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NOTE

This double issue of *Critical Exchange* presents materials from two
SCE sessions, the first (published here beginning on page 83) includes
papers presented at the 1985 M/MLA meeting, the second includes
papers presented at the 1986 MLA meeting. We have provided two
tables of contents in this issue in order to preserve the sense of the
events as such.

THEORY AND STRATEGY
IN THE THIRD WORLD:
INTRODUCTION

Barbara Harlow

    Goha is a popular figure of folk wit and people's humor through-
out the Arab world. Known as Si Djeha in Morocco or Djuha in
Palestine and Syria, Goha has long animated the jokes and fables told
in Egypt where he often triumphs over superior odds by his sheer
cleverness and wiles. The story of "Goha's nail" (*mismar Goha*) has
widespread currency. According to this story, Goha offered his house
for sale, but attached one condition: that he retain ownership of
just one of the nails in the house. This condition did not dissuade
the prospective purchaser at the time, but he was surprised somewhat
later when Goha appeared at the door of his house, asking to check
on his nail. Whatever his misgivings, the owner allowed Goha to
enter to see to the safety of his nail. Goha, for his part reassured,
departs, only to return a few weeks afterward in the midst of a
severe storm, this time with his blanket, and requesting now to spend
the night guarding his nail from any elemental threat. Soon Goha
has moved back into the house, lodging there as the permanent
custodian of his nail. The story of *mismer Goha* was used by
Egyptian journalist Fikri Abaza in an editorial in the 1950s to
describe the Egyptian reaction to the British offer at the time to
evacuate Egypt, on the condition that they retain their base in the
Suez Canal.[1] Eventually *mismar Goha*, "Goha's nail," came to
represent in the Arab popular political imagination any attempt by
the dominant western powers to maintain, however discreetly or
blatantly, their active presence in the Arab Middle East.
    Popular humor is often introduced as political critique in all parts
of the Arab world, and *mismar Goha* resonates as such a critique,

from Morocco to Saudi Arabia, in Palestine no less than in Egypt. Even given the different circumstances of independence and local post-independence development, the western powers, in particular the United States, continue to exert powerful military, economic, political, and cultural control over the contemporary Arab world, like Goha, retaining many nails in the Arab house, as in that of the Third World more generally.

If "Goha's nail" circulates widely across the Middle East as a proverb or joke, it is also reformulated on multiple levels and in a variety of disciplinary vocabularies by Third World intellectuals, writers, and political theorists. In seminars, journals, novels, and stories, the issue of economic dependency and its correlate of cultural dependency figure critically in determining the ideological parameters of debate, its narrative forms and thematic paradigms. This debate, however, which contests insistently the supremacist imposition of western militarism, technology, and marketing practices, furthermore represents the complex heterogeneity of political and theoretical positions within the larger Third World. While thus acknowledging for their part the significance of the theories of dependency and world systems, the critics demand further the recognition of the internal historical and ideological dynamics of the Third World political arenas in their own terms. It is those dynamics and internal contradictions that sustain the historicity and active agency of the "dependent" countries.

For all that the theoretical production of the Third World continues largely unexamined by the western critical establishment, its significant role on the global stage has been acknowledged. In his study, *Literary Theory: An Introduction*, Terry Eagleton, for example, concluded with a reminder to "those who work in the cultural practices [that they] are unlikely to mistake their activity as utterly central," but does distinguish four areas of endeavor where such cultural practices do become "newly relevant," singling out for this relevance working-class writing, the "culture industry," the women's movement, and those "nations struggling for their independence from imperialism."[2] Similarly, Fredric Jameson ends his own cultural analysis of the contemporary literary scene, "Postmodernism, or the cultural logic of late capitalism," with the appeal for a "pedagogical political culture which seeks to endow the individual subject with some new heightened sense of its place in the global system,"[3] thus pointing at least to the need for a geo-political

decentralization of theoretical power. Most recently, Wlad Godzich, in his introduction to the English translation of Michel de Certeau's *Heterologies*, suggests that the "question of the Other" which figures so prominently in the current critical debates in the West on knowledge, theory, and ideology, has been largely influenced by two important historical challenges. The first of these is what Godzich refers to as the "conception of the subject as the organizer and sense-maker of lived experience;" the second challenge is that "posed to forms of Western thought by the liberation movements of the past forty years."[4] Despite such a recognition by prominent literary critics of the crucial significance of contemporary non-western thinking and struggle to realign global patterns of culture and society, the internal developments of these third world intellectual movements remain largely unknown in anything but their most superficial or programmatic manifestations.

Indeed such hegemonic neglect or indifference are often reinforced by a systematic retrenching, a kind of theoretical counter-insurgency directed at silencing the reverberations in the metropolis of the struggles of Third World and colonized peoples. Speaking in the United States in 1983, for example, Julia Kristeva appealed to the superpower's ideology of siege: "While the Latin American or Arab marxist revolution growls at the doors of the United States, I feel myself closer to liberty and truth working within the space of this contested giant, which is perhaps on the point of becoming another David confronting the growing Goliath of the Third World."[5] As Armand Mattelart has pointed out, however, in *La culture contre la democratie*, "the very notion of theory cannot escape the contingency of the criteria of relevance which each culture elaborates for itself, nor the blind spots which the culture maintains."[6] The concept of "theory" then can be seen as ideologically constructed as well as ideologically deployed, and it may be more appropriate to examine "strategies of theory" and their function in specific socio-political contexts.

This second collection of essays from the Society for Critical Exchange on "theory in the Third World" proposes to examine some of these theoretical developments and challenges to a theoretical First World domination, challenges which have emerged out of the historical circumstances and concatenation of events of the contemporary past.

In his essay "Critical Action and the 'Third World'," Terry

Cochran begins by questioning the use of the term "third world" in the academic forums of the "first world," and traces its development over the past three decades since the term was first employed in 1952 by Alfred Sauvy, a French demographer. The turn to a focus on Cortazar's short story "Graffiti" opens up a discussion of the differential constructs of theory and practice for the Latin American intellectual. These constructs, which call into question what Geetha Varadarajan has called the "necessity for textualization in western culture,"[7] are further developed by Ramon Saldivar and Khachig Tololyan. In "Americo Paredes, the Border *Corrido* and Socially Symbolic Chicano Narrative," Saldivar examines the connection between border ballads and the armed resistance of Texas Mexicans on the US-Mexican frontier, seeing in this connection a "model for the emergence of anti-repressive movements at large." Khachig Tololyan uses the idea of "projective narratives" and "regulative biographies" to present the role played by inherited traditions in legitimizing Armenian "terrorism." In each of the papers, the significance of narrative for mobilizing and organizing collective resistance to forces of domination is emphasized. Narrative itself is central to the concluding three papers by Michael Beard, Neil Lazarus, and Muhammad Siddiq. In the Iranian, South African, and Arab contexts, narrative is examined as a site of contestation and struggle. While each critic focuses on specific regional debates, their papers together suggest the theoretical and historical parameters of a larger global vision, a counter-proposal to Kristeva's binary relationship of power in the David and Goliath story. The essays, that is, point to the necessity of reformulating the selective western memory to incorporate the international dimensions of its own unreconstructed past. The papers collected here represent a contribution to a "Goha's nail" of another sort, a challenge to the western house of theory. As the Moroccan historian, Abdallah Laroui, has pointed out, however, "to make and remake--to recombine the facts of history--takes time."[8]

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Notes

[1] Khalid Kishtainy, *Arab Political Humor* (London: Quartet Books,

1985), p. 27.

[2] Terry Eagleton, *Literary Theory: An Introduction* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983), pp. 213-7.

[3] Fredric Jameson, "Postmodernism, or the cultural logic of late capitalism," *New Left Review*, 146 (1984), 92.

[4] Wlad Godzich, "Foreword: The Further Possibility of Knowledge" to Michel de Certeau, *Heterologies*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), p. viii.

[5] Julia Kristeva, "Memoire," *L'infini* 1 (1983), 54.

[6] Armand Mattelart, Xavier Delcourt, and Michelle Mattelart, *La culture contre la democratie: l'audiovisuel a l'heure transnationale* (Paris: La decouverte: 1984), p. 39.

[7] Geetha Varadarajan, "Notes on semiotics for the third world," unpublished seminar paper, University of Iowa, 1986. I am grateful to Geetha Varadarajan for sharing her work with me.

[8] Abdallah Laroui, *The Crisis of the Arab Intellectual: Traditionalism or Historicism?*, trans. Diarmid Cammell (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976), p. 32.

CRITICAL ACTION AND THE "THIRD WORLD"

Terry Cochran

I

Invocations of the so-called Third World can today be heard everywhere: at conferences, whether they deal explicitly with the Third World or not, in the media, and among many scholars who previously turned their attention only to the master traditions of Europe. Interest in the concept of the Third World cuts across numerous disciplines and fields of study, and it displays an increasing presence in the political, economic, and cultural spheres, including their related discourses. As the prevalence of the term *Third World* suggests, the designation appears in heterogeneous contexts and is assigned diverse, and frequently, contradictory, meanings. In other words, there doesn't seem to be a hegemonic concept of the *Third World*, which implies that it does not constitute a discursive or descriptive category as much as it serves as an emblem for a radical otherness that challenges--even if only implicitly--the current distribution of goods, discourses, and knowledge. Of course, there have been many attempts to lend it a categorical power, to integrate it into the ruling structures of western knowledge, particularly in the powerful discourse of history; these attempts have not been wholly successful, however, for to succeed would be to eliminate the critical otherness of the Third World that the discourse of history was to account for.

A narrow historical--or, to be more precise, narrative--impulse has been part and parcel of the concept of the Third World since its appearance as an expression. The term "Third World" was first used in an article that appeared in *L'Observateur* of 14 August 1952; the author of the essay, Alfred Sauvy, was the founding director of the Institut National d'Etudes Demographiques and certainly an impor-

tant--if not the single most important--figure for subsequent concep-
tions of the development-underdevelopment debate. The passage
reads: "[T]his Third World, ignored, exploited, and despised, exactly
as the Third Estate was before the Revolution, would also like to
become something."[1]   The historical ramifications of this sentence,
which led to the very designation of the "Third World," for the term
entered into widespread use almost immediately, are no more striking
than the conceptual ramifications of the theory it espouses. Rhetori-
cally, the expression is stated as existing and then defined negatively,
as the passive object of a subject that performs operations upon it;
the subject performing these operations--of exploitation, and so
forth--is unnamed but obvious, for it is the subject that has already
achieved a status that the Third World can emulate. The comparison
between the Third World and the third estate [tiers etat] opens up a
historical dimension that exceeds the comparison, for, as the sentence
continues, it not too subtly implies that the 1789 Revolution which
altered the situation of France's third estate furnishes a paradigm for
Third-World revolution; to a certain extent, one could say that Sauvy
foresaw the epoch of political decolonization and indicated the form
that it would typically take: a consolidation of state power in
different hands but not any change that would endanger long-term
stability and the vested interests it served.

The theory of history that informs Sauvy's description is a
seductive one that continues to exert a strong influence: whereas
the first part of the sentence qualifies the Third World as an object,
the second part personifies it, attributes it with will, desire, or--
perhaps--the ability and capacity to act, and inscribes it within a
recognizable Hegelian schema of becoming. The Third World thus
makes the transition from an object to subjecthood, entering the
historical course that leads to ever-greater self-consciousness. This
view of the Third World as a conceptual entity has been the prevail-
ing one in the writings of both critics and supporters of the es-
tablished modalities of power. To cite only one recent example,
Fredric Jameson's "Third-World Literature in the Era of Multinational
Capitalism" also considers the Third World in the Hegelian terms of
master and slave, although in this case the "slave" is valorized for
possessing a greater materialistic consciousness that is not automati-
cally accessible to the idealist master.[2] In this understanding, as in
Sauvy's founding conception, the issue is an epistemological one that
hinges on the capacity to act knowingly and become a protagonist in

one's own history. Nevertheless, history in this sense is conceived in
conjunction with the relationship between underdevelopment and
development, even if the roles are reversed, and movement from one
to the other takes place along the axis of measured progress. This
history, with its propulsion located in the cognitive subject, comes
out of a European master tradition that can only write the Third
World while missing the radical nature of its cultural production and
its accompanying practice of historical inscription. What follows is
an attempt merely to pose the question of that production and that
historical inscription.

II

In a number of discursive situations, being attentive to the
political or historical aspects of writing and culture is neither
premeditated nor an afterthought but is endemic to the production of
discourse itself. This of course characterizes the situation of Third-
World discourse but also of any discourse that does not lend itself to
maintaining the prevailing organization of discourses, whether one
considers this organization from the perspective of the canon of
masterpieces, the language of domination, or the established fields of
knowledge. Because cultural production of the so-called Third World-
-conceived not only geographically but culturally, as "pockets" within
the "First" or "Second" Worlds--inescapably participates in such a
discursive situation, exponents of criticism are more and more turning
to the works of Third-World writers, filmmakers, and musicians,
hoping to identify strategies of practice that can be translated and
generalized into other spheres. Whereas it was once a national or
political liability for Third-World writers if their works did not allow
for allegorical readings of the struggle between the exploiter and the
exploited, the presumed liability has now become a critical one, that
is, specifically, one of concern to practitioners of criticism, whether
literary, political, or philosophical. Yet before any judgment could be
rendered with respect to the question of liability--if, indeed, it is a
question of liability--it would seem necessary to understand the
dynamics of the relationship that brings together writing, history,
allegory, the political, and the critical reading that articulates them.

Shortly after Julio Cortazar died in 1984, a small collection of
his writings appeared under the title Textos politicos[3]; although all
of the texts had appeared elsewhere, some already collected in

other volumes, it is nonetheless difficult to discard this volume as simply another attempt by another publisher to repackage preexisting material. The significance of this volume, in fact, resides in the relationship between the *Political Texts* of the title and the disparate contents it designates: it includes letters, lectures, and short stories, each of which necessarily inscribes the political in a very different way, if they are "political" at all. Why, then, *Political Texts*?

As is well known, Cortazar's writings were in no way political in the narrow sense but instead represent some sort of discursive awareness of the socio-political and historical situation. In effect, giving the title of "political texts" shifts the concept of the political to the level of discursive practice, for it is only on the basis of that practice that the selection coheres in any way. Nowhere are the modalities of this practice more apparent than in the 1967 letter to Roberto Fernandez Retamar, currently director of Casa de las Americas; republication of this open letter, here entitled "Acerca de la situacion del intelectual latinoamericano," alone would be enough to justify publication of the volume. The title is, however, something of a misnomer, as becomes evident when the text actually comes to terms with the situation of what Cortazar is calling "the intellectual":

> The slow, absorbing, infinite, and egoistic relation with beauty and culture, . . . the daily temptation to return, as in other times, to a fervent and total surrender to intellectual and aesthetic problems, to abstract philosophy, to the high games of thought and imagination, to creation that has no other end but the pleasure of the intelligence and sensibility, unleash in me an unending battle with the feeling that none of this can be ethically justified if one is not simultaneously open to the living problems of peoples, if one does not resolve to assume the condition of a Third-World intellectual to the extent that nowadays all intellectuals *potentially or effectively belong to the Third World because their very vocation is a danger, a threat, a scandal for those whose finger is lightly but securely poised on the bomb's trigger.* (42-43; Cortazar's italics)

As is frequent in Cortazar's writings, the current dilemma, or the comparison between the two conceptions of activity, is seemingly posed in historical terms: the personification of the intellectual that was in the past and the intellectual that must be today. Yet what is

on the surface represented as a historical thematic of past versus present turns out to be two ways of thinking about cultural production that--today, according to the historical fiction--cannot be mutually exclusive. The struggle depicted in the text takes place between a pure idealization and a contaminated one that cannot dispense with the social--and, therefore, political--mediations. This contamination of the fictional, idealized world of the intellectual is surprisingly renamed as the situation of the *Third-World* intellectual. On this note, however, the passage would seem to contradict all our expectations and preconceptions: the "Third World" designation disrupts the customary categories of socio-political thought by refusing to be a geographical term, a term of national alignment, or a historical term that signifies "backwardness" as the conceptual counterpart to "advanced" in a developmental model of history; instead, it marks the existence of a differential relationship that characterizes--"potentially or effectively"--critical activity. The context of this letter to Retamar all the more emphasizes the radical nature of this conception: written in 1967, it represents Cortazar's formulation of critical activity in view of the Cuban revolution, although it puts forth a global understanding of discursive "politics" and includes a forceful critique of what Cortazar here and elsewhere calls "negative nationalism" (35), which is literally nationalism conceived according to the Hegelian model. Precisely because it is an operative concept and not a conceptual container or category, the "Third-World intellectual" inscribes the historical and, therefore, critical activity of those without power, but power in this instance has a very specific radius. In this sense, Third-World intellectuals do not control the means of the state and therefore act contrary to the interests and individuals who possess or have access to the power of instrumental violence (with fingers "poised" on the trigger). Needless to say, this formulation opens up an entirely different dimension of the so-called Third World and makes it necessary to ask what propels the critical action if it is not grounded on the (virtual) possession of power, which--again--would entail locating the impetus or agency in a cognitive subject.

Of course, for Cortazar, discursive politics relate directly to writing, but writing that is considered to be neither an aesthetic practice nor emanating from a voluntarist author cannot be identified with some worn-out conception of literature or belles lettres, for it must foreground the question of historical inscription. Historical

inscription in this case refers to the way in which one's actions--
specifically, one's writing--are historical, which obviously has very
little to do with writing a historical narrative and requires a radical
rethinking of the historical.

The Cortazar collection of *Political Texts* contains the short
story "Graffiti," which, as the title indicates, takes the issue of
inscription as its theme, in addition to being characterized by the
critical practice that has been the trademark of Cortazar's writing.
As one might imagine, given the overt presence of the state in much
of Latin America, the story line of "Graffiti" is generated on the
basis of a conflict between the state order banning all socially visible
inscriptions or signs and an inscriber or maker of inscriptions. As
for the narrative itself, it is an extensive apostrophe in which the
narrator addresses the maker of inscriptions in the familiar "tu" form,
a procedure that gains in significance as the "plot" unfolds.

According to the text, the activity of the inscriber--affirmed not
to be a painter or an artist, only someone who draws designs [*hace
dibujos*] with colored chalk--cannot be explained by recourse to the
situation: this inscribing "was not really a protest against the state
of things" [*no era en verdad una protesta contra el estado de cosas*
(83-84); and "they were not political drawings" (84). In other words,
the content or theme was not political, and the intention was not in
truth to protest. Nevertheless, the story's actor, seemingly for no
reason other than the mere pleasure of drawing, carefully chooses a
time and place for the act, and, after completing it, he remains in
the vicinity until the police squads come to remove it and restore the
blank walls. Each act of inscription, then, consisted always of two
parts, the drawing and the reading of its effects, including its
ultimate effacement, which shifts the emphasis away from creation
and toward the intervention it produces. The dynamics of this
emphasis on production runs contrary in other ways to what we have
come to consider as the social aspect of writing and its correlative
circulation. Unlike the case of the production of written texts,
which in contemporary society lead to solitary reading of a singular
product, here circulation has a collective dimension, although it is
not the collectivity of a hegemonic class or group. The graffiti do
not circulate but exist and produce effects in conjunction with
circulation of those who experience the graffiti; as the text explicitly
states, the inscriptions were viewed only in passing, for to stop
would not only condemn the viewer in the eyes of the state but

would also signal a stance of aesthetic contemplation that Cortazar
shows to be indefensible in a world in which the designation of the
Third World is taken to be the embodiment of critical practice. In
the text, the narrator describes the actor's own actions for the actor
himself:

> You had never run any danger because you knew how to choose
> well, and in the time that passed before the arrival of the
> cleaning trucks, there opened up for you something akin to a
> cleaner space that almost held room for hope. Looking at your
> drawing from a distance, you could see people casting a glance as
> they went by; of course nobody stopped but nobody failed to look
> at the drawing . . . (84)

This "cleaner space" is literally a product of the inscription, of the
drawing, that has not yet been removed by the agents of the state,
just as the "hope" that almost finds a place there marks the temporal
or, if you prefer, "historical" aspect of inscription that cannot be
reduced to some form of utopianism, as the "almost" indicates.

On the basis of this very brief discussion of the story, it
becomes apparent that our customary understandings of the political
and the historical no longer suffice for rendering an account of the
critical practice that produces political and historical effects without
simply performing an instrumental act or telling a competing history.
This has long been recognized among Third-World theorists, for the
modern military state no less than the discourse of history itself was
first established against the "other," today's Third World, which was
seen as a space to be conquered or a blank page to be filled in with
text. After all, to adopt the conceptual tools of oppression is not to
do away with it but to perpetuate it and the stability it entails; a
superficial look at the effects of so-called development--accomplished
according to the principles of organizations such as the International
Monetary Fund or the Organization for Economic Cooperation and
Development--readily bear this out, although these effects are more
visible and have certainly been more studied as they are present in
the discourses of the Western tradition. It has not been broadly
recognized, however, that what is generalizable with respect to the
Third World is the socio-historical practice that necessarily charac-
terizes the activity of those not in possession of state power. Thus
the collective dimension and the relations that constitute it--the

particularities of which are frequently discussed in relation to the Third World social order, although largely in terms of Gramscian organicism--achieve a new prominence. Nevertheless, this is not the collective or class that becomes the discursive subject that powers its own history: no traditional notion of collectivity could come to terms with the immense disparity in the Third World concept as Cortazar describes it.

Not surprisingly, the story of "Graffiti" offers allusions as to how one might begin to talk about this collective dimension. Because the story is told directly to the reader, who corresponds to the main protagonist making the drawings, the process of narration becomes highly complex when another actor appears and makes drawings that enter into a dialogue with the reader and main protagonist. As an example of this curious introduction of a third person in a narrative that is built upon a duality: "you felt that this drawing [i.e., by the other person] was the equivalent of an appeal or a question, a way of calling you" (85). The two graffiti makers never meet, although the protagonist to whom the story is addressed was convinced, according to the narrator, that his graffiti interlocutor was a woman and that he glimpsed her being caught in the act of drawing and carried away by the police. Thus their intense relationship--or, perhaps, their non-relationship--which serves as the driving plot of the story, is not based on cognition purely and simply but on the mediations or the readings' of their respective inscriptions. Reading here does not refer to the valorized aspect of contemporary literary theory; instead it literally signifies discursive understanding that cannot be arrested by static concepts of developmental history which complements and depends upon the equilibrium of the state. What, then, are the effects of this reading?

After he sees his interlocutor arrested, the protagonist and addressee of the text continues producing graffiti that neither represent his *intended* protest nor a political *content,* thereby endorsing a more expansive conception of politics that cannot be dispensed with upon accomplishing a given aim--such as obtaining state power. Following his systematic reading of the effects of the graffiti, he returns to glimpse his most recent drawing:

> From a distance you discovered the other drawing, only you could have distinguished it so small, high and to the left of yours.
> You approached it with something akin to longing and horror at

the same time, you saw the orange oval and purple spots which seemed to leap out as a swollen face, a dangling eye, a mouth smashed by repeated blows. Right, I know, but what else could I have drawn for you? What other message would have made any sense now? Somehow I had to tell you goodbye and at the same time ask you to continue. (88)

Only here, at the close of the story, does the first person narrator emerge as an actor to disrupt the narrative; and it is quite startling to encounter the narrator speaking in her own voice. This disruption shows that the narrator herself is the third person who, with her own inscriptions, questioned and responded to the drawings of the other inscriber who is being addressed as both reader and the central character of the story being recounted. As it turns out, the story itself was the graffiti all along, but only to the extent that the graffiti inscribe the political and historical operativity that works in the relay between power and powerlessness.

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NOTES

1Quoted in Sauvy's *General Theory of Population.* trans. Christophe Campos (London: George Weidenfeld and Nicolson, Ltd., 1969), 204.

2Jameson, "Third-World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism," *Social Text* 15 (Fall 1986), 85.

3Cortazar, *Textos Politicos* (Barcelona: Plaza & Janes, Editores, S.A., 1985).

Americo Paredes, The Border Corrido and
Socially Symbolic Chicano Narrative

Ramon Saldivar

It is not surprising that Tomas Rivera and Rolando Hinojosa, two
of the major figures in the development of Chicano fiction in the
1970s, both mention the decisive impact on their literary careers
caused by their first reading of Americo Paredes's *With His Pistol in
His Hand* (1958).[1] Rivera and Hinojosa simply make explicit an
influence that is implicitly felt by all of the major developers of
Chicano fiction. With impeccable scholarship and imaginative
subtlety, Paredes's study of the *corridos*, border ballads, concerning
the armed resistance by Texas-Mexicans to the injustices they face in
Anglo Texas, may be said to have invented the very possibility of a
narrative community, a complete and legitimate Mexican-American
persona, whose life of struggle and discord was worthy of being told.

Paredes's *With His Pistol in His Hand* became the primary
imaginative seeding ground for later works of Chicano fiction because
it offered both the stuff of history and of art and the key to an
understanding of their decisive interrelationship. Paredes's study is
crucial both in scholarly and artistic terms for the contemporary
development of Chicano prose fiction because it stands as the primary
formulation of the expressive reproductions of the socio-cultural
order imposed on and resisted by the Mexican-American community in
the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. In Paredes's anthropological
text we thus have the curious situation of a scholarly work that has
played a crucial role in the "formation and development of Mexican-
American political culture in our time" (Limon, 1986:1). Paredes's
work, published in 1958, anticipated certain contemporary intellectual
practices, served as an originary point for a unified Chicano aesthetic
politics, and exterted a compelling influence on a whole generation of
young Chicano artists, intellectuals, and activists.

Paredes's work concerns the *corrido*, a ballad genre cultivated throughout most of Greater Mexico, including the Mexican communities in the United States. These ballads are usually anonymous folk song narratives "composed in octosyllabic quatrains and structured in an a b c b rhyme pattern. . . . [T]he entire narrative may be framed with formulaic openings and closings" (Limon, 1984:11-12; McDowell, 1981:56-57; and Mendoza, 1954). Thematically, the *corrido* typically relates significant events, such as social conflicts, natural disasters, political issues, or individual crises. Formally, the *corrido* is related to the tradition of the *romance* and the *romance corrido*--that is the *romance* sung straight through, rapidly and simply--brought to Mexico by the Spanish conquistadores in the sixteenth century (Paredes, 1958b:95). It does not crystallize as a distinctive genre, however, until the last half of the nineteenth century, and it does so apparently not in Mexico proper but in the area of the former northern border province of Nuevo Santander, the present Texas-Mexico border area (Paredes, 1958b:103-4). Of special importance, however, is the fact that the rise of the *corrido* genre seems to coincide with the increasing contact, and the resulting clashes, between Anglos and Mexicans in Texas after 1848.

Paredes argues that before Texas-Mexican border balladry entered its decadent period in the 1930s it was working toward a single type: "toward one form, the *corrido*; toward one theme, border conflict; toward one concept of the hero, the man fighting for his right with his pistol in his hand" (1958:149). The older ballad forms of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries dealing primarily with everyday life lose their interest and relevance during the period of border conflict (roughly 1848-1930) and are superseded by folksongs about individual and organized resistance (1958b:94).

With the accelerated movement of Anglo-American agricultural entrepreneurs into South Texas between 1890 and 1930, who begin a pattern of class and racial oppression that is still in place today, the necessity for overt and symbolic forms of resistance on the part of the Mexican-American community became urgent (Limon, 1983:203; Montejano, 1979:131-169). These "border troubles," as they came to be known, peaked in intensity in the first decades of the twentieth century and led to especially violent repression in South Texas. One historian has noted that Mexican American resistance often "provided an excuse for reprisals by [Texas] Rangers and Anglo authorities" (Acuna, 1981:308). The resistance and the reprisals are the subjects

of the *corrido*.

Now because the *corrido* is "*narrative, reflexive*, and propositional in semantic intent and *poetic* in technique" (McDowell, 1981:45), it lends itself readily to use as an instrument of ideological analysis. Paredes points out that by the end of the nineteenth century, it had thus emerged as the dominant socially symbolic act of the Mexican-American community. Not typically a form of personal narrative, a reproduction of idiosyncratic experiences, the *corrido* instead tends to take a transpersonal, third-person point of view representing the political and existential values of the community as a whole. Since its narrated events are historical in nature, the *corrido* focuses on those events of immediate significance to the *corrido* community that are capable of producing a heightened reflexive awareness of the mutual values and orientations of the collective. It poetically selects "events for narration which have instrumental and symbolic value in the *corrido* community" (McDowell, 1981:46). It does not generally convey news as such. Rather, like classical epic, it takes a body of symbolically-charged, iconically-powerful experiences and plunges the audience *in medias res* to an examination of those events (McDowell, 1981:47). As an instrument suited to ideological analysis, the purpose of the *corrido* is "to interpret, celebrate, and ultimately dignify events already thoroughly familiar to the *corrido* audience" (McDowell, 1981:47).

By the late nineteenth century, therefore, many *corridos* functioning as elements of social resistance had been composed. One particular song, however, came to epitomize the genre of heroic epic ballads about a man who defends his rights "with his pistol in his hand." With the skills of an historian, Paredes first analyzes "El corrido de Gregorio Cortez" in the socio-cultural milieu of early twentieth-century Texas to explain the genesis both of the song and the events that the song chronicles. With the sensibility of a novelist, he then recreates the style and substance of the heroic legends and songs surrounding the figure of Cortez. Finally, with the insight of a biographer, he narrates the actual historical events of Cortez's simple life of struggle, pointing out as he does so the very ground for future Chicano narrative fiction.

As Paredes recounts the historical events memorialized in the song, on the afternoon of June 12, 1901, Sheriff W. T. (Brack) Morris of Karnes County in south central Texas who was hunting a horse thief appeared at the farmhouse of the Texas-Mexican brothers,

Gregorio and Romaldo Cortez. Morris spoke no Spanish and the
Cortez brothers spoke little English. Boone Choate, a deputy who
Morris had brought along as interpreter, mistakenly translates the
Cortez's response to Morris's questions, causing Morris to think that
the brothers are the horse thieves he seeks.[2] The first error in
translation is apparently compounded by a second when the translator
takes Gregorio's words that he cannot be arrested for a crime he has
not committed to say that "no white man can arrest" him (Paredes,
1958:62). Taking these words as a challenge to his authority and as
an indication that Cortez is resisting arrest, Morris instantly draws
his revolver, shoots Romaldo, and shoots at but misses Gregorio.
Gregorio then shoots and kills the sheriff.[3] Cortez flees, "knowing
that the only justice available to him in Karnes County would be at
the end of a rope":

> In his flight toward the Rio Grande, Cortez walked more
> than 100 miles and rode at least 400, eluding hundreds of
> men who were trying to capture him. On the way he killed
> another Texas sheriff, Robert Glover of Gonzales County;
> and he was also accused in the death of Constable Henry
> Schnabel (Paredes, 1976:31).

After this flight of near-epic proportions and on the verge of making
good his escape to Mexico, Cortez surrendered to American
authorities near Laredo, Texas, when he learned that his family and
all who had aided him had become the targets of American reprisals.
His case united Mexican Americans in the cause of his defense.
Armed resistance became a legal battle that lasted three years. In
the course of several trials and appeals, Cortez was acquitted of
murder in the deaths of Sheriff Morris and Constable Schnabel but
was sentenced to life imprisonment for the death of Sheriff Glover.
In 1913, Governor O. B. Colquitt pardoned Gregorio Cortez. Both the
acquittals and the pardon were significant legal victories in the
Mexican-Americans' fight for civil rights in Texas and the Southwest
and were, in the rarity of the justice received by the Mexican-
American defendant, part of the reason for the elevation of Cortez to
the status of folk hero. "Gregorio Cortez and the *corrido* about him
are a milestone in the Mexican-American's emerging group
consciousness" (Paredes, 1976:31).
      The events of history almost immediately become artform, as by

1901, both legendary tales and folksongs embellishing Cortez's real-
life historical deeds, his exceptional horsemanship, his use of the
pistol, and his undeniable courage, had transformed an incident of
heroic resistance into a folk hero's tale of almost mythic proportions
(Paredes, 1958:109).
      The typical *corrido* situation posits a common, peaceful working
man put into an uncommon situation by the power of cultural and
historical forces beyond his control. The *corrido* hero is forced to
give up his natural way of life by his attempts to defend his home,
his family, his very community. In the process of this attempt to
win social justice, his concern for his own personal life and his own
solitary fate must be put aside for the good of the collective life of
his social group. Composed for a predominantly rural folk and
focused on a specific geographical locale, the unity of the *corrido* is
culturally, temporally, and spatially specific; the *corrido* makes no
effort to be "literary" or "universal." Its point of view is cultural
rather than national (Paredes, 1958:183-4). And since its principal
aim is narrative, the *corrido* concentrates on the actions of the hero.
"Though it avoids for the most part comments from the narrator and
all unnecessary detail, the *corrido* gives a fairly complete account of
the facts. . . . [T]he narrative style is swift and compact; it is
composed into scenes; there is a liberal amount of dialogue (Paredes,
1958:188).
      Because of the narrative objectivity of the *corrido*'s transpersonal
point of view, only the narrative product, not the poetic producer,
appears. The narrator is anonymous, as is the author; the distinction
between reliable and unreliable narrators is totally inapplicable in the
corrido context. What one scholar says of the epic is equally true of
the *corrido*: "the connection between authorship and authority had
not yet been made because it was not necessary; it was not necessary
because there was no place or need for the idiosyncratic view to
stand outside the communal concern" (Bernstein, 1984:51).
Corresponding to the "subjectlessness" of the *corrido* at the level of
author and narrator, one finds a curious lack of "individuality" on the
part of the hero. Lukacs argues that "The epic hero is, strictly
speaking, never an individual. It is traditionally thought that one of
the essential characteristics of the epic is the fact that its theme is
not a personal destiny but the destiny of the community" (1920:66).
Similarly, the *corrido*, a product of an integrated community sharing
a working-class world view and values, offers no place for the

idiosyncratic, for an individual perspective that stands totally outside of communal concerns. No individual life, even that of the hero, may be regarded as uniquely different from the fate of the community as a whole. Gregorio Cortez stands, consequently, not as an individual but as an epic construction of the society that constitutes him. His fate cannot be disconnected from communal fate.

Now only against the background of the later bifurcation of time and plot in Chicano narrative fiction can we get a sense of the immanent unity of the *corrido*'s forms and themes. The hero's individual life-sequences have not yet become totally distinct from those of his community; the private sphere of interior consciousness has not yet become the concern of the balladeer; the private quality of life has not yet coalesced into a central, independent identity that is distinct from the identity of the community. Life is one and it is "historicized" to the extent that all existential factors are not merely aspects of a personal life but are a common affair, as M. M. Bakhtin has argued concerning the nature of folk art in general (1981:209). On the Texas-Mexican border, the *corrido* drew its vitality from the fact that the relationship between balladeer and audience, that is to say between aesthetic producer and consumer, was still that of "pre-capitalist" modes of aesthetic production, "a social institution and a concrete social and interpersonal relationship with its own validation and specificity" (Jameson, 1979:136).

In the struggle for control of the Southwest between 1848 and 1930, Mexican American men and women used both the techniques of overt and symbolic action. In the symbolic sphere, the *corrido* became the preeminent form of action and resistance against the ever-increasing political and cultural hegemony of Anglo-American society, a living example of Jameson's force "with its own validation and specificity."

In considering the *corrido* as a form of symbolic action, it is useful to recall Raymond Williams's notions of the "residual" and the "emergent" pockets of culture that resist the encroachment of the dominant culture. Williams says that:

> The residual, by definition, has been effectively formed in the past, but it is still active in the cultural process, not only and often not at all as an element of the past, but as an effective element of the present. Thus certain experiences, meanings, and values which cannot be expressed

> or substantially verified in terms of the dominant culture, are nevertheless lived and practised on the basis of the residue--cultural as well as social--of some previous social and cultural institution or formation. (1977:122)

The sources of these residual counter-hegemonic forces are difficult to define. For Gramsci, an alternative hegemony can spring from the working class. With its reflexive, poetic, and narrative techniques, the epic heroic tradition of the socially engaged *corrido* functions as just one such active counter-hegemonic force prior to 1930. Its roots are determined by a confluence of powerful factors, including those of class, race, and gender, which continue to serve as defenses against the incorporation of the *corrido* into the dominant culture's music industry. When after 1930 the *corrido* enters a long period of decline due, as Jose Limon demonstrates, to an "advanced capitalist cultural re-organization in the Southwest" (1984:14), it does not disappear altogether but continues to function in a "residual" manner for the Mexican-American community. Thereafter, residing as a repressed element of the political unconscious, the *corrido* begins to exert symbolic force in the displaced sphere of the narrative arts. But that suggestion takes us too far forward into the history of contemporary Chicano narrative and is thus one that we must set aside for another occasion.

Paredes reminds us that in its pre-1930s form, and as a folk art product of the isolated, self-sufficient, patriarchal Mexican-American communities of the nineteenth century whose economic structure could well be termed "pre-capitalist," the *corrido* is decisively linked to the heroic past of cultural resistance. In the face of the dominant culture's different traditions, the *corrido* continues through the first three decades of the twentieth century to voice "experiences, meanings, and values which cannot be expressed or substantially verified in terms of the dominant culture."

In another version of this essay I discuss how after its period of decline Paredes keeps alive the form and spirit of the *corrido* in his own poetry and fiction. But his anthropological work functions as a socially symbolic narrative act too. This work identifies him as one of the key literary intellectuals of our time, as the kind of organic intellectual,

> whose radical work of transformation, whose fight against

repression is carried on at the specific institutional site where he finds himself and on the terms of his own expertise, on the terms inherent to his own functioning as an intellectual. (Lentricchia 1983:6; cited in Limon 1986:31).

As Jose Limon has argued, in the 1950s Americo Paredes "continued to be this kind of intellectual, doing so by drawing creatively on his own cultural background and bringing it to bear in critical dialogue" (Limon 1986:31) with traditional hegemonic distortions of the history of the Southwestern United States. His writings represent a transformation of the *corrido* in the service of the Mexican-American community and as a model for the emergence of anti-repressive movements at large.

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Notes

[1]See, for example, Hinojosa's comments in "This Writer's Sense of Place," in *The Texas Literary Tradition: Fiction, Folklore, History*, ed. Don Graham et al. (Austin: The College of Liberal Arts, The University of Texas at Austin and The Texas State Historical Association, 1983), pp. 120-124. Hinojosa has acknowledged this influence in various personal conversations with the present writer. Rivera explicitly names Paredes as a major influence in an interview published in *Chicano Authors:Inquiry by Interview*, by Bruce-Novoa (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1980), p. 150: Paredes's book "indicated to me that it was possible to talk about a Chicano as a complete figure. . . . *With His Pistol in His Hand* indicated . . . a whole imaginative possibility for us to explore." The title of the present chapter echoes Paredes's important essay, "The Folk Base of Chicano Literature," in *Modern Chicano Writers: A Collection of CriticalEssays*, ed. by Joseph Sommers and Tomas Ybarra-Frausto (Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1979), pp. 4-17. See also the excellent biographical note by Jose E. Limon, "Americo Paredes: A Man from the Border," *Revista Chicano-Riquena* 7, no. 3 (1980): 1-5.

[2]The court records of both the original trial and the appeals offer these details of the incident and its aftermath. See "Cortez v. State" Court of Criminal Appeals of Texas, January 15, 1902 (66 SW 453) 1902; and "Cortez v. State" Court of Criminal Appeals of Texas, June 15, 1904 (83 SW 812) 1904. I owe these cites to Paulette B. Saldivar who tracked them down for me.

[3]"Cortez v. State" (66 SW 453-460) and "Cortez v. State" (83 SW 812-816).

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El Corrido de Gregorio Cortez

In the county of El Carmen
A great misfortune befell:
The Major Sheriff is dead;
Who killed him no one can tell.

At two in the afternoon,
In half an hour or less,
They knew that the man who
    killed him
Had been Gregorio Cortez.

They let loose the bloodhound
    dogs;
They followed him from afar.
But trying to catch Cortez
Was like following a star.

All the rangers of the county
Were flying, they rode so hard;
What they wanted was to get
The thousand-dollar reward.

And in the county of Kiansis
They cornered him after all:
Though they were more than three
    hundred
He leaped out of their corral.

Then the Major Sheriff said,
As if he was going to cry,
"Cortez, hand over your weapons;
We want to take you alive."

Then said Gregorio Cortez,
And his voice was like a bell,
"You will never get my weapons
Till you put me in a cell."

Then said Gregorio Cortez,
With his pistol in his hand,
"Ah, so many mounted Rangers
Just to take one Mexican!"

TERRORISM IN A TEXTUAL COMMUNITY

Khachig Tololyan

The strong form of the argument I will make here is that the
Armenians of the Diaspora are a textual community. This community
is not constituted by a single paradigmatic text and its satellites, as
Islam was once elaborated around the Qur'an and the attendant
hadith, or Judaism around the first five books of the Old Testament
and commentaries on it. Instead, the Armenians of the Diaspora are a
textual community whose vital traditions are in large part constituted
by a corpus of disparate but related narratives whose "grammar" and
shared vocabulary matter more than the specific configuration of any
particular story. This agglomeration of loosely related and often
overlapping narratives developed in fits and starts over the past
fifteen centuries, both in the traditional Armenian heartland and in
Diaspora. It continues to be extended and reinterpreted by retelling,
the composition of new narrative variants and, most recently, by new
actions committed by Armenian terrorists, whose self-conception,
motivation, and self-legitimation are intricately connected to their
sense of themselves as re-enactors of the traditional narratives. This
reenactment functions as self-affirmation even as it also affirms and
extends the narrative canon. Such a use of the traditional narratives
is not altogether new. For centuries, they have been part of a
complex belief-system that has enabled and constrained certain forms
of self-representation and action by individuals or by institutions
seeking self-legitimation and vying for authority in the Armenian
communities of the world.

To make what I have called the strong form of these claims both
convincing and useful, I am writing a book that deals with what I
believe to be complex issues of more than parochial interest. I take
the Armenian Diaspora as my sample case because I am of it and care
about it, but also because it is, for anyone interested in the

constitutive powers of broadly disseminated narrative, a rich and unexplored resource. Before pressing on with questions of narrative, legitimacy, and terrorism, I must first attempt a broad sketch of the past and present conditions which ground such a claim.

First, a minimum of necessary historical detail. The traditional homeland of the Armenian nation occupied a high plateau of some 180,000 square miles. Like Poland, it was repeatedly partitioned. Today, most of that territory is part of Turkey, essentially the provinces of that country east of the Euphrates, north of the Tigris, and south of the Pontic mountain range. This territory adjoins, on the east, the Soviet Armenian republic, one of the fifteen constituent republics of the USSR, whose territory encompasses less than a sixth of the traditional homeland, other sectors of which were long ago incorporated into Iran, as well as the Azerbaijani and Georgian republics of the USSR. The original territory of the Armenians was ruled by a series of weak states, held together more by the strength of a shared culture than by its semi-feudal ruling elites. The abrupt adoption of Christianity in 301 A.D. and the carefully thought out, commissioned invention of a distinctive phonetic alphabet in 406 A.D. were acts enshrined in religious narratives that are still taught in today's Diaspora, and still instrumental to collective self-conception. After the Arab invasion of 641 A.D. and the much more destructive invasion of Turkic tribes from Central Asia, which began in the eleventh century, this collective self-representation was hard-pressed, and tested in many ways and in several places, since by this time the Armenian Diaspora had begun to develop in earnest. As is often the case with exiles, refugees, or emigrants, those parts of the Armenian (Christian) Diaspara which were implanted in relatively receptive (European) societies were eventually assimilated, while those established in more alien and closed societies (for example, Shiite Iran in the early seventeenth century), survived and maintained their links with some of the other Diaspora communities and with the fraying homeland. There, Turkish religious persecution, discriminatory taxation and state-encouraged pogroms led to continued waves of emigration and, among those who remained, to more pronounced commitment to the national traditions. Nine hundred years of persecution came to a head during the first World War. The Ottoman Turkish government, profiting from the opportunity that total mobilization presented--rather as the Nazis profited from World War II--committed the first of history's state-sponsored genocides

against a subject population; about 1.5 out the two million subjects of the empire were exterminated, the Armenian provinces incorporated into the postwar Turkish republic, and yet another Armenian Diaspora came into being, made up of the survivors of this genocide.

There are now around 5.5 million Armenians in the world, of whom 1.5 million live in communities scattered in thirty-four countries. Not surprisingly, this is a very heterogeneous Diaspora. Less than half of these people continue to speak Armenian. Around 70% cling to the ancestral Armenian Apostolic Church, while the rest are Catholic or Protestant. Yet, despite the enormous differences in language, religion, declared political ideology, and economic life, the major institutions of the Armenian Diaspora speak as though they represent one nation and one tradition, and base their competing claims to legitimacy on a belief-system in which the narratives I shall discuss play a central role. I shall not consider the extent to which reality differs from these claims. Just as the Zionist component of the leadership of the Jewish Diaspora in, say, 1930, found it useful to speak in the name of a Jewish nation which rhetorically bridged the gap separating a Yemenite Jew from Theodor Adorno, so also the rhetoric of Armenian activists obscures enormous differences. The important point is that the shared narratives remain efficacious for many and that the textual community is the one that generates the rhetoric of leadership and legitimacy, as the emergence of Armenian terrorism since 1975 makes particularly clear.

In 1975, on the sixtieth anniversary of the launching of the genocide by Ottoman Turkey, the Armenian Diaspora and its traditional leadership were stunned by the appearance of two Armenian terrorist groups, which launched bombings and assassinations of Turkish diplomats. These continued for a decade before abating. The names of the terrorist organizations indicate something of their ideology and motives: the Armenian Secret Army for the Liberation of Armenia (ASALA) and the Justice Commandos of the Armenian Genocide (JCAG), later transformed into the Armenian Revolutionary Army (ARA). These two movements have carried out over two hundred terrorist acts and have killed over sixty people in a dozen countries. While small, the movement has attracted considerable attention, in part because Turkey is a NATO partner of the West, but also because Armenian terrorism, like the Diaspora itself, has been "international" since its inception. In two books and numerous articles by political scientists and journalists, it has been

discussed as a paradigm case of international terrorism more ominously conceived: as an aspect of the "international terror-network" which is in part a fiction that serves as a weapon in the ideological arsenal of the resurgent Cold Warriors, and (in much smaller part) truth. In the rush to substantiate such an identification, the political scientists have entirely overlooked the national and cultural implications of Armenian terrorism. Since I am a native speaker of Armenian, and since the archive, so to speak, of materials published by the terrorist based in Lebanon is substantial--around 4000 pages--and since the material written about them by other Armenians is even more voluminous, the primary texts are inviting. Taken together, they raise questions of more than parochial interest, of which I will address only one here.

From Weber to Habermas, social theorists have raised the question of authority and legitimacy--of the ways in which a ruling elite, an institution, a government, an entire social class--extracts support or acquiescence or obedience without the daily exercise of violent power (of which it has a monopoly). The Armenian Diaspora (indeed, any Diaspora) complicates these questions because, while it has leading elites (religious, economic, cultural, even political, in a peculiar sense of that term), there is no state machinery with a monopoly on the exercise of violent power and of its tamer avatars-- the power to tax, for example. Rather, the claims of Diaspora elites are made upon populations which are officially subject to others, to governments legitimized by the more usual means. In the case of the Armenian Diaspora, the narrative canon has functioned as a pivotal element of the belief-system which has legitimated the traditional elites. The Armenian terrorists have come to challenge these with the claim that their polemic, their political theory and--especially--their deeds spring more directly from the tradition than the words and actions of their traditionalist elders. For my purposes, then, Armenian terrorism is a reinterpretation, both by word and bloody deed, of the textual tradition, and also an extension of it, because each act serves as the kernel for a new narrative.

Here I must summarize some sixty pages of about-to-be-published work. I have identified the specific forms of narrative central to the Armenian textual community as "projective narrative" and "regulative biography." I stress that while the terms are new, the texts to which they refer are familiar. The concepts and image-clusters these share are those of "martyrdom" and "witness," but not simply in the

familiar religious sense. While the precise implications of these can only emerge in a prolonged account, for the present we can define a projective narrative as one that not only tells a story (often a semi-legendary one constructed around at least a kernel of fact), but also maps out future actions that can imbue the time of individual lives with transcendent collective values. I stress collective values. The actors of these narratives are not primarily motivated by a search for merely personal salvation in a religious context. In redeeming their own lives by properly heroic (and usually fatal) action, they are explicitly said to redeem their collectivity in *this* world, not in the ledgers of a Kingdom to come. In turn, they see the projective narratives as containing plots and roles appropriate to the construction of ideal, heroic selves, not alienated from their community (as youthful western terrorists often are and feel) but at one with its most valorized traditions. By their actions, they testify both to the continuing power of the narratives and to the ability and right of the textual community to continue to function as a "character" in history, as a unity which, despite its political powerlessness in Diaspora, can still feel itself to be actively making its history and reaffirming its values. Such acts by the terrorists will also constitute a claim to legitimacy because here, as in all communities, to act and die for a community in ways the community has already valorized in narrative constitutes such a claim by the group which supplies the agents and re-enactors of sacrifice.

Of course, there is no self-evident way in which a contemporary act--in this case, terrorism developing in the context of a world-wide resurgence of the same phenomenon--announces itself as a re-enactment of acts depicted in traditional Armenian narratives. The act needs to be narrativized, re-presented, reinterpreted as such. Regulative biographies (and autobiographies) are ways of appropriating a life (and often a death) in order to remake them into exemplary narratives. They originate in the earlier genres of hagiography and exemplum, but have been secularized. Together with projective narratives, they prescribe to those who belong to the textual community not static roles but dynamic shapes of the time of their lives. The writings of the Armenian terrorists reveal minds steeped in this traditional idiom.

In this idiom, stories emanating from the Genocide occupy a very important place. But their relation to collective self-conception would be difficult to illustrate sketchily, has been discussed elsewhere, and

some facets of it (but only some) would be unsurprising to an American audience familiar with the Holocaust. I want therefore to turn to another story, drawn from circumstances peculiar to the Armenians. I must first summarize it, then demonstrate its use by the terrorist movement.

This ubiquitous narrative dates from the second half of the fifth century A.D., and is the story of Vartan and his fellow martyrs, whose memory is commemorated by a Saints' Day in the calendar of the Armenian Apostolic Church. Armenian children encounter the story at Church, in Sunday school, in kindergarten and elementary school. More advanced students in the parochial school systems of the Middle East encounter it in extended narrative form, usually in contemporary Armenian but sometimes even in the classical Armenian in which it was first written down by the cleric Yeghishe. This narrative has been ably translated and controversially edited by the Harvard scholar Robert Thomson, who believes that the historically accurate residue in the tale is small, and that the model for the heroic resistance and martyrdom of Vartan and his men derives more from the biblical books of the Maccabees than from reality. However, the debate about the historical accuracy of the work is beside the point here. The invocation of the model of the Maccabees only serves to underscore the ways in which the Vartan story enables and sanctions certain kinds of resistance, endowing it with a mantle of traditional and religious authority. While this religious dimension was vital in the period extending from the fifth to the nineteenth centuries, it has steadily become less so since. In the nineteenth century, the increase of literacy, the revival of Armenian literature, and the accessibility of secular education combined to spawn a dozen versions of the tale. The first major Armenian romantic poet, Alishan, composed one of his most important poems about the battlefield where Vartan and his followers fell in battle against the Sassanid Persians. Two of the most important early romantic historical novels authored by Raffi, the Armenian equivalent of Victor Hugo, invoke Vartan as model, while a third takes related figures from the same era for its heroes and villains. In the process of secularization of the tale and proliferation of its versions, three words have remained in play: *v'gah*, or witness; *martyros*, from the Greek martyr, and *nahadag*, which means "champion," but functions as the synonym for "martyr." In many recountings of the tale, in speeches, sermons, laments and funeral orations, the formulaic line

most frequently invoked is *mah imatzyal anmahootyun e*, that is, "death knowingly grasped is immortality." The line is an emblem of Yeghishe's entire text, and refers to the willingness of Vartan and his followers to risk all in defense of Armenian Christianity, conceived then (as now) as a crucial component of national identity.

The crisis which provoked the remark was brought on by the Persian Empire's insistence, in 450/1 A.D., on converting the Armenians, who had been Christian since 301 A.D., to militant Zoroastrianism. Defiant Armenian princes and clergy were summoned to Ctesiphon, the capital of the Sassanid empire, submitted to coerced conversion, and upon their return to Armenia vacillated about imposing a similar conversion on the mass of their subjects until events took matters out of their hands. Proselytizing Persian priests forcibly converted altars to fire-altars, were attacked by enraged Armenians led by a priest, and the conflagration spread. The Persian army invaded; Vartan (the hereditary commander of Armenian armies) and his troops met it in unequal battle. He and many of his followers fell, and thirty years of passive resistance punctuated by minor uprisings followed. Such are the bare bones of the story. What matters to my analysis is the way in which what was originally a struggle for religious tolerance, local autonomy, and feudal privilege became an exemplary narrative of virtuous action, in defense of national identity and personal honor, simultaneously. Today, it retains the most potent aspects of martyrology without any longer being a tale that inspires religious piety as such; it has been reinterpreted, through its many nineteenth-century retellings, as primarily a struggle for the survival of national identity. Its exemplary status can be made clearer by a comparison with a medieval parallel. As Christ's life, narrated in sermons and pictured on cathedral windows, constituted an invitation to *imitatio Christi*, an exemplar revealing the way in which to live one's life so that it conformed to the highest ideals of the community as embodied in the New Testament narratives, so also Vartan's life and death are endlessly narrated with a passion that establishes them as models of exemplary courage and virtue. Today, even in Sunday schools in the United States, the grandchildren of pacific third-generation Armenian-Americans still learn to recite verses that declare: *Hye em yes, hye em yes/Kach Vartanin torn em yes*, namely, "I am Armenian, I am Armenian/ the grandchild of valiant Vartan." The first and second statements are equal, and they imply a regulative

autobiography: to be Armenian is to acknowledge Vartan as ancestor. To acknowledge as ancestor one who is not a blood relative is to acknowledge his moral and symbolic authority. In an ethnically pluralist America, the lines and the tradition may have no further import. In the Middle East, where Armenians are less assimilated and much beset, the statement and the Vartan stories as a whole come into play as projective narratives.

The omnipresent narratives of the Genocide and of Vartan provide a frame for a series of more recent narratives of Armenian heroism and sacrifice. The most popular form in which these are embodied is song, learned in early childhood in schools and clubs, and in formal and informal public occasions where they are spontaneously sung. In the United States, where music as recent as Elvis Presley's is sometimes relegated to "oldies" radio programs, it is difficult to imagine the musical practice of a culture in which rock music coexists with the lyrics of Sayyat Nova (an eighteenth-century court composer), and with songs composed mostly in the period 1890-1920 to commemorate executed revolutionaries and guerrillas fallen in combat. In the United States, of course, only a very small portion of Armenian-Americans actively retain this musical and narrative culture; Western records, cassettes, television, and video dominate, for Armenians as for other ethnic groups. But in the Middle East, in the countries whence most Armenian terrorists have come, at least a plurality of the people retained this traditional culture until very recently. In Lebanon, confessional warfare is temporarily reviving its fading vitality. Armenian bookstores still sell songbooks containing such songs. Of these, one has the status of an anthem. The quatrain inevitably included in all versions ends with the lines: *Amenayn degh mahe me e/Mart me ankam bid memi/ Paytz yerani oom ir azki/Azadootyan ge zohvi*--"Death is the same everywhere/and a man dies only once/ Lucky is he/ who dies for the freedom of his nation." Another, composed in 1896, honors the revolutionaries who occupied a French-owned bank in Istanbul. They held hostages and demanded access to the European powers and press in the hope of publicizing the plight of the Armenians during a moment of . persecution and pogrom particularly vicious even by the Sultan Abdul Hamid's high standards. Nearly a century later, in portions of the Armenian Diaspora, the song is still sung spontaneously, with something of the ease with which an American might put a golden oldie on the stereo as a party winds down, or with the sentiment

that colors the singing in a bar of a song commemorating Irishmen executed decades ago by the British. Of course, this and other Armenian songs do not explicitly affirm the legitimacy of terrorism. Their depictions of suffering, daring, rare partial success, and heroic death constitute projective narratives which serve to establish the willingness to act against very high odds, and to accept violent death, as essential elements of the character of those who would honorably live out lives that are socially approved, lives whose paradigm is represented in projective narratives. (It helps, of course, that Vartan is a saint of the Armenian Church, and that groups of Armenians hold annual memorial masses for victims and heroes who fell decades ago.) Literally dozens of other songs from this period celebrate small victories and large, heroic defeats that testify to Armenian endurance in what Paul Wilkinson calls their "very long tradition of resistance."[1] This tradition is alive in the web of culture, not just a matter for the learned, the books, the museums. It is inscribed into the minds of a certain proportion of Diaspora Armenians as they grow up; it partially but importantly constitutes their Armenianness.

The final cluster of traditional narratives I want to mention consists of stories of the Armenian assassins who, in 1921-3, after the Genocide, struck down several members of the Young Turk junta responsible for its organization, chief among them Talat Pasha. Other stories concern the killing of Armenian traitors, or even particularly oppressive Tzarist officials in Eastern Armenia. These stories have been restricted to a more narrow audience, because they are not enshrined in song. Still, they are familiar to many. They were invoked in countless discussions and articles in the first few years of the revival of Armenian terrorism, which began with Kourken Yanikian's revenge-killing of two Turkish officials in Santa Barbara, California, in 1973. Of course, to a detached observer, there is a clear sense in which the earlier assassinations do not provide appropriate models for thinking about terrorism directed against officials whose guilt could only be established after extended moral and philosophical argument, if at all. Direct participation in a genocide is a different order of "crime" from working for the civil service of the contemporary Turkish state, however much that state continues to benefit from the crimes of the Young Turks while distorting the historical record. The fact that phrases like "the avenging arm of Talat's assassins strikes again" were used to discuss

such complex issues provides one measure of the saturation of Armenian culture by this narrative idiom of persecution and revenge. The persecution has been very real, of course, and revenge is not to be lightly dismissed as a value or motive; what must be underscored is that they are not political facts that are politically institutionalized in Armenian life, but complex cultural and psychological phenomena woven as narratives into the matrix of what passes for ordinary life in certain Middle Eastern societies.

The Vartan narrative is ubiquitous. To give but one example: the ASALA terrorists' publications are illustrated with the photographs of fallen terrorists. The captions include an incongruous coupling of the Christian and the Marxist: all the dead are *nahadag-ungers*, that is, martyr-comrades. One issue[2] has a paragraph describing the death of a terrorist that reads, in part (in my own translation): "*Fedayee* Megerdich Madurian completed his mission before exploding a grenade he carried attached to his waist, thus showing that the Secret Army is determined to continue in the path of "death knowingly grasped" [of "*imatzyal mah*"]--cited in the original classical Armenian from Yeghishe's Vartan narrative. Such an explicit identification of ASALA cadres in 1983 with the Vartan of 451 A.D. constitutes a rejection of the Western notion of a suicide mission, though objectively Madurian apparently committed suicide in order to avoid capture by the Turkish police. Vartan and his men are certainly not regarded by Armenians as having committed suicide; they went to do battle against large odds that in fact proved deadly to some of them, but their act was not suicidal in motive, their defeat did not lead to extermination, and the word suicide is not associated with their action. The logic of the ASALA is the narrative logic which continues to be applied even to acts that are, in fact, inevitably fatal to the perpetrators when carried out in Turkey proper. Yet they are represented as standing and fighting to the death for Armenia.

The logic of ASALA analysis in the end owes more to the logic of the dominant narratives of Armenian culture, to the emplotment of sacrifice on the altar of national identity, than to Marighella or Lenin or George Habash. Despite the radical changes in that historical context over the centuries, the narrative that dictates that logic of action and projects that action and its agents into the future retains its stubborn structure, inherited from textualizations of history that begin in the Vartan narratives and have continued since.

Thus, the blinding by an accidental bomb explosion of ASALA leader Yenikomshian is compared to the death, under similar circumstances but a full seventy-five years earlier, of Krisdapor Mikayelian, the founder of an earlier Armenian political movement, the ARF. This comparison recurs throughout the early 1980's publications of the ASALA[3], even in some of the most vituperative essays attacking the more traditional ARF. The deep structure of such discourse has its own pre-analytic logic. It resembles typological-prefigurative narrative, in which historical and contextual changes intervening between two events do not necessarily create a discontinuity of meaning-making, of interpretative procedure. Just as Abraham sacrificing his son Isaac prefigures God sacrificing his son Christ, so also the whole of the Old Testament prefigures the New, and the book of Apocalypse the end of the world in nuclear holocaust, all proclaimed by parsons who think with the same narrative "logic" as the ASALA.

In the discourse of Armenian communal politics, both those endorsing terrorism and the majority opposing it use the language of projective narrative as well as its logic; those opposed to terrorism condemn the terrorists as misguided misinterpreters of the constitutive narratives, as well as, of course, of contemporary reality. However, just as denouncing someone as a false Messiah affirms a shared belief in the possibility of a real one, so also Armenian critics of terrorism unwittingly reaffirm the authority of the textual corpus. In addition, the situation of those who denounce the terrorists is complicated by the need to debate some of their new claims to legitimacy made in the traditional language. This is particularly true of the Middle Eastern Diaspora. For example, in his recent book on *The Witness of the Armenian Church in A Diaspora Situation*, the Bishop of the Armenians of Beirut writes:

> The [mission] of the [Armenian] Church's witness is to proclaim in word and sacrament the definitive breaking into history of the *Kerygma* of the Kingdom of God in Jesus of Nazareth. [The Church must become] a sign and anticipation of the Kingdom on Earth (*Koinonia*), and to realize that Kingdom through service in the socio-political order (*Diakonia*) . . . [The content of the Church's witness] is the announcement of God's offer of salvation in Christ, through identification with the oppressed, the struggle for liberation,

and service among the poor . . . . The Church does not
have a witness, she *is* the witness. In fact, the witness is
the raison d'etre of the Church's very being and existence.
With such a theology of *martyria* the Armenian people
understood the Church as the living presence of God in the
midst of their life and history.[4]

Such a statement both clarifies a certain kind of Armenian
understanding of the role of the Church and demonstrates how
inextricably what some Westerners think of as the political can be
intertwined with the religious, and how both are implicated in the
narrative tradition. In particular, the concept of *Diakonia* poses a
dilemma that has existed since Christ's own time: was he heralding a
Kingdom of Earth or of Heaven? The New Testament is notoriously
ambivalent on the matter: it is not even clear whether the Romans
crucified him because he was a religious challenger of its subalterns
in the Jewish leadership or because they regarded him as a zealot in
politics and a potential danger to their own imperium. Nor is it
certain that such a distinction could have been made then. It is
clear that the distinction is very hard to maintain today, either in
the Middle East or in Nicaragua. The Armenian Church, Bishop
Keshishian declares, is heir to a divine intervention in human history,
to which it has born witness with its martyrs and a "theology of
martyria" which is not written in ink but in blood. That witness *is*
the Church, or, in terms of popular religion, the church over the
centuries has so successfully appropriated sacrifice for major
Armenian causes as an aspect of martyrdom for the church that the
two remain impossible to separate.

In turn, the Armenian terrorist movements have appropriated the
language of martyrdom --already secularized in the nineteenth
century--from the Church and have made it an essential part of the
narrative apparatus by which the lives of terrorists are reclaimed and
valorized. They have borrowed both the language of the church and
the style of hagiographic narratives and regulative biographies in
order to portray their own militants as leftist, secular martyrs for
the Armenian cause. Furthermore, in the publications of terrorists
and even in writings by others who have only a very limited
sympathy for them, terrorism has been discussed as a problematic
"*Kerygma*, a definitive breaking into history," not by God but by the
hitherto impotent, passive, politically supine Armenian Diaspora.

One of the many ways in which the discursive success of the
terrorists has been manifested is in the realm of ritual. Both in
Lebanon and in certain parishes in the United States, where recent
emigrants from Lebanon have been numerous, parish priests have been
requested to perform masses for the souls of dead "martyrs,"
especially for members of the Armenian Revolutionary Army who died
in a suicide commando raid on the Turkish embassy in Lisbon,
Portugal, in 1983. Some clerics have agreed; others have resisted.
The entire situation invites comparison with that which has prevailed
in Nicaragua for some time now. The Sandinistas are not terrorists,
of course, but the challenge they represent for the Pope and the
traditional church is multifaceted. The "words 'the Kingdom of God'
crop up in speech and in print with a frequency disquieting" to the
clergy, Conor Cruise O'Brien reported recently.[5] The Christian
supporters of the Sandinistas, as well as many of the Sandinistas,
regard their struggle as one for the "earthly Paradise," themselves as
the "Pueblo de Sandino, Pueblo de Cristo," and they have developed a
"cult of the revolutionary dead," who "are invariably referred to in
countless official statements and inscriptions as 'heroes y martires':
not merely national heroes but also martyrs' witnesses, through their
death, to their faith in the God of the Poor" (55). This fusion of
secular heroism and religious martyrdom, so troubling to the Pope
during his visit to Nicaragua, was accomplished in Armenian life by
the fifth century A.D., *by the Church itself*, whose position as the
leading institution of the nation was thereby affirmed. It is that
fusion, accomplished by narrative and ritual, emblematized by the
focus on an ever-expanding textual corpus, that has enabled Armenian
terrorists to tap an enormous reservoir of emotion in certain portions
of the Diaspora, and to turn that emotion both into various passive
sorts of support and, most importantly, into an instrument of self-
conception and self-validation. The terrorist can see himself not as a
marginal outcast from his society but as a paradigmatic figure of its
deepest values--as martyr, *nahadag*, and witness--living and dying in
the central martyrological tradition of the culture, while remaining
resolutely secular, disdaining the promise and reward of any paradise.

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NOTES

[1]Paul Wilkinson, "Armenian Terrorism," *The World Today* (September, 1983), 344.

[2]*Hayasdan* [The organ of the ASALA terrorists], June, 1983, 47.

[3]e.g. *Hayasdan*, December, 1980, 16.

[4]Bishop Aram Keshishian, (New York: The Press of the Prelacy of the Armenian Apostolic Church of North America, 1978), 9-10. [This translates an Armenian original published a year earlier in Beirut].

[5]Conor Cruise O'Brien, "God and Man in Nicaragua," *The Atlantic Monthly*, 258 (August, 1986), 55.

THE STRATEGY OF NARRATIVE FORM

Mary Layoun

I will tell you something about stories,
[he said]
They aren't just entertainment.
Don't be fooled.
They are all we have, you see,
all we have to fight off
illness and death.

Leslie Marmon Silko
Ceremony

During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries many protests against social injustice were written in prose. They were reasoned arguments written in the belief that, given time, people would come to see reason; and that, finally, history was on the side of reason. Today this is by no means so clear. . . . All this means that the resolution--the coming to terms with the sense to be given to life--cannot be deferred. The future cannot be trusted. The moment of truth is now. And more and more it will be poetry, rather than prose, that receives this truth. Prose is far more trusting than poetry: poetry speaks to the immediate wound.

John Berger
The Sense of Sight

At first glance, the consideration of narrative form might suggest nothing quite so much as an exercise in New Critical typologies.

After all, what is "narrative form"? Point-of-view, plot structure,
character development, closure, style--the incantatory litany of
introductory literature classes. And if these are commonly
understood as constituent categories of narrative form, to what
extent can they be called "strategic"? Military strategy presumably
has a distinct telos. That is, most simply perhaps, the defeat of the
enemy. But also it is the marshalling of forces to create
advantageous circumstances under which the enemy is confronted (and
then presumably vanquished). Against what, then, are the "forces" of
the narrative marshalled (and for what telos)? It is perhaps the very
formal characteristics of narrative form listed above--point of view
or style or plot--which, as historically changing devices rather than
universal categories, call attention to themselves as formal devices
precisely as they are marshalled (in a tactical operation) in the
confrontation with that which simultaneously infuses and refuses the
text--history.

Even if the consideration of narrative form, then, might suggest
initially a kind of textual formalism, the consideration of narrative
form as strategy suggests what is usually designated as distinctly
other to a narrowly defined sense of the literary. In fact, this
combative designation is an apt enough recognition of coincidence of
the literary and the political. In this scheme of things, is it not, for
much first-world literature, the political that is the "enemy" of the
literary--debasing the lofty soaring of the literary text or,
alternately, deceptively camoflauging the strictly delimited and
logocentric realm of the text? The coincidence of the literary and
the political is usually located 'out there' in the peripheries of what
we call the third world. In a rampantly overt ideology of literary
progress and high development that is an at least implicit correlate
of an overall highly developed society, it is a coincidence beyond
which the first world has developed. But, there are alternative
critical readings, in the first world, of the literary and political
coincidence of narrative form. Two of the most suggestive, if
problematic, critical considerations of the conjunction of the literary
and the political are Deleuze and Guattari's assignment of that
conjunction, in their *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature*,[1] to the
domain of minor literature and, in addition to his *The Political
Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act*, Fredric Jameson's
"Third World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism."[2]

If Jameson's notion of narrative form in the third

world novel as an allegory of nationalism[3] seems a rather procrustean
gesture, perhaps the force of his analysis resides in his critical
notion of allegory itself rather than in his citation of the national as
the privileged concern of allegory in third-world literature. For
allegory, that presumably long abandoned and heavily Christian
discourse of the Middle Ages, here resurfaces with astonishing critical
power. And perhaps more suggestive than the notion of allegory
(simplistically?) cited as a series of one dimensional equivalences in
the medieval play *Everyman* or Bunyan's *Pilgrims Progress* is the
classical (Greek) notion of "speaking otherwise" (*allos*) in the forum
or marketplace (*agora*). For, finally, this is the crucial distinction
that Jameson makes about third-world literature as national allegory--
the radically different proportions of the relationship between the
public and the private. (This is, equally, a crucial distinction in
Deleuze and Guattari's notion of "minor" literature.) Arguably
perhaps, this "public" in the third world has been and even is
primarily the national. But then it seems equally necessary to allow
the possibility of other "allegories," other ways of public "speaking
otherwise," other re-situations of what we call the national. The
very notion of the national itself, in third-world literature, can be
seen as an allegory of another anticipatory or pre-figurative public,
or collective, or social organization. But one not yet possible in the
present, one still utopic. It is, also, to this notion of allegory as a
predominantly (rather than private) "speaking otherwise" (the first
world's symbolism and/or high modernism) that the notion of strategy
and, particularly of the strategy of narrative form as simultaneously
literary and political, might be juxtaposed. For the difference
between what is located elsewhere (in "developing" or
"underdeveloped" third-world cultures) and what is not recognized as
constituent of first-world culture is virtually non-existent.

It is then, not surprisingly, nationalism (like the political), that
dimension not recognized in or repressed from first-world "cultural
consciousness," that is located elsewhere. But, for that matter,
nationalism is a particularly acute example of the mutual
engenderment[4] of the here and not here, of the at once negative and
positive. Nationalism, and its counterpart of national culture,
proposes (the utopia of) unity and cohesion, of inclusive sameness.
But at the same time, at least potentially and more often than not
quite literally, it brandishes the threat of and enacts an exclusive
"homogeneity" based on an ideology of a past purity that must be

reasserted and maintained in the present. In a perverse if nonetheless pleasing reversal, the most radical location or citation of the allegory of nationalism could perhaps not be exclusively situated in the third-world novel at all but precisely in the universalizing post-modernist first-world text. There the national is that which is fearfully repressed in the text (if rather too frighteningly expressed outside of the text). Finally, it is not only allegory of nationalism that arguably distinguishes third-world literature but, I would suggest, the national as allegory.

Deleuze and Guattari, in their work on Kafka's narratives as a way to approach a theory of minor literature, also cite the crucial importance of the public, the political, and the collective. Minor literature in their perhaps familiar formulation is written in a major language, immanently political and immanently collective. Here too, as in Jameson, the critical distinction of minor literature is its formulation of the public and the private or individual. For the minor writer, regardless, of autobiographical propositions, the presumably personal and/or authorial is always charged with the political, the collective. It is this public gesture, like the impoverishment of the major language from within, that breaks down boundaries, de-territorializes, the "dominant and effective order of things."[5] Here the critical and oppositional terrain of third world literature is reconstituted (re-territorialized) from within the corpus of major. It is, interestingly enough, the now canonical figures of high modernism such as James Joyce, or Kafka himself, or the later figure of Samuel Beckett that Deleuze and Guattari cite as the minor. Regardless of the arguable relevance of this critical scheme for third-world literature, they, like Jameson, attempt to formulate the significance of narrative (form and content) as a "socially symbolic act" for the first world. And, as well, Deleuze and Guattari at least imply the "life and death struggle with first world imperialism"[6] that marks all "minor" (or third-world) cultural efforts. The presumption, then, of some essential national or ethnic or cultural purity or absolute autonomy is a truly dubious one.

So it is precisely the coincidence of the literary and the political in narrative form, the consideration of narrative form as strategy both literary and political, that is, by way of introduction to the papers that follow, the proposition here. In geographically distant contexts--those of Africa and of the Middle East--the papers examine the workings of the simultaneously literary and political aspects of

narrative form in specific (con)texts. It is this simultaneous context that *is* one of the "problems of narrative form." But that problem, I would suggest, is also possibility. And it is in this context of both problem and possibility that the issues frequently cited in the practice of and critical commentary on third-world literature--of genre and language--must be situated. For the notion of the appropriation of "foreign" or "western" genres (here the novel), like that of language, presumes that culture, no matter where it is located, is self-contained, essential, pure. The critical argument in the third world of the independently linear development of indigenous cultures that was ruptured by colonialism and imperialism is certainly crucial in terms of focusing attention on colonialism's cultural as well as political and economic violation. Of that rupture and of its past and present consequences as well as its present variations there should be little doubt. But there is more than just one possibility for the constitution of an alternative to that imperialist violation. It is neither "naturally" nor by definition the essentialist citation of national identity. If we can return in closing to the image of strategy, in spite of what for some might be its offensive military connotations, the forces need to be identified before they are marshalled and their formation as they are marshalled is not fore-ordained. The constitution of narratives, whether historical or literary ones, does not preclude strategy. It might just demand it. And the location and formulation of forces to carry out that strategy is not done only from pure sources (if we are to assume there are such sources at all). The historically variable telos of strategy is suggested, however tentatively, by Ngugi wa Thiong'o in his most recent critical non-fiction, *Decolonizing the Mind: the Politics of Language in African Literature*:

> Perhaps the crucial question is not that of the racial, national, and class origins of the novel, but that of its development and the uses to which it is continually being put.[7]

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NOTES

[1]Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature*, tr. Dana Polan (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986).

[2]Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1981) and "Third World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism" (*Social Text*, Fall 1986, 15).

[3]Jameson, "Third World Literature . . . ," 69.

[4]Tom Nairn, "Janus-faced Nationalism," in his *The Break-up of Britain* (London: New Left Books, 1977), especially 348-49.

[5]To borrow Michel de Certeau's apt phrase. See his "On the Oppositional Practices of Everday Life" in (*Social Text*, 1, #2).

[6]Jameson, "Third World Literature . . . ," 68.

[7]Ngugi wa Thiong'o, *Decolonizing the Mind: the Politics of African Literature* (London: James Currey, 1986), 69.

LOOSE CANONS:
THE PURSUIT OF MIDDLE EASTERN IDENTITIES

Michael Beard

The novel is, famously, the genre of the specific--of detail, of sharp focus, of materially realized background and unpredictable turns of action: the mundane, the contingent, the asymmetrical. In a way everything we have to say as western observer and western-trained observers of third-world cultures takes place on a grid between the novel's specifics and the abstract we wish to confront it with, a location which requires us to ask how to get from one to the other pole of discourse.

In a recent issue of *Critical Exchange* there is an article by Mary Layoun which addresses a question, or rather a pseudo question, which everyone who studies third-world writing confronts: "Is it possible to discuss these texts in terms of a critical theory--isn't description all you can do?"[1] In other words, the reader new to third-world writing sees it as a collection of discreet phenomena for which no abstraction is possible. And so it appears: a threat to our institutional training, a barrier which prevents the inductive leap beyond positivism into the coherence of theory. As critics we want to be able to focus on the recurring networks in which those specifics are lodged, but in order to do that I suspect we will have to face the question again and again, "Isn't description all you can do?" And so my subject is the obstacles we encounter as readers of the Middle Eastern novel in our passage from one pole to the other.

I want to start by presenting two obvious, much repeated, partially true statements. We can speak of narrative as a problem in Middle Eastern traditions in two senses. The first is that the Islamic world is said not to have a narrative tradition. In a sense it is true. There did not evolve in Middle Eastern writing the particular line of post-Balzacian story-telling that we know as the novel. The *Koran* is often cited as a culprit here, a forbidding influence which dis-

couraged innovation and creativity, though I do not consider that an argument worth pursuing. The *Koran* is also a stimulus to writers. (If there is a culture without an institution cited as authority against innovation I would like to hear about it.) In any event the novel is a transplant: it is not in the Middle East the instrument with which one traditionally grasps reality, which one uses to comprehend one's relation to history. Not, at any event, as it is for us. That is, in the Middle East, the function of poetry. And, we should add, poetry fills that function with an enviable (if one genre can be said to envy another) flexibility: its "use" is to crumble into fragments, to be quoted as commentary on the events of daily life. Poetry is utilized as a source of authority in the manner of a proverb, or of the tags from the *Koran* which ornament and animate daily speech. The premise of the novel is the contrary, a narrative which wraps around the consumer, surrounding us with an illusion of mundane detail which stands between us and experience, and requiring a considerable perceptual leap before it can be accomodated to individual experience.

The other way in which narrative is a problem in the Middle East is easier to document: it is within Islamic culture that there has evolved the most powerful critique of narrative mimesis in world literature. The critique I have in mind is an anti-novelistic esthetic, an ironic narrative machine which fragments the narrative process and makes the act of story-production visible edge-on. Such a critique can be found in any sophisticated use of parables: it can be found in the *Koran* and it can be found in the story collection called *Kalila wa Dimna*, or in the Arabic encyclopedia tradition, but it evolved furthest in the collection of stories called the "Arabian Nights."[2] Since Todorov's essay "Narrative Men,"[3] his study of speech acts in the Arabian Nights, now collected in *The Poetics of Prose*, the critique has become sufficiently well known that we don't have to comment on it here. (One observation, though: we would like to be able to say that this edge-on vision of the speech act was a window into the Arabic style. That would be easier to do if "Narrative Men" were not followed in *The Poetics of Prose* by an essay on *The Odyssey* which ascribes all the same fragmenting, anti-narrative features to Homer.)

Both of these premises are sufficiently true for us to take them seriously. The novel did indeed develop in the west; narrative is indeed radically denatured in the narrative monuments of the Islamic world. One could argue from these premises for an ingrained

hostility to novelistic thinking in the essence of the culture. What these premises do if we take them more seriously is urge us to differentiate between narrative forms. They make us realize, for instance, that we don't really have a rigorous definition of the novel. To what extent is it the neutral, portable, omnivorous form we imagine it to be? What happens when the novel is released of its regional content? Is it still a novel when the setting is Middle Eastern, or is the cultural background sufficiently different to make unrealistic the traditional assumptions of novelistic style? What is the particular "real" that realism is good at capturing and what are the elements of the community that make that "real" seem natural to us? It is an unsettled question because the novel is so close to us; there are elements in it which prevent our critical distance. We are raised seeing the novel in Auerbachian terms, teleologically, as something which develops, the happy ending of a historical evolution. When we see it exported to a culture where it didn't evolve "natural- ly" we are tempted to treat it as unnatural, a form striving to be like the novel but without the social context which would nurture it spontaneously and make it a "proper" novel. Even if we see the novel as an outdated form, we are likely to think of it as a neces- sary stage to pass through, a form we are on the "other side" of.

One tactic, once we have acknowledged our cultural anxiety about the novel, is to search for "organic" development outside the western environment. It is not hard to see the transplanted form in its own historical evolution. There is a standard sequence of forms which the novel has taken in Islamic cultures. It includes a period of translation: in both Iran and the Arab world the end of the nineteenth century sees a series of romances along the lines of Chateaubriand, Bernardin de St.-Pierre, and Dumas. (In Arabic Mustafa Lutfi al-Manfaluti's famously free versions of French romancès and in Iran Jules Verne, Sherlock Holmes mysteries, and most influentially *The Three Musketeers*.) A second stage produces indigenous historical romances (in Iran San'atizadeh Kermani's 1920 "The Avengers of Mazdak," in Egypt Najib Mahfouz's pharaonic novels of the late thirties [actually 1939, 1943, 1944]). In a third, antithetic stage a reaction produces a hard-boiled narrative with contemporary settings of the sort we recognize as the style of the western novel.[4] The antithesis between the second and third stages, however, may be less innovative than it first appears when we reflect that the two premises--a heroic past depicted nostalgically and a degraded present

depicted in the naturalistic mode--in fact reinforce one another.

More telling still, at any stage in this evolution Iran and the Arab world were subject to translations and allusions to modernist texts which make the notion of a self-contained Hegelian logic of developing forms impossible. (In Iran the first translations of Kafka appeared within twenty years of the first western-style short stories.) Looking at this unequal development makes us aware how impervious to outside influence the western community has been, that what permits us to speak of literature as a development analogous to a biological succession of forms was only our cultural narcissism. If a comparative sequence of forms is of use to us it is to force a rethinking of what "development" means, and a warning that our most familiar terms (development, evolution, influence, national character) are all potentially condescending. If we want to construct a history which avoids using our own tradition as a standard, thus summing Middle Eastern culture up as a single essence, what we need is an emphasis on distinctions.

Sometimes, of course, distinctions are too easy to find. Early in the process of studying the novelistic tradition of non-western cultures we always run into the question of hybrids. We are told about such and such a culture that the novel, once it arrives there, meets with a native narrative tradition and breeds with it. Thus the short story in the style of Maupassant, in a commonly repeated trope, meets with the *hekayat* in Iran and falls in love. The children bear the marks of both parents, thus reassuring us that they are legitim- ate. The problem is that the more we look for the distinguishing properties of the two families, the more elusive they become.

A personal observation goes here: when I first began to study the Iranian novelist Sadeq Hedayat, whose idiosyncratic novel *The Blind Owl* (1936) took on a kind of cult status during the Pahlevi years, it seemed to me that it was a question of location influences. Hedayat lived in France from 1928 to 1930; the nature of his reading wasn't hard to trace, and it seemed as if at some point in the process of noting western allusions a negative shape would form. The negative shape--the bit left over, the "uninfluenced" part--would be the outline of the indigenous forms, its "Iranian" self, the part that pointed to the Iranian national identity. To simplify the process a little, the negative shape never materialized. Still, it was clear that *The Blind Owl* is legitimately what it seems, a profoundly Iranian phenomenon. It is also legitimately a post-novelistic performance. It

is a self-conscious narrative spoken by an untrustworthy narrator, who introduces himself through a fantasy account of his life which alters gradually into a "novelistic" one--so that the narrative changes key from a private world, almost into a landscape of realism. There is an Iranian setting, themes of skepticism and despair which are appropriate to Iranian life of the period (as later), but every allusion, every formal device, can be traced to a European source, sometimes in such specifity that we can find a pastiche of passages from Rilke's *Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge* and short stories of Edgar Allan Poe. Perhaps still more important, his greatest innovation, the molding/discovery of simple Persian style which dealt with serious subjects in a conversational voice--a level of discourse without recent precedent in the thirties--is clearly modeled after the middle style he found in French narrative. What made him profoundly "Persian" in other words could also be called a European borrowing.

Characteristic and culture-specific forms, clear and quantifiable, are easier to find in the Arabic novel because, unlike Persian, Arabic is a language in which spoken and written dialects vary radically. The novel evolved in Modern Standard Arabic, a variation of the Koranic dialect, which is no one's spoken language in this century: consequently the project of the novel to capture demotic experience is compromised at the outset. Though a tradition of dialogue has evolved whereby characters speak a kind of modified formal Arabic, the potential gap between the narrating voice and those of the characters is always there, and novelists have to develop a terrifical- ly specialized skill in dialogue of approximating what one might really say with a formal, elevated equivalent. (Najib Mahfouz is said to be particularly adept at suggesting the untranscribable, so that one hears the colloquial term underneath the formal one.)

If a demotic language which feels "natural" is out of reach, it may be logical to experiment with linguistic perspective in a way for which we have no counterpart in English. The "neo-Mamluk" style made famous by the Egyptian novelist Jamal Al-Ghitani in his 1974 novel *Al-Zayni Barakat* represents a shift away from demotic ex- perience. It is on the face of things an account of life in medieval Cairo in the style of a fifteenth-century chronicle. This allows a long-range, generalizing view which would otherwise seem a betrayal of the realistic taste for detail. The opening lines combine the mood of mystery (the unintroduced speaker, later identified as a European traveler, his subjective perception of the silent city) with sharply

perceived detail (the rider in the empty street):

> Conditions in the land of Egypt are troubled in these times.
> Cairo appears different to me. Not as I knew it on previous
> visits. I know the language of the region and its dialects, and
> the things people talk about are not the same. The countenance
> of the city is sickly, on the verge of tears. The face of a
> woman who fears being raped late at night. Even the sky is a
> shallow blue, its clearness murky, covered by a mist from some
> distant land which carries with it the feeling of small villages in
> India when the plague overtakes them. Tonight the air is heavy
> with dampness. The houses seem to wait for some event,
> something which might happen tomorrow, or perhaps the day
> after. I listen to the sound of hooves striking against the stones
> of the street as they pass and move on into the distance.[5]

But the self-imposed limitation of a medieval setting and a paratactic,
spare medieval dialect produces an effect at once so patently
allegorical and so clearly contemporary to a modern reader that,
paradoxically, its stylization grasps the mood of post-revolutionary
Cairo directly, with an exactitude and efficiency which would be
unavailable to the crowded canvases of Mahfouzian naturalism. Such
devices as the direct statement of the city's mood ("Conditions in the
land of Egypt are troubled") and the personification of the landscape
might otherwise be dismissed as unwarranted narratorial intrusions;
the distancing of the speaker, his specificity as a historical charac-
ter, recuperates them, draws them into a realist esthetic.

The shifting attitude towards narrative authority is a category
prior to thematic engagement. Before we enter the conflict of
classes which generates the narrative of *Al-Zayni Barakat*, we
experience the detachment of a narrator whose ignorance of Cairo is
balanced by a traveler's worldliness. (To say that the houses have an
air of expectancy is to say that the traveler doesn't know what they
anticipate, but he does know there is something about to happen.)
Even in the lines we have quoted the creation of that liminal voice
constitutes a mediation on history.[6]

The claim to authority which a narrating voice must make as it
represents reality to us is, I think, one of the clearest entryways we
have to the commentary on social authority which we are learning to
hear behind the novel as an institution. The attitude towards

authority is as visible formally as it is thematically, perhaps more so.
This retreat to the self-conscious use of a traditional authority seems
to me a phenomenon of tremendous importance for our understanding
of social forces as well. Curiously, there is a comparable develop-
ment in Iran, in spite of the fact that Persian and Arabic cultures
have virtually no commerce through translation, and that in Iran the
dialects of narration and dialogue in Persian are extremely close to
one another.

There has been since 1979 a series of trends in Persian writing,
both by exiles and at home, which experiment with forms that
approximate traditional storytelling. Readers of Mahmoud Dowlata-
badi's *Kelidar*, that mammoth, multi-volumed novel of tribal life in
Khorasan (north eastern Iran), speak of it as something like the
spare, unornamented style of the eleventh-century historian Bayhaqi.[7]
We might expect a more conservative use of language in the wake of
that revolution, but in fact the archaic style tends to be a tool used
for critical perspectives--which prefer to express themselves through
parable, distancing and indirection. An example which I wish
someone would translate is Sa'idi Sirjani's *Shayky San'an*,[8] a comic
retelling of the famous story in which the Sufi shaykh falls in love
with a Christian woman who makes her living tending swine. The
shaykh is pretty clearly a portrait of Khomeini, and the Christian
woman is named Qodrat Khanom, "Madame Power." (The disguise, I
fear, is slight.) One is, perhaps unexpectedly, more likely to find
novels in the western style, such as Ahmad Mahmoud's "Burnt Earth"
("Zamin-e sukhte," 1982)--his account of mobilization in the wake of
the Iraqi invasion--or Ebrahim Fassih's self-consciously Hemingwayes-
que "Sorayya in a Coma" (which has been sensitively translated into
English), among supporters of the regime, for whom a more "interna-
tional" approach is a way of legitimizing themselves to an unsym-
pathetic reader.

If there is a moral here (and to say there is a moral is simply to
say that a level of patterning, a visible abstract can be found behind
our examples) it is not that the Middle East is more flexible, or more
chaotic than us. The loose canons seem to exist whereever we look
closely at the novel: the problem is, I suspect, the novel itself. Its
role in world literature is a challenge to a materialist criticism
because it does seem to be a privileged form, a form which travels
with a mysteriously unchanging appeal from one culture to another.
We would like to be able to see literary forms as a response to social

structures, or at the very least as events in some visible relation to them. The recent article by Fredric Jameson in *Social Text* on the third-world novel in the age of multi-national capital suggests that non-western forms erupt in them, breaking through the imported overlay of realism like a return of the repressed.[9] One would like this to be true; it is the sort of thing one feels instinctively ought to happen. But what seems to erupt in the version of the novel which has developed in the Middle East is something measured, reserved, cerebral: when it flirts with traditional forms what emerges is something very like western modernism.

The novel seems to me an appropriate vehicle for helping us focus on the problems of internationalism and the sensitive relations between western readers and the third world. All students of non-western culture are faced with the double bind that to emphasize cultural distance risks the trap of exoticism (what we have come to call Orientalism); to ignore cultural differences tempts us to use western cultural patterns as norms. (Third world writers face an analogous double bind.) There is no escape from that dilemma except to acknowledge it. There is, however, some comfort in the fact that the strategies for outwitting the persistent complicity of the novel with institutional authority are recognizable internationally; they seem to be the same strategies on either side of the dominant discourse. What makes the novel a useful lens is not its clarity or neutrality; it is as cloudy and undefined at "home" as it is abroad. The transparency of form which constitutes its generic dream, that illusion of neutrality which is for many readers a trap, a source of ideological bad faith, is also its source of power.

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NOTES

[1]"Indigenous Third World Cultural Criticism(s): Against Hegemony or a New Hegemony?" *Critical Exchange,* 21 (Spring 1986): See pages 87-96 of this volume.

[2]See Ferial Ghazoul, *The Arabian Nights: A Structural Analysis* (Cairo: The Cairo Associated Institution for the Study and Presenta-

tion of Arab Cultural Values, 1980).

[3]Tzvetan Todorov, *The Poetics of Prose*, trans. Richard Howard (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977), pp. 66-79.

[4]For Iran, see Christophe Balay and Michel Cuypers, *Aux Sources de la nouvelle persane* (Institut Francais d'Iranologie de Teheran, 1983); for the Arab world, Roger Allen, *The Arabic Novel: An Historical and Critical Intorduction* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1982) and Hamdi Sakkut, *The Egyptian Novel and its Main Trends from 1913 to 1952* (Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press, 1971).

[5]Jamal Al-Ghitani, *Al-Zayni Barakat* (Cairo: Madbuli, 1974). The translation (unpublished) is by Samia Mehrez.

[6]See Amai Mehrez, "Al-Zayni Barakat: Narrative as Strategy," *Arab Studies Quarterly*, 8.2: 120-42.

[7]See the review of *Kelidar* in *Iranian Studies,* 18 (Spring-Autumn 1985); 432-37.

[8]Sa'idi Sirjani, *Shaykh San'an* (n.p. [San Francisco?]: Eastern Publishing Co., n.d.), in Persian.

[9]Fredric Jameson, "Third-World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism," *Social Text*, 15 (Fall 1986): 65-88.

" Then swift his haggard brow he turn'd
To the fair child, who fearless sat."

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THE RETRIEVAL OF NATURALISM: THE POLITICS OF NARRATIVE IN RADICAL AFRICAN FICTION

Neil Lazarus

In the field of African literary theory, no debate within recent years has been as hotly-contested, as fundamental, and as far-reaching in its practical implications, as that concerning language. The terms of the debate themselves are not new: as long ago as 1962, in a celebrated clash of views, the Nigerian critic Obi Wali argued that no literature written in a European language could consider itself African, and the South African writer and critic, Ezekiel Mphahlele, countered that for African writers to relinquish the European languages would be to participate actively in their marginalization and thereby to extend the legacy of colonialism. Over the course of the last decade, however, and largely through the interventions of the Kenyan writer Ngugi wa Thiong'o, this question of language has not only been renewed, but also for the first time placed center stage, as an *a priori* to any thinking about African literature.

On the left, Ngugi's position--which is essentially the same as Wali's--seems to have become the prevailing one. This situation strikes me as lamentable, since, with the best will in the world, I cannot help but regard Ngugi's arguments as simplistic and one-dimensional. Ngugi's case is premised upon a presupposition, which nobody on the left would wish to deny, as to the sociality of language; but it falls into difficulty in proceeding from this basis to a Manichean categorization of languages in Africa as either "European" or "African," "imposed" or "indigenous," "theirs" or "ours." "The question is this" Ngugi writes: "we as African writers have always complained about the new-colonial economic and political relationship to Euro-America. Right. But by continuing to write in foreign languages that pay homage to the metropolis, are we not

maintaining, on the cultural level, that neo-colonial slavish and cringing spirit?"[1] The properly dialectical answer to this rhetorically closed question is "no," or at least "not necessarily." As a multitude of examples drawn from Third World, feminist, working class, and regional literatures could testify, to use a language is not necessarily to "pay homage," still less to enslave oneself, to the dominant ideology of the culture within which it is inscribed[2]. The position that Ngugi assumes is unhistorical and frankly essentialistic. Literature written in English, French, or Portuguese, he argues, is not African, even when and where it has been composed by Africans. Instead, it must be called "Afro-European literature": "another hybrid tradition, a tradition in transition, a minority tradition that can only be termed Afro-European literature. . .[and that] can be defined as literature written by Africans in European languages in the era of imperialism."[3] To this, the best riposte still seems to me that of Chinua Achebe, who, when asked several years ago to defend his use of English as a literary language, responded that "I have been given this language and I intend to use it."[4] Achebe's feeling was that no language widely spoken and written, in Africa, by Africans, could be regarded as extrinsic or foreign, no matter what its derivation. English, he suggested, its history as a colonial language notwithstanding, had ceased to be a foreign language in Africa. It was no longer a European but had become an African language.

I find Achebe's argument attractive, not least because it is consistent with other recent discussions in Third World literature-- typically centering on such writers as Salman Rushdie, Buchi Emecheta, George Lamming, and Timothy Mo--concerning the emerging status of English as a world language[5]. This is not the time to discuss the theoretical implications that follow from such a conceptualization of English. I mention it in passing here only to note that, within radical circles at least, it has not been Achebe's subtle and historically sensitive commentary on the language question but Ngugi's more rigid and mechanistic one, that has become predominant. And this is important, in turn, because it is indicative of a pervasive dogmatism on the part of many of the theorists of African literature who would describe themselves as radical. Like the bulk of their mainstream colleagues, too many radical theorists of African literature remain untouched by the critical energies that have animated the theorization of the Third World (and minority) literatures in recent years; and they continue, accordingly, to be

more or less uncritically committed to assumptions that, in the broader context of these theorizations, have come to seem suspect if not patently untenable.

One such assumption concerns the continuing centrality of realism as a narrative mode within fiction. In radical African literary theory, as in its orthodox counterpart (although for different reasons), the apparently natural priority of realism is very largely taken for granted[6]. A good example of this privileging in operation is to be found in a recent article, "The Rediscovery of the Ordinary," by the South African writer and critic Njabulo Ndebele[7]. Despite its lavish use of Roland Barthes' *Mythologies*, Ndebele's essay is profoundly un-Barthesian in its retrieval and valorization of the critical ethic of realism. Setting out to discuss recent tendencies in black South African fiction, it builds its argument upon a primary distinction between two narrative modes: a first, that "merely reflect[s] the situation of oppression . . . merely document[s] it"; and a second, that "offers methods for [this situation's] redemptive transformation."[8] The former mode, which Ndebele labels "the spectacular," tends to convey the impression that circumstances are bleak and unalterable. It depicts the powerless in their powerlessness, as believing that "their situation seems hopeless."[9] The cardinal registers of "the spectacular" are, accordingly, moralism and self-pity. The second mode, by contrast, "the ordinary," is dynamic and disclosive. It goes "beyond spectacle in order to reveal the necessary knowledge of actual reality so that we can purposefully deal with it."[10] It is an analytical mode, not a documentary one, concerned to portray and not merely to report.

We may not recognize the terms "spectacular" and "ordinary," but we certainly recognize their dimensions and effectivities. In "The Rediscovery of the Ordinary," Ndebele has "rediscovered," not the ordinary, but Georg Lukacs' classic distinction between realism and naturalism. Basing himself on Engels' celebrated characterization of realism as implying, "beside truth of detail, the truth in reproduction of typical characters under typical circumstances,"[11] Lukacs, it will be recalled, had moved to define realism as the progressive avatar of truth in post-feudal (capitalist and socialist) art--an aesthetic mode uniquely sensitive to and expressive of the movement of history. Realism, in these terms, was to be distinguished from naturalism, which, in its concern to replicate the look--the "spectacle"--of everyday life, fetishized it, mistaking its surface for its deep

meaning. Lukacs was far from being dismissive of the ideological aspirations of naturalism, which he saw as stemming from the oppositionality of a sector of the petit-bourgeoisie. Oppositional writers from this class fraction, "who stood in greater or lesser proximity to the workers' movement"[12] attempted to express their radicalism in their work through objective representation of "the most crying abuses and grievances"[13] within capitalist society. As such, Lukacs argued, naturalism was to be faulted less for its intentions than for its execution of them. For in representing the blunt facts of social life, the naturalists lost sight of the social meaning of these facts. Their failure, accordingly, was a failure to render society in its totality, as a contradictory unity. In naturalism, Lukacs wrote, there was a "weakening of the relation between ideological principle and individual fact . . . . Bourgeois naturalism expressed the bourgeois writers' bafflement, his inability to discover a rational pattern in the multiplicity of facts."[14] The most significant narrative consequences of this inability were a determinate incapacity to grasp what Lukacs termed "the 'slyness' of reality,"[15] its overdetermined potentiality, on the one hand, and a tendency to represent society, as constituted, in its violence and enormity, as unalterable, on the other. Thus it is that we find Lukacs drawing attnetion, time and again, to the *defeatism* of naturalism, a defeatism whose ideological symptomaticity is not only, in the final analaysis, reactionary, but also profoundly different from that disclosed in realist art. In his famous essay, "Reportage or Portrayal," for example, Lukacs addressed the question of naturalism's defeatism in these terms:

> [In naturalism] the exposure of the bourgeoisie's repressive apparatus, which is made with good revolutionary intent, is given a false emphasis politically. It appears all-powerful and invincible. What is missing is the struggle and resistance of the working class. The proletariat is depicted as the impotent object of the judicial system. Indeed, in most cases what we see are not the genuine representatives of the class, but rather characters who have already been worn down and had the life beaten out of them, people incapable of resistance who have fallen into the lumpen-proletariat.[16]

To turn from this formulation to the field of African literature is immediately, one might suppose, to be able to discriminate between a

novel like Ngugi's *Petals of Blood* and another Kenyan work, *Going Down River Road*, by Meja Mwangi. And indeed, such Lukacsian discriminations have often been made. In them, predictably, *Petals of Blood* is celebrated as an example of socialist realism and *Going Down River Road* is castigated for its objectivism, which is read as politically retrograde. The question here, however, is whether this sort of reading is adequate to its object: can the discourse of naturalism in African literature be theorized in Lukacsian terms as a degraded form, one whose effective politicality emerges as contrary to its radical intent?[17]

At first glance, and looking at *Petals of Blood* and *Going Down River Road*, it might seem that it can. Certainly, the conclusions of the two novels can be taken to support a Lukacsian reading. *Petals of Blood*, the realist text, ends with an explicit evocation of the vigor and purpose of working-class militancy as Karega, its protagonist, a trade union activist, looks forward to the day when "it would be the workers and the peasants leading the struggle and seizing power to overturn the system . . . bringing to an end the reign of the few over the many. . .Then, only then, would the kingdom of man and woman really begin, they joying and loving in creative labour."[18] Possessed of this happy vision, he glories in the political awareness that "he was no longer alone."[19] *Going Down River Road*, by contrast, ends much as it had begun, in the squalor of a Nairobi slum. It is true that there is here, too, a coming together of sorts, but it is a coming together of Ben and Ocholla, two isolated and dissolute slum-dwellers, and it bespeaks nothing more than a mutual desire on each of their parts for comradeship in the face of overwhelming deprivation. Also seeming to substantiate the Lukacsian categorization is the fact that while Ngugi's narrative never ceases to remind us of the transformability of existing conditions, Mwangi's seems to place these conditions as irremediable, as when he speaks of the march of laborers to work every morning as "the endless routine trudge, the tramp of the damned at the Persian wheel."[20]

Yet to appropriate *Going Down River Road* as a naturalist text in the Lukacsian sense would be to misrepresent it fundamentally. It is not only that Mwangi's novel is altogether free of the moralism that Lukacs and, following him, Ndebele, claimed to be able to discern in all naturalist work. The truth is, rather, that in its defiant embrace of a naturalistic code that is not fatalistic, Mwangi's text is

subversive of the totalizing, rationalistic progressivism upon which the discourse of realism as Lukacs theorizes it and Ngugi practises it ultimately rests. What is evoked for us in *Going Down River Road* is the prospect of an oppositional politics whose content, unspecifiable in advance, will yet not be reducible to the centering categories, chiefly of class and nation, that inform a work like *Petals of Blood*. It is the indeterminacy of the political action to which it points--an indeterminacy of "how" and "when" and "where," though not of "if"-- that makes for the radicalism of Mwangi's novel. In this ideological respect--though not in respect of form--it closely resembles Ayi Kwei Armah's *The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born*. The spectral promise of insurrection haunts the margins of *Going Down River Road*. "*If you hold down one thing you hold down the adjoining*" Salman Rushdie observes in his novel, *Shame*. "In the end, though, it all blows up in your face."[21] In these terms, Mwangi's achievement may be said to consist in showing us characters being held down by the seamless web of oppression. The future explosion is then latent in his figuration of a resilience that is negative, contentless, illustrative only of sheer resistance:

> [Ocholla] leads Ben into an alleyway, past a heap of excrement, Ben wonders who squats here and when. They emerge in a dark back street that smells of dust though it is wet. This leads into another lane that in turn vomits them into River Road. The place is crowded with its usual mass of haunted, hungry faces, poverty-hypnotised faces, hateful faces, and fragrant stink of unwashed bodies and burst sewers. Though most shops are closed down, the ghostly wanderers are still here. This is one place where there will still be people left after doomsday. They have survived repeated police clean ups. They can take anything.[22]

Two points of emphasis need to be drawn here, in conclusion. The first of these is negative, the second positive. Negatively, then, it seems to me that we must insist that the new naturalism in African fiction--represented by such writers as Mwangi, Dambudzo Marechera, and Mongane Serote--cannot adequately be addressed through a critical lens that has been tuned, through frequent usage over the years, to see in a naturalist narrative only a localistic welter of abstract facts straining towards but failing to reach their social truth. The short stories that Bessie Head writes in the

naturalist idiom, for instance, in their implicit utopianism, their pragmatism, and their sensitivity to the materiality of everyday existence in the rural villages of Botswana that constitute their field of action, simply render inapplicable the conventional radical commentary on naturalism.

The mention of Bessie Head here enables us, moreover, to turn to the second of our two points of emphasis--the positive one. For Head's work does not simply retrieve the cogency of *naturalism* as a narrative idiom, it also actively throws into question the acceptability of *realism*. On the level of form, it does so through its problematization of the transparency of representation, a strategy whose significance those of us who have taken the thrust of post-structuralism's critiques of realism can readily appreciate. Yet it is on the level of content, through its disavowal of the progressivist ideologies that sustain realism as a discourse, that the radicalism of Head's challenge to the credentials of realism becomes full apparent. In "Critical Realism and Socialist Realism," Lukacs had argued that "the great works of realist art are a main factor in creating the intellectual and spiritual climate which gives human personality its specifically national character."[23] Of great interest here is the contention that the discourses of realism and nationalism cannot be separated, either historically or aesthetically. The contention might be extended still further: realism is necessarily aligned, not only with nationalism, but with all the other totalizing collectivities implicated in and by capitalist social existence. Among these latter, as Jean Baudrillard has so outrageously suggested, would have to be included Marxism: not without cause did Engels observe, in a famous utterance, that the German workers' movement was the heir to classical bourgeois philosophy. The significance of Head's work, in these terms--and the significance, I would argue, of naturalist writing in Africa today in general--is that, although it refuses to relinquish its radicalism, its commitment to a transindividual utopia, it is resolutely opposed to the totalizing collectivities affirmed by realism, viewing these as dominative, as alternative hegemonies rather than counter-hegemonies, to use Raymond Williams' valuable distinction.[24] In rejecting these progressivistic discourses, naturalism rejects also the master narrative of realism, which renders them. In this respect, it rejoins the critique of realism articulated in other Third World literatures. From quite different directions, thus, the project of Bessie Head's fiction may ultimately be said to emerge as consonant

with that of writers like Gabriel Garcia Marquez and Salman Rushdie.

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Notes

[1] Ngugi wa Thiong'o, "The Language of African Literature," *New Left Review*, 150, (March/April 1985), 124. For a fuller exposition of Ngugi's views, see his new book, *Decolonising the Mind. The Politics of Language in African Literature* (London: James Currey, 1986).

[2] See here the work of the Moroccan writer and critic, Abdelkebir Khatibi, who argues that the use of French by North African writers is capable of engendering an "irony which would not only be a form of revenge on the part of the colonized who had been oppressed and seduced by the West, but would also allow the francophone North African writer to distance himself with regard to the language by inverting it, destroying it, and presenting new structures such that the French reader would become a stranger in his own language" (quoted and translated by Barbara Harlow in her Introduction to Malek Alloula, *The Colonial Harem*, trans. Myrna Godzich and Wlad Godzich (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press), 1986, p. xviii).

[3] "The Language of African Literature," 125.

[4] Chinua Achebe, "The African Writer and the English Language," in *Morning Yet on Creation Day* (London: Heinemann Education Books, 1977), p. 62.

[5] See for example here Anthony Barnett's review article on Salman Rushdie in *Race and Class*, 26 (Winter 1985), 91-98.

[6] One of the very few critical reflections on realism as a narrative mode in African fiction is to be found in Gerald Moore's *Twelve African Writers* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1980), pp. 12-15.

[7] Njabulo Ndebele, "The Rediscovery of the Ordinary: Some New

Writings in South Africa," *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 12, (April 1986), 143-57.

[8] Ibid., 151

[9] Ibid., 152

[10] Ibid.

[11] Engels, quoted in Georg Lukacs, "Roportage or Portrayal," in *Essays on Realism*, trans. David Fernbach (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1981), p. 52.

[12] Ibid., p. 48.

[13] Ibid.

[14] Georg Lukacs, "Critical Realism and Socialist Realism," in *The Meaning of Contemporary Realism*, trans. John and Necke Mander (London: Merlin Press, 1977), p. 119.

[15] Ibid., p. 125.

[16] "Reportage or Portrayal," p. 54.

[17] A cautionary note on terminology might be in order here. Lukacs defines naturalism negatively, in opposition to his prior categorization of realism. The opposition is thus formal and diacritically derived. In following Lukacs here, I am not suggesting that we blind ourselves to the problems that attend his conceptualizations of realism and naturalism. On the contrary, the rationalism and expressivism of these conceptualizations plainly stand in need of critique. In the present context, however, I am more concerned with the consequences of a direct transposition of Lukacs' ideological reading of naturalism to the universe of African literature than with the admittedly more fundamental question of the philosophical cogency of his theory.

[18] Ngugi wa Thiong'o, *Petals of Blood* (London: Heinemann Educational Books, 1977), p. 344.

[19]Ibid., p. 345.

[20]Meja Mwangi, *Going Down River Road* (London: Heinemann Educational Books, 1980), p. 6.

[21]Salman Rushdie, *Shame* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1983), p. 189.

[22]*Going Down River Road*, p. 57.

[23]"Critical Realism and Socialist Realism," p. 103.

[24]Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), pp. 12-3. The ideological status of nationalism in the Third World is currently the subject of considerable debate. In his recent article, "Third-World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism," Fredric Jameson attempts to weigh the implications of this debate. His resolution, however, seems to me insufficiently motivated. Jameson is sensitive to the charge that nationalism might represent an alternative hegemonic as distinct from a counter-hegemonic tendency: "one cannot," he observes, "acknowledge the justice of the general poststructuralist assault on the so-called 'centered subject,' the old unified ego of bourgeois individualism, and then resuscitate this same ideological mirage of psychic unification on the collective level in the form of a doctrine of collective identity" ("Third-World Literature in the Era of Mulinational Capitalism," *Social Text*, 15, (Fall 1986), 78). Yet in his article Jameson moves to define all Third-World texts as, necessarily, "national allegories." It is not only that the texts he refers to (and there are very few of them) constitute a suspiciously selective sample. Rather, he provides no reasons for overruling his own caution, besides the less-than-convincing suggestion that since "a certain nationalism is fundamental in the third world," it becomes "legitimate to ask whether it is all that bad in the end" (65).

IN AND OUT OF ARABIC FICTION:
THE PLIGHT OF THE ARAB INTELLECTUAL

Muhammad Siddiq

The current debate over the role and responsibility of intellectuals in relation to the academic, social, and political structures of power that institute, legitimate, or prescribe their activities seems to engage Arab intellectuals in various parts of the Arab world as intensely as it engages their Western counterparts in Europe and the United States. From all evidence, the scope of the debate appears to be world-wide. Insofar as the Arab intellectual is concerned, however, the Western context in its broad historical diversity remains the most immediately relevant and constitutive. The reasons for this are of course many and varied but, at one remove or another, they all hark back to the historical encounter between the Arab East and the European West around the turn of the eighteenth century. More precisely, the brief but cataclysmic French occupation of Egypt (1798-1801) is generally cited as the event that set in motion both this fateful encounter and the modern epoch in Arab history.

Historical processes, we well know, never quite begin or end at precise points like our narrative accounts of them. With this general qualification in mind, one can readily acknowledge the compelling reasons for locating the beginning of modern Arab history at this high historical watershed. For one thing, it forced a complete reorientation of the Arab region, beginning with Egypt, away from the Ottoman sphere and toward Europe. According to the Egyptian thinker al-Sayyid Yasin, this sudden reorientation ruptured the traditional Arab epistemological system and set in motion an intellectual crisis from which modern Arab thought never fully

recovered.[1] Without necessarily endorsing the possible implications of this sweeping generalization, Arab intellectuals appear to share its sense of a chronic crisis in modern Arab thought. This crisis routinely flares up during severe national setbacks and sends Arab intellectuals scurrying for immediate answers to long standing cultural and philosophical questions.[2]

Since the catastrophic Arab defeat at the hands of Israel in 1967, this agonized intellectual search for the causes of the defeat has been in high gear. The quest acquired added urgency in the wake of the Islamic revolution in Iran, and especially in the aftermath of the 1982 Israeli invasion of Lebanon, the eighty-day long siege of Beirut, and the massacre of Palestinian civilians in the refugee camps of Sabra and Shatila. Two major interrelated questions have grounded the debate. The first, and by far more generative of the two, concerns the degree to which modern Arab thought has assimilated the categories, concepts, and scientific methodology of the secular West with which it has been familiar since the beginning of the encounter. The second is more theoretical and concerns the very adequacy of applying these Western concepts and methodologies in the analysis of non-Western societies in general and Arab society in particular.

In a recent colloquium sponsored by the Cairene literary periodical *Fusul* under the title "The crisis of creativity in contemporary Arab thought," intellectuals from various Arab countries addressed these issues at some length. Of the many important points raised in that colloquium, two in particular bear directly on our interest here. The first was made by Mustafa Safwan in the process of elaborating on Hegel's view that the more determined Europe becomes in attempting to impose its scientific hegemony on the rest of the world, the greater are the chances that particularist movements will emerge in various parts of the world to oppose and challenge this hegemony. Among the various ideologies currently operative in the Arab world, Islam alone, according to Safwan, possesses such a distinctive particularity as to be able to play an adversarial role in opposition to the global hegemony of the scientific West.[3] The evident success of resurgent Islamic fundamentalism in Iran and its impressive show of force in Lebanon seem to corroborate this observation. The second point was made by al-Sayyid Yasin who attributes the current crisis in Arab thought to the mechanical application of borrowed Western concepts such as liberalism and

Marxism to the Arab reality. Because they were taken out of their proper historical context and arbitrarily applied to the Arab scene, these concepts never struck deep roots in the Arab soil. "Were we to look for ten original books on liberal or Marxist Arab thought, we will be hard pressed to find them," Yasin argues.[4] His statements imply that the failure lies not so much in the nature of what was borrowed from the West, or in the act of borrowing itself, but rather in the manner of applying what was borrowed in the new context. Yet a third Arab intellectual, Muhammad Abid al-Jabiri, argues in a separate article in the same issue of *Fusul* that the crisis in contemporary Arab thought stems from the fact that in attempting to analyze contemporary Arab reality Arab intellectuals rely exclusively on either the Islamic or the secular Western tradition, both of which, according to him, are in fact alien to that reality.[5] From his recent publications, al-Jabiri appears to have embarked on a farreaching revisionist project the full extent and impact of which cannot be fully gauged yet.[6]

How does this lively intellectual debate enter into modern Arabic literature? To pose the question thus is to presuppose an *a priori* separation between the intellectual, political, and literary realms. In point of fact such compartmentalization is completely alien to Arabic literature, whether modern or ancient. Much like his Islamic and pre-Islamic predecessors, the modern Arab poet or writer champions social and political causes as a matter of course, not choice. From a theoretical as well as a practical point of view, therefore, it may be more rewarding in studying this literature to investigate how the political and social components of history are transmuted into artistic and aesthetic objects than to insist on an *a priori* separation of these realms. For, let it be said unequivocally: shorn of its political and ideological role in abetting the national struggle for self-determination and independence, and its Promethean commitment to articulate the civilizational mission of the Arab nation in modern history, modern Arabic literature loses much of its intrinsic value. This is by no means to suggest that this literature is without aesthetic appeal or to play down the value of this appeal in Arabic and all literature. It is merely to emphasize a well-known fact without waxing apologetic in the process.

By all accounts and standards, Arab intellectuals constitute a small and heterogeneous group of individuals whose dependence for livelihood on teaching positions in Arab universities owned and run

by Arab governments makes them perhaps even more marginal than intellectual groups in other societies and significantly curtails their freedom to pursue their intellectual activity unhindered. (It is interesting to investigate whether there is a connection between this precarious standing of the Arab intellectuals and their frequent turn to fiction to express their views and ideas.)[7] This phenomenon may also suggest that the novel, an imported genre from the West whose debut in Arabic dates no farther back than the beginning of this century, has been so thoroughly acclimatized in Arab culture that it has in effect replaced poetry as the diwan, i.e. record or register, of the Arabs in modern history. But, as the foregoing remarks may have already made clear, the Arab novelist is never merely an impartial scribe or a passive witness of the social scene he inscribes in his fiction. With varying degrees of directness, all Arab novels engage contemporary Arab history in an attempt to change or influence its course and outcome. For this reason, the image of the intellectual one frequently encounters in Arabic fiction appears highly symbolic and paradigmatic. This is particularly true in novels that thematize the cultural conflict between East and West.

Within the main tradition of the Arabic novel there is a sub-tradition that specializes precisely in dramatizing this cultural encounter.[8] The standard thematic feature of species in this sub-tradition is the journey of a fictional Arab protagonist to the West in pursuit of higher education. Once there, the contrast between his traditional religious background and the secular life-style of the metropolitan West plunges the young and impressionable protagonist into a severe identity crisis. In the throes of this crisis, he often undertakes a thorough reexamination of his inherited cultural values in light of his newly-acquired knowledge and experience. As it unfolds, the personal crisis invariably accumulates symbolical significance and figuratively enacts the larger and more general cultural encounter between East and West.

Now this cultural terrain was repeatedly traversed by actual Arab intellectuals long before it became a standard feature of the Arabic novel. The historical record of the encounter between pioneering Arab intellectuals and the West has been painstakingly documented by such eminent scholars as Albert Hourani, Ibrahim Abu-Lughod, and Hisham Sharabi, among others.[9] Its fictional dramatization appears primarily in the works of Arab authors who actually experienced it, and thus, inevitably contains a recognizable autobiographical element. Awareness

of this fact enjoins us further against drawing a sharp line of separation between the experience and views of the Arab intellectual in and out of Arabic fiction. For, even when it is effectively concealed behind or underneath the formal properties of the literary text, this connection and the ideological import it carries are never wholly invisible and can, and should, be made conscious in the act of criticism. In the novels I will be discussing here, for example, the manner of representing the "Self" and the "Other" can generally help us unearth the points at which the fictional intersects with the actual.

The first Arabic novel to thematize the cultural conflict between East and West is Tawfiq al-Hakim's *Usfur min al-Sharq* (Bird of the East, 1938). In this novel an ontological cultural difference appears to separate East from West and, since this difference appears irreconcilable, European civilization is categorically rejected. The ground on which this wholesale rejection stands within the contrived fictional action is the interpersonal relation between Muhsin, an Egyptian student in Paris, and Suzy Dupont, a French woman he briefly befriends during a temporary separation between her and her French male friend. Her eventual reconciliation with this friend puts an end to her relation with Muhsin, who readily finds in her behavior ample evidence for his preconceived ideas about her, European women, Europe, and Western civilization in general. The novel consists of little more than this "cultural comparison."

To al-Hakim's credit, it must be noted, that he makes little effort to hide the ideological substance behind the thin fictional veneer of his novel. From the beginning of his literary career, he has consistently held an elitist view of life and literature in which the artist enjoys a privileged position among the elite for which he produces literary, philosophical, and cultural formulas and paradigms from his "ivory tower."[10] Thus, in this novel, Suzy stands directly for Europe, "this blond woman," who is said to be culturally the "offspring of intercourse between Asia and Africa" and whose fickleness is a function of the "addictive" materialistic civilization she is now administering in ever larger doses to the rest of the world.

Against this "corrupting" materialism of the West, al-Hakim poses the "spirituality of the East." Ingenuously, he makes a deracinated Russian emigre named--what else? Ivan, of course--rather than Muhsin, pose this putative spirituality of the East as an alternative to the deadly materialism of the West. If you allow the pun, this

technical maneuver aims to kill two birds with one stone. First, coming from a Russian refugee from the Bolshevik Revolution, the condemnation singles out the Marxist phase of Western materialism precisely because it is uncompromisingly historicistic and earthbound. ("Marx tossed people a bomb, the bomb of materialism, and hatred, and anguish, and rashness when he threw heaven out of their calculations and made them understand that this earth was all that counted.")[11] Second, through Ivan, al-Hakim can propagate an Orientalist myth of the East both he, and Muhsin, know to be completely false and utterly incompatible with the actual historical reality. This myth prevails in the book in spite of Muhsin's fainthearted attempt to disabuse Ivan of it precisely because al-Hakim himself subscribes to it.

This contrived superficial representation thoroughly falsifies the complex historical reality by abstracting out of it all traces of the actual conflict between colonizer and colonized, oppressor and oppressed, in place of which it postulates a permanent, irreconcilable, metaphysical conflict between East and West, man and woman, materialism and spirituality, artist and all other mortals. The Eastern spirituality it contrasts to Europe's materialism is presumably Islamic, or, more generally in the discourse of Ivan, monotheistic and prophetic. Aside from the gross inaccuracy involved in representing Islam in such abstract immaterial terms, it should be noted that al-Hakim's outlook is not religious. Had this been the case, the wholesale rejection of Western civilization would at least have enjoyed a degree of consistency, whatever value that may have. For, in another novel published five years earlier, *Awdat al-Ruh* (Return of the Spirit, 1933) al-Hakim valorizes Egypt's pharaonic, not Islamic, past as the authentic source of national inspiration for resurrection. What matters here is to notice al-Hakim's manipulation of Islam and monotheism in his ideological attack on Marxism which he packages as a categorical rejection of Western civilization in its entirety on spiritual grounds.

Were it not for two important facts, this patently mediocre novel, with its flagrant ideological import, would have been of little more than historical interest. The first fact is that the novel's projection of the cultural encounter in terms of sexual relations between a "masculine" East and a "feminine" West unfortunately sets a thematic pattern for the treatment of this subject in all future Arabic novels.[12] (It will undoubtedly be very interesting to explore

the origins of this pattern especially in light of the wide-spread Orientalist myth about the Orient's "femininity," "seductiveness," and "fecundity.") The second fact is that in 1974 al-Hakim published a book entitled *Awdat al-Wa i* (The Return of Consciousness) in which he indicts Nasirism as severely as he had indicted Western civilization in *Bird of the East*. The conscious evocation of the author's earlier novel *The Return of the Spirit* practically exhausts the literary value of this slender volume. Moreover, the brief preface to the book is even more misleading because it presents the book as memoirs comprised of "testimony and feelings . . . brought from memory" and covering the period "from Wednesday, 23 July 1952 to Sunday, 23 July 1972" when in fact it is an outrightly tendentious diatribe, and an execrably written one, at that.

But literary value is not what admirers sought or found in this book by "Egypt's foremost writer." Bayly Winder, who translated both works into English, sums up the value of *The Return of Consciousness* in his "Translator's Introduction" thus:

> Awdat al-Wa i . . . is the intellectual forerunner of "Sadatism." It marks the first public, published repudiation of "Nasirism" to emerge from the upper-class, liberal, intelligentsian, Westernized sectors of Egyptian society. As a published document it broke Egypt's group solidarity, and created a sensation. Its message is simple: We Egyptians were taken in by the promise of the revolution of 1952, and Jamal Abd al-Nasir, for all his personal charisma, imposed on us a police state which pursued failing policies in all directions. We, the intellectuals of Egypt, are to be rebuked for having accepted it all so passively at the time, but Egypt has now regained consciousness and can begin to move forward again.[13]

Al-Hakim's personal hypocrisy and opportunism--evident in the fact that for eighteen long years, while many decent Egyptian intellectuals languished in prison, he had gratefully accepted innumerable honors and benefits from the same Nasir he so loathingly denounces here--concern me less than the inconsistency of his intellectual outlook. His emergence in Winder's description as the spokesman of the "Westernized" segment of the Egyptian intelligentsia shows his wholesale rejection of Western civilization in *Bird of the*

East to have been merely a tactic to enhance the effectiveness of his attack on Marxism by grounding it in a presumed Islamic spirituality. The main target of al-Hakim's present attack is really the Arab nationalist component of Nasirism, which, as an ideology, and notwithstanding its many and grave shortcomings in practice, represented the most complete and coherent expression of Arab national aspirations for liberation and national independence from colonial and post-colonial hegemony. As an avowedly secular ideology, it is only natural that Arab nationalism should arouse the implacable hostility of sectarian ideologies and movements such as Zionism, Islamic fundamentalism, Christian phalangists, and reactionary Arab regimes such as Sa udi Arabia, Jordan, etc. How closely tied this hostility is to global hegemonic interests we can learn from the manner in which al Hakim's two works have travelled to the West.

The translation of a text from one language into another not only valorizes its discourse in the receiving culture but inevitably enhances its standing in its home culture. When this inter-cultural transaction occurs between two cultures separated by an ideological divide, as is the case between Arab nationalism and imperialism in all its forms and guises, one should be doubly alert to the possibility of ideological motivation behind the whole transaction. This vigilance would appear to be amply justified in the present case. For, as the head of an American consulting firm that maintains extensive contacts with the Sa udi monarchy and the other gulf emirates and sheikhdoms,[14] one does not have to look too far for the ideological and material interests behind Winder's "literary" and "cultural" interests in these two specific works of al-Hakim. The title of a book Winder wrote on Sa udi Arabia, *Sa udi Arabia in the Nineteenth Century*,[15] clearly shows how easily he can bend "scholarship" to serve his ideological agenda. For, as a state, Sa udi Arabia came into being only in 1932. Before that date, and throughout its recorded history, the whole region was simply known as the Arab Peninsula. This is how it appears in the works of both Arab and foreign scholars and historians.[16] Nor is this rewriting of the history of the Arab Peninsula from the Sa udi point of view confined to this book. In an Arabic grammar text-book of which he is a co-author, we find a practice passage eulogizing Ibn Sa ud as "a great and upright king" of "noble origin" and valorizing his resolve to free "the country of his fathers and grandfathers" from the usurpation of Ibn al-Rashid.[17] In yet another passage "The Saudi Arabian state" is said to have "a

king (who is) like (the) lion in war. Between him and the people is a great love."[18] It should come as no surprise perhaps to find in this same text-book, intended, incidentally, for the use of beginning Western students of the Arabic language, expressions that reek with class and sex prejudice such as "Do your work today without delay, do not listen what the leaders of the strike say, and cooperate with the sincere ones among your brothers"[19] and "he hit the maid," "he hit a maid."[20]

My purpose behind this lengthy "genealogical" digression has been to uncover the ideological and material motivation behind the writing of these two books by al-Hakim as well as the motivation behind their subsequent translation into English and ultimate travel to the West. Wittingly or otherwise, the image of the Arab these two books project reinforces the one Edward Said discovered inscribed in the discourse of Orientalism. The Arab appears as contradictory, irrational, fatalistic, and permanently shrouded in an ontological otherness here as he does there. It is imperative, therefore, to expose this practice for what it is, namely: a concerted revisionist campaign to delegitimate Arab nationalist discourse with its secular outlook and institute in its place a reactionary discourse consecrating the Sa udi economic, political, and cultural hegemony over the Arab world. The 1967 defeat of the nationalist camp represented by Nasir gave a tremendous boost to this campaign which has not abated yet. Much of the current malaise Arab intellectuals experience at present emanates directly from this relentless campaign. Because of his widespread fame as a writer and a playwright, al-Hakim appears to have been carefully chosen to render to imperialism on the Arab scene the same service V.S. Naipaul renders it on the Islamic one.

In contrast to al-Hakim's "rejection" of Western civilization, Taha Husayn's advocacy of total and immediate espousal of this civilization enjoys the persuasive power of true conviction. Before expressing this conviction explicitly in his book *Mustaqbal al-Thagafa fi Misr* (The Future of Education in Egypt,1927), he sought to demonstrate in action the value of applying the scientific methodology of the secular West to a correct understanding of Arab culture and history. Adopting an uncompromisingly Cartesian skeptical stance towards traditionally sanctioned truths, he dared the unthinkable by questioning some fundamental aspects of Islam and Islamic history in *Fi Al-Shir Al-Jahili* (On Pre-Islamic Poetry, 1926). A much less daring book by another Azharite, Ali Abd al-Raziq, which mildly suggested

the possibility of separation of state and religion in Islam, had caused
a great public uproar and resulted in the expulsion of the author
from his teaching position at al-Azhar and from the ranks of the
ulama altogether when it was published a year earlier. Although he
was interrogated by a public prosecutor, Taha Husayn was never
indicted and, unlike Abd al-Raziq who refused to permit a reprinting
of his book in his life-time, he allowed additional printings of the
book to appear, albeit under a slightly modified title. Also unlike Abd
al-Raziq, who more or less withdrew from the public scene in the
wake of the debacle, Taha Husayn remained in the limelight for
decades to come and played a major role in acclimatizing secular
Western thought in modern Arab culture.

When his "fictional" dramatization of this conflict appeared in
such works as *Adib* and *al-Ayyam* however, it presented only a pale
copy of the actual drama that preceded it. The primary innovation
this fictional treatment adds to the essentially autobiographical
account is stylistic. Husayn habitually splits the fictional protagonist
of his works into two. The first usually travels to Europe in an
inappropriate frame of mind and ends up enjoying only the superficial
aspects of European civilization before he is completely devastated by
it. The second is usually spared the ill-fate of his "(our) friend" by a
combination of sound natural disposition and and good luck. While his
natural open-mindedness enables him to see the positive aspects of
European culture, his good luck causes his path to intersect with that
of the one European woman who was destined to become his wife for
a long and happy life.

A zigzagging but unbroken line connects the trials of Ali Abd al-
Raziq and Taha Husayn in the first quarter of this century and the
trials of two other Arab intellectuals in more recent years. In 1968
the Yale-educated professor of philosophy at the American University
of Beirut, Sadiq Jalal al-Azm, published a book entitled *Naqd al-fikr
al-oini* (Critique of Religious Thought) in which he critiqued certain
obscurantist and metaphysical views on religion prevalent in modern
Arab thought. As a result, he was brought to trial in Beirut on the
charge of inciting for sectarian strife. And although he was acquitted
at the end of the trial, which lasted two years, he was never able to
regain his teaching position.

Far worse was the fate of the seventy-six-year-old Sudanese
Muslim thinker, Mahmud Muhammad Taha, who was accused of heresy
and hanged in Khartoum in January 1985. His "heresy" consisted of

distributing "a pamphlet that opposed the way in which Islamic law
was being implemented in Islam."[21] At that time, we may recall, the
corrupt dictator of Sudan, Ja far Numairi, was trying, with active Sa
udi support and encouragement, to turn the republic of Sudan into an
Islamic imamate with himself, as Imam, at the head of its
government. Fortunately, he was deposed just in time to save the
Sudan from retreating into the dark ages.

Yahia Haqqi's delightful novella *Qindil Um Hashim* (The Saint's
Lamp, 1944) tries to chart a middle course between al-Hakim's
categorical rejection of Western civilization and Taha Husayn's total
embrace of it. Isma il, the Egyptian protagonist of this novella,
travels to England to study medicine and, once there, he befriends a
blond English female student named Mary. Under the charm of both
Western science and Mary, Isma il undergoes a religious-cultural
crisis as a result of which faith in science completely replaces his
previous faith in God and religion. Mary plays a decisive role in this
development. Though she comes across more as a composite
stereotype of the liberated, independent, and extroverted European
woman than an individualized character, Mary evidently enjoys the
author's full sympathy and approval. This positive view of her
remains undiminished even when she forsakes Isma il for another
man. Isma il himself, though badly bruised by the betrayal at first,
eventually comes around to seeing Mary's conduct for what it is,
namely, an expression of her absolute right to her own soul and
body.

Upon his return to Egypt as an ophthalmologist, Isma il suffers a
severe cultural shock when he sees his old mother applying oil taken
from the lamp of a saint's shrine to the trachomic eyes of his cousin
Fatima. Enraged by this superstitious practice he rushes to the
shrine, smashes the lamp, and returns to apply his medical expertise
to Fatima's eyes, cocksure of its scientific effectiveness. Rather than
improve, Fatima's condition worsens steadily until she nears blindness.
In despair, Isma il gives up the treatment, becomes estranged from
his family and society, sells his medical equipment, and seriously
contemplates leaving his homeland permanently for the West. A
profound insight into the source of the crisis averts this drastic
measure and paves the way for Isma il's reconciliation with his family
and culture. The problem, Isma il realizes at a particularly anguishing
moment, lies in his constant comparison of Egypt to England and his
perverse desire to have Egyptians behave as if they were English.

This being unrealistic, the only solution to Isma il's spiritual and
intellectual conflict is obviously to desist from comparing the two
incomparable societies. In the optimistic outlook of the novella, this
solution takes the more positive form of a cultural synthesis between
science and faith, which metonymically stand for West and East
respectively. Armed with this synthesis, Isma il resumes his medical
treatment of Fatima's eyes and soon enough the combined
prescription of oil from the saint's lamp and Western medications
achieve wondrous results. When Fatima's eyes are fully cured she and
Isma il get married and live happily ever after, with a large number
of children to boot.

Elsewhere I have shown that this simplistic solution appears to
make sense only on the superficial thematic level of the novella and
readily deconstructs under careful scrutiny.[22] What matters here is
to note that Haqqi's approach to the conflict is more historical than
that of al-Hakim or Husayn. Beside its acknowledged fine artistry, the
novella's lasting contribution to the study of the cultural encounter
may be its insistence that cultural differences cannot be wished away
nor do they need automatically or necessarily to be translated into
value judgments that might, if only inadvertently, promote ethnic and
national chauvinism.

By far the finest Arabic novel in this vein is al-Tayyib Salih's
masterpiece *Mawsimal-Hijra ila al-Shamal* (Season of Migration to the
North, 1966). The two Sudanese protagonists of this novel travel to
London in pursuit of education at different times and come away
from the encounter with Western culture with completely different
experiences. The difference between the two protagonists is not
merely personal but rather symbolical of the difference between the
two generations the protagonists represent. The first, Mustafa Said,
was born on the very day the British defeated the Sudanese
nationalist forces in 1898, was educated entirely by the British in
Khartoum, Cairo, and London, and can be properly understood only in
the context of the colonial situation. By merely aping the West's
scientific and rational methods, he manages to enter the *sanctum
sanctorium* of the British educational system, Oxford University, and
to fake his way through, all the way up to the highest spheres of
intellectual life in London during the heyday of the British Empire.
The end for which he thus applies his mind is to wreak the most
satisfying revenge he can imagine on the colonial masters of his
homeland, namely, sexual possession of the colonizer's women. This,

Mustafa Said does aplenty, causing in the process the death of four
English women who come into sexual contact with him.

In contrast to Mustafa Said, the narrator's encounter with
Western culture is completely devoid of the tension of the colonial
situation. Being a representative of the younger generation that
grew up under national independence, he can partake of the colonial
experience only vicariously through Mustafa Said. Having wandered
for the greater part of his life through the world, Mustafa Said
finally returns to a small Sudanese village on the Nile and attempts
to strike roots in a homeland to which he is culturally alien. It is
there that he meets the narrator after the latter returns from a
seven-year stay in London, where he received a Ph.D. in English
literature but successfully avoided any meaningful contact with the
British and their culture. Somehow, though, Mustafa Said gets him
embroiled in his life-story, and the narrator eventually confronts and
assimilates Mustafa's experience into his own.

Any attempt to reduce this fine work of literature to a set of
ideas or discursive statements is bound to do grave violence to its
artistry and suggestive richness. But if we must conclude our brief
discussion of it with one or two general observations, we would do
well to note that it completely problematizes the cultural encounter it
thematizes. Its very title suggests this complexity. The presence of
the north-south axis in the novel thoroughly upsets the traditional
axis of East-West on which the cultural encounter had been
habitually enacted in Arabic fiction. Moreover, while it severely
indicts colonialism and the cultural and intellectual enterprises that
support it, the novel insists on the need to confront the legacy of
colonialism and come to grips with it.

An indirect but compelling tribute to al-Tayyib Salih's profound
and exhaustive treatment of the cultural encounter theme appears in
the only serious Arabic novel in this vein to have appeared since
Season of Migration to the North. This is Hanna Mina's novel *Al-
Rabi wa-al-kharif* (Spring and Autumn, 1984). While the title of
Mina's novel readily evokes that of Salih's, the experience the former
dramatizes is completely different from that of the latter. For one
thing, the protagonist of *Spring and Autumn* is a Syrian intellectual
living in political exile, first in Peking and then in Budapest. Since
neither of these socialist capitals was ever implicated in the colonial
legacy, more than geography is involved in this change of the
protagonist's destination. Thus, while the encounter with the

capitalistic West inevitably plunges the Arab intellectual into an identity crisis, as we have seen, the experience of the protagonist of Mina's novel shores up his identity and the example of social justice he observes in both capitals, especially in Budapest, confirms his faith in the future of his own society and the rest of humanity. Thus fortified, he decides to put an end to his exile by returning to his own society to immerse himself in its struggle for freedom and dignity. His determination remains unshaken when the Syrian secret police pick him up for interrogation upon arrival at Damascus airport on the eve of the 1967 Israeli-Arab war.

Other Arab novelists are also moving in new directions away from the traditional encounter between East and West. Thus, for example, the hero of Sun alla Ibrahim latest novel *Beriut Beriut* (1984) is an Egyptian writer who travels to Beirut to publish a novel that he could not get published in Sadat's Egypt. Upon arriving in Beirut he becomes involved in an artistic project of producing a documentary on the Lebanese civil war from the perspective of the progressive forces. Outside his role as a compiler of the documentary, the fictional intellectual is neither significant nor interesting. In fact, he becomes outrightly perverse. The message thus seems clear: direct involvement in the actual struggles raging in history is the Arab intellectual's sole avenue to relevance and significance.

An identical message emerges from the second volume of *Allaz* by the Algerian writer al-Tahir Wattar. Published in 1982, the novel dramatizes the struggle of Algerian students and intellectuals to preserve the progressive social vision of the Algerian revolution and prevent it from succumbing to the pressure of the reactionary religious right. Here again the contrived fictional action relates directly to the actual historical reality which it in fact seeks to influence.

I can think of no better way to conclude this discussion than by noting that the trend towards active involvement in politics we detected in recent Arabic novels reflects an increasingly more visible trend among Arab intellectuals at present. One positive expression of this development has in the last few years taken the form of declarations addressed by gatherings of Arab intellectuals to the Arab governments demanding respect for the basic human rights of the Arab citizen. The latest such declaration came out of a conference that took place in Cairo between the 17th and 19th of May, 1985. While it may not strike people who take such matters as freedom of

thought and expression for granted, it is well-worth remembering that such is not the case in many parts of the world. On the occupied West Bank of the Jordan, for example, the Israeli military government routinely closes down Palestinian universities and disrupts education and intellectual activities. But Israel is not alone in this. Only last spring the Jordanian army opened fire on students demonstrating against tuition hikes at the University of Yarmuk in Irbid, killing nineteen students (the Jordanian government acknowledged the death of only three) and arresting hundreds more. Nor was this all. In the wake of this brutality, the Jordanian regime summarily dismissed fourteen professors and rounded up tens of leftist and patriotic intellectuals, many of whom still remain in detention without trial or due process of law. Many Arab intellectuals in and out of Arabic fiction have taken a stand against oppression and degradation and paid dearly for their courage and vision. An exorbitant price, no doubt, but one many Arab intellectuals in and out of Arabic fiction consider well-worth paying for restoring to fiction its vital relevance to life.

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Notes

[1]*Fusul*, 4 (April-May-June 1984), 206.

[2]The word "azma" (crisis) seems to cluster almost automatically to the word "muthaqqaf" (intellectual) in Arabic. See for example Abdallah Laroui, *The Crisis of the Arab Intellectual: Traditionalism or Historicism*, tr. Diarmid Cammell, (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1974); "The Crisis of Creativity in Contemporary Arab Thought" *Fusul,* 4 (April-May-June, 1984), 203-217; *Al-Adab*, 1-3 (1983), a special issue entitled "The Intellectuals and Defeat" devoted entirely to the response of Arab intellectuals to the crisis in the aftermath of the siege of Beirut.

[3]*Fusul*, ibid. 209.

[4]Ibid, 206.

[5]Ibid, 107-127.

[6]Muhammad Abid al-Jabiri, *Takwin al- Aql al- Arabi 1: Naqd al-Aql al- Arabi* (Formation of the Arab Mind 1: Critique of the Arab Mind) (Beirut: Dar al-Tali a, 1984).

[7]Abdalla Laroui, Lutfi al-Khuli, Ilyas Khuri, Jabra Ibrahim Jabra, Halim Barakat, and Ghalib Halasa are only a few of the Arab intellectuals who have written fiction. As for intellectuals who write poetry, it may suffice to mention the name of Adunis.

[8]Jurj Tarabishi's book *Sharq wa-Gharb: Rujula wa-unutha* (East and West: Masculinity and Femininity), (Beirut: Dar al-Tali a, 1977) deals with Arabic novels that make up·this sub-tradition.

[9]Albert Hourani, *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age, 1798-1939* (London, 1962); Ibrahim Abu-Lughod, *Arab Rediscovery of Europe: A Study in Cultural Encounters,* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1963); Hisham Sharabi, *Arab Intellectuals and the West: The Formative Years, 1875-1914* (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1970).

[10]For many years Tawfiq al-Hakim wrote a weekly column in the Egyptian daily "Akhbar al-Yawm" under this very title.

[11]Tawfiq al-Hakim, *Bird of the East*, tr. R. Bayly Winder (Beirut, Khayats, 1966), p. 69.

[12]See Tarabishi, op. cit., pp. 5-47.

[13]Tawfiq al-Hakim, *The Return of Consciousness*, tr. Bayly Winder (New York and London: New York University Press, 1985). p. vii.

[14]The brochure that advertises the "new ventures, marketing, and finance in the Middle East" of Mr. Winder's East West Group, ltd., dutifully shows Dr. Winder smiling as he shakes the hand of king Faysal.

[15]Bayly R. Winder, *Sa udi Arabia in the Nineteenth Century* (London: Macmillan; New York: St. Martin's Press, 1965).

[16]See for example William R. Polk, *The Arab World* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1980), p. 146.

[17]Farhat J. Ziadeh and R. Bayly Winder, *An Introduction to Modern Arabic* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957), pp. 124-125.

[18]Ibid. p. 46.

[19]Ibid. p. 133.

[20]Ibid. p. 19.

[21]Judith Miller, "The Embattled Arab Intellectual," *The New York Times Magazine,* June 9, 1985.

[22]See Muhammad Siddiq, "Deconstructing the Saints Lamp," *Journal of Arabic Literature,* 17, (1986). See also M.M. Badawi, "The Lamp of Umm Hashim: The Egyptian Intellectual between East and West," *Journal of Arabic Literature,* 1 (1970), 145-161.

INTRODUCTION

Barbara Harlow

Most of the gestures toward "opening the canon" of western literature to hitherto excluded groups of works and writers, gestures which have marked a specific and important practice within the United States academic and disciplinary system, have thus far been directed largely to the domain of what is commonly referred to as "literature." Publishing and the translation industry bear witness to this phenomenon. Novels, poetry anthologies, short story collections are beginning to be made available in sufficient abundance to allow for curricular implementation of courses on "third world literature" and even African literature or Latin American literature in translation. Very little, however, in the way of "theoretical production" from the non-western or non-hegemonic world has been made similarly available and the literary works become as a consequence the raw material for the theory factories and manufactures of first world critics. "Theory," that is, still remains in some way as if the proper domain of the western critic and intellectual.

The papers introduced here were originally presented at a panel under the aegis of the Society for Critical Exchange at the annual meeting of the MMLA held in Saint Louis in November 1985. Although each paper examines a different geo-political arena, each of them raises the critical question of the relationship between theory and practice, but poses as well the further challenge of the complications to such a relationship introduced by the distorted relationships of power in the contemporary historical context. Mary Layoun in "Indigenous Third World Cultural Criticism(s)" suggests the general discrepancies and adequations elaborated in the variant textual practices of writers and critics from both first and third worlds. Marilyn Jimenez, in turn looks at the "hesitations of theory" in the

work of Edouard Glissant and his insistence on the need to acknow-
ledge the historical specificity of Caribbean theoretical practice. It
is this specificity which Neil Lazarus examines in his paper "From
Nationalism to National Culture: Intellectuals and Social Responsibility
in Postcolonial Africa." Lazarus focuses on the social contradictions
and ideological dilemmas faced by writers in the newly independent
African states.

All three papers demonstrate importantly the internal dynamic of
theoretical questions in the third world and their global context,
suggesting perhaps that the very formulation of "third world theory"
may itself be too polarizing. Is there in the "theorizing" a different
agenda, different priorities, a different sense of urgency from those
which impel theoretical developments in the West? Here it may be
necessary to speak of "strategy" rather than of "theory."

It is hoped that this preliminary foray by SCE into the question
of "third world theorizing" will provoke further critical attention to
these issues and continued challenge to the "theoretical" dominance of
western criticism in the global arena of intellectual practices. It is
in this context that SCE will sponsor two panels at the 1986 meeting
of the MLA in New York City on the topic of "Theory and Strategy
in the Third World."

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INDIGENOUS THIRD WORLD CULTURAL CRITICISM(S):
AGAINST HEGEMONY OR A
NEW HEGEMONY?

Mary Layoun

Using language to deprive another of language
is the first step in legal murder.

Roland Barthes
Mythologies

In constructing a starting point from which to discuss the
problematic of "third world theorizing," I'd like to cite, in addition to
Barthes' provocatively thoughtful statement above, two frequent, if
slightly less thoughtful, questions. Actually, they are declarative
statements disguised as questions:

Does the third world produce any *real* literature?

and:

Is it possible to discuss these texts in terms of a critical theory-
-isn't description all you can do?

In fact, these pseudo-questions suggest what is at issue in any
consideration of theory in and of the "third world." That is: hegem-
ony and the ideological construction of "real literature" and the
refusal of theoretical or critical (though not *literary*) legitimacy for
works outside the Western canon. The inevitability of description for
what is then bracketed as exotica is almost as blatant an ideological
statement of prejudice as is the assertion and maintenance of an

isolated category of "literature" itself--"real," "third world" or otherwise. And so, there will be no arguments presented here for the legitimacy of yet another field of intellectual and literary study, another object of desire--"third world" literature.

On the contrary, what I would like to suggest is that we should not necessarily only be about the task of legitimizing third world texts (and cultures, societies, and nations) by arguing for their inclusion in the Western academic canon. In fact, I think we should remain rather distinctly skeptical of what we *are* doing in American academia by teaching "third world" literature or some variation thereof as a separate field of academic study. For I have more than a few doubts about the cultural recuperation[1] of the third world as text for the (first world) reader. Instead, the question is whether and how we can avoid creating an objectified (and moribund) "area of study," setting up the literature and culture of the Other (the third world) as a field of knowledge for the hegemonic (intellectual and political) play of the subject. For what does it mean to "know" a culture from the outside? Is it, of necessity, to dominate it? If this sounds suspiciously like an argument for the validity or necessity of the native informant, that is not what I mean to suggest. But it is a suggestion that our intellectual endeavors and our relationships to knowledge aren't innocent and pure.

How, then, can we formulate and practice a methodology which doesn't utterly objectify, doesn't make a spatial and temporal network of relationships into a petrified site for intellectual and political domination? Parenthetically, I assume the connection between the political and the intellectual or cultural is not any longer considered to be a leap of intellectual faith--not after Edward Said's provocative study of the workings of orientalism,[2] Michel Foucault's elaborations of the relationship between power and knowledge,[3] Terry Eagleton's suggestive polemics on criticism, literature, and ideology,[4] or Fredric Jameson's considerations of the narrative as a socially symbolic act.[5]

For what is our "object" of study or contemplation anyway? What is the "third world" and its culture about which we theorize? In fact, in relation to such questions, there is a nicely ironic ambiguity in the title of the panel for which this paper was written-- "third world theorizing." The subject of the theorizing is unspecified. Who is that subject--the third world itself? Is it us, as, for the most part, members of academic institutions rather distinctly outside the third world, in spite of national or ethnic affiliations and

origins? Is the theorizing *from* the third world or *about* it? If we demarcate third world culture as a separate category and disassemble or deconstruct texts, societies, cultures, nations, continents, or globes into tiny (linguistic) pieces, presumably to better understand them, when and for what purpose and by whom are those tiny bits re-assembled? Unlike the wealth of scholarship on Western Europe, England, or America in which studies of and theories about culture predominate, there are relatively few cultural studies of the third world on which to draw and those that do exist have been, at least until recently, more descriptive case studies than anything else. But there are suggestive attempts that have been and are being made in economic, political, or sociological studies: the work of people such as Immanuel Wallerstein, Eqbal Ahmad, Samir Amin, Johannes Fabian, Anwar Abdel Malek, Nikos Poulantzas, or L. S. Stavrianos. For all the frequently cited limitations of dependency theory or of structural Marxism from which many of these writers draw, their emphasis on global interrelationships rather than isolated area studies is useful and provocative. Works such as these also suggest the urgency and potential in crossing over the narrow confines of disciplinary boundaries. The work of these writers, as well as the work of the more "literary" thinkers referred to above, traverse the boundaries of history or philosophy, of the literary or the political, in a similar fashion as the literary texts with which we deal exceed national and cultural boundaries.

Six months ago when, in a rather decidedly uninspired moment, I came up with the title of this paper, "Indigenous Third World Criticisms: Against Hegemony or a New Hegemony?," I intended to present the situation of cultural and literary criticism in the Japanese, Arabic, and modern Greek context. The plan was to present a mostly descriptive negative critique of both first world and third world critical theory on the third world novel. So I outlined something of the problematic of cultural criticism in this country as it confronts the text (critical or literary) of the Other:

--the resistance of a good deal of that criticism to the challenge presented by, among other things, Edward Said's *Orientalism* (in spite of the limitations of some of Said's formulations);

--the persistence of what Henry Louis Gates, Jr., in his intro-duction to *Black Literature and Literary Theory*, calls the

"anthropological fallacy" that deems texts not much more than anthropological testaments and as such literarily (literally?) transparent;

--the recuperation of certain select texts, authors, and perhaps even cultures, into the Western canon, a process which entails, by definition, the attempt to neutralize, to negate, those texts as oppositional, as Other to a dominant cultural order;

--the insistence, already referred to, that non-Western texts can only generate description but not a legitimate literary or cultural theory.

And there are, on the other hand, the various situations of criticism outside of the first world, which aren't much less problematic:

--the difficulty of conceptualizing a framework, cultural, critical or philosophical, other than the reproduction of that formulated by the first world;

--the insistence on the reduplication of traditional cultural characteristics like orality or the narrative structure of the folktale (particularly in the African or Arabic novel) as some sort of an alternative or solution to the contradictions of that transplanted genre;

--the measure of literary/textual value by the correctness (however that might be defined) of the perceived political or social solutions a text proffers;

--the insistence on authorial autobiography, on the author's account of his/her own history, as the final measure of a text (particularly in the case of the Japanese writer/novel);

--the suggestion of some kind of innocent purity possessed by native critics (i.e. the implication that it is primarily women that should deal with women's literature, Palestinians that should deal with Palestinian literature, black Africans that should deal with black African literature and so on. . . .)

Next was a description of the initial and to some extent persistent contradictions of the modern novel as an immigrant genre: the problematic notions of the primacy of the individual bourgeois subject, of the assumption of a linear narrative trajectory, of the concept of an authoritative narrative voice, of the presence (or absence) of history in the text, of the valorization of national literature (and frequently the realist mode of the novel in particular) as the embodiment and validation of national identity and aspirations.

And, finally, a brief discussion of specific novels as examples of the contradictions of the migrant genre and/or as illustrations of the attempt to deconstruct and re-define the novel of the Other; to create an alternative and meta-individual Subject from within (and without?) the novel; to re-situate the boundaries of the text and its relationship to history, to intervention, and to power. So, in the novel, *Men in the Sun,* by the Palestinian writer Ghassan Kanafani,[6] the negative critique of, and textual foreclosure on, the isolated and fragmentary memories and impotent and equally isolated narrative present of its four migrant workers exiled from Palestine, suggests, if implicitly, a re-definition of the individual, of national identity, of social interaction. This is done not just through the story of the novel, though the text does that quite movingly, but through the very shape of the novel itself. The four Palestinians of Kanafani's *Men in the Sun* are not just metaphorically trapped in a past which they can only partially re-call, which they can only partially understand; they are textually trapped as well in the episodically separate chapters of the novel. There is no passage between one character and another, between one chapter and another, between past and present, that might by extension generate a future. There is only episodic narrative juxtaposition. The narrative structure of *Men in the Sun* exerts an almost rigidly determining influence on its content, on the textual fate of its characters. The text creates an opposition between individual subjects--their memories, dreams, and fears--and a narrative form which isolates and separates them and, while not condemning them, decisively kills them off. This textual insistence on the power of a structural force (here the structure of the novel itself) in determining content suggests itself as a textual metaphor for (a displaced fear of) the position of the individual subject in the "determining" structure of history. One of the narrative's clear, if implicit, projects is precisely to suggest the urgent necessity for the construction of a new subject which can

become an active agent of or in historical structure. And in a clearly utopian gesture for a people deprived of a nation, the text suggests that "new subjectivity" as a trans-individual and trans-national one.

There are other examples, too many to detail in such a short space but no less interesting. And they are all marked, to a greater or lesser degree, by similar attempts: to come to terms with history and the subject and to attempt alternatives to certain individually and structurally defined conceptions of nation, society, and self. There is Emile Habibi's *The Strange Life of Sa'eed, the Ill-Fated Pessoptimist*,[7] in which ironic fantasy attempts to create a narrative space to speak, or gesture towards, forbidden desire--that which a hegemony, decidedly more dependent on state force than civil alliance, would efface. Or Dimitris Hatzis' *The Double Book*,[8] in which constant narrative movement across the temporal and spatial boundaries within the text becomes a metaphor of sorts for the similar movement of the novel's narrator(s), a Greek migrant worker, across national boundaries. It is a metaphor that gestures rather explicitly beyond the hegemonic confines of dominant notions of the self, the other, and the nation. Or *Football in the First Year of Man'en* by the Japanese novelist, Oe Kenzaburo,[9] a text which, in its particular fabrication of narrative meaning, exposes the contradictions and impossibilities of such textual (and extra-textual?) fabrication.

But the issue didn't quite end itself there. Obviously, the framework of the initial argument hasn't been abandoned since I have just run through it. But I'd like to shift the focus a bit to a few ideas that underlie the argument outlined above but that aren't quite explicit in it. One is Antonio Gramsci's concept of hegemony as, not just the exertion of dominance by force, but as a system of alliance, and compromises that (through intellectuals such as ourselves among others) continually re-affirms the dominance of a particular class.[10] Another is Fredric Jameson's tracing of the utopian impulse in narrative.[11] And finally, there is Louis Althusser's elaborations, after Marx, Lenin, and Lukacs, of the workings of ideology.[12] To a certain extent, the concepts of hegemony and ideology as they are used here are congruous and overlapping. Both are "world views," formulations of value, which attempt to impose an interpretive network of meaning over the "material" or "real" world, securing and maintaining, at the same, time real power for a specific group or class. The process as a narrative one is suggested by Althusser's

formulation, with distinct Lacanian overtones, of ideology as the "representation of Imaginary relations to the Real." But these totalizing narratives (of hegemony or ideology) are, in fact, not so much the site for a tremendous homogenization process as they are the site of continual contradiction and struggle. There is then a utopian impulse that can be seen to underlie the movement of hegemony and/or ideology. It is that sense in which hegemony can be seen as an attempt at utopian wish fulfillment, as the utopian desire to establish a representation of collective unity, of collective agreement on meaning and value, of an agreed-upon definition of identity, and, of course, of a quite real power.[13] This notion of the utopic thrust of hegemony (or ideology) is implicit in the delineation of hegemony itself as the very site of struggle, of conflict and contradiction. It is a conflict not just within the dominant schema itself, not just among contradictory definitions within a dominant (and seemingly complete) framework of meaning and value, but as well among competing and contradictory schemas that always remain incomplete and fluid. It also implies the extent to which a radically re-situated or re-defined hegemony could conceivably be constructed on broadly-based, collective agreement.

In this respect, one of the most crucial aspects of Gramsci's definition of hegemony is that it describes the dominant power of a specific class, not only through its ability to threaten and employ force, but through a strategy of agreement, alliance, and compromise, however limited. Clearly, then, hegemony is not only that which the ruling class exerts when it rules, it is also the more-than-passive involvement of the classes or groups structurally locked out of decisive power themselves. Nonetheless, within variously defined boundaries, a hegemonic class maintains its own dominance but allows certain limited gains or reforms or compromises to the classes and/or groups which it dominates. The workings of this system of alliance and compromise that at the same time maintains one class's dominance are effected through the educational and civil apparatus of the state as well as through the activities of the presumably independent intellectual strata. It is in this sense that I suggested earlier the possibility, in fact the high probability, of our own complicity in a discourse of hegemonic power which we might, at least theoretically, actually oppose. It is, for example, the limitations of challenging the myopia of Western liberal humanism in the terms of humanism itself. Limited concessions or reforms might be conceded by the dominant

discourse, but its own hegemony remains. To give a rather pedantic example, within the liberal and humanist atmosphere of a university, it is possible to teach a large survey class in literature that incorporates (or recuperates?) what we call third world literature, but an entire educational system which perpetuates the dominance of a canon of "great works of the Western world" in opposition to third world literature is scarcely challenged, let alone altered, by the limited inclusion of third world literature as another area of study. On the other hand, given the implications of Gramsci's theory, hegemony has the potential to become a truly democratic force, securing consent to a collective will in which various groups within society unite. (That is clearly a utopian desire.)

In the meantime, critical play in the realm of literary signs, the appropriation and analysis of, the theorizing about, texts will continue to have rather distinct implications, implications that aren't always just literary. Intentionally or not, we, like the texts we trade in, take part in a broader (ideological and hegemonic) discourse of dominance and power and of resistance and alternative construction. But we have no pure and innocent language, no pure origin from which to set forth in the construction of a pure and innocent methodology. We are always already *in* language as, in a rather similar double bind, we are always already in history. We are stuck with what is at hand (although we can broaden its boundaries somewhat), in a historical, linguistic, and cultural situation that, to borrow a phrase, is not entirely of our own making.

And so, given that situation, in suggesting that the construction of a new (literary) hegemony is worth theoretical consideration, and perhaps even practical application, I'd like to reiterate that sense of hegemony suggested earlier as distinctly provisional and fluid, as the site of struggle and contradiction (as, in fact, hegemony is described in Gramsci's original definition), and finally as based on a (utopically) broad democratic consensus. But then, ideology and hegemony are both utopian in the sense that they propose a collectivity, a shared identity and system of meaning and value that are "no where"-- utopia. It is the definition of that collectivity, identity, and value (and of that literary canon?) that is the issue.

To return to the realm of the more specifically literary, I would like to close with another quotation, one that is precisely about the unspeakable or inconceivable utopia(s) in and outside of the narrative text. It is from Gabriel Garcia Marquez' acceptance speech,

on receiving the Nobel Prize for literature a year or so ago, in which he spoke of:

> . . .a new and sweeping utopia of life, where no one
> will be able to decide for others how they will die,
> where love will prove true and happiness be possible,
> and where the races condemned to 100 years of solitude
> will have at last and forever, a second opportunity on
> the earth.

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NOTES

[1]See Theodor Adorno's development of this concept of recuperation in "Cultural Criticism" in *Prisms*, trans. by Sherry Weber (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1979).

[2]See *Orientalism*, New York: Pantheon, 1978 or *The World, the Text and the Critic* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1983).

[3]"The Order of Discourse" in *Language, Counter-memory, Practice* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977).

[4]Most obviously in *Criticism and Ideology* (London: New Left Books, 1976), but even more provocatively in *Walter Benjamin or Towards a Revolutionary Criticism* (London: New Left Books, 1981).

[5]*The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1981) and the equally excellent *Fables of Aggression: Wyndham Lewis, the Modernist as Fascist* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979).

[6]Ghassan Kanafani, *Rijal fi ash-Shams* (*Men in the Sun*) (Beirut: Mu'assasa al-Abhath al-'Arabiya, 1975).

[7]Emile Habibi, *al-Waoa'i' al-Ghariba fi Ikhtifa' Sa'id Abu Al-nahs al-Mutasha'il (The Strange Events in the Disappearance of Sa'id,*

the Ill-Fated Pessootimist) (Haifa: 1974).

[8]Dimitris Hatzis, *To Diolo Vivlio (The Double Book)* (Athens: Keimena, 1977).

[9]Oe Kenzaburo, *Man'en Gannen no Futtoboru (Football in the First Year of Man'en)* (Tokyo: Kodansha, 1971).

[10]Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks.* Hoare & Smith, translators and editors (New York: International Publishers, 1971), especially the sections on "Intellectuals" and "Education" and pp. 416-18.

[11]See note 5 above.

[12]Louis Althusser, *Lenin and Philosophy*, trans. Ben Brewster (London: New Left Books, 1971).

[13]But to the extent that it is an allegorical position, a symbolic expression of the unity of a collectivity, hegemony/ideology is not utopian in itself. It remains only camouflaged or repressed desire. See Jameson's conclusion to *The Political Unconscious,* especially p. 289.

FROM NATIONALISM TO NATIONAL CULTURE: INTELLECTUALS AND SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY IN POST-COLONIAL AFRICA

Neil Lazarus

It is now more than twenty-five years since the first African colonies gained their political independence from the Western colonial powers. In the years between then and now, proclamations of independence have issued from national capital after national capital throughout the continent. Today, only South Africa and Namibia do not yet celebrate an Independence Day.

Yet in winning independence, what exactly was it that the various populations of Africa won? What was it they managed to prise from the reluctant grasp of their colonizers? The more time passes, the stronger becomes the temptation to answer these questions with the single word "nothing." Such an answer would represent an exaggeration, of course, but not, it seems--and this is the point--a radical inaccuracy. For it is certain that independence has gained the many peoples of Africa neither freedom from external domination nor even the right of self-determination. Twenty-five years ago, Frantz Fanon observed that if power in the post-colonial African world fell to the indigenous national middle-classes, the whole momentum of decolonization would be derailed, since this social fraction seemed to have taken on the task of turning itself into a "transmission line between the nation and a capitalism, rampant though camouflaged, which today puts on the masque of neo-colonialism."[1] Intended to play an admonitory role by their author, these words today sound uncannily like a prophecy. For the mission that, according to Fanon, the nationalist elite was fated by history either to fulfil or betray, it has fulfilled so successfully that the tentacular reality of neo-colonialism is no longer even questioned by today's African intellectuals. Not for nothing does Ngugi wa

Thiong'o, the Kenyan writer, choose to speak of independence as "flag independence," and to describe it as "a situation where a client indigenous government is ruling and oppressing people on behalf of American, European and Japanese capital."[2]

When Fanon's classic essay, "The Pitfalls of National Consciousness," first appeared in the early 1960s, its pertinence and implications were curiously misrecognized. Clearly, the essay offered a scathing critique of the ideology of bourgeois nationalism, that is, of the nationalist elite poised, in territory after territory, to ride to power on the coattails of the departing colonials. Bourgeois nationalism, Fanon argued, stemmed indirectly from the acute separation of the African middle-classes from the masses of the African population. This separation was determinate: it was the consequence "of the mutilation of the colonized people by the colonial regime."[3] Because of their alienation from the masses, the African middle-classes were incapable of mobilizing and maintaining popular support. Yet, for a variety of reasons, they needed not to see this incapacity as an incapacity. They needed, rather, to develop what Fanon called a "neo-liberal universalist"[4] ideology, a rhetoric that would enable them to present themselves as the most progressive social strata, hence the most fit for leadership, regardless of mere popularity. The ideology that served this function was nationalism. It was promoted as representing "the all-embracing crystallization of the innermost hopes of the whole people."[5] Yet it was far from being so. For although its exponents claimed to speak in the masses' best interests, Fanon showed convincingly that they had their own, very limited, social agenda. They called for nationalization, he bitingly observed, but "to them nationalism quite simply means the transfer into native hands of those unfair advantages which are a legacy of the colonial period."[6]

Quite transparently, Fanon's critique of national consciousness represented a critique of the social philosophies that sustained the explicitly Eurocentric and reactionary political programs of such figures as Felix Houphouet-Boigny of the Ivory Coast and Kofi Busia of Ghana. What was missed at the time, however, was the extent to which Fanon's critique was directed not only at these figures--obvious targets, in any case--but also, and indeed more urgently, at such avowedly radical figures as Kwame Nkrumah, Julius Nyerere, Leopold Sedar Senghor, Jomo Kenyatta, and Kenneth Kaunda, politicians and intellectuals who liked to identify themselves as the

architects of and spokespeople for "African Socialism," and who, though they called themselves nationalists, would have winced to hear themselves called "bourgeois." It is in this context that the remarkable thrust of Fanon's critique makes itself manifest: for the effect of his commentary is to throw into question the very integrity of middle-class progressivism. Even in its most progressive avatar, Fanon seems to be suggesting, even at its best, in the guise of an Nkrumah or a Nyerere, that the African middle class has little to offer the revolution: their progressivism notwithstanding, even these leaders, at the time they came to power, were still middle-class actors, and still at odds, hence, despite their best intentions, with the aspirations of the mass of their compatriots. So it is that towards the end of the 1960s, we find a number of radical intellectuals beginning, in the spirit of Fanon's problematization of progressivism, to mount critiques of African Socialism. To these new critics, revealingly, African Socialism emerges as the expression, not of any brave new world of African Liberty, but of the inherently contradictory social position of its advocates, caught, as middle-class nationalists, between the aspirations of the masses on their left and the protocols of capital on their right.

Of course, Fanon did not leave the matter here. There is, indeed, no way, even on the level of personal biography, that he could have. For if Nkrumah and Nyerere were members of a privileged elite within African society, how much more so was Fanon, foreign-born, foreign-educated, and--at least at first--a psychiatrist in colonial Algeria? We can say more: a hallmark of Fanon's thought is its suppleness and reflexivity. It is inconceivable that a theorist as alert to the sinuosities of history as he would have embraced a static conception of class-inscription, in terms of which one's ideological affiliation would be immutably fixed by the circumstances of one's class background. No: if it was the historical mission of the nationalist elite to offer the nation to capital as a mere raw resource awaiting exploitation, then it was the historical mission of the dissenting intelligentsia to align itself with the popular masses in resistance. In his essay "On National Culture," accordingly, Fanon moved beyond his critique of national consciousness to a positive consideration of the role of the revolutionary intellectual in the liberation struggle.

At the head of this essay, he placed a citation from Sekou Touré, first President of independent Guinea, and himself a revolutionary:

> In order to achieve real action, you must yourself be a living part of Africa and of her thought; you must be an element of that popular energy which is entirely called forth for the freeing, the progress and the happiness of Africa. There is no place outside that fight for the artist or for the intellectual who is not himself concerned with and completely at one with the people in the great battle of Africa and of suffering humanity.

Of great importance here is Touré's appeal to the radical intelligentsia to identify itself wholly with the masses, that is, to commit "class suicide," as a precondition for effectivity. The intelligentsia is being asked not merely to side with the masses, but to unclass itself.

This same call to intellectuals to unclass themselves in committing their energies to the anti-colonial struggle is sounded over and over again in the writings of the revolutionary figures of recent African history. One encounters it, obviously, in Fanon and Touré, but also in Patrice Lumumba and Agostinho Neto, in Eduardo Mondlane and Amilcar Cabral. So important does the conscious rejection of class origins seem to these activists, indeed, that it figures in their theories as a *sine qua non* of revolutionary commitment. In the absence of such a rejection, all action undertaken by leftist intellectuals remains mere progressivism.

In his book, *Nation and Revolution*, Anouar Abdel-Malek coins the term "nationalitarianism" to describe what earlier had had to be labelled as "revolutionary" or as "radical nationalism." This new term is unwieldy, it is true, but its concept is valuable, for it enables Abdel-Malek to suggest that while there is still a nationalist impetus within nationalitarian activism, the practical intent of this nationalism is to be distinguished starkly from that of nationalism proper. The "nationalitarian phenomenon," he writes, "has as its object, beyond the clearing of the national territory, the independence and sovereignty of the national state, uprooting in depth the positions of the ex-colonial power--the reconquest of the power of decision in all domains of national life. . . ."[7] As an intellectual, we can surmise, one can move across the divide between nationalism and nationalitarianism only by unclassing oneself. Phoenix-like, the intellectual as

revolutionary is to rise from the ashes of his auto-destruction as nationalist. And is this not precisely the course followed by such figures as Nkrumah and Nyerere--though not, significantly, by Senghor, Kenyatta, and Kaunda--as their careers unfolded? In Nkrumah's case, we can argue that it took his own ouster as President of Ghana to disabuse him of the illusions of progressivism; in Nyerere's, we can see the famous Arusha Declaration of 1967 as his own public statement of radical rebirth. In each case, however, what is clear is that between the early champion of African Socialism and the later, more principled advocate of revolution or nationalitarianism, there is a wide gulf. One would not have found the early Nkrumah, writing, as does the later, that

> Intelligentsia and intellectuals, if they are to play a part in the African Revolution, must become conscious of the class struggle in Africa, and align themselves with the oppressed masses. This involves the difficult, but not impossible, task of cutting themselves free from bourgeois attitudes and ideologies imbibed as a result of colonialist education and propaganda.[8]

Nor, by the same token, would one have found Nyerere in his early years as leader maintaining, as he does after the Arusha Declaration, that,

> We have to be part of the society which we are changing; we have to work from within it, and not try to descend like ancient gods, do something, and disappear again. A country, or a village, or a community, cannot *be* developed: it can only develop itself. For real development means the development, the growth, of people.[9]

At this point I would like to pause briefly and change the focus of our discussion in an attempt to explore some of the implications of what has already been said for a cultural--and particularly for a literary--practice in postcolonial Africa. Specifically, I would like to suggest that in one of the most distinctive literary voices of the first decade of independence--that of the Nigerian novelist and cultural critic, Chinua Achebe--there is to be found the cultural analog of that contradictory middle-class progressivism that underlays African Socialism.

Few of Achebe's writings are as revealing of the contradictory nature of his position as his critical essay, "The Novelist as Teacher." In this essay, Achebe reflects thus on the responsibility of the writer in the immediate post-colonial era:

> Here then is an adequate revolution for me to espouse--to help my society regain belief in itself and put away the complexes of the years of denigration and self-abasement. And it is essentially a question of education, in the best sense of that word. Here, I think, my aims and the deepest aspirations of my society meet. For no thinking African can escape the pain of the wound in our soul. . . . I would be quite satisfied if my novels (especially the ones I set in the past) did no more than teach my readers that their past--with all its imperfections--was not one long night of savagery from which the first Europeans acting on God's behalf delivered them.[10]

This is an extremely well-known passage, whose fame is at least partially a testament to its effectiveness. In it, Achebe economically and eloquently espouses a literature of commitment, one devoted to the progressive trans-formation of African society. Yet let us look closely at what is revealed in Achebe's rationalization of "teaching" as a fit vocation for the novelist. Notice that Achebe himself declares that there is a need for such "teachers"; that *he* determines that what is "taught" should relate to cultural retrieval; that *he* stipulates who stands to gain from his "lessons"; that *he* finds himself qualified to "teach." His stance here is presumptuous and uncritical, even if it is not necessarily authoritarian--even, as a matter of fact, if it is actually *progressive*. Too much rests on his mere presumption that in what he outlines, "my aims and the deepest aspirations of my society meet." When we hear these words, it is impossible for us not to recall Fanon's bourgeois nationalists, promoting their programs as the identity of their beliefs and "the innermost hopes of the whole people."

My point is that it is not only the case that the separation between Achebe as progressive intellectual and "the whole people" is wide. Also of fundamental importance is the fact that Achebe does not see this separation as an alienation, reflecting the divergence between his social aspirations and those of the masses, but only as a distance, something that, with the right training, the masses could

reduce and ultimately make disappear. There is a strain of arrogance in Achebe's assumption that the substance of his progressivism does not stand in need of verification at the hands of the masses. To him, the mountain needs absolutely to move to Mohamed, not Mohamed to the mountain.

It was Ngugi wa Thiong'o who first drew attention to this strain of class arrogance in Achebe's writing. (And remember that we are focusing on Achebe here primarily in his capacity as one of the most articulate and sympathetic voices on the post-colonial scene.) In a wonderful critique of Achebe's fourth novel, *A Man of the People*, Ngugi recalled Achebe's essay on the novelist as teacher and asked what it would take to transform such a novelist into "a man of the people." His answer was most instructive: "The teacher no longer stands apart to contemplate. He has moved with a whip among the pupils, flagellating himself as well as them. He is now the true man of the people."[11]

This answer is significant because it is so redolent of Fanon's depiction of the revolutionary artist as "an awakener of the people."[12] No doubt it will immediately be protested that Achebe, too, sees the writer as an awakener of the people. This is true. He does. But notice Fanon's insistence that in order to become such a force among his people, the intellectual needs first to recognize how alienated from them his intellectualism has caused him to become. "He cannot go forward resolutely unless he first realizes the extent of his estrangement from [the people],"[13] he writes. Nowhere can I find evidence of Achebe's having come to this realization.

What is true in this respect of Achebe, however, is not true of Ngugi. For like Nyerere and Nkrumah in the political realm, Ngugi in the cultural came increasingly to appreciate the need to unclass himself in order to ground his commitment to his people. He came, indeed, to see this act of consciously repudiating his class of ascription as the indispensable precondition for his legitimacy as a writer. We can identify three stages in the movement of Ngugi's unclassing of himself. First, there is his recognition of his estrangement from the classes on whose behalf and in whose name he aspires to speak. He begins to see the extent to which, despite himself, he has remained, in Cabral's terminology, an "unconverted"[14] intellectual: at about the time he is writing his review of Achebe's *A Man of the People*, we also find him speaking thus of the position of the African writer: "When we, the black intellectuals, the black

bourgeoisie, got the power, we never tried to bring about those policies which would be in harmony with the needs of the peasants and workers. I think that it is time that the African writers also started to talk in the terms of these workers and peasants."[15] Building upon this recognition of estrangement, Ngugi moves, second, to a complementary awareness that what he needs to write *about* is not the social and historical experience of the elite--not, that is to say, his *own* experience--but that of the Kenyan masses, hitherto voiceless in the written literature of the nation. Here, too, he presumably draws his inspiration from Fanon, who had written that "the native intellectual who wishes to create an authentic work of art must realize that the truths of a nation are in the first place its realities. He must go on until he has found the seething pot out of which the learning of the future will emerge."[16] In accordance with this conceptualization, we find Ngugi announcing the aims and conditions of his identification with the Kenyan masses. In an essay written in 1969, he framed his views as follows:

> I believe that African intellectuals must align themselves with the struggle of the African masses for a meaningful national ideal. For we must strive for a form of social organization that will free the manacled spirit and energy of our people so we can build a new country, and sing a new song. Perhaps, in a small way, the African writer can help in articulating the feelings behind this struggle.[17]

Finally, the stage is cleared for the third and last step in the movement of unclassing: the conscious rejection of the intellectual's class of origin. Ngugi describes this last step as necessary in order to consolidate the forging of a "regenerative link with the people."[18] One is troubled here, perhaps, by the apparent resemblance between a religious experience of conversion and Ngugi's description of unclassing. Even repentance for the errors of past ways forms part of Ngugi's narrative: in his prison memoir, *Detained*, for instance, he writes that "My only regret was that for many years I had wandered in the bourgeois jungle and the wilderness of foreign cultures and languages."[19] Yet Ngugi has always been a profoundly religious writer; and whatever misgivings we may feel about the tone and exact register of his account of his passage to radicalism, there is no mistaking the authority of his current standpoint, from which he now

speaks to us of the need for all African writers to follow in his footsteps. Here is a characteristic passage from the collection, *Writers in Politics*, published in 1981. In it, Ngugi speaks directly to his vision of the social responsibility of the writer in contemporary Africa:

> What the African writer is called upon to do is not easy: it demands of him that he recognize the global character of imperialism and the global character or dimension of the forces struggling against it to build a new world. He must reject, repudiate, and negate his roots in the native bourgeoisie and its spokesmen, and find his true creative links with the pan-African masses over the earth in alliance with all the socialistic forces of the world. He must of course be very particular, very involved in a grain of sand, but must also see the world past, present, and future in that grain. He must write with the vibrations and tremors of the struggles of all the working people in Africa, America, Asia and Europe behind him.[20]

This will make a good place to stop. In closing, however, I would like to sketch out a couple of questions that seem to me to have been framed, but left open, in what I have outlined in this paper.

1. Once the intellectual has unclassed himself and aligned himself actively with the peasants and/or workers--and is, presumably, living and working with and among them--what ought his bearing toward them to be?

2. What, specifically, ought the nature of the service rendered by the revolutionary *writer* be?

3. Depending on our answer to question 2 above, what ought the writer's attitude be toward the metropolitan languages of the ex-colonial power?

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NOTES

[1]Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. Constance Farrington (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1977), p. 122.

[2]Ngugi wa Thiong'o, *Writers in Politics: Essays* (London: Heinemann, 1981), pp. 119-20.

[3]Fanon, p. 119.

[4]Ibid.

[5]Ibid., p. 122.

[6]Ibid., p. 166.

[7]Anouar Abdel-Malek, *Nation and Revolution* (London: Macmillan, 1981), p. 13.

[8]Kwame Mkrumah, *Class Struggle in Africa* (New York: International Publishers, 1970), p. 40.

[9]Julius K. Nyerere, *Freedom and Development. A Selection from Writings and Speeches, 1968-1973* (London: Oxford University Press, 1974), p. 25.

[10]Chinua Achebe, *Morning Yet On Creation Day* (London: Heinemann, 1977), pp. 44-5.

[11]Ngugi wa Thiong'o, *Homecoming: Essays on African and Caribbean Literature, Culture, and Politics* (London: Heinemann, 1978), p. 54.

[12]Fanon, p. 179.

[13] Ibid., p. 182.

[14]See Amilcar Cabral, *Return to the Source: Selected Speeches of Amilcar Cabral*, ed. Africa Information Service (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1973), p. 46.

[15]Ngugi wa Thiong'o's discussion of Wole Soyinka's paper, "The Writer in a Modern African State," in Per Wastberg, ed., *The Writer in Modern Africa* (New York: Africana Publishing Corporation, 1969), p. 25.
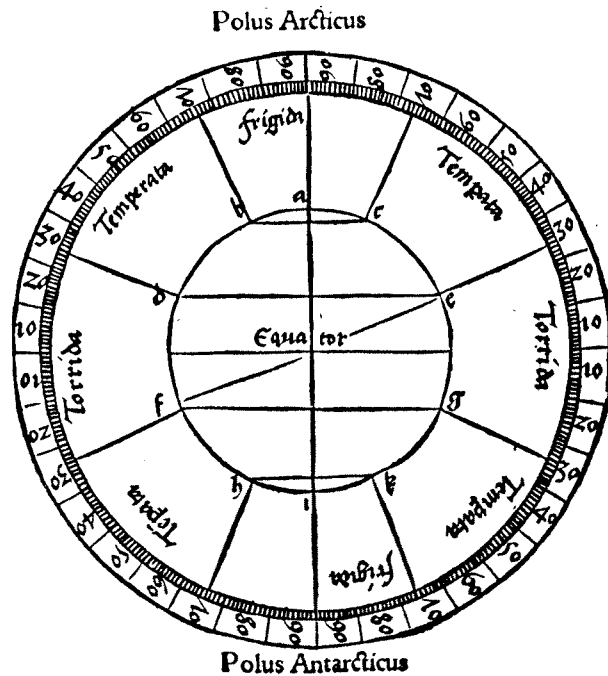
[16]Fanon, p. 181.

[17]Ngugi, *Homecoming*, p. 50.

[18]Ngugi wa Thiong'o, *Detained. A Writer's Prison Diary* (London: Heinemann, 1981), p. 160.

[19]Ibid., p. 105.

[20]Ngugi, *Writers in Politics*, p. 80.

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THE HESITATIONS OF THEORY:
EDOUARD GLISSANT'S THEORY OF "LA RELATION"

Marilyn Jiménez

There is a street in Martinique named after Frantz Fanon, its most famous native son; and this forgetful homage symbolizes the ironic fate of revolutionary theories of liberation in societies subjected to advanced forms of neo-colonization. The powerful echoes of Cesaire's appeal to Negritude and Fanon's call for revolutionary violence reverberate still in areas of the Third World where the struggle for liberation is a daily matter of life or death; in the French Caribbean, however, where colonization succeeded beyond even the greatest expectation of the colonizers (but much to their later chagrin), these echoes have been muted by the myths of political integration and cultural assimilation. Such societies can not, in Edouard Glissant's view, be awakened to action by theories that point to the universal or general forms of oppression, for the conflictual nature of political domination has been veiled by the fiction of participation; they can be brought to the brink of action only by the patient, relentless elucidation of the forms of domination and cultural genocide past and present. The main function of theory, then, is to re-interpret history or, more accurately, to "historicize," if we may coin a term in English that is readily available in French, the collective consciousness of a people denied a living, productive relation with its past.

In Glissant's conceptualization of the role of theory, the theorist is more of a researcher, an investigator, and less of an ideological leader, proposer of solutions or revolutionary prophet: hence, what we shall term, less in a negative sense, than in the sense of the movement of frontal attack, followed by a strategic retreat, the "hesitations" of his theory. The gap between theory and action,

which other theorists have attempted to bridge with varying degrees of failure, becomes, in our view, constitutive of Glissant's theory. By continually pointing to the more modest role of theory in guiding revolutionary action, Glissant gives primacy to action, since action becomes "unthinkable" within theory. However, we may be anticipating a conclusion that can only be reached after a profound reading of Glissant's *Le discours antillais*.[1] For the purposes of this paper, we must limit ourselves to a brief sketch of Glissant's theory.

Stated in its most simple, abstract form, "La relation" is the relationship between the West, conceived as a project of domination and not a place, and every society or ethnic and cultural group with which it comes into contact. The relation is "a planetary drama," the struggle between the hegemonic, universalizing force of the West and the "opaque" diversity of colonized groups. Fanon had already pointed out that the colonized opposes his "originality," the irrational concreteness of his individual existence, to the universalizing discourse of the colonizer. Glissant takes this observation one step further by requiring that the theoretic discourse of the colonized itself be diverse, plural; the theory "specific," not general. The characteristics that the West associates with the discourse of theory--generalizations, rationality, logic, lucidity, and so on--all mask a will to power, to subsume the concrete "otherness" of the colonized under universal categories. For Glissant, the only truly generalizable category is that of the "relation" itself; beyond that, each colonized group lives its relationship to its oppressor within a concrete, historical situation. The generalizing tendency of theoretic discourse should, in Glissant's view, be countered by the weight of the particular, irreducible "lived experience," whether present or past, that is accumulated in the discursive process.

It follows, then, that Glissant should be critical of the conventional Marxist's reductive use of categories. While Glissant makes use of Marxist categories, he, like Fanon before him, is calling for a critique of conventional Marxism in the light of the experience of colonization. Fanon had observed that in the colonized situation the infra-structure is also a super-structure, and he called for a "loosening" of Marxist methodology. Similarly, Glissant is suspicious of the concepts of infra- and superstructure, for, in his words, they act as "écrans sécurisants." The danger is to fall prey to the hierarchical assumptions underlying these Marxist notions. Everywhere he denounces the Hegelian concepts of history underlying Marxist

criticism. It is not, as he admits, that he does not use Marxist categories, such as the notion of production, for he does; but that he refuses to privilege the infrastructure over the superstructure. At best, the primacy of the infra-structure is chronological; at worst, it serves to mask the real processes of domination. In order, perhaps, to avoid the assumptions of hierarchy underlying the discursive exposition, Glissant repeatedly jumps from one type of discourse to another. Thus, an analysis of the elite's relationship to the means of production may be preceded or followed by a psychoanalytic analysis of behavior or a discussion of poetics. In so doing, he also undermines what he sees as the tyrannical role that the notion of production plays in Marxist analysis. He argues that, while it is a useful category of analysis, its pivotal role in the theory of class conflict closes off the possibility of other means of overcoming oppresssion than seizing the means of production.

The peculiarity of Martinique, for example, is to have been a society where the relationships between the group and the means of production have been illusory. Glissant points out that the Martinican planter was far less interested in the mechanisms of production and, therefore, far more dependent upon the metropolis as the promoter and initiator of economic changes than other dependent elites of the region. Thus, the planter does not become the decisive enemy for the slave and later for the agricultural worker. Class conflicts in Martinique are a form of shadow-boxing around non-existent means of production. The phantasmal nature of class conflicts in Martinique is further attenuated by the legal fiction of incorporation into France. In this process, Martinique has been reduced to non-productivity and passive consumption of metropolitan products, to the exaggerated extent that no product, according to Glissant, that is consumed in Martinique has been produced there. A more adequate analysis of the Martinican situation would focus on the notion of "technical mastery" (*la maîtrise technique*) of the environment that must precede the development of production. Throughout *Le Discours antillais*, Glissant implies that for Martinique to free itself from its dependency, the Martinican people must first learn to master their environment. In this way, an adequate theory can suggest a modality of action, if not the action itself.

Glissant also questions the uncritical use of universal categories derived from psychoanalysis to describe the situation of the colonized. Like Fanon before him, Glissant speaks of the moral and

mental disequilibrium of Martinican society, and he links its morbid character to the non-functionality of Martinican social groups (that is, their lack of a real relationship to the means of production). However, he insists that the "collective unconscious" is first and foremost historical; all psychic phenomena and impulses have been in large part historically conditioned. Thus, the irruption of psychic forces, as in Fanon, can lead to revolutionary action, but only if that psychic release is conditioned by a true vision of the real:

> *Aucune théorie ne "conduit" le réel, et le pulsionnel peut être producteur d'histoire. Mais c'est quand il vient bouleverser par sa soudaineté féconde une vision décidée de ce réel.*[2]

Theory must be not only historical, but also total and provide a totalizing view of the real:

> *Il s'agit de sérier les problèmes, partout ou les mécanismes d'aliénation et d'oppression ne sont pas si visibles qu'on veut le croire; là où, par conséquent, le recours mécanique a des catégories notionnelles pré-établies (en politique comme en "sciences humaines") renforce l'aliénation et en définitive sert le système. La pensée théorique doit par exemple poursuivre en même temps l'investigation des mobiles "individuels" et l'éluci-dation des aliénations "économiques" globales.*[3]

To return to Fanon, then, and the strange irony that his theory has had greater impact outside of the French Caribbean than within, Glissant places the blame and the praise on the generalizing aspects of his theory:

> *La parole poétique de Césaire, l'acte politique de Fanon nous ont menés quelque part [. . .] Les traces de la Négritude et de la théorie révolutionnaire des Damnés sont pourtant généralisants. Ils suivent le contour historique de la décolonisation finissante dans le monde. Ils illustrent et démontrent le paysage d'un Ailleurs partagé. Il faut revenir au lieu.*[4]

For himself, Glissant reserves a less heroic role, but perhaps one that can be ignored less easily:

> *Nous en avons fini, du combat contre l'exil. Nos tâches sont aujourd'hui d'insertion. Non plus la généralité prodigieuse du cri, mais l'ingrat recensement du détail du pays.*[5]

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NOTES

[1]*Le discours antillais* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1981).

[2]Ibid., p. 178.

[3]Ibid., p. 292.

[4]Ibid., p. 36.

[5]Ibid., p. 265.

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