of two men, Sello and Dan. Sello and Dan are both actual people in the village of Motabeng in Botswana, where Elizabeth has come to live after fleeing South Africa. However, she rarely interacts with them or even sees them in the external world. The appearances of the two men are containers for forces in her inner life. Sello, a seeker of harmony for the whole human race who is dominated by the destructive Medusa, acts as Elizabeth’s ghostly double: “Most of what applied to Sello applied to her, because they were twin souls with closely-linked destinies and the same capacity to submerge other preoccupations in a pursuit after the things of the soul” (11-12). Dan is Elizabeth’s demon lover, “an extremely pretty man” with a permanent erection, and an expert in the cruel “mechanics of power” (12-13). He brings with him a whole host of figures of female sexuality, whose significance is discussed below. For now, I wish to draw attention to the balance between the two worlds represented in *A Question of Power*. Although the text makes it clear that there is a difference between these two worlds—no one but Elizabeth can see the characters that haunt her inner life—the border between them is almost completely unmarked. Elizabeth does not cross over into one world and then return, as Meheimeed does in *Bandarshah*. Rather, she inhabits both worlds equally. Here, for example, Dan tries to push her into suicide:

He tried another prophecy: “You are going to commit suicide at a quarter to one tomorrow.” She nearly did, except that her small boy had asked her to buy him a football and he came down the road with a gang of eager friends. (13)

The two worlds flow seamlessly into one another. Their contact zone is Elizabeth herself. Her double life possesses a formal symmetry with her status as a woman of mixed race dwelling between two worlds, the black and the white, and with what Nixon calls Head’s own “radically and traumatically liminal” relationship to categories of belonging—familial, racial, national (108). The permeability of the border between the two worlds does not connote harmony, but the extremely tenuous nature of life *as*, rather than *on*, the border: Elizabeth “nearly did” commit suicide. Significantly, she is saved by her son. Like Head, Elizabeth knows only one of her blood relations: her own child (Nixon 108).

Elizabeth’s son is a new life; for his sake, she goes on living, and strives to create a new world they can both inhabit in Botswana. Yet she questions her own suitability for motherhood. After shouting at her son, she contemplates him “in a sort of agony,” aware that “[p]eople who had mothers like he had were lost if they did not know how to care for themselves” (50). Elizabeth has had to care for herself, and knows the cost. Like Bessie Head, Elizabeth was raised by foster parents. She recalls being told as a child: “Your mother was insane. If you’re not careful you’ll get insane just like your mother” (16). When she does, in fact, begin to struggle with mental illness, she wonders if her suffering is really “the silent appeal of her dead mother: ‘Now you know. Do you think I can bear the stigma of insanity alone? Share it with me’” (17). In this identification with the mother through a negative trait, through “stigma,” Elaine Savory Fido reads a double bind forming Elizabeth: “to yearn after similarity to the absent mother is to yearn after destruction” (342). Yet the connection is ambivalent, for the stigma, society’s

judgment on Elizabeth's mother, may be turned against the society that shamed her and locked her away. When Elizabeth goes to her foster-mother and says "Tell me about my mother," she also learns about her maternal grandmother, who insisted on seeing the infant Elizabeth when everyone else in the family wished to forget her (17). "It was such a beautiful story, the story of the grandmother, her defiance, her insistence on filial ties in a country where people were not people at all" (17). The story of Elizabeth's mother's mother, delivered by her sympathetic foster-mother, reveals a network of women who have chosen to mother Elizabeth against the grain of an unnatural system. This defiant mothering is part of Elizabeth's inheritance, and casts new light on the stigmatized part of her inheritance, her madness. The principal of the mission school who warns Elizabeth to be "careful" not to go insane adds: "Your mother was a white woman. They had to lock her up, as she was having a child by the stable boy, who was a native" (16). According to the principal's logic, which is the logic of Apartheid, Elizabeth's mother's pregnancy by a black man *is* her madness. The legacy of madness is also the legacy of defiance. In a letter to Randolph Vigne, Head claimed her mother, writing: "I still say she belongs to me in a special way and there is no world yet for what she has done. She has left me to figure it out" (in Villares 48). *A Question of Power* is deeply concerned with world-making, with the creation of a new world to replace the "dead" one that destroyed Elizabeth's mother. It is "driven," Lucia Villares writes, "by an urge to 'figure out' a world ... where the biographical Head and the fictional Elizabeth could belong as subjects in their own right" (48). This world-making by a refugee woman requires immense courage; Elizabeth needs all of her grandmother's defiance to create her own "beautiful story." Mothering and defiance coalesce in the play on dear/dare in a note Elizabeth receives from her son while she is in hospital recovering from her second

breakdown. The child, with his imperfect spelling, writes: “Dare Mother, when are you coming home?” (182).

Elizabeth’s world-making takes place in Botswana, but the new world is not of any particular nation. Its center is Motabeng Secondary School, run by Eugene, an Afrikaner, Elizabeth’s fellow South African in exile. Eugene and his wife care for Elizabeth’s son while Elizabeth is in the hospital: “We are both refugees and must help each other,” Eugene says (52). This is the first sign of the emergence of the new world: only as refugees outside South Africa can Elizabeth and Eugene belong to the same community. The community, formed around a variety of projects, including agriculture, weaving, carpentry, and printing, involves participants of diverse backgrounds: they are South African, Motswana, Danish, English, and American. The community is not idealized: the arrogance of some forms of western volunteerism is critiqued through the portrayal of the Danish woman Camilla, whom Elizabeth nicknames “Rattle-tongue” (77). “Why must she come here and *help* the black man,” Elizabeth asks bitterly, “with a special approach: ha, ha, ha, you’re never going to come up to our level of civilization?” (83). Yet for all its internal dissonances, the “strange” human network of the Motabeng Secondary project models Elizabeth’s vision of a new world, one based not on ethnic or national loyalties but on the common interest of improved living conditions for all (80). Elizabeth defines the new world in an argument with Tom, a white American who becomes an important friend and support for her. When Tom throws his fist in the air and shouts “Black Power!”, Elizabeth, “near to tears,” compares him to Hitler, and tells him: “I don’t like exclusive brotherhoods for black people only. They wouldn’t want you. You’re not black” (132). Tom claims he doesn’t care. Taking his own identity for granted, he finds it easy to throw his energies behind movements on a theoretical level, whether they accept him or not. Elizabeth can never take her identity for granted: obstacles

to belonging arise for her at every step. Her continuously jeopardized identity is the source of the urgency with which she opposes *all* groups based on race, even if their members are oppressed. The Motabeng Secondary School project represents a halting, tendentious, yet ultimately redemptive cosmopolitanism, composed of the “tentative efforts people of totally foreign backgrounds made to work together and understand each other’s humanity;...intangible, unpraised efforts to establish the brotherhood of man” (158). Even the harsh and condescending Camilla belongs to this brotherhood: “Camilla had to be included even though she was a pain in the blessed neck” (73).

The inclusivity of this community, its racial and ethnic diversity, is one key factor enabling Elizabeth to belong. The other factor emphasized in the text is a connection to the physical landscape, a connection that draws Elizabeth’s interest as she “wistfully” watches the farmers around Motabeng (60). She asks one of them, Thoko, if she can help her; when Thoko laughingly refuses, saying “[a] foreigner like you would die in one day, it’s so dangerous,” Elizabeth finds a nearness to the earth in other ways, through the conditions of her life in Motabeng:

The slowly drifting closeness to the soil was increased by living in a mud hut. It was like living with the trees and insects right indoors, because there was no sharp distinction between the circling mud walls of a hut and the earth outside. And the roof always smelt of mouldy grass, and all kinds of insects made their homes in the grass roof and calmly distributed their droppings on the bed, chair, table and floor. (60-61)

The house that belongs to the landscape recalls the house of the narrator’s grandfather in *Season of Migration to the North*, the center of belonging, where “plants... sprout from the very walls” (71). For the narrator, this deeply rooted home is a place of return, lodged in his past; for

Elizabeth it is a longed-for future. When she moves to Motabeng Secondary School and Eugene asks her what sort of project she would like to work on, she answers without hesitation: “I’d prefer any kind of work with crops” (69). Work with the soil allows Elizabeth to assert a claim to belonging on her local environment. She forms this claim, not through the local character of farms and farming practices, which Thoko believes too “dangerous” for her, but through a focus on the universal nature of the relationship between human beings and the earth that sustains them:

It is impossible to become a vegetable gardener without at the same time coming into contact with the wonderful strangeness of human nature. Every man and woman is, in some way, an amateur gardener at heart and vegetables are really the central part of the daily diet. (72)

Such statements are almost too broad to be interesting: “human nature,” “every man and woman.” Their lack of specificity makes it easy to pass them by. They resemble the pronouncements of Sello, Elizabeth’s double, statements like “What is perfection? ... Love” (34). Yet within the context of Elizabeth’s experience, these comments represent not easy, trite ideas, but maneuvers in a battle for survival. Sello’s language “was the kind of language she understood, that no one was the be-all and end-all of creation, that no one had the power of assertion and dominance to the exclusion of other life” (35). Elizabeth’s gardening provides her with a portion of a shared inheritance: the planet. Here she can partake of the “daily diet,” in community with “every man and woman.” This emphasis on the earth as the ultimate homeland, one from which no human being can be excluded, may help explain Bessie Head’s interest in the countryside, and her unique status as “the only black South African writer to have grown up in the city and to have transformed herself into a rural writer” (Nixon 122).

Elizabeth's inner drama reveals the challenges and the stakes of her world-creation project at Motabeng Secondary School. Sello, she learns, is under the power of his terrifying wife, Medusa, who attacks Elizabeth with two accusations. The first is that Elizabeth has no vagina. The attack is bound up with a sensation of pleasure, which suggests both orgasm and the lulling, liquid embrace of amniotic fluid:

Without any bother for decencies [Medusa] sprawled her long black legs in the air, and the most exquisite sensation traveled out of her towards Elizabeth. It enveloped Elizabeth from head to toe like a slow, deep, sensuous bomb. It was like falling into deep, warm waters, lazily raising one hand and resting in a heaven of bliss. Then she looked at Elizabeth and smiled, a mocking superior smile:

“You haven't got anything *near* that, have you?” (44)

The idea that Elizabeth lacks sexual organs is repeated by Dan, who claims that she cannot satisfy him the way his other women can (127). Dan presses “several buttons at the same time,” filling Elizabeth's head with thoughts that circle constantly in her head, like a record:

You are supposed to feel jealous.

You are inferior as a Colored.

You haven't got what that girl has got. (127)

Dan charges Elizabeth with a sexual inadequacy linked to her mixed racial background, evoking a common trope of racist discourse: that the offspring of a black person and a white person will be sterile (the link between “mule” and “mulatto”) (Young 66). This racialized notion of sterility haunts Elizabeth's inner world. She is sexually inferior to Dan's other women because she is “not made the same way” (147), because she has the wrong sort of hair—“Your hair is not properly African”—and because Dan fears her touch might “contaminate his pure black skin”

(127). The association of mixed race with sterility extends to Elizabeth's memories of South Africa: "She had lived for a time in a part of South Africa where nearly all the Colored men were homosexuals and openly paraded down the street dressed in women's clothes" (44-5). Medusa appropriates this memory:

Suddenly the nights became torture. As [Elizabeth] closed her eyes all these [homosexual] Colored men lay down on their backs, their penes in the air, and began to die slowly. Some of them who could not endure these slow deaths simply toppled over into rivers and drowned, Medusa's mocking smile towering over them all.

"You see, that's what you are like," she said. "That's your people, not African people... You have to die like them." (45)<sup>26</sup>

The claim that Elizabeth is sterile is a way of insisting that she has no future in Africa, that she and all "Colored" people have to die. Although she is not literally sterile—she has a son—she is not to be permitted to contribute to an African community. "The day you die you must take your son with you," Medusa tells her, "because we don't want him here either" (87). Elizabeth, denied access to her own mother, is also to be denied motherhood.

The wave of pleasure that travels from Medusa's vagina to Elizabeth, the sense of envelopment in "deep, warm waters," suggests that, paradoxical as it seems, Medusa is a mother figure. Medusa's second attack on Elizabeth strengthens this suggestion: "You're not linked up to the people. You don't know any African languages" (44). Elizabeth, who stood firm under the accusation that she had no vagina, is shattered by these words: "She fell into a deep hole of such excruciating torture that, briefly, she went stark, raving mad" (44). Madness follows the

---

<sup>26</sup> Elizabeth shows some discomfort with her own rejection of homosexuals, and an awareness of the contradiction between this rejection and her attempt to create a world without exclusion. Remembering Oscar Wilde, she decides that homosexuality "doesn't matter" (138). However, she also acknowledges that her open-mindedness only works "at a distance" (138). Thus the text can only be said to contain a gesture toward the inclusion of queer people in the new world; it stops far short of an argument for that inclusion.

statement that Elizabeth has no African mother tongue. Elizabeth has no such language because she has no African mother; therefore she has no right to an African motherland. The deep pain Elizabeth suffers under this attack is expressed through a common metaphor that takes on new meaning here as an actual loss of land: “Medusa’s next assault pulled the ground right from under Elizabeth’s feet” (44).

The two fronts on which Medusa attacks Elizabeth—female procreative sexuality, and the mother tongue—imply that Medusa may be read as a figure for the African mother, a mother who, because impossible for Elizabeth, appears in the theater of her mind as the embodiment of evil. The possibility that Medusa is the remnant of a lost, more positive, even beautiful form, is rooted in her name: in some versions of the Medusa myth, the Gorgon was lovely before she was cursed, and some Greek art represents Medusa and her sisters as “distinctly beautiful, virtually indistinguishable from goddesses or human maidens” (Topper 74). Medusa may originally have been a mother goddess: her inscription at Sais names her “mother of all the gods, whom she bore before childbirth existed” (Bowers 220). For Elizabeth, the presence of this terrifying mother signifies the most fundamental and traumatic lack: the lack of a proper body and proper language.

*A Question of Power*, like *Season of Migration to the North*, is animated by a quest for belonging, a quest beset by the ghosts of a colonial past. The challenge for Salih’s narrator is to recognize the ways in which he is complicit with a patriarchal system which, in its brutality and exclusionary tactics, functions as the double of the colonial project. Global ghosts push the narrator toward the recognition of local oppressions. Elizabeth’s quest is different. Her goal must be a type of belonging that transforms the very idea of the local. Consider two plants: Mustafa Sa’eed’s lemon tree and Elizabeth’s Cape Gooseberry. Mustafa’s tree is a hybrid: “Some of the

branches ... produce lemons, others oranges” (15). Elizabeth’s gooseberry is a transplant from South Africa, a “miracle” that first arises in Elizabeth’s yard, where she plants some experimental seedlings (152). The jam Elizabeth and the other women make from the gooseberries provides nourishment and protection from scurvy (153). Elizabeth is soon known by the nickname “Cape Gooseberry,” and regards her success with the fruit as emblematic of her work in Motabeng: “The work had a melody like that—a complete stranger like the Cape Gooseberry settled down and became a part of the village life of Motabeng” (153). *A Question of Power* seeks a motherland in the absence of a mother, a home for the “complete stranger.” If Elizabeth’s lack of a proper body is filled in some way when she takes the name of the nourishing and rooted Cape Gooseberry, her lack of proper language stands to be filled as well by the transformation of the English language into “Setswana English” (126). The community record book, kept by a Motswana woman, Kenosi, in “a fantastic combination of English and Setswana,” looks “so beautiful” to Elizabeth that she keeps turning over the names of the vegetables in her head: “Ditamati, Dionions, Dispinach, Dibeans, Dicarrots” (203-4). The produce Elizabeth has coaxed from the earth is named in language that is, itself, a new product of a world where Elizabeth can belong: a world haunted by borders, but ultimately rejecting them in favor of a fully inhabitable territory, the planet.

### ***Abiku* Country: Ben Okri’s *The Famished Road* Cycle**

Ben Okri’s three-volume cycle takes its title from the first volume, *The Famished Road*, an acclaimed novel that won the 1991 Booker Prize for fiction. *The Famished Road* was followed by *Songs of Enchantment* in 1993 and *Infinite Riches* in 1998.<sup>27</sup> The entire cycle is narrated by the boy Azaro, an *abiku* child. *Abiku* is the Yoruba word for a child who does not

---

<sup>27</sup> In in-text citations, these titles are abbreviated *TFR*, *SOE*, and *IR*.

wish to be born: if parents have several children die in succession, they are said to be afflicted by a single, difficult child, an *abiku* who always wants to return to the other world (Quayson 122-3). Azaro's name, a diminutive of Lazarus, deploys Christian tradition to emphasize the boy's special ability to cross between the land of the living and the land of the dead. The figure of the *abiku*, the child who resists birth, resonates in a striking way with Gramsci's famous description of the interregnum: "the old is dying and the new cannot be born" (276). A similar phrase defines the central problem of Salih's *Bandarshah*: "They were eleven brothers, slaves to what had passed and to what would not come about in a clearly defined form" (35). Okri's cycle, like Salih's text, draws on the episodic and repetitive structure of oral storytelling in order to comment on the political stasis of a postcolonial state. The *abiku* child at the center of the tale is Nigeria, repeatedly born only to die again. Azaro's friend Ade, also an *abiku*, tells Azaro: "Our country is an abiku country" (*TFR* 478).

Azaro's nature as an *abiku* child gives him the ability to perceive two worlds at once, the world of spirits and the world of the everyday. The mingling of life in Nigeria around the time of independence, characterized by urbanization and modern technologies such as photography and motor vehicles, with a second, spiritual reality in which ghosts speak, gods argue and angels disperse miraculous powders, has caused many critics to identify the cycle with magical realism. Brenda Cooper, for example, reads *The Famished Road* as a magical realist text because it "contests polarities such as history versus magic, the precolonial past versus the post-industrial present, and life versus death" (7). Because Okri has rejected the label (Ross 337-8), some critics are hesitant to use it: Arlene Elder prefers Harry Garuba's term, "animist realism," as "Okri denies that his writing attempts anything other than to accurately reflect the spiritually charged African landscape" (Elder 16). This purpose, however, is arguably that of magical realism: to

represent a landscape as spiritually charged is also to contest polarities such as matter versus spirit, science versus magic, and so on. A term like “animist realism” therefore threatens to confuse more than it clarifies. In this essay, Okri’s cycle is considered an example of magical realism because of its blending of two worlds, its representation of the world perceptible to the eye as merely one portion of what the world is. Material reality is undergirded, overlaid, and interpenetrated with the world of the spirits. The spiritual reality is not, however, visible to everyone, which is one of the central concerns of the cycle.

Azaro’s *abiku* nature places him in the interstices of both time and space. As a child who undergoes multiple rebirths, and for whom another is always possible, he dwells between the past, the present and the future. As a spirit child, able to perceive a reality invisible to others, he dwells between the space of his neighborhood and a fantastic space that is at times physically separate, represented by the forest, and at times merely other, a deeper dimension of his neighborhood. Azaro is thus characterized by his special relationship to time, and by his special capacity to perceive spiritual space. Although these characteristics are brought together in the figure of Azaro, their significance expands beyond him, for the whole narrative of the cycle emphasizes the two subjects of non-linear time and the faculty of perception. Perception, it should be noted, is distinct from sight: as with all of the texts treated in this study, in Okri’s *The Famished Road* cycle the ability to “see” means precisely the ability to perceive what is invisible to the eye. The essential, this cycle insists, is the invisible. This portion of my study traces the two defining characteristics of Azaro and his *abiku* text: non-linear time and vision. I then show how these two characteristics are brought together to articulate a theory of the world as defined by memory: an articulation made possible by the fantastic blending of Azaro’s worlds, which

reveals, as Brenda Cooper writes, “a more deep and true reality than conventional realist techniques would bring to view” (32).

Like the reborn Azaro, the events of Okri’s cycle are intensely repetitive. Azaro is perpetually “lost and found,” always being drawn back to the world of his spirit companions in the land of the unborn, and then finding his way home (*TFR* 28). His departures and returns, especially in the first volume of the cycle, are so numerous that they achieve a rhythmic, lulling quality: there is little suspense attached to his journeys in the spirit realm, as it is clear that he will always come home. Moreover, Azaro never appears changed by his adventures: his voice remains consistent throughout the cycle, adding to the impression of an eternal and changeless character that neither ages nor develops. Ato Quayson points out that Azaro’s voice is not at all childlike (125), and Arlene Elder echoes him, adding that it is Azaro’s parents, Dad and Mum, who change and grow over the course of the narrative, while “Azaro, born and reborn many times, remains the same Azaro” (28). Elder speaks of Dad’s “maturation” from frustrated laborer to political activist (30), a word choice that points to one of the ways linear time is subverted in the cycle: it is not the child Azaro, but his parents, who mature, Dad becoming politicized in *Songs of Enchantment* and Mum in *Infinite Riches*. Thus, in the cycle, a prematurely old child tells the story of the delayed development of two strangely young adults. This overturning of time at the level of the family is repeated at the level of history, for the first two volumes show the Party of the Poor in a struggle against the Party of the Rich, a situation that suggests the politics of post-independence Nigeria. Robert Fraser points out that the events of *The Famished Road*—such as when members of the Party of the Rich attempt to buy votes with tainted powdered milk—“bear little resemblance to Nigeria in the years 1959-60, where the three main parties were divided by region rather than by economics” (70). Yet the period of the cycle must

be 1959-60, for in *Infinite Riches* we are suddenly introduced to a British Governor-General, British supervisors of Nigerian work teams, and the first elections of an “unborn nation” (*IR* 337). The effect is of a narrative that moves backward as much as it stays in place, while constantly yearning toward the future.

The cycle is broken up into short chapters, many only one or two pages long. Often the chapters begin with waking or morning, and end with sleep or evening, so that the rotation of night and day is superimposed on the events of the narrative, emphasizing both alteration and repetition. “I went to the bed, lay down under the green netting, and slept in the feverish dreams of the room,” ends Chapter Six of Book Four of *The Famished Road*; Chapter Seven begins, “When I woke I felt as if my memory had been wiped clean. The room had changed” (292-3). Chapter Four of Book Two of *Songs of Enchantment* ends: “I got up and found, to my amazement, that mum was asleep on the bed”; Chapter Five begins: “After she had planted the precious stones in the forest, mum became different. In the mornings she went to work...” (82-83). Chapter Four of Book One of *Infinite Riches* ends, “Then, without a word, [Dad] got into bed with Mum,” while Chapter Five begins, “Dad was still asleep when we woke up in the morning” (12-13). These examples show both the alteration between waking and sleeping that characterizes the whole cycle, and also the occurrence of words connoting change or surprise—“changed,” “amazement,” “different”—that are liberally scattered throughout the texts. Azaro’s world is always changing, always surprising, always different—but only in the way that night alternates with day. The constant assertions that “Someone has changed the world around!” (*IR* 154), that a “new era” has begun (335), take on a ritual air in this lengthy narrative in which so little actually changes. The repetitions create, Brenda Cooper writes, a “paradoxical stillness” of narrative (111). As the border between sleep and waking is blurred, so that Dad brushes past

Azaro “as if he had woken into sleep,” so the borders between past, present and future blend into one another, and the change brought by the future becomes the experience of the past. “Things seep back from the future into the present,” Azaro tells us; “the past presses everything forward; and the future makes things search for their lost origins” (189).

The contradiction between the repeated statements that the world has changed, and the obvious sameness of that world, demands interpretation. This demand is underscored by an emphasis on the importance of vision that runs through the cycle. On the first page of *The Famished Road*, Azaro explains that he and his spirit companions never looked forward to being born into the human world: “We feared the heartlessness of human beings, all of whom are born blind, few of whom ever learn to see” (3). Learning to see is a major preoccupation of the cycle, even for Azaro, who, though able to see in two worlds, repeatedly confesses himself as “surprised” and “amazed” by events as others in his neighborhood. His reluctance to be born into blindness at the beginning of *The Famished Road* is echoed by Dad’s speech at the end of the novel, on the eve of his political transformation:

Our lives are changing. Our gods are silent. Our ancestors are silent. A great something is going to come from the sky and change the face of the earth. We must take an interest in politics... Human beings are gods hidden from themselves. My son, our hunger can change the world, make it better, sweeter. People who use only their eyes do not SEE.  
(498)

Human beings must learn to see, to perceive, what cannot be seen with the eye. Brenda Cooper notes the importance of the moment in *The Famished Road* when a third eye opens in the middle of Azaro’s forehead, allowing him to perceive a mystical flood of light (*TFR* 229; Cooper 67). Okri’s goal in the novel, Cooper writes, “is to see with a new ‘third eye,’” one that may

“comprehend history in the language of magic and of dreams” (67). In *Songs of Enchantment*, this emphasis on metaphysical vision intensifies. The opening chapter, entitled “What We Didn’t See,” is an incantation on the subject of blindness: the confession that “We didn’t see the seven mountains ahead of us” leads into a series of sentences beginning “We didn’t see,” “We didn’t notice,” “We were unprepared” (3). *Songs of Enchantment*, the passage concludes, “is a story for all of us who never see the seven mountains of our secret destiny, who never see that beyond the chaos there can always be a new sunlight” (3). Like Dad’s speech at the end of *The Famished Road*, this passage criticizes a lack of foresight: what must be seen is the future, the “destiny” of a people. “[W]e didn’t sense the upheavals to come, upheavals that were in fact already in our midst, waiting to burst into flames” (3). The looping time of the cycle is reframed here as something more than a natural progression: it is a riddle that demands to be read. Historical transformations are both “to come” and “already in our midst”: what is needed is an eye that can perceive them. The similarity to Tayeb Salih’s *Bandarshah* is striking. Like Salih, Okri draws on an oral tradition characterized by repetition, and uses repetition to represent political failure. And, again like Salih, he argues that only the one who can perceive the hidden logic of this dangerous repetition will be equipped to break it. In *Songs of Enchantment*, human beings remain blind: “only the circling spirits of the age saw what was happening with any clarity” (3).

The focus on blindness and vision is a call to read the future. In these texts, where time is circular, it is also a call to read the past. *Songs of Enchantment* articulates this call through the story of a plague of blindness that infects Azaro’s community after they refuse to acknowledge a death. The death is connected to a struggle against Madame Koto, a reputed witch who goes from bar-owner to leader of the Party of the Rich, and is assassinated by beggars at the end of *Infinite Riches*. In *Songs of Enchantment*, after Madame Koto’s rise to power, Azaro’s friend

Ade, another *abiku* child, attacks her, and is run down and killed by her driver (194). Ade's father, a carpenter, seeks revenge for his son's death, and is stabbed to death by Madame Koto's thugs (212). The only one who calls for help is Azaro's father, and he is immediately struck blind (213-14). Dad's blindness is a kind of paradoxical vision: he continues to rage at Madame Koto as no one else dares to do, and gains enhanced perception, saying of one of his neighbors: "I never knew how ugly he was till I couldn't see him" (225). Meanwhile, the corpse of the carpenter rots on the street, filling the neighborhood with the smell of death, which the community ignores out of cowardice: "We made no reference to the body and we stopped using the word death" (230). Those who mention the corpse lose their sight, like Azaro's father. Yet the attempt to escape blindness by ignoring death proves futile, for when the body is dragged off into the forest by Madame Koto's supporters, the blindness spreads: "We woke up one morning to find that a mysterious plague of blindness had struck our community after we had stopped seeing the dead body" (230-31).

This episode uses fantasy to express a concern with perception: the refusal to see becomes a literal blindness. The episode also emphasizes the type of perception at issue in the cycle, the ability to see what is not there. The corpse of the carpenter, evidence of Madame Koto's brutality, undergoes a triple invisibility: first the community refuses to see it; then it is hidden in the bush; and finally the community loses the power to see at all through the plague of blindness. Yet the corpse announces its presence, first through its "unbearable smell" (231) and then through sound: it begins to sing and then to scream (231; 254). These alternative ways of seeing, or sensing, underscore the non-visual nature of the type of "sight" demanded by the text. "It's not the eyes that see," Ade's ghost tells Azaro: "It's the light in the eyes that sees" (261).

Memory is a form of seeing what is not there, of seeing by “the light in the eyes.” Dad’s physical sight returns when he buries the carpenter’s corpse and marks its place with a stone, establishing a monument to the memory of the dead (285). This moment also marks the return of sight to the whole community: as the title of the chapter announces, “The Freeing of One Vision Is the Freeing of All” (283). Both *Songs of Enchantment* and *Infinite Riches* exhibit this concern with memory, a concern linked to the experience of colonization. Azaro is able to perceive the “excruciating horror” of the Kingdom of the Masquerade, a figure of oppressive power; while this power represents evil in general, there are specific, foreign, invasive Masquerades, “the invisible Masquerades of the western world” and “the great white Masquerades of the eastern nights” (*SOE* 114-15). Azaro observes the effect of this Kingdom on memory:

I saw the powers of the Kingdom, how it manufactures reality, how it produces events which will become history, how it creates memory, and silence, and forgetfulness, how it keeps its supporters perpetually young and vigorous, how it protects them, seals their lives with legality. (115)

The power of the Kingdom of the Masquerade is the power of the mask, a surface appearance concealing a deeper reality. It is also the power of language, both the language of the colonizers and that of the Party of the Rich. In this Masquerade-language, Madame Koto’s party boasts: “WE HAVE ENOUGH FREE MILK FOR THE WHOLE COUNTRY”—milk that is later revealed to be poisonous (*TFR* 124). In Masquerade-language, the British Governor-General manufactures reality:

He rewrote the seasons, and made them limited and unlyrical. He reinvented the geography of the nation and the whole continent. He redrew the continent’s size on the world map, made it smaller, made it odder. He changed the names of places which were

older than the places themselves... He rewrote the names of our food, our clothes, our abodes, our rivers. The renamed things lost their ancient weight in our memory. The renamed things lost their old reality. (*IR* 110-11).

Okri's cycle can be read as an attempt to recover an "old reality," starting with memory: the memory of oral storytelling, which is a memory of language. His narrative evokes fantastic, episodic and repetitious Yoruba orature more explicitly than the work of any English-language writer since Amos Tutuola. Unlike *Bandarshah*, Okri's cycle contains no critique of the oral tradition it puts to use, but shows a determination to remain as faithful to that tradition as possible. Where Salih opposes the epic repetition of *Bandarshah*/*Meryoud* by introducing the larger, more inclusive space of Sufi inspiration and love, Okri strives to universalize his Yoruba-derived mythos, to make his epic speak to the whole world. This is why it is so important that the Kingdom of the Masquerade exist in all places and times; it cannot be reduced to the British Empire. It is also Madame Koto. It is all cruelty, always and everywhere: "The Masquerade's kingdom is a mighty one, its armies can never wholly be defeated. They are part of the world for ever" (*SOE* 113). Moreover, the Masquerade is necessary, in a mystical fashion, as part of a universal dynamism: "The supporters of the Masquerade's way are themselves unknowing agents of higher gods of light, who understand the pressure and secret constancy and earth-nourishing silence that creates the diamonds of the universe" (113). The struggle between the Masquerade and the "higher gods of light"—a description that recalls the "light in the eyes," insight and memory—moves in a circle, like a folk narrative, like Okri's *The Famished Road* cycle, like Azaro oscillating between the living and the dead. The world, according to this set of texts, is round. Circular history is not merely a perspective drawn from a Yoruba belief system, but the story of all life. This is why Arlene Elder describes Okri's cycle as bearing an

“essentially religious message” (7). After Azaro’s father buries the carpenter and recovers from his blindness, he tells Azaro “LOOK!” and “LISTEN!”, and Azaro hears a chorus of Blessed Souls, a girl’s voice leading them, “completing the circle of enchantment” (*SOE* 294-96):

The girl began, singing:

“How does love create immortality?”

And the others replied:

“Love creates mystery.”

“And mystery creates thought.”

“Thought creates action.”

“And action creates a life.”

“The essence of your life is your gospel.”

“And your gospel is your light.”

“Your light is your immortality.”

“And so love creates immortality.” (296)

The center of this religious message recalls both Taher in *Bandarshah*, with his whole-minded concentration on “nothing... but love” (113), and Sello’s “What is perfection? ... Love” in *A Question of Power* (34). In Okri’s cycle, love is the prerequisite to light. Light, as we have seen, is associated with insight and memory, with the ability to perceive what is absent to the eye, and thus to anticipate the future by remembering the past. In the chant of the Blessed Souls, light is also immortality, an existence totally removed from time. These two ways of looking at history—from within, as an actor, and from without, as an immortal spectator—confront one another in Okri’s cycle. The structure of the cycle, its circle of events that change so little despite the constant assertions that everything has changed, lend support to the view from outside: to the

perspective of the narrator, Azaro, who is not entirely of this world. This immortal viewpoint casts doubt on the possibility of vision and memory to lead to lasting change. How much *can* change, when the Kingdom of the Masquerade is also immortal? *The Famished Road*, Brenda Cooper writes, is “scarred by its refusal to . . . embrace change wholeheartedly” (114).

As noted in the discussion of *A Question of Power*, it would be a mistake to dismiss the emphasis on love too quickly. The call for an emotional response is an attempt to connect, in a single moment, with two levels: the individual and the universal. This invocation of love is decidedly utopian. It attempts to create a space as intimate as Elizabeth’s house in Motabeng, close to particular ground, and as vast as the eternity in which Zein turns at the center of the village, and of the world, during his wedding. All of the texts in this study raise the utopian possibility of connection on the scale of the planet. Yet, as postcolonial texts, they are deeply engaged with the oppressive movement of history that has made the planet a fully-charted globe, in which power is unevenly distributed. In representing fantastic spaces, they seek both to remember and restore old names, as Ben Okri and Ibrahim al-Koni do, and to will new worlds into being, as Bessie Head does in her ambitious and anguished novel. Tayeb Salih works with various forms of the fantastic, employing Sufi Islam, folk literature, and psychological terror, in order to express planetary visions of the world as both local and global, both deeply felt and incompletely known. His work, like that of the other writers in this study, demonstrates the power of fantasy to communicate a view of the world as more-than-one-at-once: a perspective that enables, in the same moment, a creative engagement with locality and the articulation of a vision of and for the planet.

## Chapter Seven: Gestures of Belonging

*If fantasy is about being absent from home (the abandoned child or assertive voyager of the fairy tale, the science-fiction traveler or pioneer, and the inhabitant of the gothic mansion who finds her space invaded from within by the presence of the uncanny), then the inhabitant of the fantastic is always the stranger.*

—Lucie Armitage, *Theorising the Fantastic*, 8

The study of world literature has increasingly been approached, in the last fifteen years, by recourse to extra-textual strategies: by investigations of writers in the world market, such as Pascale Casanova's; by the combination of literary theory and world-systems analysis, as in the work of several writers influenced by Immanuel Wallerstein;<sup>28</sup> by attempts to answer Franco Moretti's call to study more of the world's literature through analysis of circulation and reception. These approaches share a concern with making world literature more visible, more readable on a global scale. Without condemning these efforts (of which, in fact, more are needed), I have attempted in this study to investigate the concept of world literature in a different way, through the worlds within the text. Rather than stepping outside the text in order to apprehend its place in the world, I have chosen texts that perform an imaginative stepping-outside-the-world, that employ fantastic displacement in a manner that focuses attention on the construction of the category "world." These are all postcolonial texts by writers whose lives are or were characterized by migration, writers for whom the definition of "homeland" cannot be obvious or direct. To chart their biographies would be to trace a series of lines back and forth on the map of Africa and between Africa and Europe. Bessie Head, born in South Africa, died in

---

<sup>28</sup> See for example the essays in *Immanuel Wallerstein and the Problem of the World: System, Scale, Culture*, ed. David Palumbo-Liu, Bruce Robbins, and Nirvana Tanoukhi. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011.

Botswana; Tayeb Salih died in London. Ben Okri currently lives in England, and Ibrahim al-Koni in Switzerland. If world literature, as David Damrosch writes, arises when a work circulates “beyond its linguistic and cultural point of origin,” (6), this study suggests that literature which concerns itself with the world-as-world arises among authors who are themselves border-crossers. The works of Tayeb Salih, Ibrahim al-Koni, Bessie Head and Ben Okri, through their engagement with migration, colonialism and the spread of global modernity, emphasize that the existence of a body called “world literature” depends on the movement of bodies in the world. In addition, this study takes up Homi Bhabha’s suggestion that the experience of the “unhomely” may be the key to a “worlding” of literature, one that reads “the obscure signs of the spirit-world, the sublime and the subliminal” (17).

Tayeb Salih’s work provides a complex, tripartite point of departure for this study, by offering three ways of conceiving the world: the world as the site of utopian desire, the world as defined by traumatic haunting, and the world as determined, for good or ill, by a socially constructed and implemented mythos. Myth is an important source of creative energy for Salih, one that he returned to throughout his work and often referred to in interviews. Yet myth, for Salih as for the other writers treated in this study, always escapes a strictly Herderian application. The evocation of folk material—of oral poetry, hagiography and epic—enables, it is true, the infusion of condensed time into space, a process that, as Bakhtin notes in his study of Goethe’s “Pyrmont” sketch, transforms abstract space into inhabited locality. However, this material is never limited to the nation. It is, for all of these writers, explicitly connected to the global. Zein, as Sufi pole, is not merely the center of Wad Hamid, but the center of the universe. Asouf, the herdsman of the Libyan desert, is likened to a phantom of the Himalayas. The terror experienced by the narrator of *Season of Migration to the North*, terror like that felt by a human being in the

presence of an afreet, is the terror of colonial history, the same terror that haunts Bessie Head's Elizabeth in the village of Motabeng. In both *Bandarshah* and Ben Okri's *The Famished Road* cycle, the repetitive structure of oral folk genres provides a way of conceiving local twentieth-century histories, but the texts insist that these histories must be escaped, and that escape is only possible through divine (or at least religiously-inflected) love: love that transcends both local space and history itself. All of these texts evoke the local and the global at the same time, in the same moment. Fantasy, which insists on the presence of another world beyond the immediately visible without, however, denying the visible world, is a powerful vehicle for the expression of the more-than-one-at-once, whether those simultaneous elements are spatial (local and global) or temporal (past, present, and future).

In the texts treated here, fantasy achieves a fusion of the small and the large: the instant expresses eternity, and the modern world-system operates on and through individual bodies. This achievement does, however, seem to leave out the middle terms: historical time on the temporal axis, and the nation, or any form of middle-sized community, on the spatial axis. The importance, for these texts, of displacement or detachment from community, is expressed through their protagonists, who are all strangers. Zein's ability to move across social boundaries in Wad Hamid ensures that there is no particular place to which he belongs. This social displacement, a necessary corollary of the power of the holy fool, is intensified in the case of al-Koni's Asouf, who lives entirely apart from other human beings, and regards them with fear and suspicion, like the *waddan*, the spirit of the wild. Both *Season of Migration to the North* and *A Question of Power* chronicle painful and circuitous quests for belonging, and their central characters—the narrator, Mustafa Sa'eed, Hosna Bint Mahmoud, and Elizabeth—are defined by what separates them from their local communities. In *Bandarshah*, the narrator receives a name,

but not yet a home: Meheimeed, now old enough to retire, is still trying to remember—or, more accurately, to create—the “way back” to an inclusive Wad Hamid free of the tyrant Bandarshah/Meryoud (122). The most obviously alien of these strangers is Okri’s Azaro, the *abiku* child, never a full participant in his human community, always a native of elsewhere.

The social displacement of these characters is inseparable from their ability to perceive the invisible. They are in touch with the world *as world*: a reality too large to be seen by ordinary people. Their enhanced perceptiveness is never represented as something sought or desired; rather, it comes from within, a key element of who these characters are, and they experience it with pain. Zein, on the eve of his wedding, weeps at Haneen’s tomb; Asouf’s self-knowledge is bought with his suffering above the abyss. The discursive mode of *The Wedding of Zein* and *The Bleeding of the Stone*, that of parable, requires the revelation of a deeper meaning, a meaning that is embodied in Zein and Asouf, each of whom fulfills an extraordinary destiny. Though these destinies are diametrically opposed in terms of plot—Zein is elevated, Asouf sacrificed—both operate according to a religious imaginary, and confirm the relationship of the protagonists to a vast reality whose scale is not merely global, but planetary and eternal.

In *Season of Migration to the North* and *A Question of Power*, where the invisible asserts itself in the psychological mode of the fantastic, the protagonists are also outsiders because they embody the truth of the unseen in a different sense: they cannot escape it. Both the narrator of *Season* and Elizabeth are what Sara Ahmed calls “affect aliens”: people who cannot be satisfied with what their communities consider the required elements of a happy life (Ahmed 30). Others blame them for their psychological struggles: the narrator’s grandfather and his friend Mahjoub mock him and argue with him over his sensitivity to Hosna’s misery, while Elizabeth loses her job and is ostracized by the Motabeng village community following her first breakdown. The

quest for a home which drives both the narrator and Elizabeth is complicated by this censure, by the refusal or inability of their communities to understand or validate their suffering. The reactions of the people around them make these characters strangers, isolated individuals. Yet what the narrator and Elizabeth perceive, what they are unable to ignore, is not an individual matter with import for themselves alone, but an overwhelmingly large and complex system of oppression and resistance that operates on the scale of the planet. As Ahmed writes of affect aliens: “A concern with histories that hurt is not... a backward orientation: to move on, you must make this return” (50). The narrator and Elizabeth see what is rendered invisible to others through the very fact of its scale. They experience, in abjection and terror, the truth that the global is local: that the structures of power enabling the traumatic events of colonial history are also enacted in the body. The invisible network of power makes possible both the colonial past and the postcolonial present. It is a history which continues to move present bodies, taking the narrator and Mustafa Sa’eed to England, and forcing Elizabeth and her child into exile in Botswana. The link between psychological breakdown and the refugee experience is acknowledged by Eugene, Elizabeth’s fellow South African and an important support for her during her illness, but only Elizabeth actually suffers such a breakdown. Elizabeth’s interior world exposes the system of race- and gender-based violence that makes the Motabeng Secondary School project both possible and necessary. In the waking world, this system is rendered invisible: fresh-faced white volunteers arrive in Motabeng from the United States and Europe, and the global inequality that makes their participation different from Elizabeth’s surfaces only in isolated incidents, such as Camilla’s expressions of racial arrogance. Similarly, in *Season of Migration to the North*, the long conversation between the narrator’s grandfather and his friends is filled with references to slavery, rape and female genital mutilation, but this

evidence of oppression is masked by the conviviality of the scene and the mutual affection among the speakers. The narrator's uncanny experiences reveal the workings of this invisible system. He is helped toward insight by two other affect aliens, Mustafa Sa'eed and Hosna Bint Mahmoud, whose experiences condense violent history into the violent actions of individual bodies.

Finally, in *Bandarshah* and Okri's *The Famished Road* cycle, the perpetual outsiders, Meheimeed and Azaro, possess the ability to see the repetitive historical cycles that are invisible to their communities. These communities, being inside the cycles, are unable to perceive them. They are unable to connect the present to the past, or to recognize the likelihood that the future will present them with the same struggles and failures they have already endured. Again, the problem is one of scale, of a social structure too large to be seen. Meheimeed's visions grant him access to the whole, allowing him to see the unity of Bandarshah and Meryoud, who appear as two different bodies in the waking world. Azaro, too, is able to see the world whole, as a unified reality made up of the realms of the living and the dead. However, neither of these outsiders manages to put his unique knowledge to work in the service of his community. Both *Bandarshah* and Okri's cycle emphasize vision and memory, but Meheimeed and Azaro are unable to fully make use of either. The end of *Infinite Riches* finds Azaro waiting for the world to be born, much as he was at the beginning of *The Famished Road*, while *Bandarshah* ceases rather than concludes, leaving Meheimeed at the beginning, rather than the end, of a difficult path.

Two aspects of fantasy are revealed by the study of these texts. First, fantasy enables the perception of two realities at once: the local reality of immediate, lived experience, and a far larger though hidden reality, a divine, natural or social system which is only accessible through fantastic displacement. Second, the perspective gained from this doubled vision remains outside

the middle zone: the realm of communal experience. Those who can see more than one world at once are themselves outsiders; they may experience psychological transformation, but they are unable to use their insight to instigate broader social transformation in historical time.

In this connection, it is worth recalling the observation Jameson makes, by way of Heidegger, concerning the relationship between romance and world. “World worlds”: the romantic mode draws attention to the category “world” by constructing a marvelous world of its own (142). The ability of romance to represent the world *as world* results from the movement into an alternative space from which the world can be seen whole. Like the texts examined in this study, Jameson’s point suggests that it is impossible to see the world and act upon it at the same time.

As stated in the introduction to this study, fantasy shares a structural affinity with planetarity as formulated by Gayatri Spivak and others, in the ease with which it transcends or ignores geopolitical borders, its connection to the deep time of folklore and myth, and its flexibility in evoking a sense of the world as both intimately felt and incompletely known. Spivak suggests that planetarity is a more helpful and liberating concept than globalization: “I propose the planet to overwrite the globe” (*Death of a Discipline* 72). The elements of fantasy brought out in this study raise the question of whether planetarity, as it shares so much with fantasy, also shares a resistance to being employed in the formation and transformation of community. Transformation happens in time, and planetarity, like fantasy, is a fundamentally spatial concept. Humanity’s undeniable effect on the planet is slower and less visible than our effect on the globe, on which lines are regularly written and erased—the most recent being the border drawn in 2011 dividing Tayeb Salih’s Sudan into two countries. This resistance of the planet as matter is surely an important point for Spivak, who wishes to honor resistance to the

penetration and appropriation of cultures, languages and literatures. Yet the essays in *Death of a Discipline*, in which Spivak first uses the term “planetarity,” are also meant as a call to action, a call to transform not only academic institutions but also approaches to world literature, and therefore to the world. This is where planetarity’s emphasis on space rather than time is potentially problematic. If the planet is to overwrite the globe, then planetarity is presumably to overwrite globalization, and the practical difference between the two is morphologically obvious: planetarity suggests a condition, and globalization a process.

This discussion of fantasy as the genre of nonstandard space, of the very large and the very small, reminds us that realism is conventionally the genre of the middle: of the middle classes (Watt), the mid-sized space of the nation (Anderson), and the “common man” (Auerbach). This middle zone is where social transformation is conceptualized and represented: the individual is too small an entity for the project, and the world too large. To take an example from African literature, Ousmane Sembène’s classic work of realism, *God’s Bits of Wood* (1960), shows a political organization of railroad workers developing in historical time, in a middle-sized space defined by the two ends of the railway line. The novel admits of no hidden worlds, but emphasizes the visible and empirical, even providing a map so that readers can follow the movement of the plot. This concentration on a middle-sized space does not mean there is no place for the small and the large: the novel follows individual characters, and draws attention to global processes both through the growing resistance of the workers to their colonial masters, and through an explicit invocation of Marx. The emphasis, however, is on the middle, and on visible, standard space: there are no visions of elsewhere, no sudden unifications of psychological and world space, no moments of dislocation or disorientation. Space here is flat and singular, subordinated to the temporal process it echoes: the railway line moves across the

map with the workers, reflecting the linear progress through time that transforms them from disempowered masses into active revolutionaries. To take another example, Tsitsi Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions* (1988) employs the structure of a *Bildungsroman*—for Bakhtin, the quintessential form of historical time (*Speech Genres* 24)—to tell the story of two young girls: the daughter of a rural Zimbabwean family and her cousin, the child of a wealthy émigré. Like *Season of Migration to the North* and *A Question of Power*, *Nervous Conditions* expresses a diseased social condition through the ailing mind and body of a character: the privileged Nyasha, educated in England, who suffers from anorexia. However, unlike the novels by Salih and Head, *Nervous Conditions* allows the reader no access to Nyasha's interior. The story is narrated by Nyasha's comparatively well-adjusted cousin, and its focus is character development in time rather than the representation of psychological space. Globalization has deprived Nyasha of her native culture and therefore destroyed her; the narrator's task is to pursue her education while avoiding a similar fate. Like *God's Bits of Wood*, Dangarembga's novel portrays the development of a political consciousness over time. The two novels also share another hallmark of the realist novel: the representation of ordinary individuals. Sembène's revolutionaries are Senegal's poor masses, his novel the story of a whole community. *Nervous Conditions* represents an affect alien in Nyasha, but is ultimately the story of her cousin's less extraordinary and more hopeful coming-of-age. There is, in these novels, no intimation of important hidden knowledge available to a select few.

At this point, it may appear that the investigation of the affinity between planetarity and fantasy has led back to the common apprehension of fantasy as a reactionary rather than progressive mode, and has, moreover, detected a similar problem in planetarity. However, the value of planetarity as an alternative concept to globalization lies in the new possibilities for

thinking that it opens. If planetary thinking passes over standard space in favor of attention to smaller and larger spaces, it does so deliberately, as a rejection of the mode of globalization, whose homogenizing tendencies, epitomized in the lines on the globe, make space not only standard but *standardized*. Planetarity invites reconceptualizations of space beyond the standard categories, and can even offer new ways of considering “middle ground.” The texts treated in this study reveal the possibilities of fantasy and its structural co-concept, planetary thinking, with regard to two middle-sized areas of central importance to the world and to literature: ecology and language.

The ecological element is clearly significant in *The Bleeding of the Stone, A Question of Power*, and the cycle of *The Famished Road*. The hero of *The Bleeding of the Stone* is the mountain desert, the wilderness, as embodied in Asouf. The blood of the human Asouf is also the blood of the *waddan*, the spirit of the wilderness, and it is also the blood of the land, the bleeding of the stone itself. The attention al-Koni draws to the endangered wilderness is planetary in more than one sense: it is concerned with the land as physical landscape rather than abstract chart—that is, with the desert rather than “Libya”—and it is diametrically opposed to the action of globalization. Globalization, in *The Bleeding of the Stone*, is portrayed in a realist mode, in the actions of Cain the hunter and the American John Parker, and their destruction of the gazelle population over time. Globalization brings automatic weapons to the desert. Planetarity, on the other hand, is expressed through fantasy. The intimate connection between human beings and their landscape emerges in the moment when Asouf recognizes the *waddan* as his father, in his own transformation into a *waddan*, in the story told by Cain’s sister the gazelle, and in Asouf’s ritual death. The desert, in *The Bleeding of the Stone*, is planetarity’s middle ground: a bioregion larger than the individual and smaller than the planet. The concept of the “bioregion,” an

important one in environmental studies, is helpful in considering landscape in relationship to planetarity, as it offers a middle ground defined by ecology rather than geopolitics. In *LifePlace: Bioregional Thought and Practice*, Robert L. Thayer Jr. offers this definition of a bioregion:

A *bioregion* is literally and etymologically a “life-place”—a unique region definable by natural (rather than political) boundaries with a geographic, climatic, hydrological, and ecological character capable of supporting unique human communities. (3)

Fantasy, in *The Bleeding of the Stone*, is the mode that expresses the notion of “life-place”: *asouf* as human herder, nonhuman *waddan*, physical desert, and culturally-specific concept of wild space.

*A Question of Power* reframes these elements: here, the trauma of globalization informs Elizabeth’s fantastic inner drama, and the connection to the land belongs to the waking world, where it is represented in a realist mode through the development of Elizabeth’s farm in time. Elizabeth does not connect to her physical landscape through fantasy; rather, her garden provides an escape from her psychological torment. Head’s depiction of landscape also differs from al-Koni’s in that the environmentalist interest in protecting the land is absent. However, for both Asouf and Elizabeth, the planetary offers the only refuge from the depredations of global power. Asouf retreats from technology, especially advanced weapons technology, into the mountain desert; Elizabeth flees urban South Africa and creates a new life for herself and her child in rural Botswana. The spread of technology and urbanization, two key features of global modernity, are rejected in these novels in favor of a slow and challenging relationship to the land. For Elizabeth, the planetary provides an answer to the problem of nationality. She is a stranger to Botswana as nation-state, but, like the Cape Gooseberry, she belongs to the larger bioregion of southern Africa. Significantly, *A Question of Power* concludes with an image that brings fantasy out of the

realm of inner torment and into the life-giving bioregion: as Elizabeth falls asleep, she places “one soft hand over her land” (206). This is an image of the impossible: Elizabeth is inside her house, not outside where she would be able to touch the land, and her gesture suggests that her hand belongs to a deity, to someone of larger-than-human dimensions. The blending of inside and outside, large and small, brings together what has been divided for Elizabeth. She has been, throughout the novel, caught in the unbridgeable gap between her inner and outer worlds, and between the large-scale traumas that haunt her and the details of her daily life. The fantastic melding of opposites in the final image closes these gaps and performs the possibility of wholeness. For Elizabeth, it is “a gesture of belonging” (206).

Ecological concerns are important in Ben Okri’s *The Famished Road* cycle. In this lengthy text, with its repetitions that express a stalled postcolonial history, the land is the domain of perceptible change. Azaro sees his community become steadily more urban, and witnesses the destruction of the forest: “Building companies had leveled the trees. In places the earth was red. We passed a tree that had been felled. Red liquid dripped from its stump...” (*TFR* 16). Erin James reads *The Famished Road* as a demonstration of bioregional thinking, in which Okri expresses “a bioregional imagination of a south-west Nigeria Yoruba homeland” (270). Like *The Bleeding of the Stone*, Okri’s cycle focuses attention on globalization as a specifically postcolonial experience of modernity: the experience of being forced into an undesired and unequal oneness with a world system determined by the metropole. The loss of agency experienced by colonized people finds expression in the victimized and ruined forest. Okri’s trees, like al-Koni’s stones, bleed human blood. The connection between human beings and the forest is further emphasized through Okri’s portrayal of the forest as a magic space, full of

spirits, which evokes Yoruba folklore and literature such as the works of Amos Tutuola, solidifying the link between forest and folk.

The ecological emphasis in al-Koni's, Head's and Okri's texts—texts which share so much with Salih's work in terms of their use of fantasy—suggests that it is worth examining the role of land in Salih's work as well. Land is clearly important to Salih, as his creative work focuses so persistently on Wad Hamid. Although the significance of land in Salih's work emerges subtly and in fragments, rather than in the sustained manner of the other writers examined here—there is not, for example, a clear expression of environmentalist concerns—his work would be impossible without the bioregion of rural northern Sudan. The notion of *bioregion*, in relation to Salih's work, invites a consideration not merely of the village of Wad Hamid, but of Wad Hamid as part of a life-place that includes the desert, the Nile river, and the human community that depends on this region and also influences it, most obviously through irrigation and the maintenance of farms. The relationship between human beings and land takes different forms in Salih's different texts. In *The Wedding of Zein*, with its emphasis on unity, it is Zein who embodies non-human nature, exhibiting the attributes of local fauna: simian arms, a giraffe's neck, and a crane's legs (34). Zein's childlike character, his manner of acting in complete accord with his instincts, also associates him with the natural world: he is viewed by the Wad Hamid community as *uncultured*—untaught and vulgar, but also free of social constraints, like an animal. Zein's unveiling at his wedding, which reveals him as the spiritual Pole, thus asserts the spirituality of nature, in a manner very close to al-Koni's.

In *Season of Migration to the North*, as in *The Famished Road*, land expresses change. The narrator, who wishes to forget history, insists that Wad Hamid has not changed during his absence: "life is good and the world as unchanged as ever" (2). However, he cannot help seeing

the changes in the landscape, and especially in the river, where modern pumps have replaced the old water-wheels (4). The Nile makes human life possible in this bioregion; its relationship to human culture has unfolded in deep time. In this sense, the Nile evokes continuity. At the same time, however, it is the domain of change, where human beings develop new technologies which, in turn, must affect the river and the land around it. The Nile thus contains the entire history of human life in northern Sudan: past, present and future. It is also both local and global: the sustainer of local life on its banks, and a moving force enabling travel and trade. Always at home, the river is also, like the narrator and Mustafa Sa'eed, a migrant:

And the river, the river but for which there would have been no beginning and no end, flows northwards, paying heed to nothing; a mountain may stand in its way so it turns eastwards; it may happen upon a deep depression so it turns westwards, but sooner or later it settles down in its irrevocable journey towards the sea in the north. (69).

Mustafa Sa'eed disappears at flood time, raising the possibility that he has drowned in the river, or been swept away to start yet another life elsewhere; the narrator almost drowns in the Nile before he chooses rebirth and calls out for help. The river, where contraries meet—north/south, east/west, past/present/future—is the site of both life and death. It forms part of a bioregion which includes human life, but it is not human. Its life-giving power is inseparable from its dangers, like the power of *asouf*, wild space, in *The Bleeding of the Stone*. The river also resembles wild space in that it provides a domain outside the realm of ordinary life, where initiation can take place: the narrator's descent into the river, where he lingers suspended in the water, echoes Asouf's initiatory torment as he hangs above the abyss. Both entries into in-between space, removed from the places where people live, represent turning points for these

characters. Both protagonists are reborn through their escapes from death. Their stories assert the necessity of wild spaces to human transformation.

In *Bandarshah*, the wilderness also serves as a place of rebirth, for it is in the desert, away from the village, that Meheimeed receives his visions, which transform him by making him aware of the true role of Bandarshah and Meryoud. Though there is no obvious environmentalist stance expressed in *Bandarshah*, there is a depiction of the desert as a necessary part of human existence. The desert provides visions and spiritual wisdom for Meheimeed, and a way of conceiving the challenges of Sufi practice for Bilal, whose sheikh tells him: “O Bilal, to walk in the paths of union is like ascending rugged mountain tracks” (112). The river in *Season* and the desert in *Bandarshah*, like animal life as expressed through Zein in *The Wedding of Zein*, are full of spiritual potency.

These representations of the spiritual dimension of land recall Bakhtin’s analysis of how fantasy makes space into place. In Goethe’s sketch, the three otherworldly figures who appear to the new inhabitants of Pymont stand for the continuity of a human community in a particular location. Their appearance humanizes space by filling it with condensed history. In a similar way, the spiritualization of landscape, in the works of Tayeb Salih and the other writers discussed here, uses the revelation of a spiritual world within the physical landscape to assert the interconnectedness of landscape and culture. Culture, in these writings, grows not from the political entities of nation-states but from bioregions. The preoccupation with subverting linear time perceptible in all of these works, and the embedding of worlds within worlds to create a sense of multiple systems of meaning within the same space, represents an effort to tell a planetary story. If this story seems repetitive, static or slow, it is because the relationship between humans and their environment which the authors attempt to portray does not proceed at

the pace of globalization, the speed at which al-Koni's gazelles are slaughtered and Okri's forest cut down. Planetary, we might say, tells the story of how land embodies history, while globalization tells the story of what history has done to land.

The use of fantasy enables these authors to express human relationships to landscape in a way significantly different from that of realism. As with land, so with language: in fact, it is language that allows these writers to link invisible worlds to the world as it is physically lived. The discursive mode of fantasy is the "mysterious gate," to use Bakhtin's phrase, through which space is made human and significant. Tayeb Salih's work, with its embrace of Sufism, oral poetry, and epic, is a powerful example of the use of language to create a sense of location—a sense that flows from the evocation of orality as the vehicle of indigenous expression. This link between culture and bioregion is performed most explicitly in his short story, "The Doum Tree of Wad Hamid."

The story is told in the voice of an old man of Wad Hamid, who addresses a stranger from the city (presumably the capital, Khartoum). The addressee only emerges at the end of the tale, when his first-person mediation on the old man's words reframes the narrative as once-removed: originally told by the old man, but repeated by the younger one. The story is related in a colloquial and meandering style, full of digressions on life in Wad Hamid; it evokes a rural Sudanese setting through the use of Sudanese expressions and through its representation of casual, desultory evening talk. The narrator circles his subject, rather than approaching it directly. At the center of his story stands the doum tree of Wad Hamid, which is also the spiritual center of the village and the focal point for the villagers' dreams. The tree embodies a constellation of the spiritual, social and natural. It grows above the tomb of Wad Hamid, the saint for whom the village was named, and draws people together in both space and time, for

they come from all over the village to celebrate as their ancestors did: “we make offerings there every Wednesday as our fathers and fathers’ fathers did before us” (10). The relationship of the villagers to the tree is a symbiotic one: when they suffer illnesses, they find healing by praying to the saint under the tree, and they also protest the government’s plans to cut down the tree in order to modernize the village with water pumps and a station for the steamer (8-9). The story expresses a bioregional imaginary, a vision of human life and the life of the land as a seamless whole. This unity is forged by the hidden world of prayers and dreams: “there is not a man or woman, young or old,” the old man tells his visitor, “who dreams at night without seeing the doum tree of Wad Hamid at some point in the dream” (8). Moreover, the relationship of the villagers to the saint reveals a unity of the global and the local: their veneration and provision of “offerings” for the saint reflect local Sufi practice, rather than orthodox Islam, but are at the same time expressions of that world religion. The comparisons of the doum tree to an “ancient idol” (4), and the Nile to “a sacred snake, one of the ancient gods of the Egyptians” (6), create another, different type of expansion, linking the doum tree to the pre-Islamic religion of the region. Like *The Bleeding of the Stone*, “The Doum Tree of Wad Hamid” sets up an opposition between the deep time of planetarity and the threatening, rapidly advancing time of globalization. Though the old man assures his visitor that the two can coexist, and that “there’s plenty of room for all these things: the doum tree, the tomb, the water-pump, and the steamer’s stopping-place,” the younger man receives the declaration with “a feeling of sadness, sadness for some obscure thing which I was unable to define” (19-20). The “obscure thing” is too large for the narrator to grasp: it is a whole way of life, the lived unity of the spiritual, cultural and physical whose exemplar is the doum tree of Wad Hamid. Through the narrator’s sadness, the text gives voice to a concern for

environmental degradation and its effect on human communities that, though expressed in a quieter and more melancholy key, is similar to the message of *The Bleeding of the Stone*.

In Salih's imaginative engagement with Sufism, in al-Koni's use of the Tamashek concept of *asouf*, and in Okri's depiction of an endangered forest that is also the site of magic, condensed historical time is infused into the life-places of human experience. Salih, al-Koni and Okri all accomplish this infusion through formal strategies that echo oral traditions, employing oral poetry and hagiography, parable, epic and folktale to fill their language with a unique sense of place. The effect is quite different from that of realist narratives such as *Nervous Conditions* and *God's Bits of Wood*. Though both of these realist novels are more explicitly political than those analyzed in this study, and arguably take a stronger stand against the effects of global modernity on indigenous African cultures, their resistance is not expressed in *formal* terms. Formally, they pay only minor attention to the narrative traditions of the cultures on whose behalf they have been written. The work of Salih, al-Koni and Okri expresses a sense of place both through the representation of places and through the formal practice of echoing oral traditions. These traditions are another "middle ground" opened by the idea of planetarity in literature: imaginative spaces independent of national borders, migratory, malleable, unchartable, thoroughly nonstandard. In their stance toward this material, the works treated in this study move beyond a Herderian use of folklore in the service of cultural nationalism, always seeking imaginative contact with the vast spaces of nature, divine presence, and modes of thinking large enough to embrace all people. Although bioregionalism has largely been concerned with the small-scale rather than the large-scale, recent writings on the subject have made attempts at planetary thinking, and at developing "a sense of place that embraces rather than retreats from a sense of planet" (Lynch, Glotfelty and Armbruster, 17). My study of Tayeb Salih and other

postcolonial writers suggests that postcolonial fiction, and in particular works that engage the fantastic modes of oral genres, may prove a rewarding field for the investigation of how literature expresses “a sense of planet.”

Bessie Head’s *A Question of Power* stands slightly apart from this discussion. Head’s novel, rather than bringing indigenous narrative strategies into play, expresses the traumatic loss of access to these genres, the absence of indigenous forms and indigenous language. Far from rendering Head’s text irrelevant to my discussion, this difference makes it crucial. A study of planetary thinking in the context of global modernity must include the voices of those for whom an engagement with indigenous forms is compromised or impossible, intimate strangers whose outsider status is caused by the history of colonialism, slavery and forced migration. Elizabeth’s fantasies of the cruel Medusa show condensed time in space as surely as Meheimeed’s visions in the desert. The accusation “You don’t speak any African languages,” and Elizabeth’s collapse when she hears the words, fill the land where she is trying to live with a condensation of brutal colonial history (44). *A Question of Power* also stands apart from the other texts in this study in its relationship to gender: although gender concerns figure significantly in *Season of Migration to the North* and *Bandarshah*, Head’s novel brings motherhood, mother-loss, motherland and mother tongue into play in a manner that puts greater emphasis on female experience. An exploration of fantasy and planetarity in women’s writing would contribute significantly to this preliminary study. In particular, it would be important to see how women’s use of indigenous genres differs from that of men. The possibilities Arab and Iranian women have found in the figure of Shahrazad would reward further study, as would a planetary approach to Yvonne Vera’s use of a Shona folk heroine in *Nehanda*, and Miral al-Tahawy’s interweaving of fantasy, female seclusion and the landscape of the desert in *The Tent*.

The texts treated in this study, like their protagonists, overcome the problem of scale that ordinarily renders the world invisible *as world*. They unfold a vision of a world that is local and global, here and everywhere, now and in the past and in the future. If this act of perception requires protagonists who step outside the world of their communities, the act of narration represents an attempt to come back. *Season of Migration to the North* is a tale told to a group of listeners, and parts of *Bandarshah* the results of Meheimeed's collection of oral narratives. Fantasy, for Tayeb Salih as for Ibrahim al-Koni, Bessie Head and Ben Okri, makes the world visible not only in terms of global history, but in terms of bioregional imaginaries, of spiritual and emotional investment in land. Literature, which attempts to make this planetary vision perceptible to others, is fundamentally "a gesture of belonging." World literature, as a conceptual field defined by the act of reading across the borders of time and space, represents a gesture of belonging on a planetary scale.

## Bibliography

- Abu Deeb, Kamal. *The Imagination Unbound: Al-Adab al-‘Aja’ibi and the Literature of the Fantastic in the Arabic Tradition*. London: Saqi 2007. Print.
- Adonis. *Sufism and Surrealism*. London: Saqi, 2005. Print.
- Ahmed, Sara. “Happy Objects.” In Melissa Gregg and Gregory J. Seigworth, *The Affect Theory Reader*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010. 30-51. Print.
- Ali, Abdullah Y. *The Holy Qur’an: Text, Translation and Commentary*. Brentwood, MD: AmanaCorp, 1983. Print.
- ‘Allām, Ḥusayn. *Al-‘ajā’ibī fī al-adab: min manzūr shi‘rīyat al-sard*. Beirut: al-Dār al-‘Arabiyyah lil-‘Ulūm, 2010. Print.
- Amyuni, Mona Takieddine, ed. *Season of Migration to the North by Tayeb Salih: A Casebook*. Beirut: The American University of Beirut Press, 1985. Print.
- Anderson, Benedict R. O. G. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. London: Verso, 1991. Print.
- Appadurai, Arjun. “Disjuncture and Difference in the Global Cultural Economy.” In Laura Chrisman and Patrick Williams, eds. *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory: A Reader*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1994. 324-39. Print.
- Armitt, Lucie. *Theorising the Fantastic*. London: Arnold, 1996. Print.
- Attebery, Brian. *Strategies of Fantasy*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992. Print.
- Auerbach, Erich. *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2003. Print.
- Austin, Peter. *One Thousand Languages: Living, Endangered, and Lost*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008. Print.

- Bakhtin, M M, and Michael Holquist. *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981. Print.
- . *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays*. Trans. Michael Holquist, Vern McGee, and Caryl Emerson. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1986. Print.
- Barthes, Roland. *The Pleasure of the Text*. Trans. R. Miller. New York: Hill, 1975. Print.
- Beardsworth, Sara. *Julia Kristeva: Psychoanalysis and Modernity*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2004. Print.
- Benjamin, Walter, Hannah Arendt, and Harry Zohn. *Illuminations*. New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1968. Print.
- Berkley, Constance. *The Roots of Consciousness Molding the Art of Tayeb Salih: A Contemporary Sudanese Writer*. Unpublished dissertation. New York University, 1979. Print.
- Berman, Marshall. *All That Is Solid Melts into Air: The Experience of Modernity*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1982. Print.
- Bhabha, Homi K. *The Location of Culture*. London: Routledge, 2004. Print.
- Bould, Mark, and China Miéville. *Red Planets: Marxism and Science Fiction*. Middletown, Conn: Wesleyan University Press, 2009. Print.
- Bowers, Susan R. "Medusa and the Female Gaze." *NWSA Journal*, 2: 2 (Spring, 1990). 217-235. Print.
- Brown, Coreen. *The Creative Vision of Bessie Head*. Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2003. Print.
- Bushrā, Muḥammad al-Mahdī. "Taḥdīd al-jins al-fūklūrī fī ibdā' al-Ṭayyib Ṣāliḥ," in *al-Ṭayyib Ṣāliḥ: dirāsāt naqdīyah*, ed. Ḥasan A. al-Ṭayyib. Beirut: Riyād al-Rayyes, 2001. Print.

- Casanova, Pascale. *The World Republic of Letters*. 1999. Tr. M. B. DeBevoise. Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 2004. Print.
- Chatterjee, Partha. *The Nation and Its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories*. Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press, 1993. Print.
- Connelly, Bridget. *Arab Folk Epic and Identity*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986. Print.
- Conrad, Joseph, and Robert Kimbrough. *Heart of Darkness: An Authoritative Text, Backgrounds and Sources, Criticism*. New York: Norton, 1988. Print.
- Cooke, Miriam. "Magical Realism in Libya." *Journal of Arabic Literature*. 41 (2010): 9-21. Print.
- Cooper, Brenda. *Magical Realism in West African Fiction: Seeing with a Third Eye*. London: Routledge, 1998. Print.
- Cooppan, Vilashini. "The Ethics of World Literature: Reading Others, Reading Otherwise." In *Teaching World Literature*, ed. David Damrosch. New York: Modern Language Association of America, 2009. Print.
- Damrosch, David. *What Is World Literature?* Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2003. Print.
- Davison, Carol Margaret. "Burning Down the Master's (Prison)-House: Revolution and Revelation in Colonial and Postcolonial Female Gothic. In Andrew Smith and William Hughes, *Empire and the Gothic: The Politics of Genre*. Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003. 136-54. Print.
- Dimock, Wai Chee. *Through Other Continents: American Literature Across Deep Time*. Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2006. Print.

- Elder, Arlene A. *Narrative Shape-Shifting: Myth, Humor, & History in the Fiction of Ben Okri, B. Kojo Laing & Yvonne Vera*. Woodbridge, UK: James Currey, 2009. Print.
- Ernst, Carl W. *The Shambhala Guide to Sufism*. Boston, Mass: Shambhala, 1997. Print.
- Faris, Wendy. "Scheherazade's Children: Magical Realism and Postmodern Fiction." In *Magical Realism: Theory, History, Community*, ed. Lois P. Zamora and Wendy B. Faris. Durham, N.C: Duke University Press, 1995. 163-90. Print.
- Fido, Elaine Savory. "Mother/lands: Self and Separation in the Works of Buchi Emecheta, Bessie Head and Jean Rhys." In *Motherlands: Black Women's Writing from Africa, the Caribbean, and South Asia*, ed. Sushila Nasta. New Brunswick, N.J: Rutgers University Press, 1992. 330-49. Print.
- Fraser, Robert. *Ben Okri: Towards the Invisible City*. Tavistock, UK: Northcote House, 2002. Print.
- Freud, Sigmund. "The Uncanny." *Psychological Writings and Letters*. Ed. Sander L. Gilman. New York: Continuum, 1995. 120-53. Print.
- . *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*. Trans. James Strachey. New York: Norton, 1989. Print.
- Friedman, Susan. "Planetarity: Musing Modernist Studies." *Modernism/Modernity* 17:3 (2010), 471-99. Web.
- . "Unthinking Manifest Destiny: Muslim Modernities on Three Continents." In *Shades of the Planet: American Literature as World Literature*. Ed. Wai Chee Dimock and Lawrence Buell. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007. 62-99. Print.
- Frye, Northrop. *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957. Print.

- al-Ghānimī, Saʿīd. *Malḥamat al-ḥudūd al-quṣwā: al-mikhyāl al-ṣaḥrāwī fī adab Ibrāhīm al-Kūnī*. Casablanca: al-Markaz al-Thaqāfī al-ʿArabī, 2000. Print.
- Glissant, Édouard, and Betsy Wing. *Poetics of Relation*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1997. Print.
- Gramsci, Antonion. *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*. Ed. Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith. London: Lawrence & Wishart 1976. Print.
- al-Haggagi, Ahmad Shams al-Din. “The Mythmaker: Tayeb Salih.” In Ferial J. Ghazoul and Barbara Harlow, *The View from Within: Writers and Critics on Contemporary Arabic Literature, a Selection from Alif, Journal of Comparative Poetics*. Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 1994. pp. 99-133. Print.
- al-Halool, Musa. “The Nature of the Uncanny in *Season of Migration to the North*.” *Arab Studies Quarterly* 30.1 (2008): 31-8. Web.
- Harvey, David. *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change*. Oxford [England: Blackwell, 1990. Print.
- Hassan, Waīl S. *Tayeb Salih: Ideology and the Craft of Fiction*. Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 2003. Print.
- Hayot, Eric. *On Literary Worlds*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2012. Print.
- Head, Bessie. *A Question of Power*. London: Heinemann Educational, 1974. Print.
- Heath, Peter. *The Thirsty Sword: Sīrat ‘Antar and the Arabic Popular Epic*. Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1996. Print.
- Hume, Kathryn. *Fantasy and Mimesis: Responses to Reality in Western Literature*. New York: Methuen, 1984. Print.

Hurreiz, Sayyid Hamid. "Afro-Arab Relations in the Sudanese Folktale," in *African Folklore*, ed.

Richard M. Dorson. Bloomington, IN: Indiana UP, 1972. Print.

Irwin, Robert. *Night and Horses and the Desert: An Anthology of Classical Arabic Literature*.

Woodstock, NY: Overlook Press, 2000. Print.

Jackson, Rosemary. *Fantasy: The Literature of Subversion*. New York: Methuen, 1981. Print.

Jameson, Fredric. *Archaeologies of the Future: The Desire Called Utopia and Other Science*

*Fictions*. New York: Verso, 2005. Print.

---. "Magical Narratives: Romance as Genre." *New Literary History*. 7.1 (1975): 135-163. Web.

---. "Notes on Globalization as a Philosophical Issue." In *The Cultures of Globalization*, ed.

Fredric Jameson and Masao Miyoshi. Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1998. Print.

Jayyusi, Salma K. *Modern Arabic Poetry: An Anthology*. New York: Columbia University Press,

1987. Print.

John, Joseph and Yosif Tarawneh. "The Impact of Freudian Ideas on *Season of Migration to the*

*North*." *Arabica* 35.3 (1988): 328-49. Web.

Khadr, Maḥmūd Ṣāliḥ. "al-Ṭayyib Ṣāliḥ rajul min Karmakūl: shaghghala al-nās ka-mā fa'ala al-

Mutanabbī... fa-mā huwa al-sirr?" In Ḥasan A. al-Ṭayyib, ed. *al-Ṭayyib Ṣāliḥ: dirāsāt naqdīyah*. Beirut, Lebanon: Riad El-Rayyes Books S.A.R.L, 2001. Print.

Khalīl, Lu'ayy A. *'Aja'ibiyat al-nathr al-ḥikā'ī: adab al-mi'raj wa-al-manāqib*. Dimashq: al-

Takwīn lil-Ta'līf wa-al-Tarjamah wa-al-Nashr, 2007. Print.

Kincaid, Paul. "On the Origins of Genre." *Extrapolation* 44:4 (Winter 2003), 409-19. Web.

Knysh, Alexander D. *Ibn 'Arabi in the Later Islamic Tradition: The Making of a Polemical*

*Image in Medieval Islam*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1999. Internet resource.

- Kristeva, Julia, and Leon S. Roudiez. *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1982. Print.
- al-Kūnī, Ibrāhīm. *Anubis: A Desert Novel*. Trans. William M. Hutchins. (Author's name transcribed as Ibrahim al-Koni.) Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 2005. Print.
- . *Nazīf al-ḥajar*. Banghāzi: Dār al-Jamhīriyah, 1998. Translation: *The Bleeding of the Stone*. Trans. May Jayyusi, and Christopher Tingley New York: Interlink Books, 2002. Print.
- Lesch, Ann M. *The Sudan: Contested National Identities*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana Univ. Press, 1998. Print.
- Lisan al-'Arab*. Vol. 11. 11<sup>th</sup> ed. Qom: Nashru Adab al Howza, 2003. Print.
- Makdisi, Saree. "The Empire Renarrated: *Season of Migration to the North* and the Reinvention of the Present." In Laura Chrisman and Patrick Williams, eds. *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory: A Reader*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1994. 535-50. Print.
- Marx, Karl, and Friedrich Engels. *The Communist Manifesto*. London: Bookmarks, 2003. Print.
- Masschelein, Anneleen. *The Unconcept: The Freudian Uncanny in Late-Twentieth-Century Theory*. Albany: SUNY Press, 2011. Print.
- Monroe, Harriet, and Alice C. Henderson. *The New Poetry: An Anthology of Twentieth-Century Verse in English*. New York: The Macmillan Company, 1932. Print.
- Moretti, Franco. "Conjectures on World Literature." *New Left Review* 1 (Jan.-Feb. 2000), 54-68. Web.
- . *Modern Epic. The World-System from Goethe to García Márquez*. London: Verso, 1996. Print.
- Mukhtar, al-Baqir al-Afif. "The Crisis of Identity in Northern Sudan: The Dilemma of a Black

- People with a White Culture,” in *Race and Identity in the Nile Valley: Ancient and Modern Perspectives*, ed. Carolyn Fluehr-Lobban and Kharyssa Rhodes. Trenton, NJ: The Red Sea Press, 2004. Print.
- Ngũgĩ, wa Thiong’o. *Moving the Centre: The Struggle for Cultural Freedoms*. London: J. Currey, 1992. Print.
- Nixon, Rob. "Border Country: Bessie Head's Frontline States." *Social Text*. (1993): 106-137. Print.
- Nūr, Qāṣim ‘Uthmān. *Al-ta’rīb fī al-waṭan al-‘arabī ma ‘a ishārah khaṣṣah li al-sūdān*. Khartoum: Khartoum University Press, 1988. Print.
- Okri, Ben. *Infinite Riches*. London: Phoenix House, 1998. Print.
- . *Songs of Enchantment*. New York: Nan A. Talese, 1993. Print.
- . *The Famished Road*. London: J. Cape, 1991. Print.
- Parry, Benita. “Reflections on the Excess of Empire in Tayeb Salih’s *Season of Migration to the North*.” *Paragraph* 28.2 (2005): 72-90. Web.
- Prendergast, Christopher, and Benedict R. O. G. Anderson. *Debating World Literature*. London: Verso, 2004. Print.
- Propp, V I. A, and Anatoly Liberman. *Theory and History of Folklore*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984. Print.
- Puchner, Martin. “Teaching Worldly Literature.” Website of the Andrew W. Mellon World Literature/s Research Workshop, Oct. 7, 2011. Web.
- Punter, David. “Arundhati Roy and the House of History.” In Andrew Smith and William Hughes, *Empire and the Gothic: The Politics of Genre*. Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003. 192-207. Print.

- Quayson, Ato. *Strategic Transformations in Nigerian Writing: Orality & History in the Work of Rev. Samuel Johnson, Amos Tutuola, Wole Soyinka & Ben Okri*. Oxford: J. Currey, 1997. Print.
- Rasmussen, Susan J. "The People of Solitude: Recalling and Reinventing Essuf (the Wild) in Traditional and Emergent Tuareg Cultural Spaces." *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute : Incorporating "man"*. (2008). Print.
- Rieder, John. *Colonialism and the Emergence of Science Fiction*. Middletown, Conn: Wesleyan University Press, 2008. Print.
- Rose, Jacqueline. *States of Fantasy*. Oxford [England: Clarendon Press, 1996. Print.
- Ross, Robert L. *Colonial and Postcolonial Fiction: An Anthology*. New York: Garland Pub, 1999. Print.
- Rossetti, John J. H. "Darkness in the Desert: Tradition and Transgression in Ibrāhīm al-Kūnī." *Journal of Arabic Literature*. 42.1 (2011): 49-66. Print.
- Rudd, Alison. *Postcolonial Gothic Fictions from the Caribbean, Canada, Australia and New Zealand*. Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2010. Print.
- Said, Edward W. *Culture and Imperialism*. New York: Knopf, 1993. Print.
- . *Orientalism*. 1978. New York: Vintage-Random House, 1979. Print.
- Ṣāliḥ, al-Ṭayyib. *Bandar Shāh. Al-Juz' al-awwal: Daw al-bayt*. Bayrūt: Dār al-jīl, 1971. *Al-Juz' al-thānī: Maryūd*. Dār al-jīl, 1976. Translation: *Bandarshah*. Trans. Denys Johnson-Davies. (Author's name transcribed as Tayeb Salih.) London: Kegan Paul, 1996. Print.
- . *Mawsim al-hijrah ilā al-shamāl*. Dār al-jīl, 2000. Translation: *Season of Migration to the North*. Trans. Denys Johnson-Davies. London: Heinemann Educational Books, 1970. Print.

---. *'Urs al-Zayn*. Bayrūt: Dār al-'Awdah, 1988. Translation: *The Wedding of Zein and Other Stories by Tayeb Salih*. Trans. Denys Johnson-Davies and Ibrahim Salahi. London, Nairobi, Ibadan: Heinemann Educational Books, 1969. Print.

Schimmel, Annemarie, and Carl W. Ernst. *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011. Print.

Sells, Michael A. *Early Islamic Mysticism: Sufi, Qur'an, Mir'aj, Poetic and Theological Writings*. New York: Paulist Press, 1996. Print.

Shah-Kazemi, Reza. *Paths to Transcendence According to Shankara, Ibn Arabi, and Meister Eckhart*. Bloomington, Ind: World Wisdom, 2006. Print.

Sha'lān, Sanā' K. *Al-sard al-gharā'ibī wa al-'ajā'ibī fī al-riwāyah wa al-qīṣṣah al-qaṣīrah fī al-urdunn, 1970-2002*. 'Ammān: Wizārat al-Thaqāfah, al Mamlakah al-Urdunnīyah al Hāshimīyah, 2004. Print.

Sharawi, Helmi. "The African in Arab Culture: Dynamics of Inclusion and Exclusion," in *Imagining the Arab Other: How Arabs and Non-Arabs View Each Other*, ed. Tahar L. Djedidi. London: I.B. Tauris, 2008. Print.

Sharkey, Heather J. "Arab Identity and Ideology in Sudan: The Politics of Language, Ethnicity, and Race." *African Affairs* 107 (Jan. 2008): 28. Web.

Siddiq, Muhammed. "The Process of Individuation in El-Tayyeb Salih's Novel *Season of Migration to the North*." *Journal of Arabic Literature* 9 (1978): 67-104. Web.

Sikainga, Ahmed A. *Slaves into Workers: Emancipation and Labor in Colonial Sudan*. Austin, Tex.: University of Texas Press, 1996. Print.

Sjöholm, Cecilia. *Kristeva and the Political*. London: Routledge, 2005. Print.

- Slemon, Stephen. "Magical Realism as Postcolonial Discourse." In Lois P. Zamora and Wendy B. Faris. *Magical Realism: Theory, History, Community*. Durham, N.C: Duke University Press, 1995. 407-426. Print.
- Slyomovics, Susan. *The Merchant of Art: An Egyptian Hilali Oral Epic Poet in Performance*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987. Print.
- Smith, Andrew, and William Hughes. *Empire and the Gothic: The Politics of Genre*. Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003. Print.
- Spivak, Gayatri C. *An Aesthetic Education in the Era of Globalization*. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2012. Print.
- . *Death of a Discipline*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2003. Print.
- Summers, Montague. *The Gothic Quest: A History of the Gothic Novel*. London: Fortune Press 1938. Print.
- Suvin, Darko. *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction: On the Poetics and History of a Literary Genre*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979. Print.
- al-Ṭayyib, Ḥasan A. *Al-Ṭayyib Ṣaliḥ: dirāsāt naqdīyah*. Beirut, Lebanon: Riad El-Rayyes Books S.A.R.L, 2001. Print.
- Thayer, Robert L. *Lifeforce: Bioregional Thought and Practice*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003. Print.
- The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary*. Vol. 1. New York: Oxford University Press Inc., 2002. Print.
- Todorov, Tzvetan. *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre*. 1970. Trans. Richard Howard. Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 1975. Print.

- Topper, Kathryn. "Perseus, the Maiden Medusa, and the Imagery of Abduction." *Hesperia: The Journal of the American School of Classical Studies at Athens*. 76:1 (Jan. - Mar., 2007). 73-105. Web.
- Turner, Victor W. *From Ritual to Theatre: The Human Seriousness of Play*. New York City: Performing Arts Journal Publications, 1982. Print.
- . *The Forest of Symbols: Aspects of Ndembu Ritual*. Ithaca, N.Y: Cornell University Press, 1967. Print.
- Villares, Lúcia. *Examining Whiteness: Reading Clarice Lispector Through Bessie Head and Toni Morrison*. London: Legenda, 2009. Print.
- Warnes, Christopher. *Magical Realism and the Postcolonial Novel: Between Faith and Irreverence*. Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire [England]: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009. Print.
- Watt, Ian P. *The Rise of the Novel: Studies in Defoe, Richardson, and Fielding*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1957. Print.
- Wilson, Rawdon. "The Metamorphoses of Fictional Space: Magical Realism. In Lois P. Zamora and Wendy B. Faris. *Magical Realism: Theory, History, Community*. Durham, N.C: Duke University Press, 1995. 209-33. Print.
- Wimmer, Andreas. "Herder's Heritage and the Boundary-Making Approach: Studying Ethnicity in Immigrant Societies." *Sociological Theory* 27:3 (Sept. 2009). 244-70. Web.
- Wittgenstein, Ludwig. *Philosophical Investigations*. Trans. G.E.M. Anscombe. New York: Blackwell 1958. Print.
- Young, Hershini B. *Haunting Capital: Memory, Text and the Black Diasporic Body*. Hanover, N.H: University Press of New England, 2006. Print.

Zamora, Lois P, and Wendy B. Faris. *Magical Realism: Theory, History, Community*. Durham, N.C: Duke University Press, 1995. Print.

Zamora, Lois P. "Magical Romance/Magical Realism: Ghosts in U.S. and Latin American Fiction." In Lois P. Zamora and Wendy B. Faris. *Magical Realism: Theory, History, Community*. Durham, N.C: Duke University Press, 1995. 497-550. Print.