**Abdelrahman Munif, *Cities of Salt* (I) (1984, trans. 1987)**

Page Numbers refer to my copy: Vintage, 1989, trans. Peter Theroux.

Note that these questions are starting suggestions for interpretation– you are encouraged to identify your own examples, issues, themes, etc.

**Seminar Tasks/Questions**

1) Read Amitav Ghosh's essay "Petrofiction: The Oil Encounter and the Novel." Mark down three points you want to discuss. (You may also want to read the excerpts from Michael Walonen's response to Munif at the beginning of his article on Oil and World Literature. The full version of his essay is on the module website, as is an essay by Peter Hitchcock, "Oil in an American Imaginary", which also responds to Munif's argument).

2) Chapter One: Read the opening of the novel, from "Wadi Al-Uyoun.... and made these hard decisions by themselves." Discern anything you feel is significant about this opening (from broad themes to specific details, individual descriptions, etc.), so that we can:

    a) widen out to a discussion of the chapter as a whole
    b) begin to sketch out general themes and particular strands of the novel
    c) think about the importance of setting and environment as a feature throughout
    d) begin thinking about formal features attached to the above – esp. narration, use of irony, analepsis, etc.
    e) attach it to another excerpt from following chapters.

3) Read section from the end of Ch.6 pp. 48-450 as an example of ironic tone and perspective, from: 'On the last day....'trees and the green plants'. Why does the narrative set up Miteb – and the plot – like this?

4) How is the "end" of Wadi Al-Uyoun described and conveyed? Chs. 12/13. (pp. 96-99; 105-07 & also beginning of Ch. 14, 110)

Take 30 mins for all the above. Read and annotate the section on your own, then form small groups. Be prepared to report your findings/discussion to the rest of the class. The critical excerpts from Walonen and McLarney are useful here.

*

5) Ch8. 65; 67-71. The installation of the American camp. How and why is this representative of the novel's take on (oil-driven) modernity? (see also 98; 393)

6) New Technology is often introduced in the plot. How is it represented? (For example, the Emir's telescope (409); The Radio (432-5, 438, 441; 443); The Automobile (Ch66; 420-1); The Telephone (598-99)

7) Significance of Narrative threads? – contradictory stories, multiple reporters, multiple perspectives on events: Ch24, p. 167-68; 279; 384; 409; 500. (See Stefan Mayer on this, in your supplementary material).

8) What is the role of Miteb Al-Hathal in the novel? See, for example, pps. 31; 107-8; 140; 143; 151-2; 510-14; 615-16 (See Sabry Hafez)

9) In groups, take a different scene and discuss its import, especially in a "global" sense?

The Ship of Satan: Ch. 31 (See also, Ch30, on "the two cities")
The Truck Drivers: Chs. 67, 68
The Emir's Automobile: Ch. 66
The Wedding: (Ch.38; but esp. pps. 266-267)

10) Why is the "Physician's Feud" a central event in the text? (see Chs. 72-4)

·troficiion -- The Trench by Abdelrahman Munif and translated by Peter Thero...
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e New Republic; Mar 2, 1992; 206, 9; ABI/INFORM Global
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with eight other items, most of them shot in Lyon. And all this was done within the lifetimes of some still surviving people.

Chardère explained that various special exhibits run continually—I saw a good one of still photography by someone new—and that there are always film series in progress. The current series is on the subject of actors: the poster features Brando and Garbo. He showed me the very inviting small screening room downstairs, with comfortable scarlet-upholstered seats that, he says, are filled almost every day for the film programs.

Then Chardère loaded me with posters and postcards, pamphlets and brochures, and put me in the car that he had summoned to take me back to my hotel—a good distance because the institute is in an outlying district. (Called Monplaisir. Ah, those Lyonnaises.) This is my note of thanks.

Since then, I've been thinking of that day less as a trip to a museum than as a visit to some people whom I was too late to catch. The richness and generosity of the villa itself seem to reflect the warmth of the people who lived there. What excitement those rooms must have known in those days when a new age was in birth. I felt that I had sensed it during my visit. Fanciful, of course, but that's what fancy is for.

A screenwriter sends a letter of objection to my point in a recent piece about the scarcity of good scripts as against the plenitude of good acting and directing. This man isn't making the usual case that there are good scripts out there that aren't being done—something that playwrights also charge. He says, and I saw the film he's speaking of, that after the script is written, a lot of other hands reach in to mess it up, and the writer gets blamed. I'm sure that this is true in many instances, and I'm also sure that, for critics, there's nothing to be done about it. All we can go by is the credit as given. Anything else would lead to rumor-mongering and to other unfairnesses in other directions.

I once praised a director for a certain shot, and he told me that his assistant had suggested it. So, every time we say, "The direction is by X," we ought to be saying, "The direction is attributed to X." The same pattern applies to writers. But to use that pattern every time would be unfair when it isn't true, and anyway it's too clumsy. All I can add is that, *whoever* is responsible for the current screenplays of the world, most of them are dreadful. •

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## The Oil Encounter and the novel.

# Petrofiction

**BY AMITAV GHOSH**

If the Spice Trade has any twentieth-century equivalent, it can only be the oil industry. In its economic and strategic value, as well as its ability to generate far-flung political, military, and cultural encounters, oil is clearly the only commodity that can serve as an analogy for pepper. In all matters technical, of course, the comparison is weighted grossly in favor of oil. But in at least one domain it is the Spice Trade that can claim the clear advantage: in the quality of the literature that it nurtured.

Within a few decades of the discovery of the sea route to India, the Portuguese poet Luis de Camoes had produced the *Lusiads*, the epic poem that chronicled Vasco da Gama's voyage and in effect conjured Portugal into literary nationhood. The Oil Encounter, on the other hand, has produced scarcely a single work of note. In English, for example, it has generated little apart from some more or less second-rate travel literature and a vast amount of academic ephemera—nothing remotely of the quality or the intellectual distinction of the travelogues and narratives produced by such sixteenth-century Portuguese writers as Duarte Barbosa, Tomé Pires, and Gaspar Correia. As for an epic poem, the very idea is ludicrous: to the principal protagonists in the Oil Encounter (which means, in effect, America and Americans on the one hand and the peoples of the Arabian Peninsula and the Persian Gulf on the other), the history of oil is a matter of embarrassment verging on the unspeakable, the pornographic. It is perhaps the

AMITAV GHOSH is the author most recently of *The Shadow Lines* (Penguin).



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one cultural issue on which the two sides are in complete agreement.

Still, if the Oil Encounter has proved barren, it is surely through no fault of its own. It would be hard to imagine a story that is its equal in drama, or in historical resonance. Consider its Livingstonian beginnings: the Westerner with his caravan-loads of machines and instruments thrusting himself unannounced upon small, isolated communities, deep within some of the most hostile environments on earth. And think of the postmodern present: city-states where virtually everyone is a "foreigner"; admixtures of peoples and cultures on a scale never before envisaged; vicious systems of helotry juxtaposed with unparalleled wealth; deserts transformed by technology and military devastation on an apocalyptic scale.

It is a story that evokes horror, sympathy, guilt, rage, and a great deal else, depending on the listener's situation. The one thing that can be said of it with absolute certainty is that no one anywhere who has any thought either for his conscience or his self-preservation can afford to ignore it. So why, when there is so much to write about, has this encounter proved so imaginatively sterile?

On the American side, the answers are not far to seek. To a great many Americans, oil smells bad. It reeks of unavoidable overseas entanglements, a worrisome foreign dependency, economic uncertainty, risky and expensive military enterprises; of thousands of dead civilians and children and all the troublesome questions that lie buried in their graves. Bad enough at street level, the smell of oil gets a lot worse by the time it seeps into those rooms where serious fiction is written and read. It acquires more than just a whiff of that deep suspicion of the Arab and Muslim worlds that wafts through so much of American intellectual life. And to make things still worse, it begins to smell of pollution and environmental hazards. It reeks, it stinks, it becomes a Problem that can be written about only in the language of Solutions.

But there are other reasons why there isn't a Great American Oil Novel, and some of them lie hidden within the institutions that shape American writing today. It would be hard indeed to imagine the writing school that could teach its graduates to find their way through the uncharted firmaments of the Oil Encounter. In a way, the professionalization of fiction has had much the same effect in America as it had in Britain in another imperial age: as though in precise counterpoint to the increasing geographical elasticity of the country's involvements, its fictional gaze has turned inward, becoming ever more introspective, ever more concentrated upon its own self-definition. In other words, it has fastened upon a stock of themes and subjects each of which is accompanied by a well-tested pedagogic technology. Try and imagine a major American writer taking on the Oil Encounter. The idea is literally inconceivable.

It isn't fair, of course, to point the finger at American writers. There isn't very much they could write about: neither they nor anyone else really knows anything at all about the human experiences that surround the production of oil. A great deal has been invested in ensuring the muteness of the Oil Encounter: on the American (or Western) side, through regimes of strict corporate secrecy; on the Arab side, by the physical and demographic separation of oil installations and their workers from the indigenous population.

*The Trench*
by Abdelrahman Munif
translated by Peter Theroux
(Pantheon, 554 pp., $25)

*Cities of Salt*
by Abdelrahman Munif
translated by Peter Theroux
(Vintage, 627 pp., $12.95 paper)

It is no accident, then, that the genre of "My Days in the Gulf" has yet to be invented. Most Western oilmen of this generation have no reason to be anything other than silent about their working lives. Their experience of the Middle East is culturally a nullity, lived out largely within portable versions of Western suburbia.

In some ways the story is oddly similar on the Arab side, except that there it is a quirk of geography—of geology, to be exact—that is largely to blame for oil's literary barrenness. Perversely, oil chose to be discovered in precisely those parts of the Middle East that have been the most marginal in the development of modern Arab culture and literature—on the outermost peripheries of such literary centers as Cairo and Beirut.

Until quite recently, the littoral of the Gulf was considered an outlying region within the Arab world, a kind of frontier whose inhabitants' worth lay more in their virtuous simplicity than in their cultural aspirations. The slight curl of the lip that inevitably accompanies an attitude of that kind has become, if anything, a good deal more pronounced now that many Arab writers from Egypt and Lebanon—countries with faltering economies but rich literary traditions—are constrained to earn their livelihoo in the Gulf. As a result, young Arab wri ers are no more likely to write abou the Oil Encounter than are their Wes ern counterparts. No matter how lon they have lived in the Gulf or in Liby when it comes to the practice of fictio they generally prefer to return to th familiar territories staked out by their li erary forebears. There are, of cours some notable exceptions (such as th Palestinian writer Ghassan Kanafani remarkable story "Men in the Sun"), bu otherwise the Gulf serves all too often a a metaphor for corruption and dec dence; a surrogate for the expression c the resentment that so many in the Ara world feel toward the regimes that rul the oil kingdoms.

In fact, very few people an where write about the O Encounter. The silence e tends much further than th Arabic- or English-speaking worlds. Tak Bengali, a language deeply addicted t the travelogue as a genre. Every yea several dozen accounts of travel i America, Europe, China, and so on ar published in Bengali, along with innu merable short stories and novels abou expatriates in New Jersey, Californi and various parts of Europe. Yet th hundreds of thousands of Bengal speaking people who live and work i the oil kingdoms scarcely ever merit li erary attention—or any kind of interes for that matter.

As one of the few people who hav tried to write about the floating world c oil, I can bear witness to its slipperines to the ways in which it tends to trip fi tion into incoherence. In the end, pe haps, it is the craft of writing itself—o rather writing as we know it today—tha is responsible for the muteness of th Oil Encounter. The experiences that o has generated run counter to many c the historical imperatives that hav shaped writing over the last couple c centuries and given it its distinctiv forms.

The territory of oil is bafflingly mult lingual, for example, while the nove with its conventions of naturalistic di logue, is most at home within monolin gual speech communities (withi nation-states, in other words). Equall the novel is never more comfortabl than when it is luxuriating in a "sense c place," reveling in its unique power t evoke mood and atmosphere. But th experiences associated with oil are live out within a space that is no place at al a world that is intrinsically displace heterogeneous, and international. It is world that poses a radical challenge no merely to the practice of writing as w know it, but to much of modern cultur



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to such notions as the idea of distinguishable and distinct civilizations, or recognizable and separate "societies." It is a world whose closest analogues are medieval, not modern—which is probably why it has proved so successful in eluding the gaze of contemporary global culture. The truth is that we do not yet possess the form that can give the Oil Encounter a literary expression.

For this reason alone, *Cities of Salt*, the Jordanian writer Abdelrahman Munif's monumental five-part cycle of novels dealing with the history of oil, ought to be regarded as a work of immense significance. It so happens that the first novel in the cycle is also in many ways a wonderful work of fiction, perhaps even in parts a great one. Peter Theroux's excellent English translation of this novel was published a few years ago under the eponymous title *Cities of Salt*, and now its successor, *The Trench*, has appeared.

Munif's prose is extremely difficult to translate, being rich in ambiguities and unfamiliar dialectical usages, and so Theroux deserves to be commended for his translations—especially of the first book, where he has done a wonderful job. He is scrupulously faithful to both the letter and the spirit of the original, while sacrificing nothing in readability. Where Theroux has intervened, it is in what would appear to be the relatively unimportant matters of punctuation and typography. (He has numbered each chapter, though the Arabic text does not really have chapters at all, but merely extended breaks between pages; and he has also eliminated Munif's favorite device of punctuation, a sentence or paragraph that ends with two period points rather than one, to indicate indeterminacy, inconclusivity, what you will ...) These changes are slight enough, but they have the overall effect of producing a text that is much more "naturalistic" than the original. One day a professor of comparative literature somewhere will have fun using Theroux's translations to document the changes in protocol that texts undergo in being shaped to conform to different cultural expectations.

The Arabic title of Munif's first novel has the connotation of "the wilderness" or "the desert," and it begins with what is possibly the best and most detailed account of that mythical event, a First Encounter, in fiction—all the better for being, for once, glimpsed from the wrong end of the telescope. The novel opens, appropriately, on an oasis whose name identifies it as the source, or the beginning: Wadi al-Uyoun, "an outpouring of green in the harsh, obdurate


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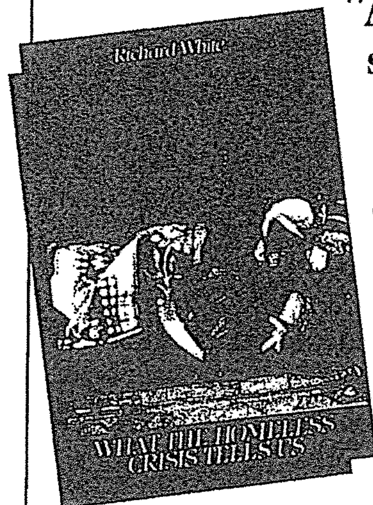



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desert." To the caravans that occasionally pass through it, as to its inhabitants, the wadi is an "earthly paradise," and to none more so than one Miteb al-Hathal ("the Troublemaker"), an elder of a tribe called al-Atoum:

> Left to himself to talk about Wadi al-Uyoun, Miteb al-Hathal would go on in a way no one could believe, for he could not confine himself to the good air and the sweetness of the water . . . or to the magnificent nights; he would tell stories which in some cases dated back to the days of Noah, or so said the old men.

But unsettling portents soon begin to intrude upon this earthly paradise. One evening at sunset, one of Miteb's sons returns from watering the family's livestock and tells his father of the arrival of "three foreigners with two marsh Arabs, and they speak Arabic"—"People say they came to look for water." But when Miteb goes to find out for himself, he sees them going to "places no one dreamed of going," collecting "unthinkable things," and writing "things no one understood," and he comes to the conclusion that "they certainly didn't come for water—they want something else. But what could they possibly want? What is there in this dry desert besides dust, sand, and starvation?"

The people of the wadi hear the foreigners asking questions "about dialects, about tribes and their disputes, about religion and sects, about the rocks, the winds and the rainy season"; they listen to them quoting from the Koran and repeating the Muslim profession of faith; and they begin to "wonder among themselves if these were jinn, because people like these who knew all those things and spoke Arabic yet never prayed were not Muslims and could not be normal humans." Reading the portents, Miteb the Troublemaker senses that something terrible is about to befall the wadi and its people, but he knows neither what it is nor how to prevent it. Then suddenly, to everyone's relief, the foreigners leave, and the wadi settles back, just a trifle uneasily, to its old ways.

But soon enough the strangers come back. They are no longer just unspecified "foreigners" but Americans, and they are everywhere, digging, collecting, and handing out "coins of English and Arab gold." Their liberality soon wins them friends in the wadi, but even the closest of their accomplices is utterly bewildered by their doings: "nothing was stranger than their morning prayers: they began by kicking their legs and raising their arms in the air, moving their bodies to the left and right, and then touching their toes until they were panting and drenched with sweat." Then a number of "yellow iron hulks" arrive, adding to the bewilderment of the wadi's inhabitants: "Could a man approach them without injury? What were they for and how did they behave—did they eat like animals or not?" Fearing the worst, the people of the wadi go to their emir to protest, only to be told that the Americans have "come from the ends of the earth to help us"—because "'There are oceans of blessings under this soil.'"

The protests are quickly suppressed, Miteb and other troublemakers are threatened with death, and before long the wadi's orchards and dwellings are demolished by the "yellow iron hulks." After the flattening of his beloved wadi, Miteb mounts his "white Omani she-camel" and vanishes into the hills, becoming a prophetic spectral figure who emerges only occasionally from the desert to cry doom and to strike terror into those who collaborate with the oilmen. As for Miteb's family and the rest of the wadi's inhabitants, they are quickly carried away by passing camel caravans. A number of them set out for a coastal settlement called Harran ("the Overheated"), where the new oil installations are to be built, a "cluster of low mud houses"—a place evidently very much as Doha and Kuwait were only a few decades ago.

The rest of Munif's narrative centers upon the early stages of Harran's transformation: the construction of the first roads, the gradual influx of people, the building of the oil installations, the port and the emir's palace. Working in shifts, the newly arrived Arab workers and their American overseers slowly conjure two new townships into being, Arab Harran and American Harran. Every evening, after the day's work is done, the men drift home

> to the two sectors like streams coursing down a slope, one broad and one small, the Americans to their camp and the Arabs to theirs, the Americans to their swimming pool, where their racket could be heard in the nearby barracks behind the barbed wire. When silence fell the workers guessed the Americans had gone into their air-conditioned rooms whose thick curtains shut everything out: sunlight, dust, flies, and Arabs.

Soon Harran no longer quite belongs to its people, and the single most important episode in the building of the new city has little to do with them. It is the story of an R-and-R ship that pays the city a brief visit for the benefit of the Americans living in the yet-unfinished oiltown:

> The astonished people of Harran approached [the ship] imperceptibly, step by step, like sleepwalkers. They could not believe their eyes and ears. Had there ever been anything like this ship, this huge and magnificent? Where else in the world were there women like these, who resembled both milk and figs in their tanned whiteness? Was it possible that men could shamelessly walk around with women, with no fear of others? Were these their wives, or sweethearts, or something else?

For a whole day and night, the inhab itants of Harran watch the American of the oiltown disporting themselve with the newly arrived women, and b the time the ship finally leaves "th men's balls are ready to burst." Thi event eventually comes to mark th beginning of the history of this city c salt:

> This day gave Harran a birth date, recording when and how it was built, for most people have no memory of Harran before that day. Even its own natives, who had lived there since the arrival of the first frightening group of Americans and watched with terror the realignment of the town's shoreline and hills—the Harranis, born and bred there, saddened by the destruction of their houses, recalling the old sorrows of lost travelers and the dead—remembered the day the ship came better than any other day, with fear, awe, and surprise. It was practically the only date they remembered.

The most sustained wron note in *Cities of Salt* i reserved for its concl sion. The novel ends wit a dramatic confrontation between th old Harran and the new: between world where the emir sat in coffe houses and gossiped with the Bedouir where everybody had time for everyon else and no one was ever so ill th they needed remedies that were sol for money, and a universe in which M Middleton of the oil company hold their livelihoods in his hands, wher the newly arrived Lebanese docto Subhi al-Mahmilji ("physician and su geon, specialist in internal and ven real diseases, Universities of Berlin an Vienna") charges huge fees for th smallest service, where the emir spie on the townspeople with a telescop and needs a cadre of secret police t tell him what they are thinking. "Ever day it's gotten worse," says one lon time resident of Harran, pointin toward the American enclave: "I tol you, I told every one of you, the Ame icans are the disease, they're the ro of the problem, and what's happene now is nothing compared to what the have in store for us."

The matter comes to a head when series of events—a killing by the secr

Possession of TIME



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police, sightings of the troublemaking Miteb, the laying-off of twenty-three workers—prompts the workers of Harran to invent spontaneously the notion of the strike. They stop working and march through the town chanting:

> ... The pipeline was built by beasts of prey.
> We will safeguard our rights.
> The Americans do not own it.
> This land is our land.

Then, led by two of Miteb the Troublemaker's sons, they storm the oil installation, sweeping aside the emir's secret police and the oil company's guards, and rescue some of their fellow workers who'd been trapped inside. And the book ends with an unequivocal triumph for the workers: the half-crazed emir flees the city after ordering the oil company to reinstate its sacked employees.

It is not hard to see why Munif would succumb to the temptation to end his book on an optimistic note. His is a devastatingly painful story: a slow, roundabout recounting of the almost accidental humiliation of one people by another. There is very little bitterness in Munif's telling of it. Its effectiveness lies rather in the gradual accumulation of detail. Munif's American oilmen are neither rapacious nor heartless. On the contrary, they are eager, businesslike, and curious. When invited to an Arab wedding, they ask "about everything, about words, clothing and food, about the names of the bridegroom and his bride and whether they had known each other before, and if they had ever met.... Every small thing excited the Americans' amazement." It is not through direct confrontations that the Harranis meet their humiliation. Quite the opposite. Theirs is the indignity of not being taken seriously at all; of being regarded as an obstacle on the scale of a minor technical snag in the process of drilling for oil.

Better than any other, Munif's method succeeds in showing us why so many people in the Middle East are moved to clutch at straws to regain some measure of self-respect for themselves; why so many Saudis, for example, felt the humiliation of Iraq's army almost as their own. But in fact the story is even grimmer than Munif's version of it, and the ending he chooses is founded in pure wish-fulfillment. It probably has more to do with its author's own history than with the story of oil in the Gulf.

Abdelrahman Munif was born in 1933, into a family of Saudi Arabian origin settled in Jordan. (He was later stripped of his Saudi citizenship for political reasons.) He studied in Baghdad and Cairo, and went on to earn a Ph.D in oil economics at the University of Belgrade—back in the days of Titoite socialism, when books written by Progressive writers always ended in working-class victories. Since then Munif's working life has been spent mainly in the oil industry in the Middle East, albeit in a rather sequestered corner of it: he has occupied important positions in the Syrian Oil Company, and he has served as editor in chief of an Iraqi journal called *Oil and Development.*

No one, in other words, is in a better position than Munif to know that the final episode in his story is nothing more than an escapist fantasy. He must certainly be aware that the work forces of the international oil companies in the Arabian peninsula have never succeeded in becoming politically effective. When they showed signs of restiveness in the 1950s, they were ruthlessly and very effectively suppressed by their rulers, with the help of the oil companies. Over the last couple of decades, the powers-that-be in the oil sheikhdoms (and who knows exactly who they are) have followed a careful strategy for keeping their workers quiescent: they have held the Arab component of their work forces at a strictly regulated numerical level, while importing large numbers of migrants from several of the poorer countries of Asia.

The policy has proved magically effective in the short run. It has created a class of workers who, being separated from the indigenous population (and from each other) by barriers of culture and language, are politically passive in a way that a predominantly Arab work force could never be within the Arab-speaking world—a class that is all the more amenable to control for living perpetually under threat of deportation. It is, in fact, a class of helots, with virtually no rights at all, and its members are often subjected to the most hideous kinds of physical abuse. Their experience makes a mockery of the human rights rhetoric that accompanied the Gulf war; the fact that the war has effected no changes in the labor policies of the oil sheikhdoms is proof in the eyes of millions of people in Asia and Africa that the "new world order" is designed to defend the rights of certain people at the expense of others.

Thus, the story of the real consequences of the sort of political restiveness that Munif describes in *Cities of Salt* is not likely to warm the heart quite as cozily as the ending he gives his novel. But if Munif can be accused of naïveté on this score, he must still be given


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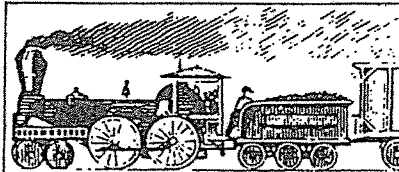


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credit for seeing that the workplace, where democracy is said to begin, is the site where the foundations of contemporary authoritarianism in the oil sheikhdoms were laid.

Today it is a commonplace in the Western media that aspirations toward democracy in the Arabian peninsula are a part of the fallout of changes ushered in by oil and the consequent breakdown of "traditional" society. In fact, in several instances exactly the opposite is true: oil and the developments it has brought in its wake have been directly responsible for the suppression of whatever democratic aspirations and tendencies there were within the region.

Certain parts of the Gulf such as Bahrain, whose commercial importance far predates the discovery of oil, have long possessed sizable groups of businessmen, professionals, and skilled workers—a stratum not unlike a middle class. On the whole, that class shared the ideology of the nationalist movements of various nearby countries such as India, Egypt, and Iran. It was their liberal aspirations that became the first victims of oil's most bizarre, most murderous creation: the petro-despot, dressed in a snowy *dishdasha* and armed with state-of-the-art weaponry—the creature whose gestation and birth Munif sets out to chronicle in the second volume of the *Cities of Salt* cycle, *The Trench.*

Unfortunately *The Trench* comes as a great disappointment. The narrative now moves away from Harran to a city in the interior called Mooran ("the Changeable"), which serves as the seat of the country's ruling dynasty. With the move to the capital, the focus of the narrative now shifts to the country's rulers.

The story of *The Trench* is common enough in the oil sheikhdoms of the Arabian peninsula: it begins with the accession to power of a sultan by the name of Khazael and it ends with his deposition, when he is removed from the throne by rival factions within the royal family. Munif describes the transformations that occur during Sultan Khazael's reign by following the career of one of his chief advisers, a Syrian doctor called Subhi al-Mahmilji (who earlier played an important part in the creation of the new Harran). The story has great potential, but Munif's voice does not prove equal to the demands of the narrative. It loses the note of wonder, of detached and reverential curiosity, that lent such magic to parts of *Cities of Salt,* while gaining neither the volume nor the richness of coloring that its material demands.

Instead Munif shifts to satire, and the change proves disastrous. He makes a valiant attempt—not for nothing are his books banned in various countries in the Arabian peninsula—but satire has no hope of success when directed against figures like Sultan Khazael and his family. No one, certainly no mere writer of fiction, could hope to satirize the royal families of the Arabian peninsula with a greater breadth of imagination than they do themselves. As countless newspaper reports can prove, factual accounts of their doings are well able to beggar the fictional imagination. Indeed, in the eyes of the world at large, Arab and non-Arab, the oil sheikh scarcely exists except as a caricature; he is the late twentieth century's most potent symbol of decadence, hypocrisy, and corruption. He pre-empts the very possibility of satire. Of course, it wasn't always so. The compulsions and the absurdities of an earlier generation of oil sheikhs had their roots in a genuinely tragic historical predicament. But those very real dilemmas are reduced to caricature in Munif's Sultan Khazael.

Even where it is successful, moreover, Munif's satire is founded ultimately upon a kind of nostalgia, a romantic hearkening back to a pristine, unspoiled past. It is not merely Americans from the oil companies who are the intruders here: every "foreigner" is to some degree an interloper in Harran and Mooran. As a result, Munif is led to ignore those very elements of the history of the oil kingdoms that ought to inspire his curiosity, the extraordinary admixtures of cultures, peoples, and languages that have resulted from the Oil Encounter.

Workers from other parts of Asia hardly figure at all in Munif's story. When they do it is either as stereotypes (a Pakistani doctor in *Cities of Salt* bears the name Muhammad Jinnah) or as faceless crowds, a massed symbol of chaos: "Once Harran had been a city of fishermen and travelers coming home but now it belonged to no one; its people were featureless, of all varieties and yet strangely unvaried. They were all of humanity and yet no one at all, an assemblage of languages, accents, colors and religions." The irony of *The Trench* is that in the end it leaves its writer a prisoner of his intended victim. Once Munif moves away from the earliest stages of the Oil Encounter, where each side's roles and attributes and identities are clearly assigned, to a more complicated reality—to the crowded, multilingual, culturally polyphonic present of the Arabian peninsula—he is unable to free himself from the prison house of xenophobia, bigotry, and racism that was created by precisely such figures as his Sultan Khazael. In its failure, *The Trench* provides still one more lesson in the difficulties that the experience of oil presents for the novelistic imagination. •

# The Gentleman as Hero

BY P. N. FURBANK

## Trollope: A Biography by N. John Hall

(Oxford University Press, 581 pp., $35)

Chameleonism in a literary biographer, it could be argued, is a vice, and those famous "sympathies" between biographer and subject, of whom it is said admiringly that the prose of the one can hardly be distinguished from the prose of the other, are a snare. It is bad tactics, and a fault of taste, to be epigrammatic in a life of Oscar Wilde or mellifluous in a life of Walter Pater.

The rule would certainly seem to apply in the case of Anthony Trollope, for reasons that reach deep into his life and his character. For he was a signal example of a self-made, or "twice-born," man. The central theme of his *Autobiography* is how a wretched and slovenly idler took an iron grip on himself and developed a bent for, and a delighted addiction to, thoroughness and regularity; how a misfit found his salvation in turning himself into a well-running machine.

There was a price to pay for this mechanization, but it was not altogether the expected one. It had no hardening effect on his heart and feeling. He remained a truculent but tenderhearted man. But it caused him, a very intelligent person, to dismiss an enormous number of things as not to be talked about, or even thought about. On a fe



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Cordell Hull, Franklin D. Roosevelt's secretary of state for most of his presidency, acknowledged that "the Near East, in which our government had evinced only a slight interest for a century and a half, became through the demand of WWII a vital area in the conduct of our foreign relations. . . . Iran (once known to us as Persia), Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Lebanon and Syria began to appear more and more in American print, not as lands of the ancients but as cogs in the machine of war."[17] In Saudi Arabia, the United States had important interests to protect, "principally the vast oil concession."[18]

World War II had a direct impact on oil development in eastern Arabia. Oil's importance was obvious. But the machinery needed to get it out of the ground was required elsewhere. Spare parts, trucks, and other equipment were requisitioned for the war effort. One boat filled with crucial parts sank en route to the Eastern Province, where Saudi Arabia's oil resources were located. Then in November 1940 Italian planes bombed the oil fields in Bahrain and eastern Saudi Arabia. Although the bombs somehow missed both sites' oil fields, and Benito Mussolini later publicly apologized for the attack, it was enough to scare Casoc's employees and spur many to return home. The camp of 371 American employees, 38 wives, and 16 children decreased in size in the weeks after the bombing to only 226 employees, 19 wives, and 5 children. Eight months later the camp emptied of its remaining women and children as German troops threatened to converge on Dhahran from El-Alamein, Egypt, in the west and the Caucasus in the north.[19] Promising Saudi fields such as the ones at Abu Hadriya and al-Abqaiq were left for future probing if and when the political situation stabilized.

In 1948, after the war's end, Aramco's drillers (Casoc was renamed Aramco in 1944) returned to a site that had long fascinated Max Steineke and other Aramco geologists. The company struck oil at Ghawar, southwest of Dhahran and east of Riyadh. The Ghawar field was soon classified as the world's largest oil deposit. Saudi Arabia was now on the map as a very serious oil player. In need of even more markets and capital given the vastly expanding Saudi output, Aramco was joined by Standard Oil of New Jersey and Socony-Vacuum, which slipped out of their IPC contracts on a technicality in November 1948. One of the king's only conditions was that whatever the face of the bigger company, it had to be 100 percent American, rather than include European (particularly British) companies. He did not trust European designs on his country.

Between 1944 and 1950 Aramco's gross production of crude oil increased from 21,000 to 548,000 barrels of oil per day.[20] Cheap Persian Gulf oil became a central component of America's postwar strategy, as the reconstruction of Europe depended on it. In 1948 the United States imported only about 6 percent of its oil, with only about 8 percent of that coming from Saudi Arabia.[21] In contrast, Western Europe was almost entirely dependent on Persian Gulf oil. U.S. planners busily determined how best to ensure its flow.

The U.S. government by and large took a backseat to Aramco's relations with Riyadh. The State Department let Aramco take the lead in interacting with the Saudi government, particularly around oil and local development issues. In the early days of the relationship Aramco handled oil, while the embassy (after it was established) handled politics, including the fallout from America's 1947 decision to support the partition of Palestine and difficulties in managing Saudi-British tensions given Washington's warm relations with both. The arrangement was partly a result of Aramco's legacy in the kingdom, but it also fit nicely with the determined efforts of successive U.S. administrations to stay out of local politics rather than re-create Britain and France's colonial experience.

This division of labor between the U.S. government and U.S. oil companies was evident in how America's diplomatic and economic interests were physically located inside the kingdom. Aramco dominated eastern Saudi Arabia and the majority of oil issues that emerged from there. The U.S. embassy operated out of Jeddah, on Saudi Arabia's west coast, and handled most of the nettlesome foreign policy issues from there. Aramco kept the State Department and CIA apprised of its initiatives, but it largely operated independent of official U.S. channels. Over time, however, especially as ownership of Aramco passed to Saudi Arabia over the course of the 1970s and the American economy became increasingly dependent on Saudi oil, the U.S. government took a more dominant role in U.S.-Saudi relations.

## America's Three Pillars

Oil, of course, is a significant factor in the U.S.-Saudi relationship, as it is in all other Saudi dealings. It can hardly be otherwise for a country that sits astride one-quarter of the world's proven oil resources and relies on oil exports for 90 to 95 percent of its total export earnings.[22] But while oil explains a good portion of America's interest in the kingdom, it does not explain the strength of the relationship. After all, America's relationships with other major oil-producing states such as Russia, Iran, Iraq, Libya, and Venezuela have been exceedingly troubled. Politically and militarily, the United States and Soviet Union were at odds for the entire Cold War period. For thirty of the thirty-six years between 1967 and 2003, the United States had no official political

The Saudi concession, roughly the size of Texas, New Mexico, and Arizona combined, was the only important oil concession in the Middle East that was exclusively American-owned and operated. Shortly thereafter a handful of Socal employees landed on Saudi Arabia's eastern shore. They included men such as the burly and "much loved" Max Steineke, a savvy geologist who could identify oil fields from Saudi Arabia's challenging landscape, and Floyd W. Ohliger, Socal's superintendent of Arabian operation. Both were "good eggs," according to Thomas C. Barger, who arrived shortly after the others and eventually rose to head the oil company's impressive government relations department and then the entire Arabian-based company. Barger himself came to Saudi Arabia in December 1937 on a rickety barge from Bahrain, disembarked at a half-finished pier at Khobar, then just a small fishing village, and drove six miles along an oiled road to Dhahran, the hot and rugged company town. Barger, who had cut his teeth as a professional geologist around the rough-and-tumble copper mines of Butte, Montana, was assigned to assist Steineke in his geological pursuit. "I'm awfully glad to have you here with us," Steineke enthused when Barger arrived. "I don't know what I am going to do with you, but I am certainly glad to have you on board." Barger's Arabic eventually became so fluent that he was occasionally mistaken for a Bedouin, an Arab nomad. After witnessing Barger's language proficiency, the king blurted out, "*Mashallah!*"—a phrase expressing wonderment and amazement.[10]

Almost immediately, Socal's newly formed and wholly owned subsidiary, the California Arabian Standard Oil Company (Casoc), faced a quandary. If the company's investment in Saudi Arabia's fields paid off and the company struck oil, it would not have markets available to sell its product to. Fiercely competitive, IPC denied Casoc access to its markets. Partly as a result of this, Casoc merged in 1936 with Texas Oil—a company that had markets in Asia but only a limited supply of American oil to service it. Together in 1944 the two companies renamed their subsidiary the Arab American Company (Aramco), which would become a principal actor in U.S.-Saudi relations.

Between 1933 and 1938 Casoc struggled. The landscape proved difficult to decipher, and no one was quite sure how deep the oil was located, or even if there was any. The Americans began drilling at an area called Dammam, a few miles north of Dhahran. The first holes produced little of note; on occasion the wells showed traces of oil, but not enough to give them commercial value. The seventh hole proved a different story. On March 4, 1938, after a series of disappointing drills, Saudi Arabia's Dammam-7 well "blew," producing more than 1,500 barrels per day. At the time, an average U.S. well produced about 100 barrels per day, although Saudi Arabia's neighbor, Bahrain, was producing a total of 13,000 barrels per day.[11] Still, Saudi Arabia now had one commercially viable well and its future as an oil producer appeared bright.

The Dammam-7 blow corresponded with a visit to Dhahran by Princess Alice, the granddaughter of Britain's Queen Victoria, and her husband, the Earl of Athlone, the brother of Queen Mary. Both had crossed the entire width of Arabia from Jeddah in a sort of goodwill tour. For the Americans, isolated from much of civilization in eastern Saudi Arabia, the arrival of royalty overshadowed the excitement of the oil discovery. Although those involved did not realize it at the time, the visit of Princess Alice, corresponding as it did with the discovery of oil in Saudi Arabia, foreshadowed the handover of British influence in the Gulf to the Americans. The cordial letters that later passed between the princess and Dhahran's American women, discussing among other things an angel food cake recipe, preceded a higher-stakes and much terser set of letters exchanged six years later between Roosevelt and Churchill arguing over whether the United States was seeking to "deprive" Britain of its oil assets or whether Britain was trying to "horn in" on Casoc's Saudi oil concession.[12]

The 1938 oil discovery and subsequent finds shocked and delighted King Abdel Aziz. His first royalty check topped $1.5 million. Months later, on May 1, 1939, the king, along with a retinue of more than two thousand people in five hundred automobiles, journeyed out to the eastern oil fields and turned the spigot that began the flow of oil into the first tankers. On the return trip, the king, along with some of his brothers and older sons, boisterously sang Bedouin raiding songs from their youth.[13] Impressed with American ingenuity and seeming to genuinely like the American oil workers, the king augmented Casoc's concession by nearly 80,000 square miles, increasing Casoc's area to about 440,000 square miles, a little over 50 percent of Saudi territory.[14] "Do you know what they will find when they reach Mars?" the king asked Tom Barger after he had heard a radio report predicting that men would someday travel to the distant planet. He then proceeded to answer his own question: "They will find Americans out there in the desert hunting for oil."[15]

In 1939 Casoc produced approximately 11,000 barrels per day. Ten years later that number hovered around 477,000 barrels, accounting for slightly more than 5 percent of total world production and about 35 percent of all Middle East production.[16]

Oil would play an even larger role in World War II than it had in World War I, as new technologies demanded ever more "black gold."

Saby Hafez.

together with the older man, who was not only much more widely read but a gifted teacher, as well as an established author and critic, had plainly changed Munif, increasing his self-confidence and scope as a writer. For his subsequent work is marked by a startlingly new range and depth that probably owes much to the lengthy critical discussions that must have accompanied the joint creation of 'Ammuriyyah, and fired Munif to conceive his own geography of the imagination—a parallel world like Hardy's Wessex or Faulkner's Yoknapatawpha.

For this he needed quiet and distance. On leaving Baghdad, Munif did not relocate to Damascus or Beirut, but moved with his family and his savings to France, taking up residence in Boulogne, near Paris, where many a famous exile had passed his days. There Munif wrote his quintet, *Cities of Salt*. Originally planned as a trilogy, the complete work took seven years to write, and at two thousand five hundred pages is the longest novel in modern Arabic literature. Epic in scale and ambition, it depicts the traumatic social transformation that came about with the discovery of oil, wrenching traditional desert communities into exploited and oppressed urban populations, and nomadic tribal rivalries into centralized police states. In one sense, it can be—and often is—read as a huge canvas of the brutalities of modernization and its devastation of customary ways of living. The novel seeks to capture the nature and rhythm of a pastoral world that has now been largely swept away, to record its practices and relations, its popular lore and moral beliefs, its forms of memory and of solidarity, and to show what becomes of them once petroleum is extracted from the sand: the enormous leap from traditional desert life, with its bedouin ethos and cosmic sense of time, to the frenzies of consumerism and conflicts of class and wealth in ultramodern cities. It depicts the arrival of modernity in these conditions as inseparable from the proliferation of tyranny, and oil riches as an evil feeding corruption, greed and human weakness. We watch the crushing of the life of the desert, with its freedom, independence and dignity, under the wheels of a repellent juggernaut.

But though there is a powerful sense of loss in the novel, which mourns the destruction of a world Munif half-knew as a boy, *Cities of Salt* is far from a simple threnody for tradition. With two technical works on the economics of oil and years of engagement in the Ba'th cause behind him, Munif was scarcely a foe of mineral wealth or modernity as such. It is the cruelly perverted form that modernization has taken in the

Arabian peninsula that is the commanding subject of the quintet, and that gives the work its remarkable form. For in the foreground is a tribal saga—the story of the feuding tribes of Arabia and the triumph of one particular tribe over the others through treachery, violence, manipulation of religious dogma and the enlisting of foreign support; and of how the feuds continue within the triumphant tribe, once it has achieved a monopoly of power.[18] Saudi Arabia is the only country in the Arab world that is named after a family. Munif, demolishing the historical lies on which this dynasty has based its legitimacy, etches a savage portrait not only of its brutality, perfidy and hypocrisy, but of its consistent servility to foreign overlords and sabotage of any moves to economic or political independence in the Arab world. From beginning to end, the House of Saud stands revealed as a dependent of imperial suzerains—first Britain and then the United States. Behind the tribal saga lie the Western empires of oil and their role in thwarting any progress in the region.

Munif's great novel is composed with an extraordinary formal freedom. Each of its five volumes has a different narrative structure, unlike any of the others, and their sequence breaks apart any conventional chronological order. Unifying them is an utterly distinctive tone, at once acerbic and poetic, delivered in an impersonal third person, charged with irony and figural intensity. Generally short, vivid sentences, at times veering close to aphorisms, alternate with terse dialogues in actions that unfold to a kind of epic voice-over. The story—or succession of stories—is told with a continuous energy that seems to belie the huge length of the whole work, and with gifts of metaphoric imagination capable of throwing up images of arresting power or beauty. Aiming at a 'middle language' between classical and colloquial Arabic, Munif was himself not entirely satisfied with the style he arrived at. But as a vehicle for fusing history and fiction on the grandest scale, it is strikingly effective.

The title of the quintet—not of the first volume, as in English—is a judgement: the Cities of Salt built by a grotesque dynasty in the Arabian desert, where oil will one day give out, are barren pillars of artifice destined for ultimate dissolution. To recount the history of the kingdom that created them, Munif devised an original solution to the problem of balancing fact and fiction in his novel. At one level, the narrative of *Cities*

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[18] For a detailed study of this novel as a tribal saga, see Amina Khalifa Thiban, *Transformation and Modernity in the Desert Tribal Saga: Cities of Salt*, PhD thesis submitted to SOAS, University of London, 2004.

*of Salt* is a faithful reproduction of the main episodes and landmarks of Saudi history, from the turn of the century to the time of the first oil shock—in effect, a gigantic historical *roman à clé*, in which the successive actual rulers of the kingdom and their familiars, with the thinnest of disguises, are the principal *dramatis personae.* But all these figures and events are transposed by Munif's peculiar modes of storytelling into a semi-mythopoeic register, so that the reader is never left in any doubt that this is a work of highly-wrought fiction, as well as an eerie report of political realities. The extreme twisting of time in the novel further distances the direct data of history from their imaginary correlates. The first volume of the quintet covers what in real time are the years from 1933 to 1953. The second deals with historical events between 1953 and 1958. The third reverses to the equivalent of 1891 and ends around 1930. The fourth moves forward to the years between 1964 and 1969. The fifth, which is divided into two parts, first doubles back to 1920–35, and then shifts to 1964–75.[19] The reasons for such a complex structure have been much debated, as have its aesthetic merits. The effect, however, of its switchbacks, overlaps and disjunctures is to estrange the annals of Saudi despotism for the less expected purposes of fiction.

## *Camels to Cadillacs*

The opening volume of *Cities of Salt*, entitled *'al-Tih* (The Wilderness), begins in a pre-modern and pre-national time in the oasis of Wadi al-'Uyun, where a bedouin community lives in traditional simplicity and unity with its surroundings, and seeks to record the forgotten social history and popular geography of Arabia. Into this setting there suddenly

[19] The historical events behind these dates were as follows. In 1891 the Saudi tribal leader Abd al-Rahman was driven from his lands by the Rashidi. In 1902 his son Abd al-Aziz, founder of the modern Saudi state and later often known in the West as Ibn Saud, retook Riyadh, and by 1930 had conquered all of the area of today's Saudi Arabia. In 1933 Abd al-Aziz granted the first oil concession to what would become Aramco. The first oil fields were pumped in 1938; a pipeline to Dhahran was completed in 1950; the first strikes in Dhahran occurred in 1953. In the same year Abd al-Aziz died, and was succeeded by his son Saud, who had saved him from an assassination attempt in 1935. Saud was deprived of his power by his brother Faysal in 1958, attempted a comeback in 1962, and was finally forced to abdicate and driven into exile in 1964, when Faysal seized the throne. Saud died in 1969. Faysal was in turn assassinated by a nephew in 1975. The only significant modification of this chronology in the quintet is the compression of Saud's loss of power in 1958 and his eviction in 1964 into a single coup by Faysal, depicted from different angles at the end of the second and in the middle of the fifth volumes.

appears a small group of Americans, with a strong recommendation from the local emir to the pragmatic elder Ibn al-Rashid, on a mysterious mission which they never explain to the local people. They are resisted by the fiercely independent Mut'ab, who instinctively suspects them. In his understanding of a harsh—yet also beautiful—environment and respect for its natural rhythms, Mut'ab is a more developed and mythologized version of 'Assaf, the hero of *Endings*.

But he is also a fighter and prophet, whose forebears defended the oasis against the Turks as he will against the Americans, who are bent on destroying the oasis in search of oil. When their yellow tractors finally tear up its trees, he vanishes on his camel into the desert, entering legend as a mythic figure in collective consciousness, and the scene moves to the coastal town of Harran where the Americans need to build a port and a pipeline to the wells they have drilled. There the uprooted bedouin are tricked into becoming exploited construction workers, as the emir presides over the growth of a company town and a class society, enforced by police thugs. When a selfless local healer is murdered by the latter, a strike breaks out, the police open fire but cannot quell the workers, and the emir departs. The entire action of the novel, based on the first discovery of oil in Ayn Dar in the early thirties through to the first strikes in Dhahran in the early fifties, is delivered in the style of an oral storyteller, recounting the fate of a community rather than a set of individuals. New characters enter and old ones disappear in a relay that minimizes, without abolishing, the significance of personal identities. These are features of *'al-Tih* that drew a famously crass comment from John Updike, who announced: 'it is unfortunate that Abdelrahman Munif appears to be insufficiently Westernized to produce a narrative that feels much like what we call a novel. His voice is that of a campfire explainer'—and one denigrating Americans with 'the maledictory rhetoric of the Ayatollah Khomeini' (sic) to boot.[20]

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[20] No parody of Western ignorance and condescension could better the ineffable remark with which Updike concluded his review: 'The jacket flap tells us *Cities of Salt* has been banned in Saudi Arabia. The thought of novels being banned in Saudi Arabia has a charming strangeness, like the thought of hookahs being banned in Minneapolis': *Odd Jobs*, New York 1991, pp. 563–67. Martin Amis characteristically gawps with admiration at these fatuities, in his own inimitable tone: 'You have only to look at the bibliographical lead-ins to feel your lower lip tremble: "*Cities of Salt*, by Abdelrahman Munif, translated from the Arabic by Peter Theroux. 627 pp"—627 pages! Yet Iron John dispatches that one'—*New York Times*, 10 November 1991.

Stefan Mayer — Experimental Arabic Novel —



from modernity and the sensitive depiction of locale—are key characteristics of the same texts by Toomer, Stein, and Hemingway that experiment with building the novel on the form of the short story or vignette. Thus, paradoxically, Munif's move toward basing the novel on a more indigenous form of narrative makes it highly comparable to key texts in the Western modernist canon.

In his *Inkisār al-Aḥlām* (The shattering of dreams),[6] Muhammad Kamil al-Khatib (Muḥammad Kāmil al-Khatīb) makes the point that Munif was a member of a highly politicized generation that turned to literature as a form of alternative expression. When the political dreams they had nurtured failed to come to fruition, the writers of this generation used literature as a weapon trained against the power structure of their own society. Muhammad Siddiq, for instance, characterizes one of Munif's later novels, *The Trench* (1991; *Al-Ukhdūd*, 1985), as a work which challenges "the hegemonic master-narrative" of the "official Saudi account of the establishment of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia."[7]

Munif may be among the most misunderstood and underrated Arab writers in terms of his formal experimentation. Western readers and critics are inclined to regard Munif's "Cities of Salt" series, of which three volumes have been translated and published in English, mainly as social critique of a highly elaborate and sophisticated nature. These works, in particular, have been the subject of proprietory claims on the part of self-styled "postcolonial" critics in the West. The claim is made on the basis of their preoccupation with broad historical or political themes, their rewriting of history from a distinctly "Arab" viewpoint, or simply their apparently unadorned, "realistic" style, qualities that endear them, respectively, to historicists, multiculturalists, and antimodernists.

At the same time, among Arab critics, Munif tends to be viewed as a novelist in the classical (realist) mode, the prose and structure of his texts unextraordinary, and their subject matter noncontroversial. There is a failure on the part of even highly sophisticated critics to grant Munif the status of an experimental writer. The "Cities of Salt" series is generally lumped in the category of the historical novel in the mode of Ghitani's *Zayni Barakat*. This is due partly to Munif's narrative style, which is unadorned, almost reportorial in tone. It is also due to the historical theme of these novels, as well as to the apparent absence of literary devices in these works, which either directly or obviously interferes with the



sequentiality of narration. The latter technique is one that Arab critics, in particular, have come to associate with the experimental novel. Yumna al-'Eid, for instance, contrasts what she calls the "modern" novel from its antecedent in terms of its reliance not on storytelling, but on *discours*. According to this distinction, she asserts that Munif's *Cities of Salt* (1987; *Mudun al-Milh: Al-Tīh*, 1984) is not a modern novel, since it is "preoccupied with the 'play' of composition, not with that which forms the elements of novelistic discourse" (125).

This type of distinction, however, tends to ignore the ways in which Munif's form of narrative is, in fact, innovative in comparison with that of early modernists such as Mahfouz or Kanafani. Eid provides a hint of such a distinction when she refers to "narrative techniques which are not employed without the specialized discourse of storytelling" (126), and concludes that

> The novel of 'Abd al-Rahmān Munif departs from the form of the problem-solution novel, or the novel of the heroic personality, but, in terms of its orientation, it remains a novel which tells a story. (127)

In other words, Eid is acknowledging that Munif does away with narrative techniques that impose a "problem-solution" (as in *Miramar*) or a "heroic personality" (as in *All That's Left to You*), neither of which can be employed without the discourse of storytelling, without actually doing away with the storytelling discourse itself. For her, then, Munif occupies a transitional position with respect to modern narrative development. This analysis, however, ignores other ways in which Munif's writing is experimental. While his experimentation may be conservative in that it is not meant to overturn the discourse of storytelling, it nevertheless draws attention to the act of narration. It also highlights its own fictiveness in ways that are subtler, yet paradoxically bolder, than those of most of his contemporaries.

In some ways, Munif's work in the "Cities of Salt" series is written in a clearly more traditional mode. Like Sonallah Ibrahim in *Najmah Aghusṭus*, he offers a counternarrative instead of a resistance narrative. Unlike *Najmah Aghusṭus*, however, the "Cities of Salt" novels are not "negative" texts, in the sense that they do not aim at defamiliarizing—but rather with refamiliarizing—the reader with an alternative view of history. In this sense, Munif is working in a retrograde manner from the

point of view of those critics whose only notion of experimentalism is as a defamiliarizing process. At the same time, this debate concerning the historical aspect of Munif's narrative obscures ways in which Munif is involved in an experimental project that specifically is meant to draw the reader's attention to the fictiveness of the text and, by implication, to the fictiveness of history itself.

The first of the volumes translated into English, *Cities of Salt*,[8] is the story of the arrival of Americans in the tiny desert village of Wadi al-Uyoun. It proceeds to relate the story of the destruction of the village, the dispersal of its inhabitants, and the monumental reconstruction of the port town of Harran, linked by pipeline to Wadi al-Uyoun. Munif plays with the reader's cultural perspective by writing from the viewpoint of the Arabs who have no inkling of the technology that the Americans bring with them:

> With the first light of dawn, huge iron machines began to move. Their deafening noise filled the whole wadi. So gigantic and strange were these iron machines that no one had ever imagined such things existed. . . .
>
> When the machines stopped, small windows and doors opened up in them and dusty men came out and looked around them. A bewildered silence reigned: Where had these men been? How had they entered and come out of these machines? Were they men or devils? . . . These yellow iron hulks—could a man approach them without injury? What were they for and how did they behave—did they eat like animals, or not? (98)

The narration is objective, yet at the same time it reflects a communal perspective, in order to give the reader an immediate feel of the shock that the Arabs are experiencing. Walid Hamarneh refers to this technique as the "dialectic of process and narration." He explains this term by noting that although Munif relies on using a narrative form with objective perspective, he combines it with an underlying voice that is "sympathetic, yet not completely submerged."[9] Such a perspective combines objectivity with an empathic voice that represents the shifting consciousness of the community.

The destruction of the village of Wadi al-Uyoun shows Munif's continued preoccupation with endings, as reflected in this shifting communal consciousness:



> This was the final, insane, accursed proclamation that everything had come to an end. For anyone who remembers those long-ago days, when a place called Wadi al-Uyoun used to exist, and a man named Miteb al-Hathal, and a brook, and trees, and a community of people used to exist . . . the . . . things that still break his heart in recalling those days are the tractors which attacked the orchards like ravenous wolves, tearing up the trees and throwing them to the earth. (106)

The collective ignorance of the villagers and townsfolk is particularly used in contrast with the presence of the Americans, creating a sense on the part of the reader that they are "absent," just as Western colonial texts tend to treat their native subjects:

> They were busy all day long. They went to places no one dreamed of going. They collected unthinkable things. They had a piece of iron—no one knew what it was or what they did with it—and when they returned in the evening they brought with them bags of sand and pieces of rock. Once they brought tamarisk and wormwood branches, and bunches of clover. They broke the branches in a strange way and attached pieces of paper on which they had written obscure things. That was not all: they placed wooden markers and iron poles everywhere they went, and wrote on them, and wrote things no one understood on the sheets of paper they carried with them everywhere. (30)

The Arabs' collective view of the Americans, who seem to accomplish things without exerting any visible power, confers on the foreigners an aura of mystery similar to that which orientalism conferred on the Arab world. In this case, however, the contrast is between an Arab culture that does not wish to know the causes of everything, and the fetishistic "scientific" attitude of the Americans, who constantly probe into every aspect of existence:

> "The bastards want to know everything," said Ibrahim al-Nasir. "Even why my father got divorced and remarried. They wanted to know if I was unclean, because I didn't pray all the time. They asked if I had a lot of wet dreams, and they laughed. The bastards want to know who has planted every seed and laid every egg in history." (329)

Irony is one of Munif's most essential narrative techniques, never more powerful than when he is depicting the Arabs' participation in their

own downfall. One of the main characters is Ibn Rashed, a man who becomes a recruiter for the Americans, and rises to a powerful position in Harran. The Arabs succumb like sheep to the lure of the wealth he distributes, regardless of the cost to their previous way of life:

> In the first days a number of the workers thought of leaving Harran . . . but the first salary Ibn Rashed distributed changed their minds. No one had ever dreamed of getting that much money, and none had ever possessed that amount before. They received their pay in a silent, solemn, almost majestic rite. (185)

> Ibn Rashed . . . looked at their faces. "There's one more matter, my friends." He looked at them carefully. "The camels. From today onward they are of no use here."
>
> For the first time the men felt that they were confronting an agonizing situation and a decisive choice; they were being asked to give up the most precious things they owned.
>
> The next day they turned their camels over to Ibn Rashed with no discussion, and he gave them some money.
>
> No one said a word. They were all thinking of the safest way to store their money so that it would not get lost or stolen, and after long deliberation most of them decided that the best and surest way to safeguard it was to have Ibn Rashed keep it for them. (186–88)

Pitted against these overwhelming forces, Miteb al-Hathal resists the coming of the Americans from the moment that they first appear, and delivers dire prophecies of the consequences. When the destruction of the village is accomplished, he vanishes into the desert, yet he continues to exert an influence on the imagination of the people, and upon the reader. By means of this character, Munif plays with the paradox of presence and absence, and combines these qualities in the person of the prophetic, subversive character of Miteb al-Hathal:

> Long days of hard, uneasy waiting . . . but Miteb al-Hathal did not come.
>
> Miteb al-Hathal . . . No worker said it outright or pronounced his name out loud, but his specter filled the whole desert. . . . After the investigation they were all sure that Miteb al-Hathal, who had been gone for long years, no one knew where, was back, and that he would make the desert a hell for the Americans. (511)



In this passage, Munif connects the notion of disappearance or nonpresence with both the tradition of bedouin guerrilla warfare as well as Muslim messianic traditions such as that of the *Mahdi*. Munif is also playing here (and throughout the text) with the desert as symbol, in a way reminiscent of Kanafani's *All That's Left to You*. He uses this symbol, in part, to represent the Arabs, and he juxtaposes it with water, or the sea, which is associated with the Americans. The Americans arrive, via the sea, on great ships; they know how to swim; they are at home with water and on the water. The sea is the means by which they transport their men, their equipment, their technology, and even women who are brought for the pleasure of the colonists. In *Rich and Strange*, Marianne DeKoven argues that the symbolism of water, or the sea, is a uniquely modernist trope. In *Cities of Salt*, we can see how culturally specific such an observation is. Munif plays with this symbolism, echoed in earlier experimental Arabic novels such as *The Ship* and his own *Sharq al-Mutawassit,* (East of the Mediterranean, 1975);[10] the desert symbolizes the native consciousness of the Arabs, while the sea represents the foreign consciousness of the Americans.

At one point, Miteb al-Hathal indeed makes an appearance, and here Munif borrows from the conventions of magical realism, all the more striking for its isolation within the lengthy text:

> Rain filled the earth and sky. The narrow *wadi* at the end of Rawdhat al-Mashti gushed crazily with water, and the people stood and watched in bewilderment.
>
> At that very moment, as a brilliant flash of lightning rent the sky, creating fear upon fear, Miteb al-Hathal appeared.
>
> He . . . seemed to stand squarely on the opposite bank of the wadi. He struck the earth with his staff, looked at them all sternly and shook his head three times. Before he turned away his voice rumbled . . . "Fear is from things to come."
>
> . . . "Didn't you see him? Where is he? He was there . . . he was there." (151–53)

Miteb al-Hathal is not a heroic figure, however, but rather an ambivalent one. He expresses his attitude toward the Americans in exaggerated, demonic terms:

> Watch their eyes, watch what they do and say. They're devils, no one can trust them. They're more accursed than the Jews. And the bastards memorized the Koran. Strange. (29)

In this third volume of the "Cities of Salt" series, Munif experiments further with narrative point of view. This experimentation can be seen most clearly when he focuses on events of particular importance. At these points, he tends to stop and recount the event from numerous viewpoints. For instance, after describing the Battle of al-Samha, the narrator proceeds for two pages to give supplementary accounts of the battle:

> Before verdicts were given and the outcome weighed, there had to be an answer to the most basic question: what had happened?
> Even this question, which should not have caused any great dissension, gave rise to the wildest discrepancies.
> One of the Sultan's biographers, writing seven years after the Awali campaign, wrote. . . .
> One of Mooran's "historians" wrote of the Battle of al-Samha. . . .
> A more recent researcher who came to Mooran with a number of motives, one of which was the writing of history, wrote of the battle that. . . .
> Hamilton wrote about the Battle of al-Samha years later, working from his journals. . . .
> Much later a neutral historian recounting the battle wrote that. . . . (122–23)

At many other points in the narrative, the narrator is at pains to include various versions of an event, often conflicting. Sometimes versions are later even asserted to be plainly fictitious. The technique seems to aim at creating uncertainty in regard to history, or to make the point that the reconstruction or interpretation of any event depends on the viewpoint of the individual:

> The stories and tidbits, and even the rumors about their relationship, and the matter of Othman's money and other affairs, were full of contradictions and conflicting versions due to the numerous narrators and their varying motives, so that it was impossible to establish the truth, or even parts of it. (185)

> There were radically different accounts of what happened next, after the gold and jewels were handed over. According to one version, the Sultan sold all of the gold in the markets of Haifa and Jaffa; according to another, Olayan took it all to India and sold it there. The best-



> informed people said that no final sale took place: the gold had all been deposited or pawned with Jewish goldsmiths and money changers in Baghdad, against commercial loans at interest. (188)

> Why had the Sultan chosen this specific place? Was there any meaning in this?
> Historians were later perplexed by this detail, and found unnumbered interpretations for it. (195)

> As to how Ibn Bakhit knew, there were at least three different stories. (209)

At the same time, however, when Munif reports a given event from different perspectives or viewpoints, his purpose is to give the reader a more complete view of an event. It represents an ultimate attempt to "objectify," to write history in the form of fiction. The idea that material of dubious authenticity can help to construct a "true" historical picture is a modernist idea in Western literature, but a traditional one in Arabic literature. Specifically, it has a direct connection with the Arabic literary tradition of *hadith*, or the record of actions and sayings of the Prophet. In the earlier days of Islam, those people who had lived in the society of the Prophet were the best authority for this knowledge. Later, Islamic tradition was further built on the authority of the first generation after Muhammad, and then with that of following generations. Not all of these traditions can be regarded as reliable; in fact, numerous contradictory traditions arose, yet all still form a part of the total body of *hadith*.[15]

At the same time, the notion that an accumulation of viewpoints can heighten the sense of "reality" conveyed by a narrative is certainly a modernist technique, akin to that which we have discussed in relation to Faulkner, Mahfouz, and others. In view of Munif's connection with Jabra Ibrahim Jabra, it may also be worth quoting from *The Ship*, in which Jabra reveals indebtedness to Kafka with respect to this narrative technique:

> It was Kafka's habit in his *Memoirs* to describe an experience in one way, then again in another way, then again a third way, and so on for a fourth, or a fifth time in some cases . . . each time he would start differently, abbreviating some details in the previous version and expanding others. . . . It's like looking at a huge object and walking around

As the people are severed from their homes and land, Munif resorts to apocalyptic language. With the destruction of the wadi, the infernal qualities of the desert take over. Fueled by the summer heat, it transforms into "an unbearable hell . . . and torment" (*CS*, 98). With the Americans' arrival, the people of the wadi are already beset by premonitions of evil, referring to them as devils (*ʿafarit*), demons (*jinni*), and satans (*shayatin*) (*CS*, 56, 58, 59, 61, 62, 87, 96, 99, 103, 110, 121). When the Americans begin to pour water into the ground—drilling through the ground rock—the people of the wadi wonder if they are "quenching the thirst" of the *jinn* "burning in the belly of the earth" (*CS*, 151). Through these images, Munif constructs an antithetical world of hellfire, diametrically opposed to the "paradise" that Wadi al-ʿUyun had been. Munif speaks in a prophetic voice, warning of the ethical and moral ramifications of these seismic disruptions. He describes a fervent heat in this "house of fire"; people feel this burning as an intense pain, tearing apart certain limbs of their body (*CS*, 223). Mitʿab says, "They talk about resurrection day? Today is resurrection day. They say if iron strikes iron? Today I saw iron strike iron" (*CS*, 86–87). The people live through hellfire, are nearly destroyed, and are reforged into a new form. In Munif's apocalypse, men are turned not into salt but into machines.

In his book *Democracy First, Democracy Always*, Munif explains the apocalyptic imagery of the title *Cities of Salt*. It refers, he says, to unsustainable cities that would turn into "infernal ovens" without a constant flow of electricity and air conditioning. He describes these steel edifices as a world of "huge iron entities" molding humanity in its image.[39] In a key, hallucinatory scene in the novel, an American, a black man, works to erect a drill. As night turns to day, he transforms into an iron pillar, a kind of modern-day "pillar of salt." When the men from the wadi begin working for the American company, the author describes one of them as "planting himself in Wadi al-ʿUyun, not like the palms that used to fill the wadi in days past, but like those iron pillars sunk in every place" (*CS*, 146). In an interview in *Counterpunch*, Munif explained the title's meaning to Tariq Ali, "Cities of salt means cities that offer no sustainable existence. When the waters come in, the first waves will dissolve the salt and reduce these great glass cities to dust. In antiquity, as you know, many cities simply disappeared. It is possible to foresee the downfall of cities that are inhuman."[40]

39. ʿAbd al-Rahman Munif, *Al-Dimuqratiya Awlan, al-Dimuqratiya Daʿiman* [Democracy first, democracy always] (Beirut: Jamiʿ al-Huquq al-ʿArabi, 1998), 327–28.
40. Tariq Ali, "Farewell to Munif: Patriarch of Arabic Literature," *Counterpunch*, January 31/February 1, 2004, available at http://www.counterpunch.org/ali01312004.html.

that a human feels" (*CS*, 81).[38] The agrarian ties do not just bind generations to this locale, invested as they are in the planted earth; they also tie the community together, making water thicker than blood. They tend each other's gardens, making "the people as if they were one family. It's true that family relationships of some kind or another brought people together here, but the relationships that dominated were stronger than those family ties" (*CS*, 72).

When the Americans come to the oasis, they raze the palms and drive out the inhabitants. Munif personifies the trees, as if they were living beings felled from the earth: they kneel in supplication, begging mercy from their executioners. The author depicts them imploring with a voice, feeling pain, needing and wanting. Munif paints the violence of this severing in palpable, human terms, with anthropomorphic images of the trees as living flesh torn from the ground.

> The tractors attacked the trees like hungry wolves, tearing them up and throwing them to the ground one after another, and after that, leveling one tree after another, between the irrigation canal and the land around it. Even if they finished with one group of trees, it attacked with the same voracity and ferocity a new group and began to uproot them. The trees, leaning and reeling, before falling, screamed, begging for help, wailing, frantic, calling a final painful call, until they neared the ground, falling beseechingly, as if they needed or wanted to cling to the ground, in an attempt to spring or burst forth from the ground again. (*CS*, 122)

Munif depicts the machines' attack on the trees as a battle between two factions, but even the machines are depicted as living entities, like "huge moving iron creatures" (*CS*, 113). Like the voracious "mouth" of Abu al-Khayzuran's truck, these machines have appetites of wild beasts and devour human flesh. Both authors depict a twofold process: the initial uprooting of the people from the land, then the transformation of these people into fuel for the machines. They represent not only the transition to a society constituted by machines but also the demand for labor to sustain their functioning. The people of the wadi feel that "the world had ended" (*CS*, 114).

38. This passage echoes Qur'an 22:5: "We created you from dust, then a drop of semen, then an embryo . . . You see the earth all withered, then We send down rain upon it, and it bestirs itself, swells, and brings forth every kind of beauteous verdure." See *Qur'an: A Contemporary Translation*, trans. Ahmed Ali (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1993).

are governed by water, the gold Ibn Saʿud originally hoped that the Americans would find. Munif expresses this harmony through a number of synonyms: *ittisaq*, *tanasuq*, and *insijam*. *Insijam*, for example, suggests fluency and streaming, a metaphor Munif sustains by describing the people's faces "flooded with life" (*CS*, 28). Water shapes their communal rhythms, and time is lived as ebbing and flowing: "The people of the wadi are like their waters . . ." (*CS*, 23). In the years of abundance, *khayr*, or "goodness," the wadi's inhabitants overflow with generosity, while in the years of drought, they withdraw into themselves with a certain introversion and melancholy. These cycles also affect the balance between the sedentary and nomadic. In times of want, the wadi cannot support its own population, forcing people to emigrate in search of wealth. Through this picture, Munif describes the historical social and economic organization of the Arabian Peninsula, where trade conducted by the nomadic Bedouin balanced out the food produced by the sedentary, agrarian oasis dwellers. All this serves as contrast to the exponential growth of the oil boom.

Like Kanafani, Munif maps anthropomorphic traits onto the land (and vice versa), describing a "place pouring out green, as if it exploded from the belly of the earth . . . one of the few ways in which nature expresses its genius and willfulness" and a people "planting themselves in the land" (*CS*, 19). The author develops this relationship in a scene of planting, as one of the wadi's inhabitants, Mitʿab, "feels more than any other time the bonds tying him to the land and palms and fig trees and to the people of the wadi, too" (*CS*, 65). Like Kanafani, Munif imagines infants as seedlings, as Mitʿab points out to his son: "That palm, the fourth on the right, is your same age, my son. Every day you grow, it grows with you. Soon you will plant a palm for your own son and your own son will plant a palm for his son. Year after year the wadi will become greener, and people will keep passing through, drinking the wadi's water, asking for God's mercy on the dead, and they'll say, while in the shade (*zill*) of the tree, God have mercy on all those who have planted a palm and a green shoot" (*CS*, 65). Munif describes the sprouting of the plants as a birth, as Mitʿab watches his garden bloom after the rains: "It gave him pleasure to watch the water drip into the earth and remain there. Then the earth began to do incredible, unfathomable things. . . . The earth trembled a prolonged tremor, closer to a shudder, and the belly of the earth began to spill out. He saw the seeds that had been scattered begin to force their way out from inside the earth, raising their little heads . . . this shudder of the earth . . . resembles the cleaving between a man and a woman, resembles the moment of ecstasy

in this treacherous, accursed desert . . . a blessed power protects them and makes life prosper" (*CS*, 19). In recounting the tribe's genealogy, their common ancestor is described: "the selflessness that distinguished all his movements and existence made him, in the eyes of the whole, *khariq*, transcendent" (*CS*, 28). The word used by Munif to express this selflessness, *tafanin*, is also a mystical term denoting the obliteration of the self and extinction of individual consciousness in the whole. The author sustains the Sufi terminology with the travelers' "insistence on the repetition [*dhikr*] of Wadi al-'Uyun . . . [as] salvation" (*CS*, 20). These are repositories of social ideals, embodied in geographical space, emanating a sacred aura. As Fredric Jameson observes, "The novel can express a kind of unity of meaning and life, but it is a unity thrust into the past, a unity remembered only."[35]

Munif's descriptions of the oasis resonate with nostalgia for the desert and the past, idealizations that are partially a product of his own exile. The features of the wadi echo with the utopian vision of later classical Arabic poetry, where poets, separated in time and space from their cultural origins, imagined an idyllic landscape in Najd as a kind of Arcadia. The landscape resembles the mythical Najd, with a high plateau, seasonal streams, "several springs that form oasis like ponds surrounded by vegetation," and people who are hospitable, humane, and virtuous. "This is pure idyll. As a landscape, Najd has become transformed into an arrested poetic vision. It is the desert abloom in the poet's memory long after the rain of spring is lost in vaporous figments of mirages and long after the desert has reverted to its nearly year long inclemency."[36]

The "adequate balances" of the epic are central to Munif's descriptions of the wadi, cycles dictated by water, by winters and summers, floods and droughts, abundance and scarcity.[37] Time is measured by cycles: years of blessings and years of drought, of floods and locusts, of caravans' comings and goings. In Munif, a social and economic equilibrium is struck in the community, as all suffer in leaner times. The cycles of poverty and wealth collectively shape the physiques of the people of the wadi, making their features symmetrical. The community is also described as one body, with a sense of proportion between its individual members. These cycles

35. Fredric Jameson, "The Case for Georg Lukács," in *Marxism and Form* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1971), 176.
36. Jaroslav Stetkevych, *The Zephyrs of Najd: The Poetics of Nostalgia in the Classical Arabic Nasib* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 117, 121.
37. Lukács, *The Theory of the Novel*, 33.

ducing the conditions of secular modernity. Although Kanafani, like Munif, was a secularist, and Arab nationalism is essentially a secular creed, religious imagery inflects their climactic scenes. As the men pass through the desert, they cross into a supernatural realm, headed toward the "next life." The 150 kilometers of road at the border is described as the path God promised "before he distributed people between heaven and hell. For whoever falls on the path goes to hell and whoever crosses it arrives in heaven. And the angels here are the men of the border!" (*MS*, 66). The desert is an inferno, the other world (*al-akhirah*), a hell (*jahim*, *jahannim*), blaze (*wahaj*), flame (*lahab*), burning (*ihtiraq*), fire (*nar*), flaming ground (*ard multahibah*) (*MS*, 7, 8, 25, 27, 65, 66, 67, 72, 74, 86, 88). The border guards call Abu al-Khayzuran "damned" six times, for committing the seven sins, lying, and deceiving them (*MS*, 93–95). Down the road, he returns the curse, invoking not Allah but *al-ilah*, "the god," in a pagan sense: "Curse of the god almighty on you, curse of the god that doesn't exist at all in any place . . . curse of God on you all of you" (*MS*, 96–97). The dream of "umbrage"—of shade and protection—has turned into a burning inferno for the men. The steel womb of the tanker thus forges the denizen of the world economy, what Qutb calls the "deformed birth" of the technological age, or Marinetti "the dreamt-of metallization of the human body," a violent machine whose "lifeblood is oil."[33]

### Paradise Lost: *Cities of Salt*

Like *Men in the Sun*, Munif's *Cities of Salt* is an "epic of a world abandoned by God," Lukács's definition of the novel.[34] *Cities of Salt* begins in epic terms, as a world not yet abandoned, as a paradise not yet lost. The text begins at Wadi al-ʿUyun (Valley of the Springs), a place travelers call "paradise on earth," a place of sweet waters, cool breezes, palm groves, and abundant green (*CS*, 20). Munif infuses the place with a sense of the divine: the wadi is "*shay khariq*," something preternatural, miraculous, transcendent, beyond the rational. The travelers in the caravans are "sure that That which had created the world and human beings had created, at the same time, Wadi al-ʿUyun . . . to be a salvation from death

33. Qutb, "The America I Have Seen," 12; Harold F. Williamson et al., *American Petroleum Industry: The Age of Energy, 1899–1950* (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1959), 748. Benjamin quotes Marinetti in "The Work of Art," 121. "The Futurist Manifesto" can be found at http://www.cscs.umich.edu/~crshalizi/T4PM/futurist-manifesto.html.
34. Lukács, *The Theory of the Novel*, 88.

'Abd al-Rahman Munif's *Mudun al-Milh* (*Cities of Salt*, 1984).[5] Kanafani and Munif project ideal communities back in time to preindustrial utopias, depicting metaphysical, transcendent worlds where man exists in harmony with his environment. These geographical locales are saturated with cultural meaning—an olive grove in a pre-1948 Palestinian village; Shatt al-'Arab in Iraq, where the Tigris and Euphrates meet and pour into the Persian Gulf; an oasis in the Arabian Peninsula and suggestions of the mythical Najd of classical Arabic poetry. The authors bury the seeds of these cultural origins, scattered elements of tradition and the past, within the modern technology of the novel. As they dig down into their roots, Kanafani and Munif ground the Arabic novel in an "aura of authenticity," lending legitimacy to a genre some literary criticism has considered profoundly inauthentic.[6] Racial, cultural, and geographical memory is at the core of their narratives: a throbbing, living heart planted deep in the soil. These images function to root a foreign genre in local soil, producing "narratives of cultural continuity that can absorb the dislocations of modernity."[7] They also ground these two exiled authors deep in their native soil.

While these narratives begin with the heart, they climax with the metamorphosis of the human body into a machinelike entity. In *Men in the Sun*, Kanafani depicts a water tanker as symbolically aborting the vestiges of village life, then giving birth to the new denizen of the petroleum economy. Munif warns of a Sodom-like transformation of the human being into salt, but these pillars are oil rigs. Machines preside over—and embody—the ritualistic state of transition to the age of technology. Viciously tearing up olive groves and palm trees, they destroy centering logic of an agrarian existence. Apocalyptic imagery permeates these climactic scenes: the

5. Ghassan Kanafani, *Rijal fi al-Shams* (Beirut: Manshurat al-Tali'ah, 1963), translated as *Men in the Sun and Other Palestinian Stories*, trans. Hilary Kilpatrick (Boulder, Colo.: Lynn Rienner, 1999). Hereafter, this work is cited parenthetically as *MS*. 'Abd al-Rahman Munif, *Mudun al-Milh* (Beirut: Al-Mu'assasah al-'Arabiyyah lil-Dirasat wa al-Nashr, 1984–89), translated as *Cities of Salt*, trans. Paul Theroux (New York: Vintage, 1989). Hereafter, this work is cited parenthetically as *CS*. A simplified transliteration system has been used, with ' for the 'ayn and ' for the hamza.

6. Sabry Hafez discusses debates over the authenticity of imported genres like the novel in *The Genesis of Arabic Narrative Discourse: A Study in the Sociology of Modern Arabic Literature* (London: Saqi, 1993), 11–23. Aamir Mufti defines "the aura of authenticity" as "a pervasive language and mood in the contemporary critical scene that is concerned with the inauthenticity of postcolonial culture, community, and politics, and in which authenticity comes to attach itself to the concepts of certain cultural practices as a kind of aura." See "The Aura of Authenticity," *Social Text* 18, no. 3 (Fall 2000): 87–88.

7. Mufti, "The Aura of Authenticity," 88.

the earth. One product of this industrialization is a vision of a pristine state of nature, a place prior to and untouched by the predations of the "empire of the machine."[1] This is a golden age, an imagined utopia, what Raymond Williams calls "the natural economy, the moral economy, the organic society, from which critical values are drawn . . . a contrast to the thrusting ruthlessness of the new capitalism."[2] Such idealized times and spaces not only characterize the Arabic oil novel, but also American, Latin American, and African oil novels, as particular locales become retrospectively valorized as sites of cultural origins.[3] Imbued with an aura of authenticity, these places are envisioned as antithetical to the occupying force of the global military-industrial complex, or even as its antidote. Authenticity, however, is clearly one of modernization's by-products. While Georg Lukács and Walter Benjamin saw aura as part of prior forms, like the epic or painting, destroyed by mass production, Fredric Jameson's work on utopia sees aura as one more product of mass culture.[4] These oil novels envision enchantment only to have it crushed by the secularizing machine of modernity, destroyed by the myth of progress.

This essay examines two seminal works in the canon of Arabic literature, Ghassan Kanafani's *Rijal fi al-Shams* (*Men in the Sun*, 1963) and

1. The phrase "empire of the machine" comes from Gustavo Luis Carrera's *Novela del petróleo en Venezuela* [The petroleum novel in Venezuela] (Caracas, 1972), 98. He discusses the contrast between the traditional environment and the petroleum explosion: "Lo que resulta más evidente como primera impresión en la 'explosión' petrolera es el contraste entre el ambiente tradicional y el nuevo estado de cosas después del surgimiento inesperado" [At first glance, what is most apparent in the petroleum "explosion" is the contrast between the traditional environment and the new state of things after the unexpected appearance of oil] (79).
2. Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City* (London: Oxford University Press, 1973), 36–37.
3. Upton Sinclair's *Oil!* (New York: Grosset and Dunlap, 1927) imagines the righteousness of country life corrupted by oil politics. Carrera's work on the Venezuelan petroleum novel details the disruption of an agrarian existence; Laura Restrepo's novel *La novia oscura* (New York: Rayo, 2002) imagines an early utopia of the *petroleros* in Colombia; J. M. G. Le Clézio's *Onitsha* (Paris: Gallimard, 1991) is full of images of sacred waters in Nigeria, before their sullying in foreign hands.
4. See Georg Lukács, *The Theory of the Novel: A Historico-Philosophical Essay on the Forms of Great Epic Literature*, trans. Anna Bostock (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1996); Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technical Reproducibility," in *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings, Vol. 3, 1935–1938*, trans. Edmund Jephcott, ed. Howard Eiland and Michael W. Jennings (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2002); and Fredric Jameson, "Reification and Utopia in Mass Culture," *Social Text* 1 (Winter 1979): 130–48.

# "Empire of the Machine": Oil in the Arabic Novel

*Ellen McLarney*

> Faced with the machine, the human being cannot maintain his equilibrium, until he himself nearly transforms into a machine.
> —Sayyid Qutb, "The America I Have Seen: In the Scale of Human Values"

> War is beautiful because it initiates the dreamt-of metallization of the human body.
> —Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, "The Futurist Manifesto"

> If the internal combustion engine was the heart of the modern military machine, its lifeblood was oil.
> —Harold Williamson et al., *The American Petroleum Industry*

Mechanization of human life is the main subject of the oil novel, a genre that charts the explosion of industrial production in remote regions of

Translations from the original Arabic are generally mine or are adapted from the published English versions. Thanks to the Stanford Humanities Fellowship Program. Talks related to this paper were presented at the Carolina Center for the Study of the Middle East and Muslim Civilizations at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, and at the Hagop Kevorkian Center for Near Eastern Studies at New York University.

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This sustainability is both of the environmental kind, familiar in the contemporary usage of the term, and of the social spatial variety. The first of these is illustrated most forcefully in the scene of American overseers and Arab laborers working together to lay a pipeline through the desert between the oil fields and the coast—the Americans set themselves against the grain of nature, "fussing" with generators that break down, because of the dust, in efforts to cool themselves that end up making them hotter, while the Arabs manifest a more organic mode of relating to the land by using the open air and breezes to cool their tents during the day (510). As for social sustainability, the society of the Harran oil compound is untenable because it is divided into the separate and materially unequal Arab Harran and American Harran, each of which is oriented around a value system that is at odds with the other. The Arabs, for example, are extremely shocked and disconcerted when a ship arrives in the harbor bearing foreigners who revel in what is received as extreme wantonness and dress in scandalously revealing swimsuits. Moreover, the unrelenting drive to produce and the relative indifference of the American company toward the well-being of their native workers contribute to the sense that their foreign presence poses a risk of social corruption. The conflict between the two groups reaches its climax when the local military, acting as agents of the oil company, attempts to suppress the collectivity that has coalesced in the form of a strike inspired by the figures of Miteb al-Hathal and Muffadi al-Jeddan, men who have in their own ways resisted the Western encroachments onto their land, disappeared, and been inflated to mythic proportions in the imagination of the Arab residents of Harran. This attempted repression leads to a stronger sense of communal purpose, and the Americans' puppet emir is driven from Harran as the oil company is compelled to accede to the demands of the strikers. However, the novel ends on a note of unease, as characters look ahead to the bloodshed to come and the lasting social "illness" brought on by the American oil company's continuing presence in the land.

The same kind of anxiety regarding the dangers posed to the continuity of a people by the impact of foreign oil companies is expressed in Ken Saro-Wiwa's autobiographical work, *A Month and a Day* (1995). *A Month and a Day* recounts Saro-Wiwa's efforts as an activist on behalf of his ethnic group, the Ogoni tribe, and the period of imprisonment he undergoes at the hands of the ruling Nigerian military dictatorship in an attempt to silence his protests. The Ogoni, Saro-Wiwa observes, face a form of genocide as the victims of an "unholy alliance between oil interests and the Nigerian military" (192), which has sown rampant pollution in the once-fertile

dried up, and the geopolitical struggle for control of access to oil reserves taking on an increasingly pronounced role in world affairs, a number of literary voices appeared, decrying the ravages inflicted by oil companies upon the spaces of traditional societies during the postwar era. Perhaps the most richly penetrating of these is that of Abdelrahman Munif in his novel *Cities of Salt*. Munif's text chronicles the arrival and installation of American oil workers in the oasis village of Wadi al-Uyoun, their disruption of its environmental conditions and basic rhythm of life, and their transformation of the coastal town of Harran into their base of operations and transport depot.[6] The novel culminates with the Arab workers of the oil company rising up in demonstration against the Americans and the corrupt local leaders with whom the Americans are allied, an act that Ellen McLarney connects with "the 1953 workers' strike against Aramco in Dhahran" (195) but that Amitav Ghosh sees as an escapist fantasy that masks the reality of how oil companies in the Middle East have prevented such labor uprisings through their use of workers from elsewhere in the developing world (147–49).[7]

The radical changes wrought in Wadi al-Uyoun by the presence and efforts of the foreign oil company, figured symbolically in the tainting of the oasis's water supply and the cutting down of its palm trees, alter its basic functional social organization, replacing the tribal model with that of the employees' relationship to the company and consequently altering the identity of the Wadi's inhabitants (133–34). This shift from a gemeinschaft to a gesellschaft society is so striking that the atomized oil workers who move to Wadi al-Uyoun are initially almost incomprehensible to its more long-standing, communally oriented inhabitants: "How did these men sleep, and where? How did they eat? . . . It seemed . . . each of these men lived by himself, without any connection to the others around him" (137). McLarney observes that this conceptual juxtaposition—the idyllic, prelapsarian Wadi al-Uyoun versus the fallen, mechanized existence that stems from contact with the industrialized world and the culture of the Americans—hinges on projecting the notion of an ideal community of authenticity and cultural origins back in time (178–79). It is only by formulating this idealized sense of a stable and ecologically harmonious community existing prior to the contaminating touch of global oil that Munif can arrive at the thematic formulation proclaimed in his title—"Cities of salt means cities that offer no sustainable existence. When the waters come in, the first waves will dissolve the salt and reduce these great glass cities to dust" (qtd. in McLarney 193).

texts may not be *War and Peaces* of what Ghosh calls "the Oil Encounter," but nonetheless offer an incisive running commentary on oil's social and spatial impact—its destruction of traditional spatial orders; its creation of vast levels of material inequality, with the attendant risk of undermining democratic political systems; and its exercise of power, both diffuse and concentrated in the hands of legendary oilmen. Most of the texts examined here are canonical, though they occupy fairly marginal places within the literary canon; others, like Essad Bey's *Blood and Oil in the Orient* (1930) have been largely forgotten. But to properly begin this study with a consideration of the prehistory of the oil industry, the conditions that preceded and led to its ascendancy, we must turn first to one of the most canonical works of all, Herman Melville's *Moby-Dick* (1851).

## LOOMINGS

It might at first blush seem like something of a stretch to trace the lineage of the literature of oil and place back to *Moby-Dick*, but Melville's novel remains not only the earliest but also one of the most powerful cautionary explorations of the greed and monomania that fuel the quest for oil wealth. The whaling business, carried out chiefly to obtain sperm whale oil for use as a source of illumination, was the direct predecessor, and one could even say antecedent, of the American oil industry. In her *Forbes* magazine article "Blubber Capitalism," Laura Saunders notes that the New England whaling industry in many ways anticipated modern-day corporations, sharing such traits with them as risk distribution, international business scope, sophisticated forms of organization, capital accumulation, and technological innovation. By the 1850s the whaling industry was experiencing problems, particularly escalating costs due to the increasing scarcity of its product brought on by overfishing, and into this breach stepped petroleum, kerosene extraction having been patented in 1854 and what is generally credited as the first successful example of subsurface drilling for oil having taken place in western Pennsylvania in 1859 (Maugeri 3–4). For the first half century of its existence, kerosene, which provided a more affordable alternative to sperm whale oil, drove the petroleum industry—it was not until 1910 that gasoline, which had previously been considered "an almost useless by-product," dumped into rivers at night on occasion, bypassed kerosene in sales thanks to demand occasioned by the spread of motor vehicles (Yergen 14, Maugeri 22).

is, the physical contours of a given area, but also the socially produced totality of the uses to which it is put, composed of the institutions, customs, functional divisions, aesthetic codes, and so forth that define it. In an era in which the discipline of literary studies finds itself seeking to go beyond nationally bounded canons and fields of concern, it is hoped that this approach might provide a productive way of discursively situating texts from disparate cultural and linguistic traditions in terms of their responses to a common global and globalizing situation, one whose ramifications, as the preceding has hopefully shown, are immense. Undertaking this task comprehensively would be a massive project, beyond the scope of this article; instead, I have selected an assortment of texts that offer particular insight into the nature of the oil business, as well as the transformations and threats posed by the quest after oil, and that represent a wide variety of eras and major oil-producing regions of the world. One might also have focused on such works as Antonina Koptiaeva's social realist *Gift of Earth* (1963), Romulo Gallegos's *Sobre la misma tierra* (1943), Ralph de Boissière's *Crown Jewel* (1952), Gregorio Lopez y Fuentes's *Huasteca* (1939), Ghassan Kanafani's "Men in the Sun" (1962), J. M. G. Le Clézio's *Onitsha* (1991), Laura Restrepo's *The Dark Bride* (1999), Raymond Chandler's *The Big Sleep* (1939, set against the backdrop of the moral corruption of the Southern California oil industry), and Gerald Haslam's writings about the oil-producing places of the Bakersfield area.

In his essay "Petrofiction: The Oil Encounter and the Novel" (1992) Amitav Ghosh, whose novel *The Circle of Reason* (1986) will appear later in this study, argues that "scarcely a single [literary] work of note" has been published on the subject of the encounter with oil—its extraction and trade and the social consequences thereof (138). According to Ghosh, no work outside of Abdelrahman Munif's *Cities of Salt* (1984) has come anywhere near capturing the transnational scope of the oil industry, the heterogeneous mixing of peoples in its workforce, and the forms of social organization it has fostered, because for Americans oil and oil dependence have a shameful aspect to them, because the literary epicenters of the Arab world are not found in oil-producing countries, and because of the tendency of contemporary fiction to occupy itself with the familiar and the geographically bounded rather than fluidly cross linguistic, cultural, and national boundaries (139–40). While there may not be a single crowning literary achievement that heteroglossically captures the flow of people, capital, and geopolitical control represented by the oil industry, this article will show that there is a well-established world literary tradition whose constituent

Joe Sacco, *Palestine* (1993)

Seminar/Study Sheet

"Certainly his images are more graphic than anything you can either read or see on television." Edward Said, "Homage to Joe Sacco" (iii)

1. What claims about "comics" does Edward Said make in his introduction? Write down 5 single-word points or themes. Does Said think comics are "alternative" to novels or poems?

2. Why does the simple title immediately give us something to think about?

3. What kind of aims and claims does Sacco make for his "comics blockbuster" (76)? See pps. 76; 218-21; 208;— 213

4. How do we read comics as "graphic novels"?

   With a partner, "read" and interpret the double page spread depicting a scene from Jabalia refugee camp (Ch6, pps. 146-7). What kinds of things can you discern that "tell the story" of the camp? Why does this work visually, as well as narratively? Can you find other "novelistic" or poetic qualities? Where is "Sacco" here (turn the page to 148 to discuss this further).

   Read over the excerpts from "Understanding Comics" Use it to read sections – pps. 113 (Ch.4); 118-19 (Ch.5); 123 (Ch.5); 135 (Ch.5); 186 (Ch.7); 249 (Ch.8). Find a scene by yourself to analyse in this way.

   + Gregory on distortion of time/space

5. Is the novel tendentious? Partisan? Didactic in its political revelations and stance? See Said (iii); 92 ("what can we do except continue the struggle?"; 131; 241; 256; 283; His 'disgust' 24; the depiction of soldiers – 16; 128; 241; 270; the depiction of settlers: 37; 63; the tomato guys 173.

6. "Another authentic refugee camp experience" (217)

   What "role" and "character" does "Sacco" have/produce in the text? See Said (v), "Author's Foreword (vi).

   As "tourist": 38, 75-6, 145, 148
   As "journalist": 58-61
   As "spokesperson": 66 ("she had no ability to reply"); 77 ("did you get a picture?"); 99; 121-22
   As "intrepid", "heroic": 121-22; "Too heavy" 71; "A goddamn adventure cartoonist" 208.
   As "outsider": 185; 189 ("You gotta keep <u>some</u> distance"); 217; 221 ("That'd make a good picture")

Remember, *mis*representation is a crucial theme. (see, for example, the Newspaper cutting scene: 132)

7. What other aspects of novelistic technique can you discern? There are repeated motifs, for example: Mud (42, 145-46, 151, 175); Fences (86, 90-91, 222); Mazes, Crowds. Food and Tea. He also uses Talking Heads a lot. The story of certain characters such as Ammar, Ghassan, etc. Anything else?

8. How do we interpret the ending?

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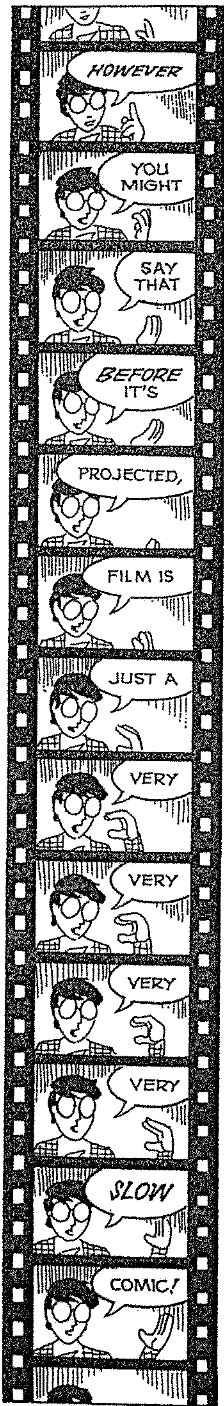



ANYWAY, THIS SHOULD MAKE IT A BIT MORE *SPECIFIC.*

JUXTAPOSED SEQUENTIAL VISUAL ART

DOES IT HAVE TO SAY *"ART"*? DOESN'T THAT IMPLY SOME SORT OF *VALUE JUDGMENT?*

WELL...

OKAY, HOW ABOUT *THIS?*

JUXTAPOSED SEQUENTIAL *STATIC IMAGES*

NOW IT SOUNDS KIND OF *ARBITRARY.*

OKAY, HOW ABOUT *THIS?*

JUXTAPOSED STATIC IMAGES IN *DELIBERATE SEQUENCE*

WHAT ABOUT *WORDS?*

OH, IT DOESN'T *HAVE* TO CONTAIN WORDS TO BE COMICS...

JUXTAPOSED STATIC IMAGES IN DELIBERATE SEQUENCE

*NO, NO.* I MEAN, DOESN'T THAT DEFINITION DESCRIBE *WORDS?*?

HUH?

LETTERS ARE *STATIC IMAGES,* RIGHT?

JUXTAPOSED STATIC IMAGES IN DELIBERATE SEQUENCE

WHEN THEY'RE ARRANGED IN A *DELIBERATE SEQUENCE,* PLACED *NEXT TO EACH OTHER,* WE CALL THEM *WORDS!*

YOU *TELL* 'IM, BOB!



OKAY, HOW DOES *THIS* SOUND?

JUXTAPOSED PICTORIAL AND OTHER IMAGES IN *DELIBERATE SEQUENCE*

WHAT ABOUT *BATMAN?!* SHOULDN'T IT HAVE *BATMAN* IN IT?

JUXTAPOSED PICTORIAL AND OTHER IMAGES IN DELIBERATE SEQUENCE

WHO LET *HIM* IN?

NO, I *MEAN* IT! AND WHAT ABOUT THE *X-MEN* AND-- *OW!* -- HEY! *HEY!* LET *GO* OF ME! *HEY!*

WELL, ANYWAY, THIS SHOULD DO FOR *NOW.*

WE'LL JUST *TYPE IT UP,* ADD A LITTLE BIT ON THE *USES* OF COMICS, AND--

tap tap tap tap tap

*THERE!*

adv.

**com·ics** (kom'iks)**n.** plural in form, used with a singular verb. **1.** Juxtaposed pictorial and other images in deliberate sequence, intended to convey information and/or to produce an aesthetic response in the viewer.

~~**2.** Superheroes in bright colorful costumes, fighting dastardly villains who want to conquer the world, in violent sensational pulse-pounding action sequences! **3.** Cute, cuddly bunnies, mice and roly-poly bears, dancing to and fro, Hippity Hop, Hippity Hop. **4.** Corruptor of our Nation's Youth. **com·ing** (kum'ing) **adj**~~

I ADMIT, THIS ISN'T THE SORT OF THING THAT COMES UP A LOT IN *CASUAL CONVERSATION*--

--AND IN *MOST* CASES, THIS IS THE *ONLY* DEFINITION WE'RE LIKELY TO *NEED.*

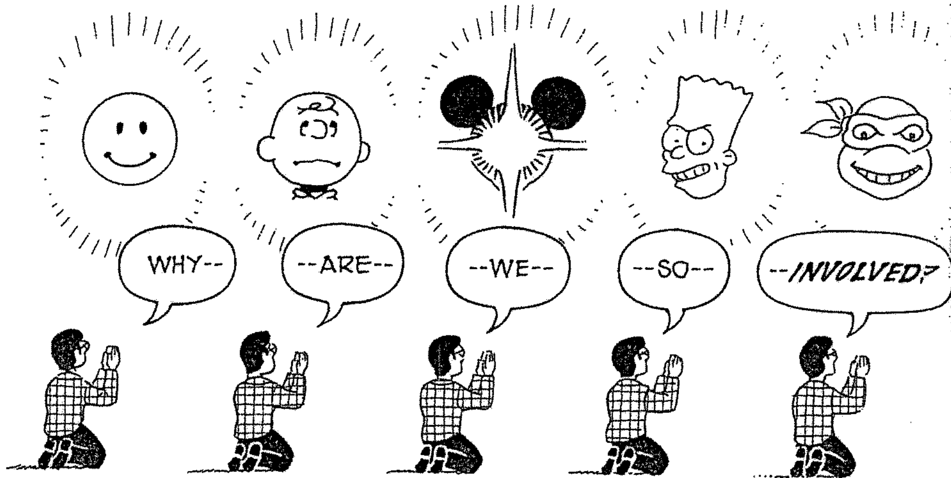
BUT, WITH A *SPECIFIC* DEFINITION UNDER OUR BELTS--

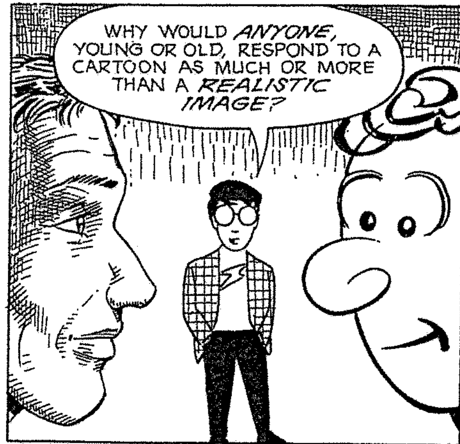
SEQUENTIAL ART

--PERHAPS WE CAN SHED SOME *NEW LIGHT* ON THE *HISTORY OF COMICS.*

MOST BOOKS *ABOUT* COMICS BEGIN SHORTLY BEFORE THE TURN OF THE CENTURY, BUT I THINK WE CAN VENTURE A BIT FARTHER THAN *THAT.*

1880 1890 1900 1910



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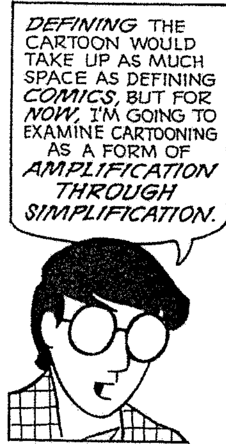
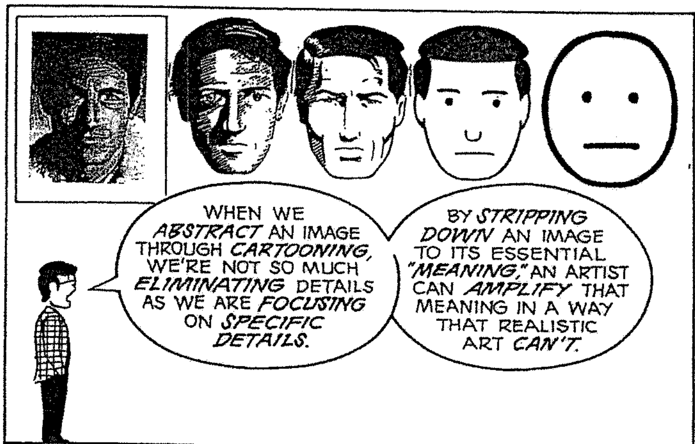
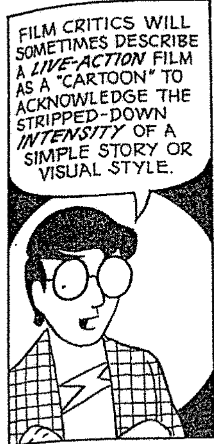
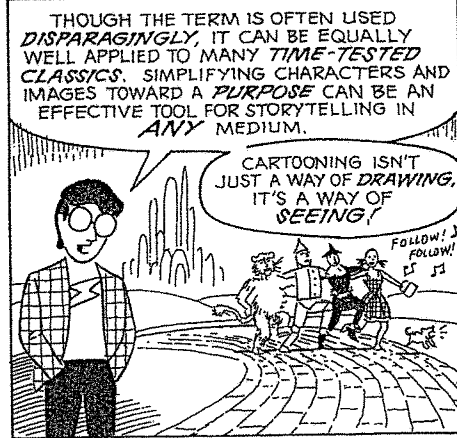
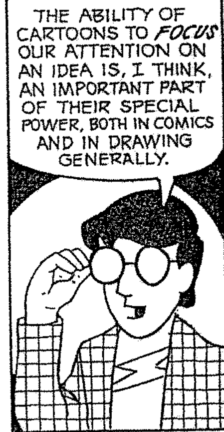


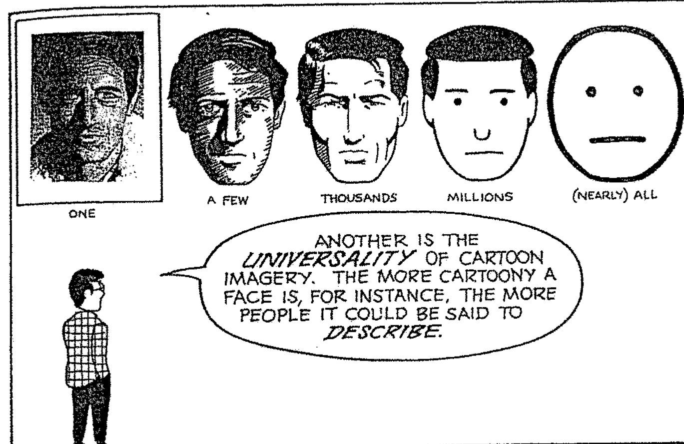



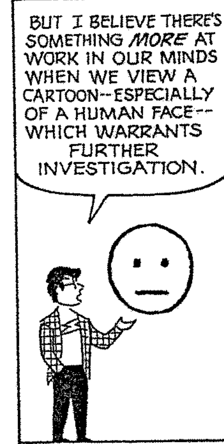


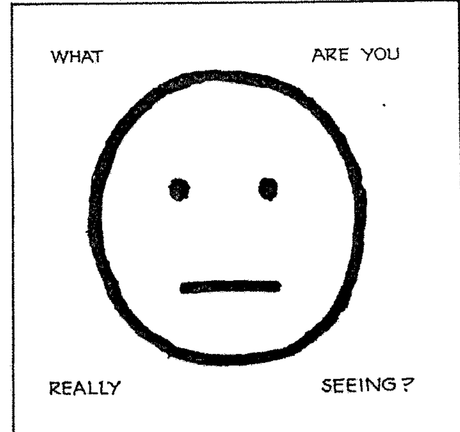



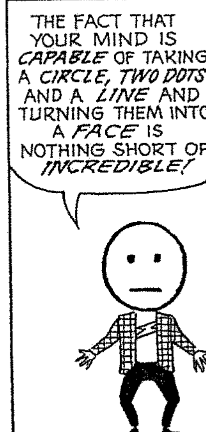



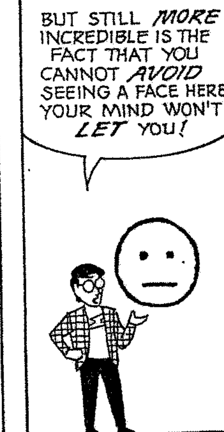



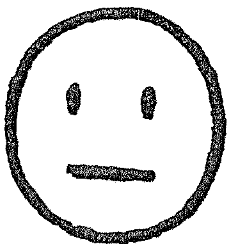



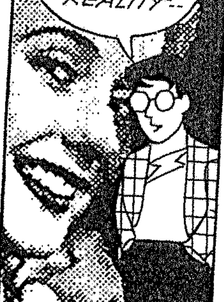



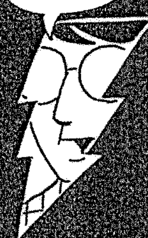



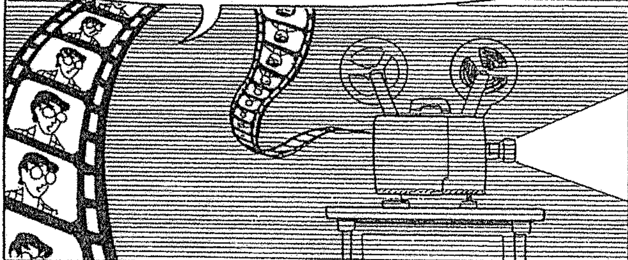



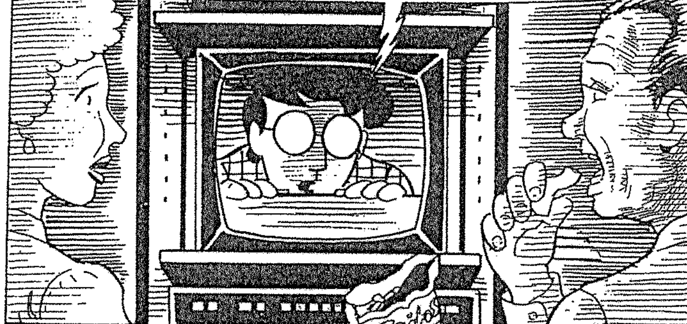



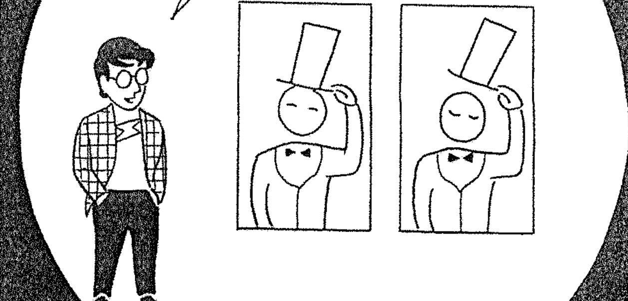






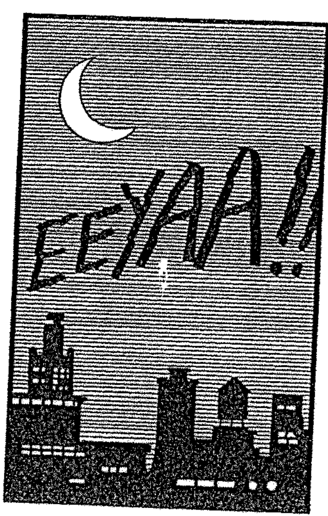






* MEDIA GURU TONY SCHWARTZ DESCRIBES THIS AT LENGTH IN HIS BOOK MEDIA, THE SECOND GOD.

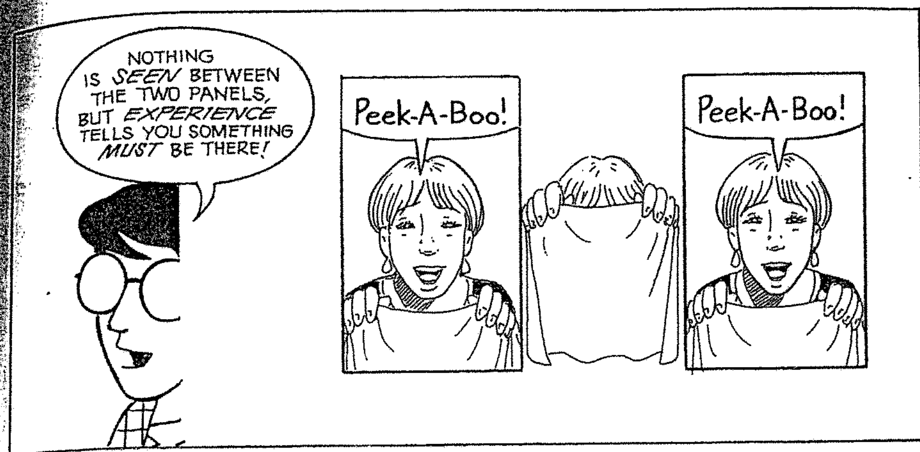
NOW YOU DIE!!
NO! NO!

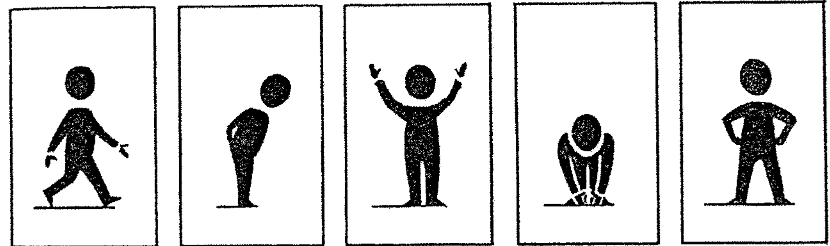

EEYAA!!

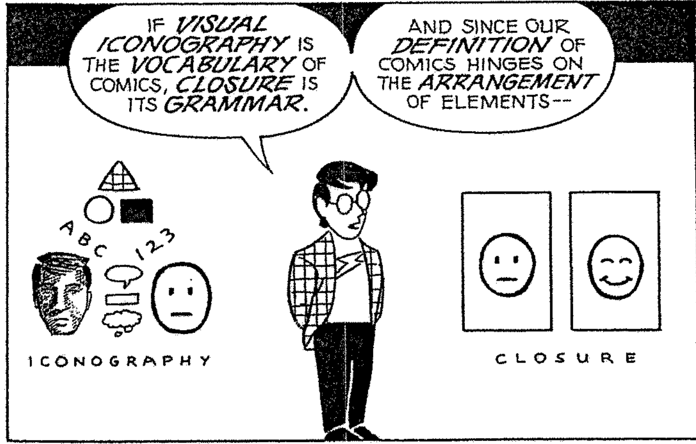
SEE THAT SPACE BETWEEN THE PANELS? THAT'S WHAT COMICS AFICIONADOS HAVE NAMED "THE GUTTER."
AND DESPITE ITS UNCEREMONIOUS TITLE, THE GUTTER PLAYS HOST TO MUCH OF THE MAGIC AND MYSTERY THAT ARE AT THE VERY HEART OF COMICS!

HERE IN THE LIMBO OF THE GUTTER, HUMAN IMAGINATION TAKES TWO SEPARATE IMAGES AND TRANSFORMS THEM INTO A SINGLE IDEA.




NOTHING IS SEEN BETWEEN THE TWO PANELS, BUT EXPERIENCE TELLS YOU SOMETHING MUST BE THERE!
Peek-A-Boo!
Peek-A-Boo!


COMICS PANELS FRACTURE BOTH TIME AND SPACE, OFFERING A JAGGED, STACCATO RHYTHM OF UNCONNECTED MOMENTS.
BUT CLOSURE ALLOWS US TO CONNECT THESE MOMENTS AND MENTALLY CONSTRUCT A CONTINUOUS, UNIFIED REALITY.

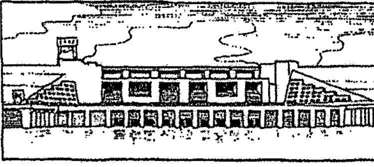

IF VISUAL ICONOGRAPHY IS THE VOCABULARY OF COMICS, CLOSURE IS ITS GRAMMAR.
AND SINCE OUR DEFINITION OF COMICS HINGES ON THE ARRANGEMENT OF ELEMENTS--
ABC 123
ICONOGRAPHY
CLOSURE

--THEN, IN A VERY REAL SENSE, COMICS IS CLOSURE!

JOE SACCO

# *Down! Up!*

December 2004. On the Euphrates River, in Iraq's volatile Anbar province, on one of the top levels of the Haditha Dam, isolated from the reserve marines of the 1st Battalion of the 23rd Regiment, which is headquartered here, two U.S.



servicemen are tasked with shaping a motley group from the Iraqi National Guard (I.N.G.) into the sort of self-motivated, competent soldiers that can—in the words of President George W. Bush—"stand up" so that we can "stand down."

# DOWN! UP!

by Joe Sacco ©2006

And if anyone is going to help Iraqis save Iraq, it is Sgt. Tim Weaver, but they won't be saving anything, he'll tell you, until they get small unit formations into their skulls.

Unfortunately, this afternoon's quiz confirms that this lot can't tell its "skirmish left" from its "echelon right."

And that makes Sgt. Weaver one disgusted fifth-generation marine.

EVERY-ONE THAT MISSED ONE—

STAND UP!

Sgt. Weaver's prescription for one wrong answer is ten push ups.

DOWN!

UP!

DOWN!

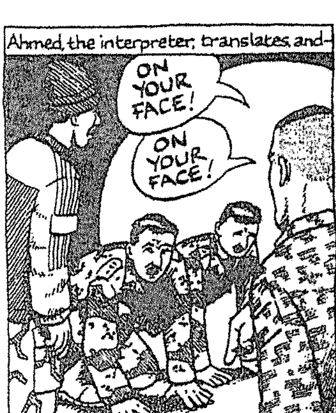
UP!

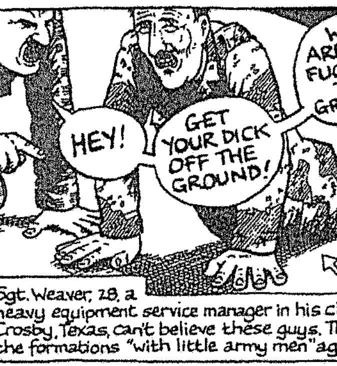
YOU JUST DID TEN FUCKING PUSH UPS AND YOU DIDN'T HAVE TO.

ALL RIGHT, WHO MISSED TWO?

YOU'RE DOING 20!

J. SACCO 8.06






One hapless fellow can't get past his 20th push up so an even harder exercise is substituted.

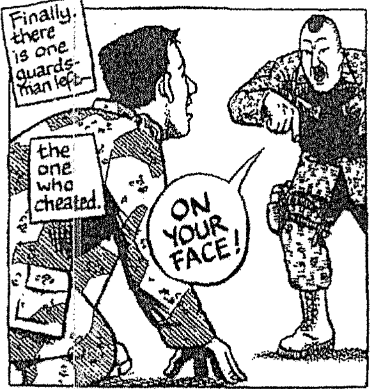
Doc Saba, a 37-year-old paramedic from Plymouth, Massachusetts, demonstrates.

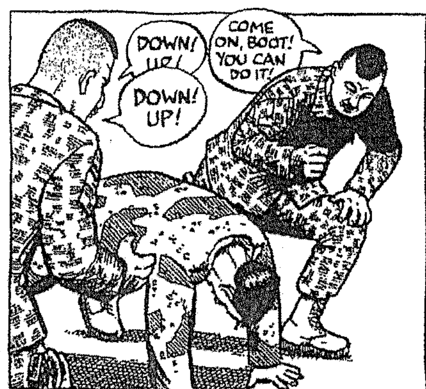
THEY'RE CALLED BUTTERFLY KICKS.

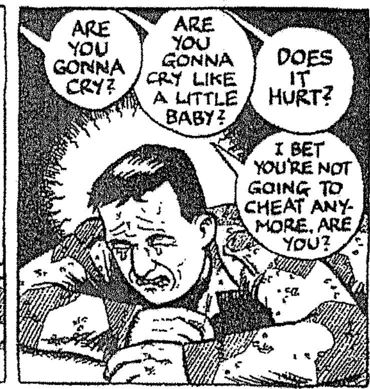
IF I CAN GET MY SIX-YEAR-OLD SON TO DO THEM—AND HE'S TINIER THAN YOU—YOU CAN DO THEM.

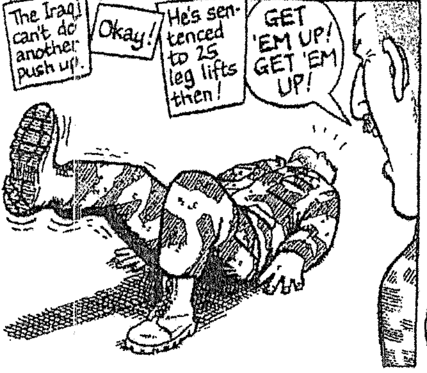
I DO THEM WHILE I'M TALKING TO MY WIFE OR SON OR WHILE I'M WATCHING T.V.

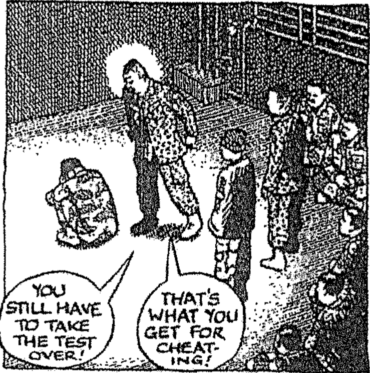




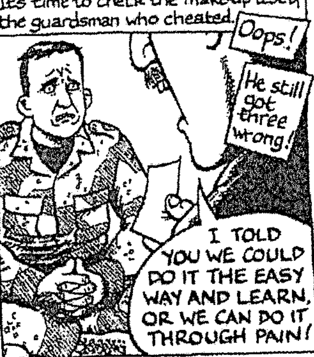


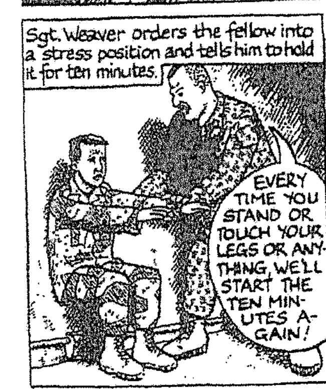



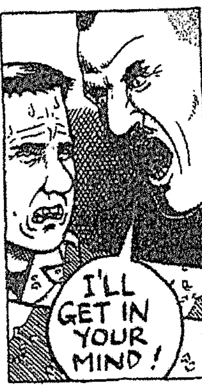



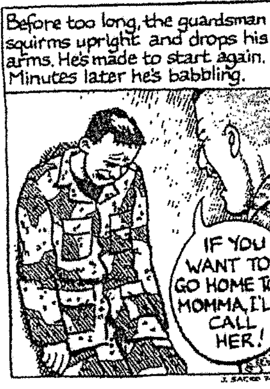
FOR THOSE OF YOU WHO ACED THE TEST, EXCELLENT JOB!
YOU HAVE TO PAY ATTENTION BECAUSE IF YOUR FIRE TEAM LEADER GETS KILLED IN COMBAT, YOU'RE GOING TO HAVE TO STEP UP AND TAKE OVER.
NEXT WEEK WE GET ON THE RIFLE RANGE.
YOU'VE GOT TO KNOW WHAT YOU'RE DOING OR SOLDIERS ARE GOING TO GET SHOT IN THE BACK.

While the men go over the answers to the quiz, Sgt. Weaver steps over to where I've been sitting taking notes.
SOME OF THEM ARE UNEDUCATED.
In fact, only five of the 14 can read and write.
THEY'RE BACKWOODS BOYS.
SOME OF THEM HAVE NO COMMON SENSE, NO COMPREHENSION SKILLS.


It's time to check the make-up test of the guardsman who cheated.
Oops!
He still got three wrong!
I TOLD YOU WE COULD DO IT THE EASY WAY AND LEARN, OR WE CAN DO IT THROUGH PAIN!


Sgt. Weaver orders the fellow into a stress position and tells him to hold it for ten minutes.
EVERY TIME YOU STAND OR TOUCH YOUR LEGS OR ANYTHING, WE'LL START THE TEN MINUTES AGAIN!


I'LL GET IN YOUR MIND!

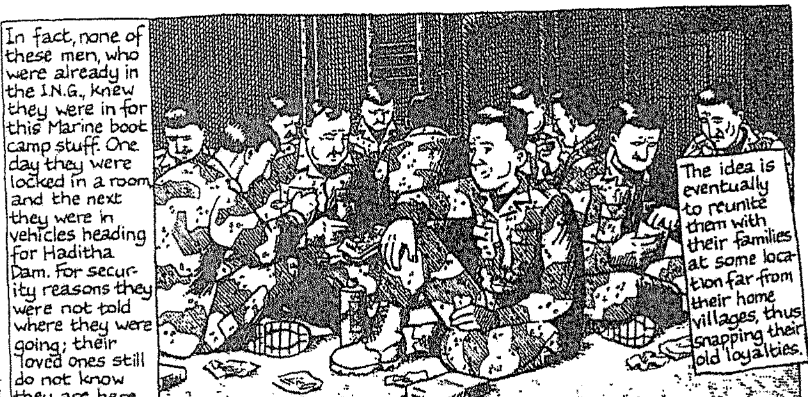

Before too long, the guardsman squirms upright and drops his arms. He's made to start again. Minutes later he's babbling.
IF YOU WANT TO GO HOME TO MOMMA, I'LL CALL HER!

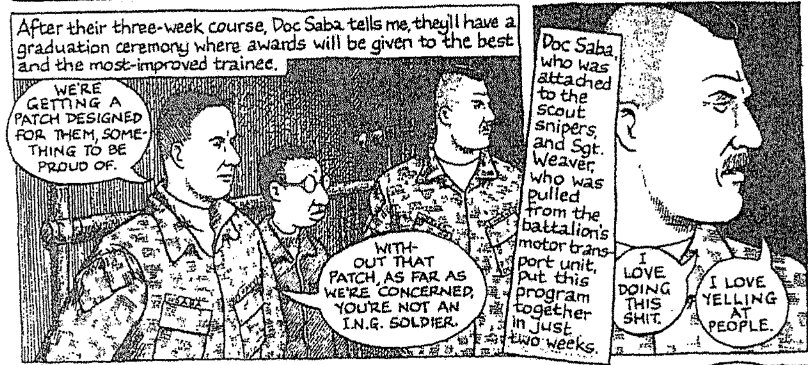
Now it's Doc Saba's turn.
DON'T EVER WRITE ANSWERS ON YOUR HAND.
EVER.
THAT'S CHEATING.
CHEATING DISHONORS YOURSELF.
WHEN I SEE SGT. WEAVER, I FORGET EVERYTHING...
YOU NEED TO REMEMBER YOUR 'RIGHT' FROM YOUR 'LEFT.'

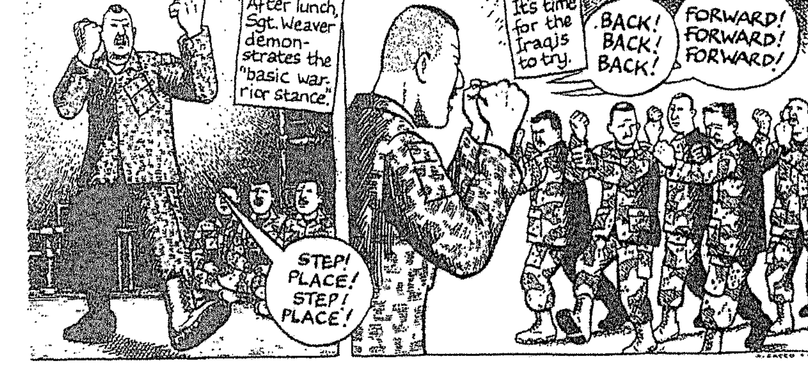
Sgt. Weaver, too, worries that they haven't got the basics down. He reviews hand signals they should know by now.
DIRECTION LEFT!
STOP FIRE!
ENEMY, 300 METERS!
They yell out the answers in English like happy school kids.

Sgt. Weaver promises real combat training after chow.
SO ALL OF YOU WHO ARE PISSED OFF AT ME, YOU CAN KICK MY ASS...

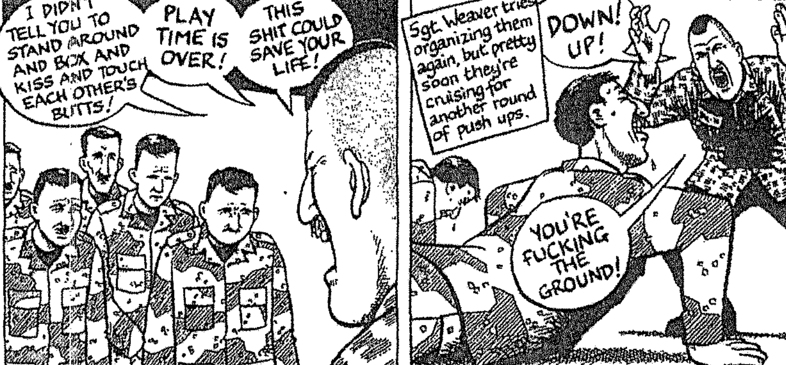
The Iraqis are given Meals Ready to Eat.
They pester Ahmed to translate what the packets and pouches contain.
THESE GUYS ARE IN MORE DANGER THAN WE ARE.
THERE'S MORE OF THEM GETTING KILLED OFF EVERY WEEK THAN AMERICANS AND COALITION FORCES.
WE GET THEM OUT OF THEIR ENVIRONMENT AND UP HERE 'CAUSE THERE'S NO TRIBAL CONNECTION AND THEY'LL BE ABLE TO FIGHT.


In fact, none of these men, who were already in the I.N.G., knew they were in for this Marine boot camp stuff. One day they were locked in a room and the next they were in vehicles heading for Haditha Dam. For security reasons they were not told where they were going; their loved ones still do not know they are here.
The idea is eventually to reunite them with their families at some location far from their home villages, thus snapping their old loyalties.

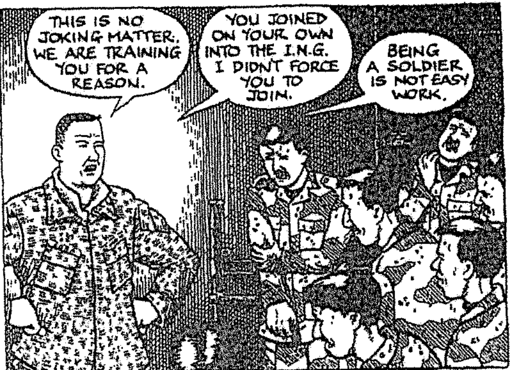

After their three-week course, Doc Saba tells me, they'll have a graduation ceremony where awards will be given to the best and the most-improved trainee.
WE'RE GETTING A PATCH DESIGNED FOR THEM, SOMETHING TO BE PROUD OF.
WITHOUT THAT PATCH, AS FAR AS WE'RE CONCERNED, YOU'RE NOT AN I.N.G. SOLDIER.
Doc Saba, who was attached to the scout snipers, and Sgt. Weaver, who was pulled from the battalion's motor transport unit, put this program together in just two weeks.
I LOVE DOING THIS SHIT.
I LOVE YELLING AT PEOPLE.


After lunch, Sgt. Weaver demonstrates the "basic warrior stance."
STEP! PLACE! STEP! PLACE!
It's time for the Iraqis to try.
BACK! BACK! BACK!
FORWARD! FORWARD! FORWARD!

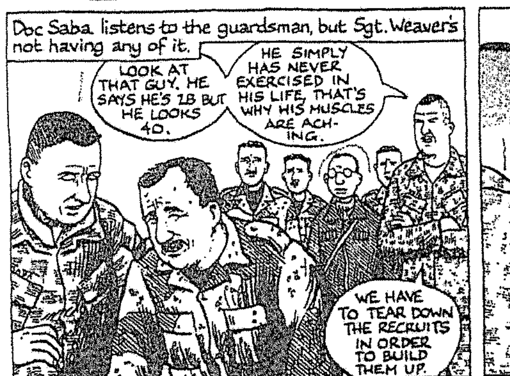
A few minutes later, the lesson disintegrates.
YOU'VE GOT SO MUCH ENERGY TO PLAY AROUND--?
EVERY-ONE, ON YOUR FACE!
DOWN!
UP!
DOWN!
UP!


I DIDN'T TELL YOU TO STAND AROUND AND BOX AND KISS AND TOUCH EACH OTHER'S BUTTS!
PLAY TIME IS OVER!
THIS SHIT COULD SAVE YOUR LIFE!
Sgt. Weaver tries organizing them again, but pretty soon they're cruising for another round of push ups.
DOWN! UP!
YOU'RE FUCKING THE GROUND!

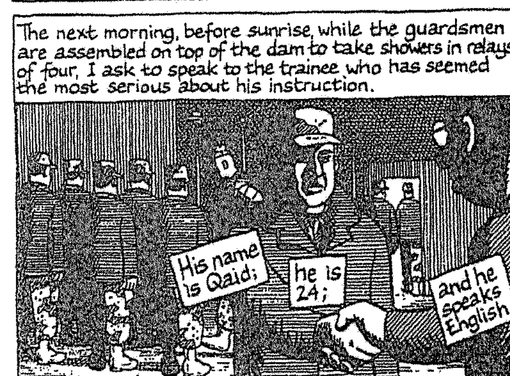
But Sgt. Weaver isn't satisfied he's made his point.
He gets them into a new position and makes them hold it till they collapse.
Doc Saba tells them he can be just as ferocious, but—
—I'M JUST NOT IN A SHOUTING MOOD TODAY...
IF SGT. WEAVER AND I CAN'T TRUST YOU WITH PAYING ATTENTION AND LISTENING TO US, THEN THERE'S NO WAY WE'RE GOING TO PUT A WEAPON IN YOUR HANDS.

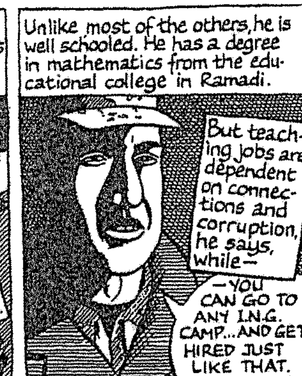

THIS IS NO JOKING MATTER. WE ARE TRAINING YOU FOR A REASON.
YOU JOINED ON YOUR OWN INTO THE I.N.G. I DIDN'T FORCE YOU TO JOIN.
BEING A SOLDIER IS NOT EASY WORK.

Meanwhile, one guy still hasn't come to his feet. He's complaining about his hips. Not even Sgt. Weaver can shout him off the ground.

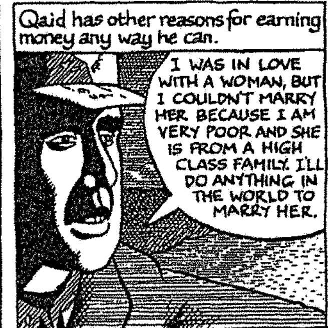

Doc Saba listens to the guardsman, but Sgt. Weaver's not having any of it.
LOOK AT THAT GUY. HE SAYS HE'S 28 BUT HE LOOKS 40.
HE SIMPLY HAS NEVER EXERCISED IN HIS LIFE. THAT'S WHY HIS MUSCLES ARE ACH-ING.
WE HAVE TO TEAR DOWN THE RECRUITS IN ORDER TO BUILD THEM UP.

WE'RE NOT TRYING TO KILL YOU..
I AM.


The next morning, before sunrise, while the guardsmen are assembled on top of the dam to take showers in relays of four, I ask to speak to the trainee who has seemed the most serious about his instruction.
His name is Qaid;
he is 24;
and he speaks English.

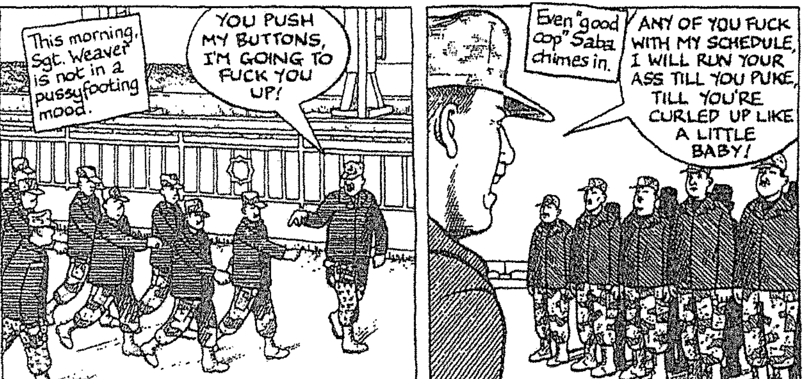

Unlike most of the others, he is well schooled. He has a degree in mathematics from the educational college in Ramadi.
But teaching jobs are dependent on connections and corruption, he says, while—
—YOU CAN GO TO ANY I.N.G. CAMP... AND GET HIRED JUST LIKE THAT.

And even though the I.N.G. is targeted relentlessly by the insurgents, it offers Qaid one of the only steady sources of income available to him.
I AM A POOR MAN.
THERE ARE 14 PEOPLE IN MY FAM-ILY...
IT'S A HARD SIT-UATION IN GENERAL.

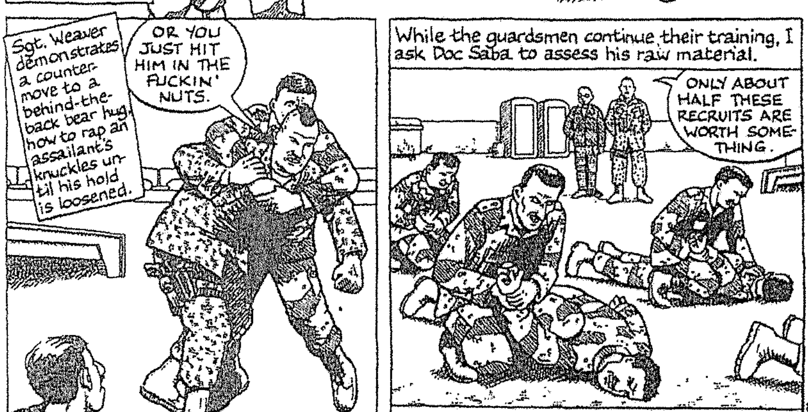

Qaid has other reasons for earning money any way he can.
I WAS IN LOVE WITH A WOMAN, BUT I COULDN'T MARRY HER BECAUSE I AM VERY POOR AND SHE IS FROM A HIGH CLASS FAMILY. I'LL DO ANYTHING IN THE WORLD TO MARRY HER.

But now he is having second thoughts about the I.N.G.
I DIDN'T KNOW I WAS COMING TO HADITHA.
I DON'T WANT TO STAY IN THE GUARD.
FIRST THING, I LIKE THE CIVILIAN LIFE.
THE MILITARY LIFE NOW IN IRAQ IS UGLY.
THIRD, MOST OF THE OFFI-CERS ARE CORRUPT.
He says he intends to "quit" in a couple of months.
I HOPE IN THE FUTURE TO HAVE A SCHOL-ARSHIP TO GET TO ANY OTHER COUNTRY IN THE WORLD.
AND I WILL TRY TO GET ANOTHER CITIZEN-SHIP...
THEN I WILL BE HAPPY —BECAUSE I AM FINISHED WITH IRAQ.

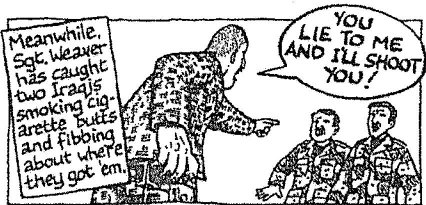
RUN IN AND TELL OMER, IF HE CAN'T GET OUT OF THE SHOWER NOW, I'M GONNA CUT HIS DICK OFF!
I KNOW ARABIC, TOO:
'GET THE FUCK OVER HERE!'
THEY SEEM TO KNOW WHAT THAT MEANS.

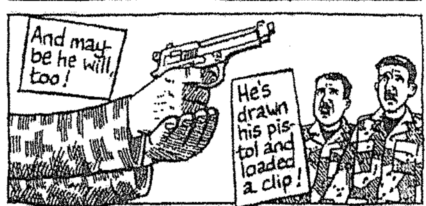

This morning, Sgt. Weaver is not in a pussyfooting mood.
YOU PUSH MY BUTTONS, I'M GOING TO FUCK YOU UP!
Even "good cop" Saba chimes in.
ANY OF YOU FUCK WITH MY SCHEDULE, I WILL RUN YOUR ASS TILL YOU PUKE, TILL YOU'RE CURLED UP LIKE A LITTLE BABY!

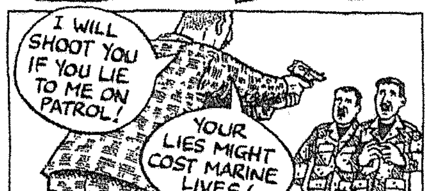
Today's class takes place on top of the dam. After some warm ups, the guardsmen are paired up to try the moves they learned yesterday. They seem enthusiastic about this kung fu stuff, about inflicting pain on their partners.
MAKE SURE YOU SPIN HIM!
DON'T FORCE HIM DOWN!
MAKE THAT ROTATION!
NOW YOU'RE GOING TO DO IT FASTER!
DO NOT HURT EACH OTHER!

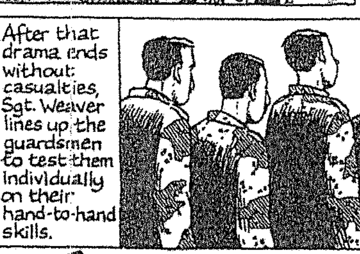

Sgt. Weaver demonstrates a counter-move to a behind-the-back bear hug, how to rap an assailant's knuckles until his hold is loosened.
OR YOU JUST HIT HIM IN THE FUCKIN' NUTS.
While the guardsmen continue their training, I ask Doc Saba to assess his raw material.
ONLY ABOUT HALF THESE RECRUITS ARE WORTH SOMETHING.
In any case, he says, this course is too short. They need six or even eight weeks' training to be "minimally" ready to patrol with marines.

Soon they'll be put on the firing range to test their proficiency on the A.K.47.
They'll be given only six rounds each, just in case—
Well, just in case they're bad guys bent on a killing spree.
AS FAR AS TRUST, WE DON'T KNOW NOTHING ABOUT THESE GUYS. IT NEVER FAILS THAT THE MUJAHADEEN PUT INSURGENTS AND SPIES AMONG THE RECRUITS.


Meanwhile, Sgt. Weaver has caught two Iraqis smoking cigarette butts and fibbing about where they got 'em.
YOU LIE TO ME AND I'LL SHOOT YOU!

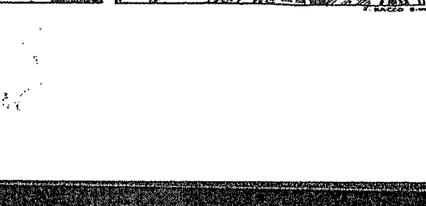

And maybe he will, too!
He's drawn his pistol and loaded a clip!


I WILL SHOOT YOU IF YOU LIE TO ME ON PATROL!
YOUR LIES MIGHT COST MARINE LIVES!


After that drama ends without casualties, Sgt. Weaver lines up the guardsmen to test them individually on their hand-to-hand skills.

He barks out the maneuver he wants to see.
STRONG-SIDE WRIST LOCK!

Few of the Iraqis get the moves right.
I TOLD YOU TO FUCKING PAY ATTENTION!
YOU DIDN'T DO IT!


Sgt. Weaver starts throwing the guys who get the moves wrong.

One of the younger trainees can't do a "leg sweep"...

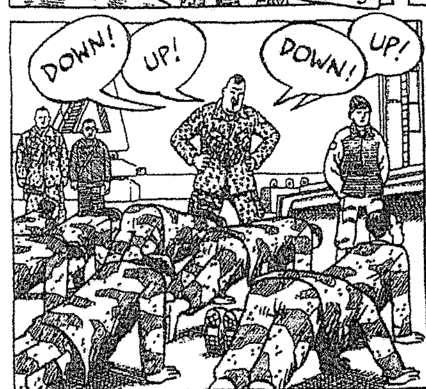
so Sgt. Weaver does one for him.
Ouch!

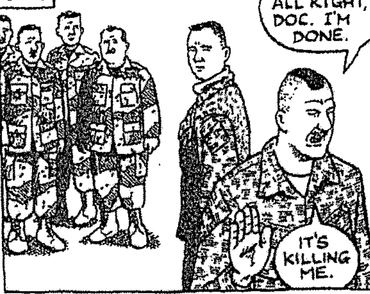
MY HEAD! MY HEAD!
YOU'RE CRYING LIKE A FUCKING BABY!
YOU'RE A GROWN MAN, NOT A LITTLE BOY!

Doc Saba steps in. He thinks the fellow might actually be hurt.
MY HEAD!

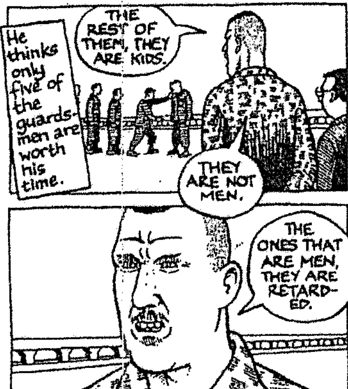
HE'S PROBABLY NEVER BEEN IN A FIGHT IN HIS LIFE.
MY HEAD...
The kid sits out the rest of the lesson but he can't stop shaking.

By the way, everyone's shivering in the crisp December air.
ARE YOU ALL FUCKING COLD?
ON YOUR FACE!

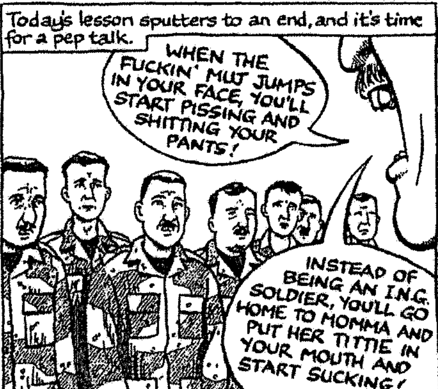

DOWN!
UP!
DOWN!
UP!


A few minutes later, Sgt. Weaver is at wit's end. Only two of the 14 guardsmen perform the hand-to-hand drill to his satisfaction.
ALL RIGHT, DOC. I'M DONE.
IT'S KILLING ME.

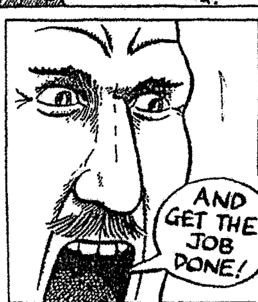


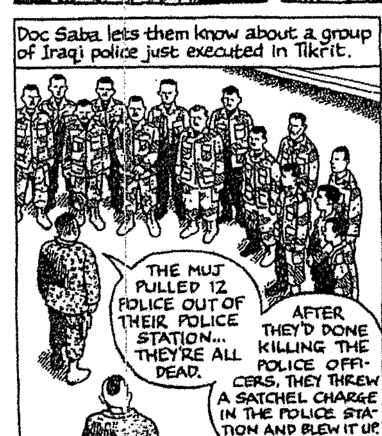

He thinks only five of the guardsmen are worth his time.
THE REST OF THEM, THEY ARE KIDS.
THEY ARE NOT MEN.

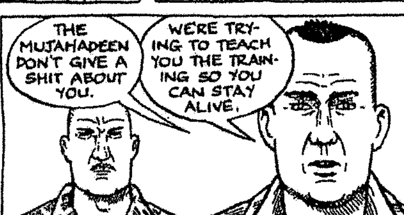
THE ONES THAT ARE MEN, THEY ARE RETARDED.

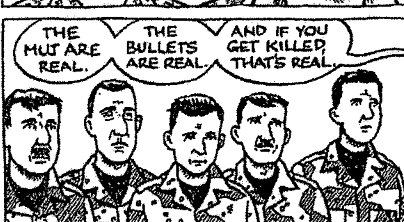

Today's lesson sputters to an end, and it's time for a pep talk.
WHEN THE FUCKIN' MUJ JUMPS IN YOUR FACE, YOU'LL START PISSING AND SHITTING YOUR PANTS!
INSTEAD OF BEING AN I.N.G. SOLDIER, YOU'LL GO HOME TO MOMMA AND PUT HER TITTIE IN YOUR MOUTH AND START SUCKING!

IF I WAS YOU, I'D TAKE THAT TITTIE OUT OF MY MOUTH...
GROW THE HELL UP...

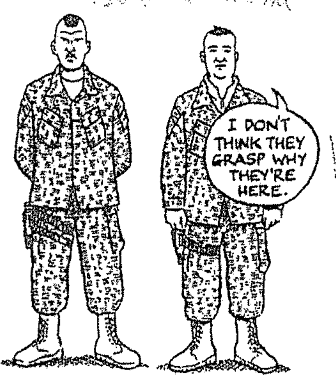

AND GET THE JOB DONE!

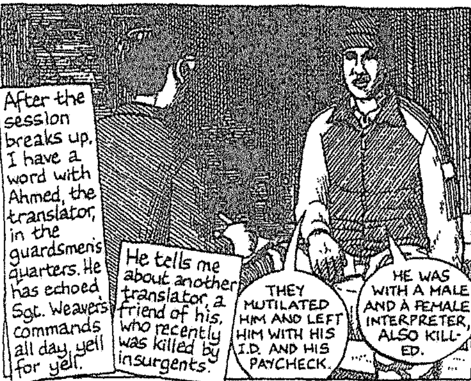

Doc Saba lets them know about a group of Iraqi police just executed in Tikrit.
THE MUJ PULLED 12 POLICE OUT OF THEIR POLICE STATION... THEY'RE ALL DEAD.
AFTER THEY'D DONE KILLING THE POLICE OFFICERS, THEY THREW A SATCHEL CHARGE IN THE POLICE STATION AND BLEW IT UP.


THE MUJAHADEEN DON'T GIVE A SHIT ABOUT YOU.
WE'RE TRYING TO TEACH YOU THE TRAINING SO YOU CAN STAY ALIVE.

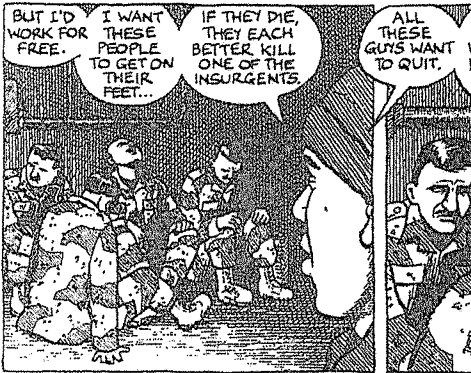

THE MUJ ARE REAL.
THE BULLETS ARE REAL.
AND IF YOU GET KILLED, THAT'S REAL.

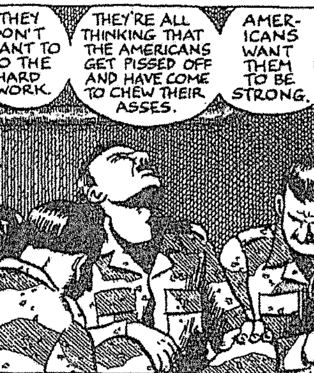
He tells them they'll be expected to encourage others to join the I.N.G. Then:
PRESIDENT BUSH WANTS TO SEE YOUR COUNTRY SUCCEED.
PRESIDENT BUSH HAS HELPED YOUR COUNTRY A LOT...
DON'T LET HIM DOWN.


I DON'T THINK THEY GRASP WHY THEY'RE HERE.

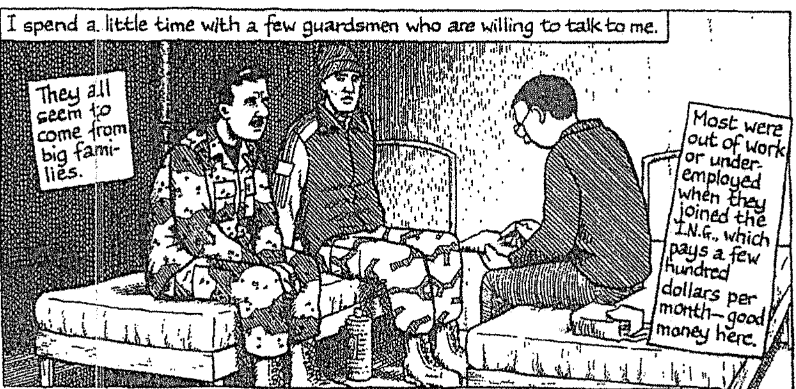

After the session breaks up, I have a word with Ahmed, the translator, in the guardsmen's quarters. He has echoed Sgt. Weaver's commands all day, yell for yell.
He tells me about another translator, a friend of his, who recently was killed by insurgents.
THEY MUTILATED HIM AND LEFT HIM WITH HIS I.D. AND HIS PAYCHECK.
HE WAS WITH A MALE AND A FEMALE INTERPRETER, ALSO KILLED.

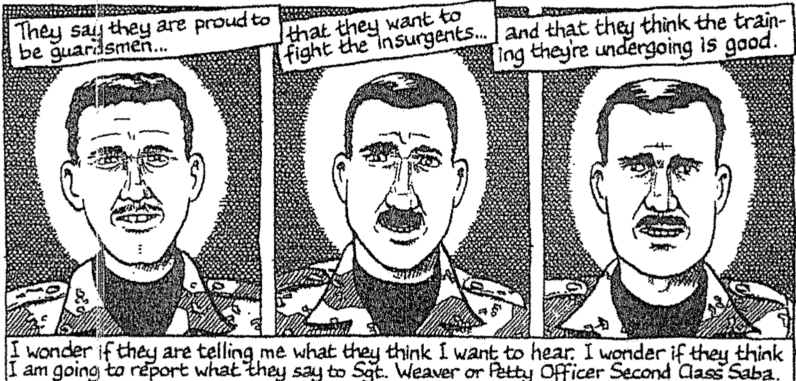
AFTER I HEARD ABOUT THEM, I WAS SHOCKED.
MY FAMILY IS PUTTING PRESSURE ON ME TO STOP THIS WORK.


BUT I'D WORK FOR FREE.
I WANT THESE PEOPLE TO GET ON THEIR FEET...
IF THEY DIE, THEY EACH BETTER KILL ONE OF THE INSURGENTS.

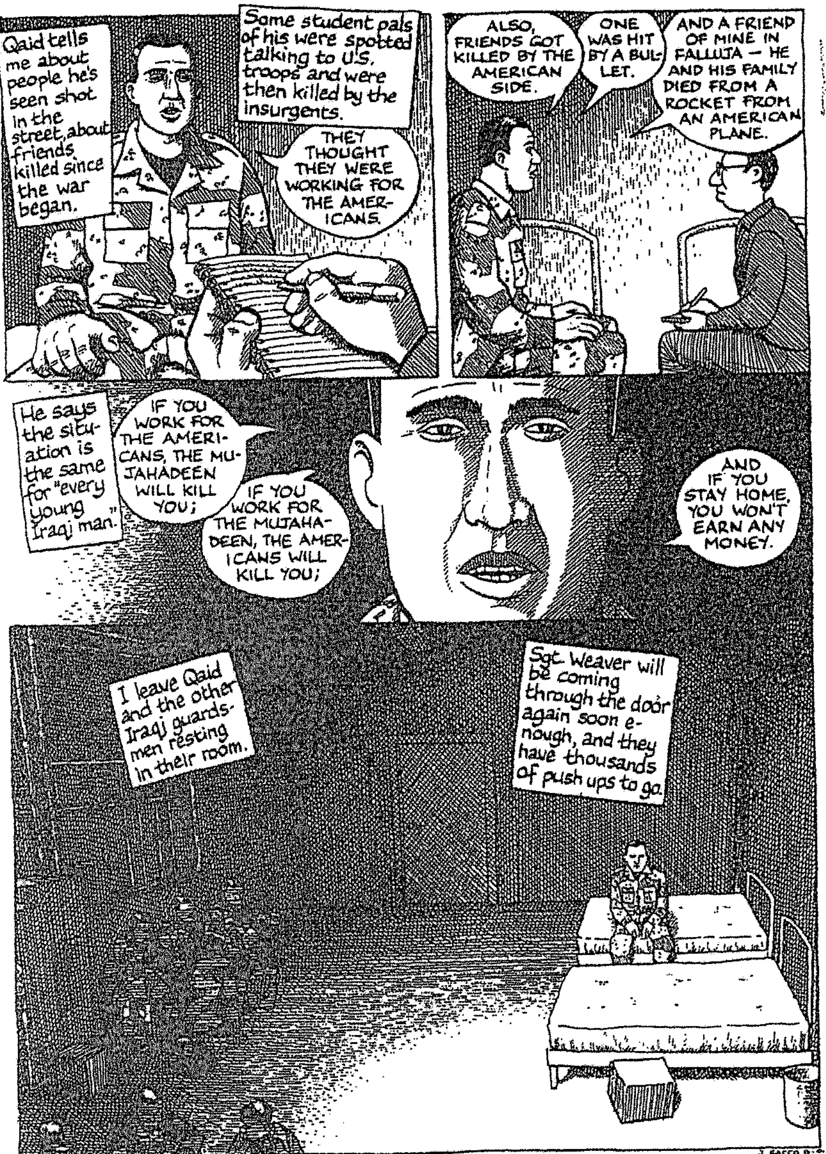

ALL THESE GUYS WANT TO QUIT.
THEY DON'T WANT TO DO THE HARD WORK.
THEY'RE ALL THINKING THAT THE AMERICANS GET PISSED OFF AND HAVE COME TO CHEW THEIR ASSES.
AMERICANS WANT THEM TO BE STRONG.




I spend a little time with a few guardsmen who are willing to talk to me.
They all seem to come from big families.
Most were out of work or underemployed when they joined the I.N.G., which pays a few hundred dollars per month—good money here.


They say they are proud to be guardsmen...
that they want to fight the insurgents...
and that they think the training they're undergoing is good.
I wonder if they are telling me what they think I want to hear. I wonder if they think I am going to report what they say to Sgt. Weaver or Petty Officer Second Class Saba.

I search out Qaid, who seems to have few reservations about speaking his mind.
THESE MARTIAL ARTS ARE NOT EFFECTIVE BECAUSE YOU CAN'T RESIST THE MUJAHADEEN WITH YOUR HANDS.
THE MUJAHADEEN COME TO YOU ARMED. THEY'LL SURROUND YOU, TAKE YOU TO AN AREA WHERE THERE ARE NO PEOPLE, AND KILL YOU.




## AHDAF SOUEIF

### *Mezzaterra*

Holland Park. He came towards me through the crowd in the drawing room of the grand house that I'd never been in before and have never been in since. "Come," he said, "I'll show you the menagerie." That was twenty-five years ago. I have, in some sense, been examining the menagerie ever since.

I had thought it made no difference where one lived: Cairo, London, what was a four and a half hour flight? We were citizens of the world and the world was fast becoming more connected. I saw the difficulty only in terms of the personal life: on the one hand, how much would I miss my family, my friends, the sun, the food, the – life? On the other, what was life worth without this miraculous new love?

We married in 1981. But I did not move to London permanently until 1984 when our first child was born.

I shared, of course, in the general life of the country that had become my other home. I supported Spurs football club, kept an eye on house prices, formed political opinions and found that whatever view I might hold about Thatcher or Europe or the NHS, I was bound to find it expressed somewhere in the common discourse of the mainstream media. Where I felt myself out of step was when this discourse had anything to do with Egypt, the Arabs, or Islam. I had become used to what was at the time an unequivocal support for Israel in the British media, but it troubled me that in almost every book, article, film, TV or

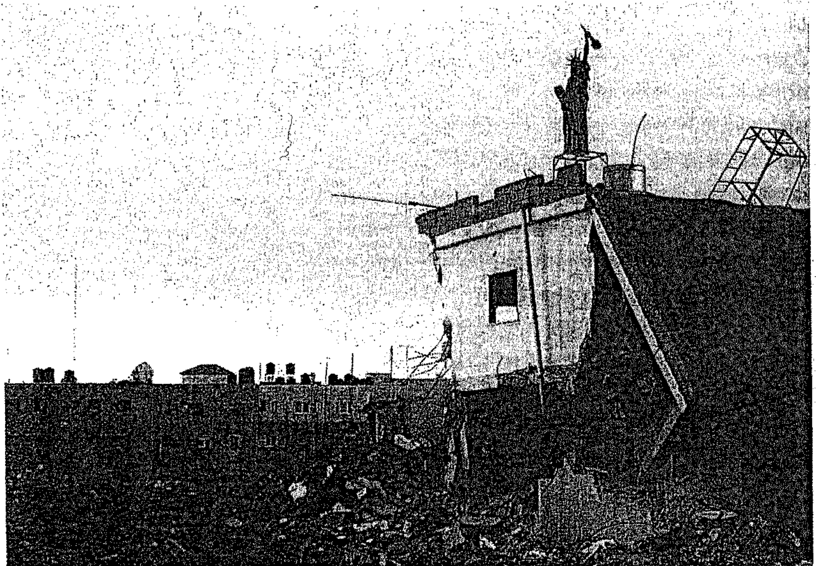


*Figure 6.1* Palestinian artists erect a “Statue of Liberty” (with the torch reversed) on top of a damaged building at Yasser Arafat’s compound, Ramallah, October 2002 (AP Photo/Nasser Nasser)

In the spring the IDF was already busily demolishing houses in Jenin refugee camp and clearing paths for tanks and troops with giant Caterpillar D-9 bulldozers. When 13 Israeli soldiers died in a booby-trapped building on April 9, the scale of destruction intensified, and the center of the camp was painstakingly reduced to rubble (figure 6.2). “I had no mercy,” a driver of one of the armored bulldozers declared.

> I would erase anyone with the D-9 just so that our soldiers wouldn’t expose themselves to danger. . . . For three days I just destroyed and destroyed. The whole area. Any house that they fired from came down. And to knock it down, I tore down some more. They were warned by loudspeaker to get out of the house before I came, but I gave no one a chance. . . . Many people were inside houses we started to demolish. . . . I didn’t see with my own eyes people dying under the blade of the D-9, and I didn’t see houses falling down on live people. But if there were any, I wouldn’t care at all. I am sure people died inside these houses. . . . I found joy with every house that came down, because I knew they didn’t mind dying, but they cared for their homes. If

*Figure 6.2* Jenin refugee camp, aerial view, April 2002 (© David Silverman/Reuters)

> you knocked down a house, you buried 40 or 50 people for generations. If I am sorry for anything, it is for not tearing the whole camp down.[23]

Almost a fortnight later the army began to withdraw, but international aid agencies and human rights workers continued to be denied access to the camp for nearly a week after the fighting had ended. When reporters were finally allowed in, they found “a silent wasteland, permeated with the stench of rotting corpses and cordite.” “The scale is almost beyond imagination,” wrote Suzanne Goldenberg, gazing out over “a vast expanse of rubble and mangled iron rods, surrounded by the carcasses of shattered homes” that became known locally as “Ground Zero” (figure 6.3). “Rarely in more than a decade of war reporting from Bosnia, Chechnya, Sierra Leone and Kosovo” had Janine di Giovanni seen “such deliberate destruction, such disrespect for human life”:

> Sofas and satellite dishes hang from the crevices of third-floors of what were once family homes. A red curtain, peppered with bullet holes, flaps in the breeze. This is what war does: it leaves behind imprints of lives. A sewing

*Figure 6.3* Jenin refugee camp, April 2002 (© Reinhard Krause/Reuters)

machine with a girl's dress still under the needle inside a house with the walls blown out. A goosedown pillow, ripped, the feathers fluttering. A photograph of a child with a bird hangs on a partly demolished wall.

Thousands of houses had been destroyed; scores of bodies were buried beneath the ruins; 16,000 people had fled in terror, and those who remained were left to survive without running water or electricity.[24] The International Committee of the Red Cross, Human Rights Watch, and Amnesty International all accused Israel of breaching the Geneva Convention by recklessly endangering civilian lives and property during its assault on the camp. Israel was undeterred, insisting that its operations were necessary, professional, surgical, and that no massacre had taken place. "Like everything else in our corrupted life," wrote Israeli commentator Yitzhak Laor, "it comes down to the number of dead: ten dead Israelis are a massacre; 50 Palestinians not enough to count."[25] This is another version of the algebra of infinite justice, and the United States endorsed the same grisly equation: it first supported, then moved to disrupt, and finally blocked any attempt at an inquiry by the United Nations.[26]



## *Besieging Cartographies*

There were geopolitical reasons that allowed the Bush administration to reaffirm American support for Israel: most immediately, the fall of the Taliban had terminated the necessity for an international military coalition in Afghanistan; more generally, the territorial designs for American Empire that had been mapped out by the Project for a New American Century had returned the Middle East to the center of the neoconservative stage. But what gave this reaffirmation its teeth – what gave it both voice and bite – was a series of parallels between the imaginative geographies deployed by America in its military assault on Afghanistan and those deployed by Israel in its military operations in the occupied territories of Palestine. The Palestinians were also reduced to targets, to barbarians, and to *homines sacri*: I will consider each in turn.

Palestinians were reduced to targets through what Camille Mansour calls a "besieging cartography" that was sustained by an intricate system of monitoring. This involved passive sensors, observation towers equipped with day/night and radar surveillance capabilities, and satellite images and photographs from reconnaissance planes that were fed through electronic communications systems into computerized data banks for storage, retrieval, and analysis. This formidable arsenal was largely funded by American aid, and much of it was provided by American manufacturers.[27] As the assault on the occupied territories intensified, however, Stephen Graham showed that the conflict was transformed into "an urban war in which the distance between enemies [was] measured in metres." Orientalist tropes were invoked to render Palestinian towns and cities as "impenetrable, unknowable spaces" whose close quarters were beyond "the three-dimensional gaze of the IDF's high-technology surveillance systems." As surveillance at a distance became markedly less effective, therefore, so "a new family of Unattended Aerial Vehicles (UAVs) and camera-carrying balloons was deployed to permit real-time monitoring of the complex battles within the cities, and to track the movements of key Palestinian fighters and officials so that missiles could target and kill them."[28] This was a strategically vital arm in the realization (and radicalization) of Israel's politics of verticality. "Every floor in every house, every car, every telephone call or radio transmission can be monitored," explains Eyal Weizman. "These eyes in the sky, completing the network of observation that is woven throughout the ground, finally iron out the folded surface and flatten the terrain." The opacity of supposedly alien

spaces is thus rendered transparent, and their complexities reduced to a series of objects in a purely visual plane.[29]

An example will serve to show what this means. In July 2002, when it became known that Hamas was about to announce a suspension of attacks inside Israel, Sharon and his Minister of Defence authorized the IDF to execute Salah Shehadeh, the leader of Hamas's military wing. This was a rerun of the assassination of Mahmoud Abu Hanoud eight months earlier, but with a savage twist. On this occasion an IDF F-16 was ordered to drop a one-ton bomb on a densely crowded neighborhood in Gaza. The raid leveled an entire city block and killed not only its intended target but also 16 others and injured 140 more. The pilot was protected by his aircraft and its armaments and also by the armature of cartographic reason: its doctrines of "objectivity" and "object-ness." Asked what he felt when he released the bomb over a residential area, he replied: "I feel a slight ping in the aircraft, the result of releasing the bomb. It passes a second later, and that's it. That's what I feel." He was not alone in his reduction of ordinary Palestinians to targets. Sharon described the atrocity as "one of our greatest successes," and President Bush merely complained that the attack was "heavy-handed."[30]

But the disembodied abstractions produced within such an enhanced technocultural sphere have been perforated by imaginative geographies that activate other, intensely corporeal registers. For Palestinians, of course, the distance between detachment and engagement has always been vulnerable to unpredictable, hideous collapse. Walking the streets of Ramallah, Hanan Elmasu recalled wondering "if suddenly the drone of the reconnaissance planes that are often circling above us will disappear and be replaced by an Apache attack helicopter beginning to rain down bullets from the sky as I am walking to my friend's home."[31] But some Israeli pilots have also been troubled by the same perforations, and they have found it difficult to sustain the optical detachment achieved by some of their colleagues and by their counterparts in America's "Kabul-ki dance" (above, p. 54). One fighter pilot urged those who flew Israel's deadly F-16s "to think about what a bombing operation would be like in the city they live in." He explained what he meant with an immediacy that provides a pointed contrast to the chilling detachment that I have just described: "I am talking about bombing a densely populated city. I am talking about liquidating people on the main street."[32]

The ground war involved the performance of highly abstract spacings too, in which every Palestinian was reduced to a threat and a target. One



reporter described how, at the height of Operation Defensive Shield in Tulkarm, a reserve detachment of Paratrooper Reconnaissance Commandos operated in "a peculiar state of sensory deprivation." Occupying a house seized from its Palestinian owners, the soldiers lived "in a kind of perpetual shadow," he wrote, "behind drawn curtains and under dim lighting, rarely venturing out except at night and then only in tanks or the windowless A[rmored] P[ersonnel] C[arriers]. Their knowledge of the battlefield [*sic*] is largely limited to the maps they study or the tiny corner of land they view when the [APC] door opens, and so anyone who crosses their path is viewed as a potential life-and-death threat." Yet here too the abstractions were qualified, their imaginative geographies perforated by much more intimate engagements, and many of the soldiers interviewed saw the military occupation as unsustainable on humanitarian rather than narrowly logistical grounds.[33] It was not only the aggrandized violence of offensive operations like Defensive Shield that convinced some reservists to become conscientious objectors. It was also the everyday exercise of the power to humiliate at what Meron Benvenisti calls "the checkpoints of arrogance" that turned their stomachs. Benvenisti is a former deputy mayor of Jerusalem, and he explains that the function of the checkpoint "is to send a message of force and authority, to inspire fear, and to symbolize the downtrodden nature and inferiority of those under the occupation." Some conscientious objectors came to see that humiliation saturates both sides of the barrier. For the checkpoint also degrades those who are enrolled in its operations: "You become a machine of the checkpoints" (figure 6.4).[34]

For all these reasons, over 500 reserve soldiers have refused to serve in the occupied territories since February 2002. Eight of them petitioned the Israeli Supreme Court to have their refusal to serve beyond the Green Line recognized as a matter of conscience. They claimed that the aim of IDF operations in Gaza and the West Bank has been to damage "the entire civil fabric" of Palestinian society and "to dominate, starve and humiliate an entire people." Their submission charged the IDF with systematically violating the most fundamental human rights of the Palestinian people, and argued that the Israeli occupation is itself illegal.[35] Significantly, the court declined to rule on the legality of the occupation. While it accepted that the reservists' objections were moral ones it nevertheless upheld the prison sentences that had been imposed upon them for refusing to serve in the occupied territories. This decision tacitly recognized that the reservists' refusal to fight what they call "the War of the Settlements" presents a much

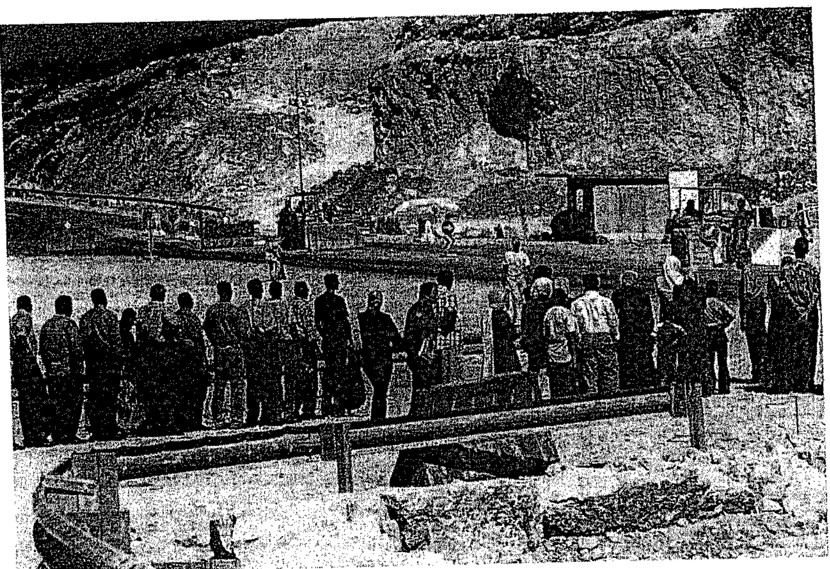


*Figure 6.4* Israeli checkpoint, Tulkarem (© AP Photo/Mohammed Azba)

more serious threat to the legitimacy of Israel's politicomilitary strategy than conscientious objectors who refuse to serve in the IDF at all. For theirs is a *selective* refusal that exposes the territorial underbelly of Israel's aggressions. As Susan Sontag observed, "the soldiers are not refusing a particular order. *They are refusing to enter the space where illegal orders are bound to be given.*"[36]

The production of this space – its articulation and legitimation – was reinforced by the deployment of other imaginative geographies that also mirrored those used by America in its military assault on Afghanistan. The "clash of civilizations" was rarely invoked directly. Huntington himself had said remarkably little about Palestine, apart from the monstrous perversion that the "fault-line war" in Gaza and the West Bank showed that "Muslims have problems living peacefully with their neighbours." He did acknowledge, in passing, the role of the European powers in setting the stage for the conflict, but said nothing at all about Israel's predatory actions. Robert Wistrich, a professor of modern European history at the Hebrew University, was more forthright. "It *is* a clash of civilisations," he wrote in the *Jerusalem Post* soon after September 11. Not only had radical Islam devastated New York City ("the largest Jewish city on the planet")



but it continued to threaten the survival of the state of Israel. Columnist Thomas Friedman, writing in the *New York Times* six months later, invoked Huntington too, but drew a markedly different conclusion: "What Osama bin Laden failed to achieve on September 11 is now being unleashed by the Israeli-Palestinian war in the West Bank: a clash of civilizations." But this had to end, so he insisted, in an Israeli withdrawal from the occupied territories.[37]

These straws in the wind were blowing in different directions, but the imaginative geography that dominated Israeli policy dispensed with their dualisms altogether. Instead, it resurrected the opposition between "civilization" and "barbarism" that had been a foundational weapon of Zionism and which the White House had also deployed in its "war on terrorism." Palestinians were represented as denizens of a barbarian space lying *beyond* the pale of civilization. When Barak had described Israel as "a villa in the middle of the jungle" and as "a vanguard of culture against barbarism," he was not only degrading and brutalizing Palestinian culture and civil society: he was also rendering its spaces inchoate, outside the space of Reason.[38] What Sharon sought to do was to establish these linguistic claims in acutely physical terms. As Lena Jayyusi wrote from Ramallah, "There is no constative any longer: only the pure performative."[39] This is the heart of the matter because, as I have repeatedly insisted, representations are not mere mirrors of the world. They enter directly into its fabrication. Israel's offensive operations were designed to turn the Palestinian people not only into enemies but into aliens, and in placing them outside the modern, figuratively and physically, they were constructed, like whole sections of the population in Afghanistan, as *homines sacri* from whom the rights and protections of international law could be systematically withdrawn. The process was already in train, of course, but by invoking the global "war on terrorism" Sharon and his government were able to radicalize its effects. As the siege of Ramallah intensified, Shehadeh recognized that, to the Israelis,

> We the Palestinians are terrorists and therefore anything they do to us is legitimate. We are treated as *homo sacer* – to whom the laws of the rest of humanity do not apply. . . . There is something pornographic about Sharon's repetition of the word terrorist. . . . Isn't pornography the denigration of the human being into a mere object, a mere body, and a toy to which things can be done? So with the Palestinians, who are now dubbed terrorists. They can be killed, disposed of like flies by the army's big machines without second thought.[40]

It will be recalled that, for Agamben, *homo sacer* is constituted through the production and performance of the space of the exception, but in Palestine this process assumes an ever more physical form.[41] On one side, a strategy of consolidation and containment continues to bind Israel to its illegal settlements and to separate both from the remainder of the occupied territories; on the other side, a strategy of cantonization institutionalizes the siege of Palestinian towns and villages.

The first objective had already been secured in Gaza during the first Intifada. "Surrounded by electronic fences and army posts," Reinhart reported, "completely sealed off from the outside world, Gaza has become a huge prison."[42] Barak had proposed the construction of a similar fence for the West Bank, but in June 2002 Sharon announced the construction of a much more formidable barrier network (figure 6.5). For most of its length this will be an electronic fence but in places it will solidify into a concrete or steel wall 8 meters high: Jabotinsky's "iron wall" materialized, malevolent (figure 6.6). The line will be flanked by a 50–100 m security zone, edged with concertina wire, trenches, and patrol roads, and monitored by watchtowers, floodlights, electronic sensors, and surveillance cameras. Barak wanted the fence to run along the Green Line, which is 360 km long, but under Sharon the barrier will be 1,000 km long and much of it will run far to the east of the Green Line. It follows no natural contour (and in any case armored bulldozers are supremely indifferent to topography). Instead, as Uri Avnery remarks, "it twists like a snake according to a single principle: most of the [illegal Israeli] settlements must remain on the western side of the wall" (figure 6.7). Thousands of hectares of some of the most highly productive Palestinian farmland will be on the Israeli side too, with implications not only for the beleaguered Palestinian economy but also for the subsistence of the Palestinian population. During the first phase of construction at least 15 Palestinian villages will be on the Israeli side, while others will be cut off from their fields and wells, so that Israel will extend its control over the crucial central aquifer. The barrier is also intended to consolidate Israel's stranglehold over East Jerusalem, where again it runs deep into Palestinian territory and cuts off hundreds of thousands of Palestinians (many of whom do not have Israeli residency) from the West Bank. In March 2003 Sharon announced plans for a second barrier to be built around the eastern foothills and along the Jordan Valley, to connect with the first and so encircle the West Bank like Gaza. The Israeli Defence Minister has persistently represented the barrier as a security measure whose sole objective is to deny suicide bombers access

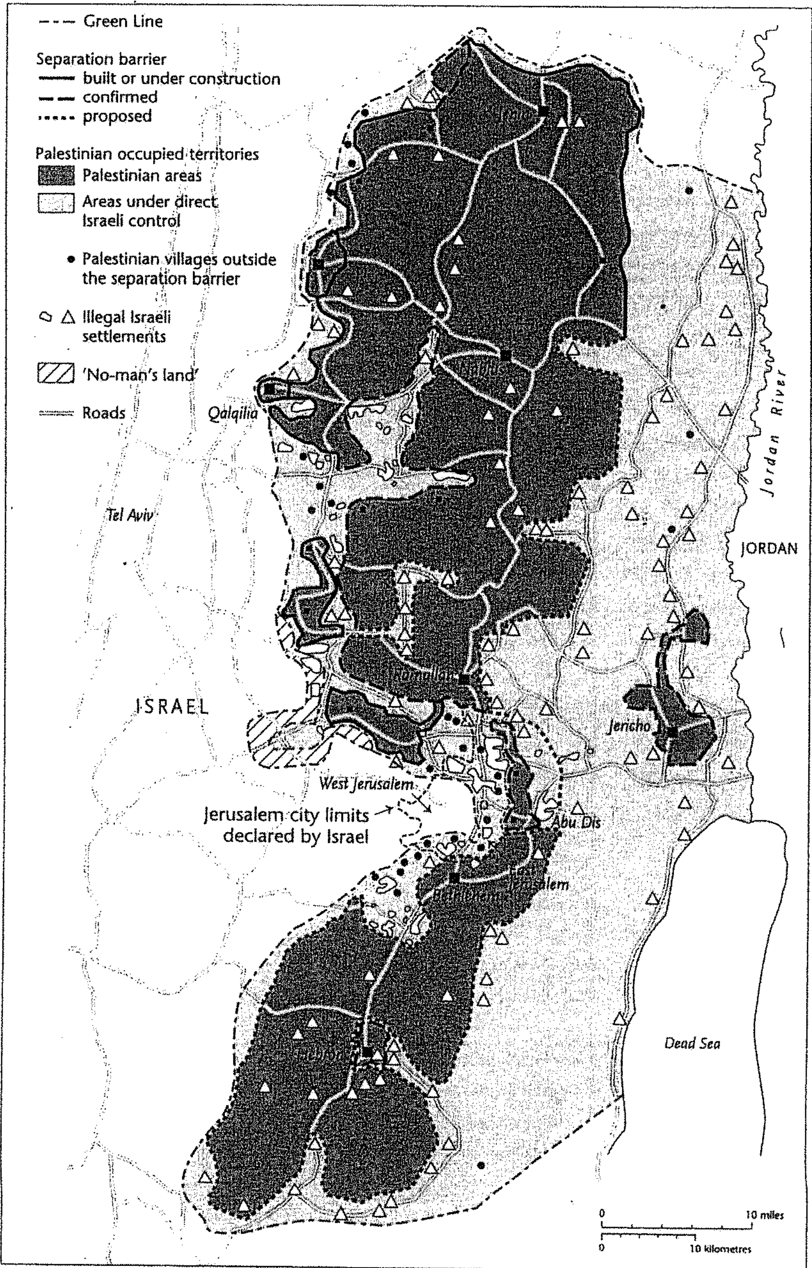



*Figure 6.5* Ariel Sharon's "Iron Wall" (after *Yediot Aharonot*)

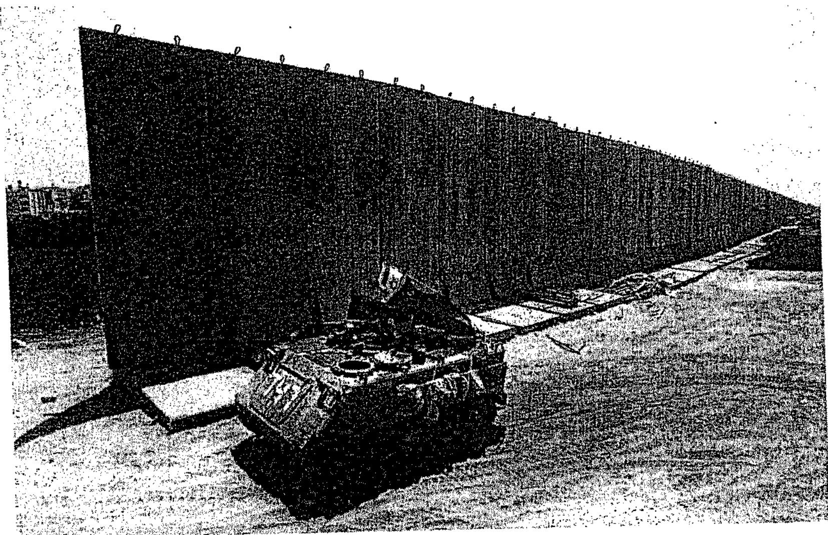


*Figure 6.6* Construction of the "Iron Wall," Qualqilya, August 2002 (AP Photo/Brennan Linsley)

*Figure 6.7* The West Bank: Palestinian village, the "separation barrier," and an illegal Israeli settlement, July 2003 (AP Photo/Lefteris Pitarakis)



to Israel from the West Bank. The route of the first barrier and the plan for a second make a nonsense of these claims, and when the minister adds that "this not a border between political entities or sovereign territories," it becomes crystal clear that the only sovereign power to be recognized is the state of Israel. What lies beyond the line is not the (future) semi-state of Palestine – confined to just 42 percent of the West Bank – but what Agamben would call the (present) space of the exception.[43]

This is the point at which the analogy between occupied Palestine and the prison breaks down, for this carceral archipelago limns the dispersed site not of the prison but of the camp. Agamben explains the difference:

> While prison law only constitutes a particular sphere of penal law and is not outside the juridical order, the juridical constellation that guides the camp is martial law and the state of siege. . . . As the absolute space of the exception, the camp is topologically different from a single space of confinement.[44]

On that other side of the line, therefore, Israel has set about the proliferation of zones of indistinction in which, as the reservists who refuse to serve in the occupied territories claim, "the legal and the lawful can no longer be distinguished from the illegal and unlawful."[45] The baroque geography of the Oslo process has been swept away; the quasi-sovereignty of Area A has been terminated, and all that remains is another Escher-like system of exclusion and inclusion in which Palestinian towns and villages are severed from one another and placed under constant siege from a military force that has now twisted the topologies of occupation into new and even more grotesque forms. In his original discussion of *homo sacer*, Agamben suggested that the space of the exception – and here we should remind ourselves that he was arguing in general terms because the concordance with the occupied territories is agonizingly close – traces a threshold through which "outside and inside, the normal situation and chaos, enter into those topological relations that make the validity of the juridical order possible."[46] A delegation from the International Writers Parliament visited the West Bank in March 2002, at the invitation of Mahmoud Darwish, and their reports described the installation of these new topologies – the performance of their collective *danse macabre* – with shivering immediacy:

> The landscape of the West Bank and Gaza Strip has been ripped and torn like cloth made from strips of different materials. Barbed wire surrounds

> Israeli settlements and military posts and the areas theoretically controlled by the Palestinian Authority: it protects and excludes, *unites separated zones and separates adjacent territories, weaves in between a labyrinth of islands that are mutually repelled and attracted.* A complex circulatory system of capillary veins demonstrates the occupier's desire to split the territory into slices, remnants, tracts that seemingly impact on each other and yet remain mutually unaware. . . . The landscape of settlements, frequently constructed on the ruins of Palestinian villages, evokes yet again the chess-board of reciprocal exclusion between the former and what remains of the autonomous areas, to the point of *confusing the inexpert visitor as to what they encompass and limit, the "interior" and the "exterior."*[47]

More prosaically, the military correspondent for *Ha'aretz* reported in April that "there is [now] only one area and that area is controlled by the IDF without Palestinian intermediaries." As far as the military was concerned, Amir Oren explained, there was no longer any difference between Areas A, B, and C: "The IDF is doing as it pleases in all of them." Israel had established a series of "security zones" throughout the West Bank (figure 6.8), so that Palestinians were now confined and corralled, subject to endless curfew and closure, whereas the IDF had complete freedom of movement and action.[48] As the Israeli Minister of Internal (*sic*) Security put it, "They are there, but we are here *and there as well.*"[49]

The occupied territories have been turned into twilight zones, caught in a frenzied cartography of mobile frontiers rather than fixed boundaries. These enforce a violent fragmentation and recombination of time and space, which is nothing less than a concerted attempt to disturb and derange the normal rhythms of everyday Palestinian life. During the first Intifada many Palestinians elected to "suspend" everyday life as a political strategy. This was a way of reminding one another that these were not normal times, a way of reasserting their collective power and, by calling attention to their actions, also a way of narrativizing the occupation: all of which actively sustained the process of Palestinian nationalism.[50] What I am describing here, in contrast, is the violent *annulment* of everyday life by the IDF through a series of military operations that is intended to paralyze Palestinian agency and – through its physical assaults on the Palestinian archive – to erase Palestinian memory.

These deformations involve deliberate twistings – torsions – of both time and space. Time is at once calibrated and indeterminate: the occupying army pulverizes Palestine into a landscape where everything is temporary except the occupation itself. In one sense, of course, Palestinians have had

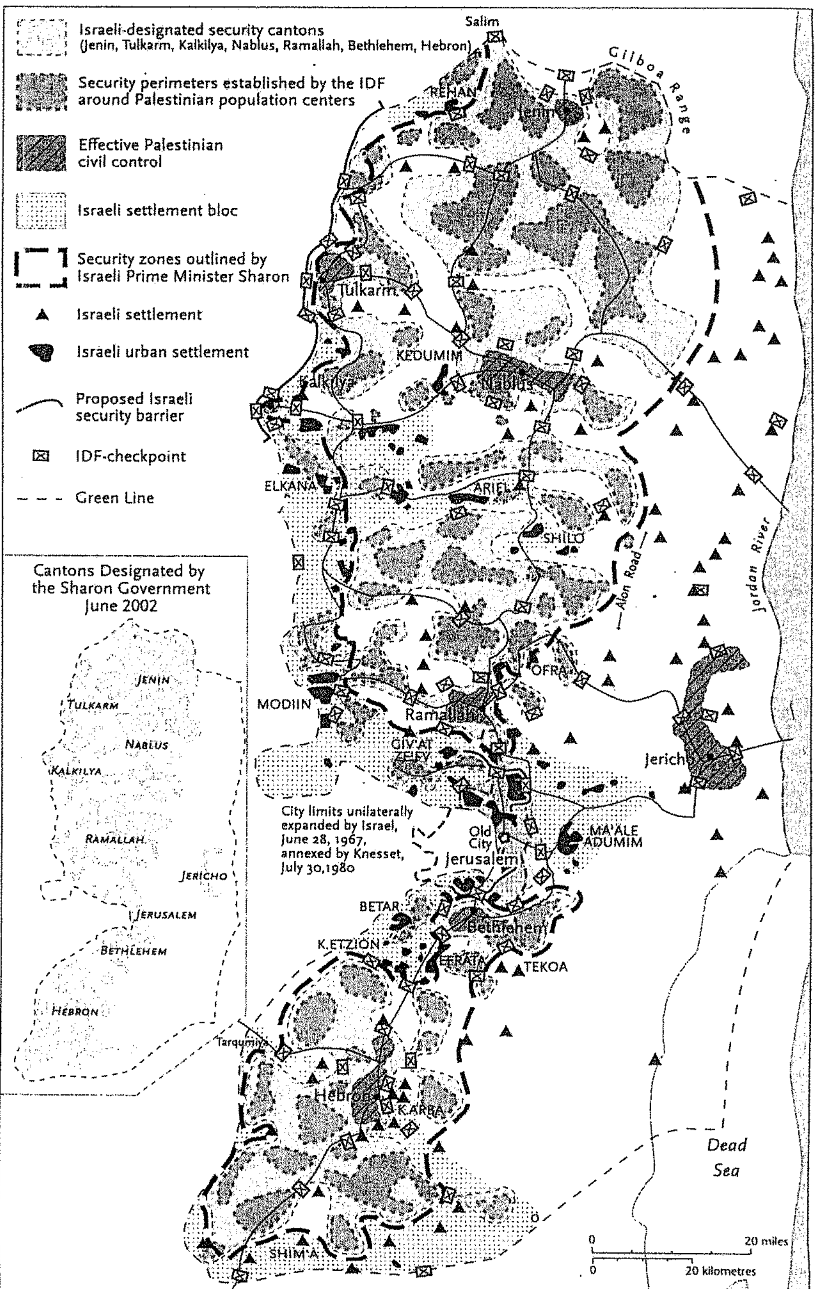



*Figure 6.8* Israeli security cantons and checkpoints in the occupied West Bank, 2002–3 (after Jan de Jong/Foundation for Middle East Peace)

from Retort, Afflicted Powers

# 4

# THE FUTURE OF AN ILLUSION

> An Eastern race well versed in Western culture and profoundly in sympathy with Western ideals will be established in the Orient. Furthermore, a Jewish state will inevitably fall under the control of American Jews who will work out, along Jewish lines, American ideals and American civilization.
>
> —William Yale, US State Department consultant, 1919

Unrelenting mass resistance to its territorial occupations; a fraudulently "miraculous" economy wholly dependent on foreign subsidies; a grotesque legally enshrined apartheid; a political class in thrall to its military; a paranoid state-of-siege society; almost universal international opprobrium for the past two decades; and pan-Islamic resentment and rage fanning ever more violence against its lone apologist and protector. From the perspective of early twenty-first-century American imperial interests ... a failed state. Yet despite this now unmistakable bankruptcy, US support for Israel's increasingly extreme version of the Zionist project remains unquestioned, unblinking.

We enter an analysis of the US–Israel relationship somewhat reluctantly, claiming no special insight into the realities of life on the ground for Palestinians and Israelis, nor into the convolutions of their internal politics. What we discuss here, we want to emphasize, is not



Israel itself but the US state's connection to it. We shall make no attempt to detail the brutality of the Israeli regime and the consequent immiseration of Palestinians; or the actual extent of the extraordinary overt and covert US support for Sharon and his predecessors; or the floundering of official Palestinian political structures. Many others, both inside and outside Palestine and Israel, are better equipped to do so than we are. And they have – comprehensively. Rather, what we grapple with here is the constellation of appearances and material conditions which has, within the United States, rendered that damning mass of information politically invisible. And which seemingly obliges the US to continue its unqualified support for the Israeli state, despite that support having become an enormous liability for the US's designs in the Islamic world.

Notwithstanding our reluctance, we believe we must break a long-standing silence on much of the Left concerning the actual genealogy – and precise dynamics – of the US–Israel relationship, and in particular the role of that relationship in the current imperial moment. We break the silence because we believe it impossible to grasp the sources and direction of recent, and future, US moves in the Middle East and Central Asia without reference to its failed Israeli client state.

Of course, the silence has not been total. Some voices on the Left have chosen to locate the US–Israel dyad entirely within the frame of the two cultures' shared anti-Arab racism. There are also conspiratorialists who see Israeli agents planted throughout the US political command structure, directing American state policy on precise instructions from Likud headquarters in Jerusalem. More commonly and insidiously, there is the uncritical acceptance of the US state's much-repeated assertion, now become a piety, that Israel is a crucial US "strategic asset". And across a broad Left political spectrum, apart from and often in the absence of any accompanying critique, there is passionate and abiding support for the Palestinian people.

that of resisters anywhere to US hegemony. They hate us because they hate freedom. And millions of Americans, who have heard the same mantra so often on behalf of the Israelis, assent to it one more time.

## V

Our argument has been that Israel's brief period as a true strategic asset now lies in the past. The same can be said, we believe, about its time in the sun of the spectacle. Images of spotless orange groves, of shining white settlements with suitable color settlers, of El Al jets and Tel Aviv high-rises, of happy families lounging at Dead Sea resorts – all these have vanished from the pages and screens of Western media. Every corner of Israel now seen around the world is contested space, every Israeli in some extreme of rage or mourning: Uzi-toting settlers denouncing Sharon's softness; smoke-filled streets strewn with twisted metal, ambulances wailing, passersby screaming for revenge; Arab-Israelis and Palestinians spread-eagled against walls by police, soldiers or civilians (the distinctions harder and harder to read). Image victory has turned into utter image defeat. Even scenes of "normal" Israeli life, when rarely they appear, have about them a sense of emergency and duress. People seem not to stroll but to scurry, teeth gritted, more chastened than comforted by the deployment everywhere of armed force. Beleaguered David morphs into wounded, flailing Goliath. "Making the Desert Bloom" gives way to nightly footage of bulldozers leveling Palestinian olive groves. The frontier of freedom is now marked by a separation wall, every slab of which speaks of imprisonment, exclusion. The very *map* of Israel – the tourniquet of settlements and fortified superhighways cutting off life-flows across the West Bank, the scatter of Palestinian Bantustans, the political economy of the arid and the irrigated, and the Fence itself, with its unmistakable message of Divide and Rule – is unshowable, unspeakable.



Failure is compounded by a Revolution in Image Affairs in the surrounding Arab world. People no longer depend on images tossed back at them from the West, or filtered through their own dismal state media. They have built themselves an alternative wisdom: al-Jazeera, al-Arabiya and their imitators; scores of Arab-language newspapers and journals; multiplying cyberspaces. The Israel portrayed by this new apparatus, safe to say, does the US no spectacular service. Orientalism talks back.

Even as colonizer and enforcer – the aspect of Israel's spectacular identity to which the American state is most deeply attached, we feel – Israel has lost its efficacy. Nearly forty years on, the Israeli state is no closer to an end-game in the Occupied Territories. The Palestinian people, its own failed official structures notwithstanding, has proved indomitable. And indominability, over time, cannot be disguised or dissembled. As enough rock-throwing boys confront enough Israeli tanks, eventually they are seen as ... tanks against boys – and no amount of casuistry will keep the "security" gloss intact. As more and more anguished Palestinian families sit in the rubble of their homes after yet another attack by helicopter gunships, eventually they are seen and heard as ... gunships against families – and no amount of "reliable information" about terrorists can alter the equation. None of this means to suggest that the bombings of civilians in Israel by Hamas, al-Aqsa, and others are in any way excusable in response. The tactic is execrable and futile. But if Israel-the-occupier is a model of anything now, it is a model of abject failure.

## VI

Why, then, is there no sign, however slight, of the US beginning to prize itself apart from this ally-become-ball-and-chain? We offer no simple or definitive explanation here, but we suspect the answer is *superficial*; for oddly, sometimes the worst entanglements are contingent and skin deep. In part

that have been most involved in building the Israeli "security barrier."

When Boeing begins building the planned $2.5 billion "virtual fences" on the US borders with Mexico and Canada – complete with electronic sensors, unmanned aircraft, surveillance cameras and 1,800 towers – one of its main partners will be Elbit. Elbit is the other Israeli firm most involved in building Israel's hugely controversial wall. Already Elbit's unnamed aerial vehicles, tested on bombing missions in Gaza and Lebanon, have been flown over the Arizona-Mexico border.

With more and more countries turning themselves into fortresses (walls and high-tech fences are going up on the border between India and Kashmir, Saudi Arabia and Iraq, Afghanistan and Pakistan), Elbit and Magal don't mind the relentless negative publicity that Israel's wall attracts around the world. In fact, they consider it free advertising. "People believe we are the only ones who have experience testing this equipment in real life," explains Magal CEO Jacob Even-Ezra. Elbit and Magal have seen their stock prices more than double since September 11, a standard performance for Israeli homeland security stocks. Verint – dubbed "the granddaddy of the video surveillance" – wasn't profitable at all before September 11, but between 2002 and 2006 its stock price has more than tripled, thanks to the surveillance boom.

Since Israel began its policy of sealing off the occupied territories with checkpoints and walls, human rights activists have often compared Gaza and the West Bank to open-air prisons. But in researching the explosion of Israel's homeland security sector, it strikes me that they are something else too: laboratories where the terrifying tools of our security states are being field-tested. Palestinians are no longer just targets; they are guinea pigs.



So in a way Friedman is right, Israel has struck oil. But the oil isn't the imagination of its clever young techies. The oil is the war on terror, the state of constant fear that creates a bottomless global demand for devices that watch, listen, contain and target "suspects." And fear, unlike oil, is the ultimate renewable resource.

The extraordinary performance of Israel's homeland security companies is well known to stock watchers, but it is rarely discussed as a factor in the politics of the region. It should be. It is not a coincidence that the Israeli state's decision to put "counter-terrorism" at the center of its export economy has coincided precisely with its unilateral abandonment of peace negotiations, as well as a clear strategy to reframe its conflict with the Palestinians not as a battle against a nationalist movement with specific goals for land and rights but rather as part of the global War On Terror – one against illogical, fanatical forces bent only on destruction.

Economics is by no means the primary motivator for the escalation in the Middle East since 2001. There is, of course, no shortage of fuel for violence on all sides. Yet within a context so weighted against peace, economics has, at certain points, been a countervailing force. In the early Nineties, it was Israel's business leaders – wanting to be part of the globalization juggernaut – who pushed reluctant political leaders into negotiations with Arafat. What the homeland security boom has done is to change the direction of that pressure, creating yet another powerful sector that is deeply invested in continued violence – and therefore threatened by the prospect of peace.

Now, rather than seeking stability in the interest of economic growth, Israeli businesses have been some of the noisiest cheerleaders for war. For instance, in the

summer of 2006, when the Israeli government turned what should have been a prisoner exchange negotiation with Hezbollah into a full-scale war, Israel's largest corporations didn't just support the war, they sponsored it. Bank Leumi, Israel's newly privatized mega-bank, distributed bumper stickers with the slogans "We Will Be Victorious" and "We Are Strong," while, as the Israeli journalist and novelist Yitzhak Laor wrote at the time, "The current war is the first to become a branding opportunity for one of our largest mobile phone companies, which is using it to run a huge promotional campaign."

Israeli industry had no reason to fear the economic consequences of war. The Tel Aviv Stock Exchange went up in August 2006, the month of Israel's assault on Lebanon. In the final quarter of the year, which had also included the bloody escalation in the West Bank and Gaza following the election of Hamas, Israel's overall economy grew by a staggering 8 percent – more than triple the growth rate of the US economy in the same period. One month after the UN declared a ceasefire between Israel and Hezbollah, the New York Stock Exchange hosted a special conference on investing in Israel. More than two hundred Israeli firms attended, many of them in the homeland security sector. At that moment in Lebanon, economic activity was at a virtual standstill and roughly 140 factories – manufacturers of everything from pre-fab homes, to medical products, to milk – were clearing away the rubble after being hit by Israeli bombs and missiles. Israeli companies, however, were upbeat. "Israel is open for business – has always been open for business," announced Israel's ambassador to the United Nations, Dan Gillerman, welcoming delegates to the event.

Only a decade earlier, this kind of wartime exuberance would have been unimaginable. In 1993, Gillerman himself, then head of the Israeli Federation of Chambers of Commerce, had called for Israel to make peace so that it could become "the strategic, logistic and marketing center of the whole region like a Middle Eastern Singapore or Hong Kong." Now he was one of the most inflammatory of Israel's pro-war hawks, pushing for an even wider escalation. On CNN, Gillerman said that "while it may be politically incorrect and maybe even untrue to say that all Muslims are terrorists, it happens to be very true that nearly all terrorists are Muslim. So this is not just Israel's war. This is the world's war."

This recipe for endless, worldwide war is the same one that the Bush administration offered as a business prospectus to the military-industrial and nascent homeland security complex after September 11. It is not a war that can be won by any country, but winning is not the point. The point is to create "security" inside fortress states, bolstered by endless low-level conflict outside their walls. In Israel, this process is most advanced: an entire country has turned itself into a fortified gated community – a green-zone nation – surrounded by locked-out people living in permanently excluded red zones. What is happening in microcosm in Israel, however, is quickly spreading throughout the world.

For decades, the conventional wisdom was that generalized mayhem was a drain on the global economy. Individual shocks and crises could be harnessed as leverage to force open new markets, but after the initial shock had done its work, relative peace and stability were required for sustained economic growth. That was the accepted explanation for why the Nineties had been such prosperous years: with the Cold War over, economies were liberated to concentrate on trade and investment, and as countries

became more enmeshed and interdependent, they were far less likely to bomb each other.

Yet at the 2007 World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland, political and corporate leaders were scratching their heads over a state of affairs that seemed to flout this conventional wisdom. It was being called the "Davos Dilemma," which the *Financial Times* columnist Martin Wolf described as "the contrast between the world's favourable economics and troublesome politics." As he put it, the economy had faced "a series of shocks: the stock market crash after 2000; the terrorist outrages of September 11, 2001; wars in Afghanistan and Iraq; friction over US policies; a jump in real oil prices to levels not seen since the 1970s; the cessation of negotiations in the Doha round [of WTO talks]; and the confrontation over Iran's nuclear ambitions" – and yet it found itself in "a golden period of broadly shared growth." Put bluntly, the world was going to hell, there was no stability in sight, and the global economy was roaring its approval. Soon after, former US Treasury Secretary Lawrence Summers described the "near complete disconnect" between politics and markets as "something out of Dickens, you talk to international relations experts and it's the worst of all times. Then you talk to potential investors and it's one of the best of all times."

This puzzling trend has also been observed through an economic indicator called "the guns-to-caviar index." The index tracks the sales of fighter jets (guns) and executive jets (caviar). For seventeen years, it consistently found that when fighter jets were selling briskly, sales of luxury executive jets went down and vice versa: when executive jet sales were on the rise, fighter jet sales dipped. Of course, a handful of war profiteers always managed to get rich from selling guns, but they were economically insignificant. It was a truism of the contemporary market that you couldn't



have booming economic growth in the midst of violence and instability.

But as in Israel, that truism is no longer true. Since 2003, the year of the Iraq invasion, the index found that spending has been going up on both fighter jets and executive jets rapidly and simultaneously, which means that the world is becoming less peaceful while accumulating significantly more profit – a global version of the Israeli phenomenon. The galloping economic growth in China and India played a part in the increased demand for luxury items, but so did the expansion of the narrow military-industrial complex into what I call the "disaster capitalism complex." With so much of the apparatus of war-fighting, "peace keeping," reconstruction and disaster response contracted out to private players, global instability does not just benefit a small group of arms dealers; it generates huge profits for the high-tech security sector, for heavy construction, for private health care companies treating wounded soldiers, for the oil and gas sectors – and of course for defense contractors.

The scale of the revenues at stake is certainly enough to fuel an economic boom. Lockheed Martin received $25 billion of US taxpayer dollars in 2005 alone. The Democratic congressman Henry Waxman noted that the sum "exceeded the gross domestic product of 103 countries, including Iceland, Jordan, and Costa Rica . . . [and] was also larger than the combined budgets of the Department of Commerce, the Department of the Interior, the Small Business Administration, and the entire legislative branch of government."

Companies like Lockheed (whose stock price tripled between 2000 and 2005) are a large part of the reason why the US stock markets were saved from a prolonged crash following September 11. While conventional stock prices have underperformed, the Spade Defense Index, "a

Bashir Abu-Manneh, "Israel in US Empire", in Lazarus & Gopal, After Iraq: Reframing Postcolonial Studies

predestines Israel to be a devoted guardian of stability in all the countries surrounding it. Its [role] is to protect the existing regimes: to prevent or halt the processes of radicalization and to block the expansion of fundamentalist religious zealotry.[64]

64. Quoted in Noam Chomsky, *Pirates and Emperors, Old and New*, New York, South End Press, 2002, p166.

The New World Order is, then, very much like the old world order: US and Israel fighting common enemies and satisfying mutual elite interests. The only difference lies in the realisation of more amendable conditions of operation. US global primacy has been the main outcome of the Cold War, and after the Gulf War Israel's regional military superiority was again reconfirmed. One other slight variation is relevant here: a new enemy. If Arab nationalism was the enemy of the Cold War period, major factions of Islamic fundamentalism are the enemies of the New World Order (and this is in no way to equate the social content of each ideology). Once a Cold War ally against nationalism, Islamic fundamentalism has turned into a foe. Examples abound. Two main ones will suffice: Mujahideen in Afghanistan (Taliban, Bin Laden and al-Qaida) and radical fundamentalists in the Arab world. In the Palestinian context, the Muslim Brotherhood is an example of the latter. It went from being supported by Israel against nationalist Fatah to mutating into Hamas and becoming the main agent of anti-colonial struggle and Palestinian self-determination in the Occupied Territories. The cost of this shift is mainly paid by local societies: with the fundamentalists, regressive social agendas rule and the sphere of individual liberty (already severely curtailed by Arab secular nationalism) shrinks even more. This is not a problem that worries Israel or the US much, as long as the fundamentalists are suppressed or kept out of office (Algeria, Egypt, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, etc). For US-Israel, the problem with democracy in the Middle East today is the problem of Islamic fundamentalism: most free elections would result in fundamentalists getting into power, as recent victories by Hamas and the United Iraqi Alliance in Iraq (and by the FIS in Algeria before that) show. Denying real democratic sovereignty remains a fundamental premise of US policy. So after the recent elections in Palestine (and the US hope for a Fatah win), the US now demonises and boycotts majority-elected Hamas and seeks to punish and 'starve' Palestinians for their democratic choice (as a recent *NY Times* headline put it). The War on Terrorism is the New World Order unleashed and unbound. It replays the Cold War dynamic, aims to reproduce its oppressive structure, and continues to satisfy longstanding US interests in Middle East: control of oil and rejection of Arab radicalism, which have lead to support for colonial Israel. And so it goes.

What this brief analysis of 'imperialism-colonialism' teaches us is clear. The US has been determining major economic and political outcomes in the Middle East since at least 1967, with Israel continuing to play a crucial role in their realisation. In Israel-Palestine, this has meant that force and colonial peace have alternated as main instruments of policy, with the main objective being a constant: Jewish supremacy in Palestine – as much land as



possible, as few Palestinians as possible. The US has exploited this Zionist imperative for its own interests in the region, and has fostered a militarised and fundamentalist Israel in the process. This reality can be gauged in Israel's most recent parliamentary elections. Gideon Levy has put it well: 'An absolute majority of the MKs (Members of Knesset) in the 17th Knesset will hold a position based on a lie; that Israel does not have a partner for peace. An absolute majority of MKs in the next Knesset do not believe in peace, nor do they even want it – just like their voters – and worse than that, don't regard Palestinians as equal human beings. Racism has never had so many supporters. It is the real hit of this election campaign'.[65] For the Palestinians, the impact of US-Israel has been much worse: collapse of the secular national project and national unity; continuing annexation of lands and resources; enclosure and 'enclavisation'; fragmentation, de-mobilisation, and collective paralysis; and unending death and suffering. If for Levy Israelis are 'One Racist Nation', for Amira Hass Palestinians have become: 'A Nation of Beggars': 'For it is not natural disasters that have transformed the Palestinians into a nation that lives on handouts from the world; it is Israel's accelerating colonialist process'.[66] This too is an outcome of US-Israel, imperialism-colonialism.

Between colonialism, looming starvation, and *sumud* (steadfastness), hope for *real* change seems remote, if not impossible. And this may yet prove to be imperialism's most catastrophic effect.

65. Gideon Levy, 'One Racist Nation', *Haaretz*, 26 March 2006, <http://www.haaretzdaily.com/hasen/pages/ShArt.l?itemNo=698426>.

66. Amira Hass, 'A Nation of Beggars', *Hareetz*, 1/03/06, <http://www.haaretzdaily.com/hasen/pages/ShArt.l?itemNo=688642>.

السّلام عليكم

"peace be with you"

**Salam Pax, *The Baghdad Blog* (2003)**

"BOMB US ALREADY! STOP PUSSYFOOTING!"

http://dear_raed.blogspot.co.uk/

http://www.theguardian.com/Iraq/blogger/

http://salampax.wordpress.com/

http://riverbendblog.blogspot.co.uk/

http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/programmes/newsnight/3260121.stm

keyword "blogging" at:
http://webcat.warwick.ac.uk/search~S1/?searchtype=X&searcharg=+blogging&searchscope=1&sortdropdown=-&SORT=DZ&extended=0&SUBMIT=Search&searchlimits=&searchorigarg=X+blog+theory%26SORT%3DDZ

and "Salam Pax" on Project Muse:
http://muse.jhu.edu/results#type=ajax&startYear=&stopYear=&terms=content:salam%20pax:AND&m=1&items_per_page=10

**Questions**

Read the blurbs, the back cover and the inside: What strikes you about the claims and sentiments surrounding the text? Pick out a few words and phrases to contribute to group discussion.

Read the end of the post for 30 May 2003 (p. 186). What are the general concerns and issues we can elicit here that are central to the concerns of this text – in its form and its subject?

The Blog

- is it a "literary" form? What aspects of the "literary" can you discern here? Is this a silly or redundant question? (Read, for example, the first post: what features of style: tone, vocabulary, etc., can you discern? How do we knit these to the issues being discussed?
- What is his rationale for blogging? 63
- Can you find a decent line or two from an internet site that we can use to establish the authority of the blog as a literary form?
- Why is "media" a theme? 143, 158

Find out something on the net about Salam. Bring it to class to tell us all.

Why is Salam's authority and authenticity critical to establish? See, for example, pps 25-6; 95, 129, 184-85.

Is he "just like us" as Ian Katz claims, in the introduction (ix)?

Why are his responses to other bloggers telling? 39, 8-9, 82, 83

Blogger or Journalist? 17, 21-2, 24, 31, 35, 39, 82, 99-100, 156, 178 (does his "rant" destroy all journalistic intentions? 119-122.

Or Documentarist? 105-06; 125; 130-31, 141, 150

The civic drive: 173, 175

In what way is communication a central theme of the text? 39, 40, 44, 59, 74, 87-88, 127, 78, 107, 143, 146, 177, 187-88

And "normality'? 112-13, 115, 137, 195

American teacher Taimur Martin in *Plowing the Dark* has a growing realization of his place in the world from which he has been removed. In fact, it's a realization that grows not only vividly in the silence of complete isolation but also in complexity across the experience of his captivity. Thus, at the beginning of his captivity he has the following vision:

> Hand between your head and the infested mattress, your free leg slung across the manacled one, you force your two column inches of captivity to materialize on the crazed plaster ceiling. And along with it, you summon up the whole front section of today's *Tribune* – World's Greatest Newspaper – the first image of any resolution to grace your private screening room. The blue banner and the hedging headlines. The weather for Chicago and vicinity. Metroland meanderings, carping columnists, gridiron second-guessers: pages scroll across your field of view on microfiche of your own devising. And tucked away, make it page 12, safe where the news will spare Des Moines and hurt only those whom hurt will benefit, you put a black-and-white reduction of your college yearbook photo, a face so saddled with goofy impatience for the future that even you no longer recognize it. (Powers 2000, 101)

And after a protracted period of being imprisoned, tortured, maltreated, just when he gives up hope, the vision recurs as follows:

> He waves a scrap of newsprint under your blindfold. Eternity's long-sought armistice. Page 6 of the *Herald Tribune*, and there is the old man's photo, identified as you. Someone has been duped, either you or the world at large. And you don't care anymore, just who. (Powers 2000, 369)

Like Julien, Martin in captivity sees himself transferred and recorded in the world of news media, the grid of information that criss-crosses and characterizes cosmopolis. His physical presence is surrendered to the virtual presence of being registered in the news. In a *Dorian Gray*-like turn, the virtual presence in the news absorbs his physical reality – he feels that the entire trauma of captivity, his aging, has been misguidedly appropriated by the news media. The inconsequentiality of that reduction of self is a kind of complicity between his captors and the news world: his captors physically contain and torture him, and the news world reduces him to inconsequentiality, sticks him deep inside the information surfeit that is the news (page 12, or page 6 at best), of less consequence than the insurance corporations of Des Moines who profit from fear of loss of human life and property.

In brief, on the one hand, there is the suffering of being removed from the Western cosmopolitan world by those who oppose it, of being sucked into anti-cosmopolitan hatred. On the other hand, there is the despair of realizing that the mediatized, digitized grid that is ultimately cosmopolis somehow works in concert with, rather than against, its enemies. To be removed from the cosmopolitan West is unbearable suffering, it is suggested, but the production of enemies and victims is part and parcel of the network or grid that is the cosmopolitan order. Literary treatments of the



idea of cosmopolitan order are seldom, unlike philosophical or theoretical treatments, unambiguous or partisan. Perhaps in this they come closer to the bone of the complexity of systems and agencies that operate in the name of cosmopolitan principles.

## VIRTUAL COSMOPOLIS

The access to ideas or experiences of globalization that are available through literary treatments of global protests/anti-globalization protests, world cities, cosmopolitan principles and their discontents, a global consciousness, etc., are all powerfully associated with the growing centrality of technologically enhanced information and communication networks and grids. The images of captured Westerners just discussed gesture towards these, and in fact these are of particular moment in a study of globalization and literature such as the present. Up to this point I have discussed globalization insofar as it is thematically treated in literary works, in relation to various relevant issues. But the effects of technological enhancement of information and communication networks, the drivers of globalization forces, are not merely represented *within* literature; they also comprehensively *act upon* literature. Reckoning with globalization changes the very way in which literature is thought about, disseminated and consumed, and even constituted. This change is so dramatic that some literary critics, notably J. Hillis Miller, regard the emerging age of the internet as portending the 'end of literature' (Miller 2002, 1). It is, however, possible to see instead a potential re-energizing and transformation in literature and literary studies which is nevertheless organically and closely linked to the past practice of these. Subsequent chapters discuss how globalization impinges upon the manner in which literature is thought about (literary criticism/theory and globalization) and the manner in which literature is disseminated and consumed (literary circulation and globalization, or the globalization *of* literature).

I have noted in passing that technological enhancement of information and communications networks impinges on the manner in which literature is constituted. I meant thereby that it is not merely that literature represents the effects of such global connectedness, but that it is itself affected by that connectedness in its expressive modes, its textual forms, its receptions as literature. Such concepts as literary authorship, readership and textuality themselves are stretched and tested in new ways, so that arguably literature, so to speak, grows in scope. One may say that the cosmopolis is not merely something that literature sometimes talks about; literature gradually begins to perform cosmopolis within itself in its new media and environments. Literature increasingly performs within itself some of the characteristics of that realized but virtual space of cosmopolitan connectedness: the cosmopolis of the World Wide Web.

What I mean by that will, as I said, become clearer in subsequent chapters, and I therefore do not discuss the substantive ideas and observations

involved here. Instead, I use the remainder of this chapter to read some literary texts which appear in such new media and environments with a view, before *discussing* them, to *demonstrating* what sorts of radical changes are becoming possible for literature and literary studies.

I have already mentioned the internet novel by Greg Ryland, *253* (to be found at http://www.ryman-novel.com/home.htm, and also published in book form in 1998), and given a brief summary of its contents. Relevantly here, *253* encourages different approaches in the two forms in which it is available, as a website and as a printed book. Both forms carry substantially the same material. The printed book naturally falls in with the convention of linear reading, and therefore follows a person-by-person and carriage-by-carriage progression, according to the layout of the underground train, with ancillary material intervening. Cross-references – between characters, to footnotes, etc. – are indicated on the pages where they appear. Checking them out is a matter of physically conforming to the linear structure of reading, by the movement of the eye or the act of shuffling pages backwards or forwards. The range of reading experiences can be as varied as one wishes to make it (one can skip pages randomly, for instance), but all variations are departures from a physically structured norm of linearity that is the shape of the book as a material object. The internet novel allows for more varieties of reading experiences, following different chains of connections and associations, and, importantly, without being constantly predicated on (departing from or adhering to) the normatively linear disposition of the physical book. By simple clicks of a button on hyper-referenced words or phrases, within any text or menu or image in the novel, the reader can construct different progressions of reading without being constantly reminded of departing from a physically maintained norm – the reader can, so to speak, construct different progressions naturally and effortlessly. These different progressions are not randomly or arbitrarily constructed; they are implicit in the logic of computer-mediated reading. The website novel, in other words, invites reading along a range of associational chains (e.g. character to similar character to explanatory footnote to another character to author/website advertisement, and so on), whereas the printed book invites reading along a linear structure, and if the reader departs from this they are consciously going against the grain of the book.

As a fiction-reading experience the website *253* is an unusual one. In printed book terms it has few analogues – *253* as a printed book is a fairly conventional matter. Normally, the idea of the literary text, the understanding of literary form, is powerfully predicated on the physical printed object, the directionally read page and book. So strong is this complicity between print culture and literary culture that their mutual dependence is scarcely noted; literary texts and forms are simply tacitly premised on their physical manifestations in print. One deliberate and somewhat laboured attempt to interrogate this complicity *within* conventional print culture that comes to mind is B. S. Johnson's novel *The Unfortunates* (1969). This was published as a loose sheaf of papers in a box which the reader could arrange in any way they chose, and could thus have a different novel at every reading. In a similar way, as a *fiction-reading* experience the website *253* might be an unusual one, but, and entirely unlike reading *The Unfortunates*, as a straightforward *computer-mediated reading* experience it presents no difficulties and falls into now familiar reading practices. At least for those who are accustomed to surfing the net (undeniably a constantly increasing constituency), dealing with any range of websites (news, institutional, search engines, blogs, etc.), associational reader-constructed directions of reading are part of everyday life. It is simply that many are still not wholly accustomed to associate fiction – or broadly reading literature – with the habitual patterns of reading websites. Literature is still too strongly associated with print culture. *253* manages to bring these together in a reasonably coherent way. It seems to work as a work of fiction and as a website, and it is at this conjuncture that a symptom of the radical possibilities of technologically enhanced information and communication networks for literature can be discerned.

As a website novel *253* does unexpected things to literary preconceptions and concepts of reading and text; received notions of both are dispersed in a manner that isn't wholly anticipated in or contained by the various theoretical interrogations of these. The given structures of the fictional text along the expected lines of formal structure (e.g. beginning, middle and end; chapter and part divisions), generic structure (a novel narrating time, space, protagonists) and even syntactic structure (the integrity of sentences and paragraphs, or a deliberate playing with these) are each potentially and systematically undermined by the associational reader-constructed reading that the website invites. This potential undermining is not constructed within the text itself (James Joyce's *Finnegans Wake* is a text which constructs its own undermining of readerly expectations; the *253* website doesn't), but is at the whim of the reader's habitual website reading practices. The reader may jump off from any part of a text to another, may stray outside the fictional text into an advertisement or footnote or explanatory text, may be drawn away in mid-sentence. This may appear to be a particularly liberating reading experience, but that's only insofar as reading is predicated on the directions embedded in print culture. What happens here is a layering of the web-design logic of providing associational linkages in the programme with the literary print-based logic of following/departing from material linearities. The reader is, so to speak, constructed somewhere between the presumptions of print culture-based literary reading and the presumptions of the website programme. Or perhaps, more appropriately, the agency of the reader shifts to a wider range of exploitations of the two sets of presumptions. However one looks at it, *253* symptomatizes potentially radical shifts in concepts of literary text and literary reading in a technologically enhanced information and communication environment.

Complicit with these, Greg Ryman also deliberately uses the *253* website to gently interrogate concepts of readership. He does this, of course, after firmly establishing his own authorial claim: 'About this site' on the home-page menu comes with a set of unambiguous authorial attributions, beginning with, 'The concept, structure and text of *253* are by Geoff Ryman', and posting author information and a list of his other works. Having done that, though, he sets up a couple of games on the *253* website which prod at conventional notions of authorship. From the 'advertisements' page there's a link to an 'another important announcement' page where one finds the following:

> Every passenger in *253* has a number that is his or hers alone. And every section has 253 words. This means that:
> each character
> has his or her own word
> in *every* section.
> Put all these words together – and you have made a monument to your favorite *253* character.
> [. . .]
> Do that for each of the seven cars, and you will have a new 253-word section in honor of Mr Keith Olewaio. In the privacy of your own home, you will have:
> treated words as things,
> moved them into place
> and counted them.
> That is all that writers do! That's all there is to it. Try it next time you want to write a business letter or instructions for the general public. Write a poem and see if it really is any different from the *253* method. You'll have a fun hobby and will impress your friends. But remember, the one thing you will not do is
> ***Earn big £££££ !!!!!***
> (http://www.ryman-novel.com/car2/ad2.htm)

This is obviously a sarcastic take on a familiar functional view of writing, often found in advertisements for commercial ventures selling packaged creative writing courses or guides. This can also, however, be read as a warning against assuming a reductive and mechanical concept of authorship which is relevant within the electronic context where it appears. That literary reading has been layered with a website programming logic, or that the habitual practice of website reading has been dislocated on the fiction-reading experience, should not be understood as a mechanization of the authorial function. If, however, this seems to leave the sanctity of literary authorship intact, it isn't for long – also tucked away in *253* is a serious and plausible invitation, on the 'another one along in a minute' page:

> Immediately behind this train is another. It is stalled in a tunnel, like so many of us are in life. The passengers wait, wondering why the train is not going forward. No one can leave, no one can enter. It sits still for five minutes.
> [. . .]
> *Another One along in a Minute* pays tribute to stalled time by describing each character in 300 words, one for each second of time.
> Together, we are inexhaustible. Populate Internet with people you imagine. Click here to email your 300-word contribution to *Another One along in a Minute*.
> What will your characters do in that five minutes? Talk to neighbours? Read their papers? Complete their crosswords? Imagine that there has been a nuclear attack?
> No money will be made from this sequel. Copyright will rest with you. The editor reserves the right not to publish, or to suggest amendments. You must undertake that no one will be slandered by your text and accept full responsibility for the material you submit.
> (http://www.ryman-novel.com/info/one.htm)

This, in a logical progression from opening up readerly expectations on the basis of computer mediation, lays a programme for opening up authorial contribution or for, in a sense, dispersing authorship into a participatory conglomeration of multiple voices. This is analogous to a multiple-author academic volume with an editor, but still likely to result in an unusual and yet coherently discrete *literary* work with an unprecedented polyvocal authorship. If realized, it can raise searching questions of what it does to the concept of literary authorship.

It may be argued that *253* is more a one-off innovative juxtaposition of literary convention upon web-based communicative practice than a symptom of wider potentialities for literature arising from technologically enhanced information and communication networks. Anyone with a slight acquaintance with the scale of such networks – as special interest e-groups or e-discussion forums, blogging networks, user/consumer communities of various sorts, topical discussion site participants, e-activism alignments, etc. – would know that, even if a literary work such as the *253* website is an unusual instance, the kinds of potentialities it gestures towards are far from unique to it. The vast cross-boundary reading–writing networks in question are naturally, to some extent, already impinging on literary production and consumption, and thereby on concepts of literariness. It is mainly a sort of institutional and establishment inertia, the conservativeness which is ingrained in how literary value is attributed and how literary industries and markets are shaped, which has impeded serious reckonings with them. But that the implications of activities in technologically enhanced information and communication networks for the presumptions of literature and literariness are wide-ranging is easily apprehended by giving cursory attention to even a small element of it. Consider, for instance, the growing cyber-world of blog-writing and blogging communities.

Whether this world could be regarded as one that is devoted even in part to literary production and reception is a moot question only because its circulations of reading and writing are not carefully policed as literary, and occur outside the domain of institutional and corporate sanction.

Dismissive sentiments range from complaints about lack of discrimination, to doubts about superlative unchecked production, to scepticism about the inchoate character of the e-communities within which such productions circulate and perpetuate further production. Very occasionally, the verve of literary production therein is brought under the aegis of literature by the usual literary sanctions – approval by some institutional authority (an established author, an academic, the media) and corporate sanction through conventional publication (inculcation into print culture). Thus, for instance, novelist Dennis Cooper has collected fiction through the use of a blogging website and published it with the title *The Userlands: New Fiction from the Blogging Underground* (2007). In his introduction Cooper sees in this a challenge to the gate-keeping of conventional print-culture literature, which would be exemplified by the self-evident and cutting-edge literary quality of the collected writing:

> The contemporary fiction known to the majority of book buyers and reviews readers is a highly filtered thing composed for the most part of authors carefully selected from the graduating classes of the university writing programs that have formed a kind of official advisory board to the large American publishing houses. To read that allotted fiction and look no further, it would be easy to believe contemporary English-language fiction has become a far less adventurous medium than music or art or film or other forms that continue to welcome the young and unique and bold. *Userlands* offer one alternative to the status quo, one unobstructed view of contemporary fiction at its real, unbridled, vigorous, percolating best. (Cooper 2007, 13)

Rather subjectively, it seems to me that some of the pieces in the anthology do have a fizz, an unexpected energetic quality, which is rare in the more staid stylistics of contemporary fiction in print. But it is impossible to determine at present whether creative writing in an electronic environment is coming up with distinctive literary styles – a great deal more research needs to go into that issue than is there at present. Ultimately, Cooper's anthology reads as another collection of unknown 'new' fiction, somehow contained and tamed by the printed pages within the book covers. It gives little scope for understanding the shifts in presumptions about literature and literariness to which blogging (for instance) may give rise. For that, I suspect, blogs have to be read as blogs, within their electronic medium, with the logic of writing, textualizing, reading that is conditioned or enabled by that medium.

There is another way of approaching the matter. If we continue with a focus on blogs, instead of looking for the literary qualities of blog fiction as if the 'literary' is an abstract normative measure which may or may not apply to this neglected realm, we may consider whether the blog could be thought of as a literary genre. Blogs incorporate a wide field, and may come as theme-defined (business blogs, news blogs, cookery blogs, music blogs, etc.) or more generally as personal blogs (the life, times and thoughts of an individual). Insofar as epistolary narratives, diaries or notebooks can be regarded as making up a distinct literary genre (an aspect, or structurally presenting an illusion, of 'life-writing'), personal blogs could be understood as a development of that genre in a technologically enhanced information and communication environment. Seen thus, the blog as a literary genre presents several critical differences from the conventional diary genre, and these differences, again, symptomatize the radical potentialities of the technologically enhanced environment for literature.

The obvious difference is in the disposition to audience in diaries and blogs. Whereas diaries (say those of Leonardo da Vinci, Samuel Pepys, John Evelyn, Alexis de Tocqueville, Franz Kafka, Virginia Woolf, Anne Frank, Anaïs Nin, etc.) are generally written or kept, at least initially, as a private record, and become accessible as public texts after the fact, blogs are from their inception maintained as public texts. Diaries are usually composed within a closed circuit of writer as reader (or writer and a closed circle of readers), and the impetus behind them is accordingly a limited one – as a mnemonic aid, as an exploration of self, as a notebook of observations and ideas to be developed in a more sustained fashion, as a desire for secret archiving, etc. In becoming drawn into print culture and literary reading, that impetus is comprehensively overturned: the diary comes to be read as a performance/construction of a particular personality, a type of character, an age, a place, etc. As a literary form, the diary is interpretively received as a literary text apparently against the grain of its form and style. A blog appears in cyberspace as a public document, and moreover as a public document which is amenable to maximum exposure, with a sense of being potentially available to an inchoate and uncharacterizable global information and communication network. It appears with its claim to being a literary form imbued within it, irrespective of the discernment or selectivity of interpretive reception, and the impetus for blogging is usually the autoconstruction/autoperformance of a blogging identity, its locations, its times, etc. Compared to the privacy, the closed circuit, of writing–reading that ostensibly subsumes the textual form of the diary, blogging reduces privacy, if at all, to the singular paradox of secreting the real-world author (say, by assuming a pen-name or constructing a fictional self) while presenting the text to maximum exposure. When, rarely, a blog rises through the surfeit of blogs that occupy cyberspace to be *received* as a particularly recognized literary text, this comes as a confirmation of its original claim and impetus. The process behind that is usually not immediately a matter of entering print culture and interpretive reception, but one of percolating through a hierarchy of blogging links. Essentially, a large percentage of blog readers–writers–watchers follow a few blogs which keep track of what relevant, topical, interesting, 'hot' stuff appears on the internet, and a reference in these guarantees a spurt of global interest (Peter Kuhns and Adrienne Crew's *Blogsphere*, 2006, conveys a sense of the blog-tracking mechanism). If that spurt can be turned into a sustained interest, the blog in question

may rise through the ocean of blogs, and, by hitting a few corporate measures of saleability, even seep into print. Typically, this happens if a blog emerges as a contribution to a significant and unusual ongoing debate – thus Salam Pax's and Riverbend's Iraq blogs covering the 2003 invasion of Iraq and its ongoing violent aftermath have become books entitled, respectively, *The Baghdad Blog* (2003) and *Baghdad Burning: A Young Woman's Diary from a War Zone* (2005). Sometimes, as seen above in Cooper's anthology, blogs are collected into published volumes – another example is Wendy Attenberry and Sarah Hatter's *The Very Best Weblog Writing Ever* (2006). And this could happen if blogs seem able to tap into a universally marketable interest. The sex industry occupies the largest part of the commercially viable sector of cyberspace and a significant part of the material cultural industry, and unsurprisingly blogs which are marketable within that circuit have also appeared as books, e.g. Belle De Jour's *The Intimate Adventures of a London Call Girl* (2005), Abby Lee's *Diary of a Sex Fiend* (2007) or Maxim Jakubowski's edited *The Mammoth Book of Sex Diaries* (2005).

Even those cursory observations on the differences between diaries and blogs as representing a shift within a literary genre gesture towards potentially radical changes in concepts of literature and literariness. This goes beyond the kinds of shifts that have been remarked for the fiction-reading experience between Ryland's novel *253* as a book and as a website. The shift between diaries and blogs obviously conforms to those shifts too. Like *253* on the website, the blog-reading experience is one that overlaps a conventional linear reading direction (usually structured by the calendar) with a computer-mediated associational-reading habit (following links of various sorts, and investing those links with various kinds of nuances – referential, informative, humorous, visual, etc.). As a text the blog appears with a more dynamic surface than is usual in books, composed usually with an attention to visual design and effect within the text, and with a range of intrinsic and extrinsic matter (e.g. advertisements) in the margins, than would be the case with published diaries – in this the layout of blogs bears some resemblance to that of magazines. The kind of participatory polyvocal authorship towards which Ryland gestures in his *Another One along in a Minute* plan is in fact shadowed constantly in the authorship of blogs. Most blogs invite comments from readers, and bloggers often devote parts of their blogs to responding to comments. In blogs which intervene or are located within areas of heated topical debate, such as those of Salam Pax or Riverbend, large sections are devoted to bloggers responding to such comments from readers. To an extent, therefore, readers become authorial agents and authors reading subjects in an interlinked process. Further, bloggers also read blogs, link to other blogs, exchange technological information and assistance with other bloggers, and copy and paste from other blogs in a kind of ongoing conversation. But beyond and underlying these features, the blog as a literary form simply disperses notions of authorship and reading and textuality into an intricate mesh which invites reconfiguration



of received literary concepts. The kind of play of identity that is noted above, the manner in which blogs enter a blogging circuit to ripple or rise or drown, the manner in which blogs exist in a blog-referential network, the potential of maximum exposure which goes into their composition/appearance, the kind of participatory and polyvocal authorship and readership within which blogs locate themselves and are located, the disregard for geopolitical and cultural boundaries which are implicit in each of these (irrespective of declared culture-specific sentiments within specific blogs) – all these place the blog as a literary genre which, unlike any print-culture literary production and consumption, is in a seething continuum of writing–textuality–reading.

If the potentialities of web novels such as *253* or of personal blogs are anything to go by, especially when seen as developments over conventional literary genres such as printed fiction or diaries, technologically enhanced information and communication networks seem to enable something like a dispersal and blending of the received categories of literary critical concepts. The optimistic may regard these potentialities as a kind of democratization of literature, a performance of global cosmopolitan dynamism within literary processes and forms themselves which radically interrogates conventional literature. The pessimistic may think of them as a failure of literary discernment and value, an irreversible challenge to the recognizable (conventional, institutional, industrial) practice of literature, and a portent of a – yet distant – end of literature itself. The reader won't have failed to notice that the above discussion of literature in relation to technologically enhanced information and communication networks has referred almost exclusively to electronic texts which have, in fact, been published in book form. This could be taken as an indication of this author's limitations as a student of literature, or of his compliance with still powerfully maintained establishment norms of literary respectability, or perhaps as an indication of the constraints of the academic form and institutional spaces within which this book itself appears.

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# WAR WITH NO END

JOE SACCO ARUNDHATI ROY
JOHN BERGER HAIFA ZANGANA
HANIF KUREISHI PHYLLIS BENNIS AHDAF SOUEIF
TRAM NGUYEN SEPTEMBER 11TH FAMILIES
FOR PEACEFUL TOMORROWS NAOMI KLEIN

The occupation's massive propaganda war focusing on sectarian strife complements US and UK counterinsurgency strategies on the ground, which actively promote a sectarian divide-and-rule policy. Most Iraqis in their towns and neighborhoods, however, can clearly distinguish between the clandestine resistance that targets only the occupying forces and their local proxies, and the criminal gangs recruited by the occupiers and their private contractors[3] to terrorize the population and shut down the street life that is the water and air of the urban national resistance. But the occupation's dismantling of civil and state institutions, and the criminality of the new occupation-trained security forces, have given rise to local neighborhood vigilante groups that have proved a mixed blessing. These groups have ended up relying on the support of traditional structures of mosque and tribe, and have at times been manipulated by sectarian parties and militias, with their huge funds and access to the infrastructure of occupation. As a result, some of these vigilante groups have engaged in communal conflict and have been used in criminal counterinsurgency activities, and in the propaganda of occupation.[4] But for most Iraqis, the main aim remains a national and non-sectarian resistance to a foreign occupation.[5] Indeed, the average number of daily attacks on the occupation troops is continually rising, and by June 2007 had reached an average of 185 a day. Without the direct and indirect support of the Iraqi people, this level of resistance would never have been achieved.[6]

Iraqi people are aware that they are paying a very high price for the expansion of the US empire, for reasons other than those declared. They perceive the real motives behind the occupation to be the US's thirst for cheap oil, and the securing of Israel's occupation of Palestine. A recent survey into Iraqi attitudes found "almost no Iraqis who felt the United States



had invaded to liberate their country from tyranny and build a democracy." Asked for "the three main reasons for the US invasion of Iraq," fully 76 percent cited "to control Iraqi oil;" followed by "to build military bases" (41 percent), and "to help Israel" (32 percent). Fewer than 2 percent selected "to bring democracy to Iraq" as their first choice.[7]

Iraqis have been on the receiving end of US–UK pledges to establish human rights in the Middle East, pledges that have acquired a grotesque resonance in occupied Iraq, from the torture of detainees in the prisons of Abu Ghraib, Bucca in southern Iraq, Cropper at the US military headquarters at Baghdad airport and the secret prisons of the Ministries of the Interior and of Defence, to the rapid deterioration of health and education services and the lack of basic infrastructure. Freedom of speech, like democracy, was strangled at birth with the systematic assassinations of academics and journalists, and the public murder of clerics.

To justify the arrest, torture and killing of journalists, and to put an end to a free press that threatened to reveal the nature and extent of the crimes committed under occupation, the US administration accused the Iraqi media of being a resource for the "insurgents" and "terrorists" – a resource that needed to be counteracted or contained by all means possible.[8] The occupation's stated objective to aid the establishment of a free press in Iraq has in fact been a mission to establish control over press freedom. The offices of Al Sharqiya Iraqi TV and of Arab TV stations in Baghdad such as Al Arabiya and Al Jazeera, have been raided and shut down. Winning the media war has become an integral part of military strategy.

The surge of US troops, the latest military operation, in which the occupying troops are regularly conducting air strikes in and near population centers,[9] has resulted in

increasing numbers of civilian casualties and further deterioration of the humanitarian situation. Many wounded or sick people cannot safely access hospitals and clinics.

The number of newly displaced people, both internally and abroad, stands at 90,000 per month in 2007,[10] and "the number of people arrested or interned by the multinational forces has increased by 40% since early 2006. The number of people held by the Iraqi authorities has also increased significantly."[11] There are over 38,000 detainees in US–UK and Iraqi detention centers. The ICRC is unable to gain access to more than 18,000 of these inmates; Iraqi vice-president Tareq Al Hashemi questioned United States forces over the fate of 9,000 detainees who, according to US army statistics, have simply "vanished" from the face of the Earth. Iraqis think that many might be accounted for among the bodies of those tortured, blindfolded, and murdered that are found daily, dumped in various places across the country.

According to a refereed report in the medical journal *The Lancet*, "Bringing democracy to Iraq" had resulted in the deaths of 650,000 Iraqis by mid-2006.[12] This is proportionally equivalent to 7 million US citizens or 1.4 million British citizens. More than half of Iraq's doctors have already fled the country; Iraqi women are driven to despair and self-destruction by grief. Their expectations are reduced to pleas for help to clear the bodies of the dead from the streets, according to a report by the ICRC.[13]

It is hardly any wonder that most Iraqis approve of attacks on US-led forces, and that a strong majority wants US-led military forces to withdraw immediately from the country, saying that their swift departure would make Iraq more secure and decrease sectarian violence.[14]

Most surveys and media reports seem to ignore Iraqis' strong belief that the occupation is also targeting their



national identity, culture, history, language and religion. They ask, "How else can you explain the destruction and looting of the Iraqi museum, which houses the precious artefacts of the world's oldest civilization, as well as of 22 universities and art galleries, the National Library with its unique manuscripts and historical documents, and archaeological sites, while US-led troops either assist looters or watch from a distance?" Is it any wonder that, in the minds of Iraqis, these acts invoke comparison with the barbarity of the Mongols when they sacked Baghdad in 1258?

The killing of academics, scientists, doctors, journalists, singers and artists is seen as an attack on culture and learning. One recent crime is the killing of Khalil al-Zahawi, one of the Muslim world's leading calligraphers, who taught students from all over the Middle East. He was shot dead by gunmen in Baghdad, in late May 2007.

The renowned Iraqi musician Naseer Shamma views the "sovereign new Iraq" thus:

> . . . far from democracy and sovereignty as it has been for decades. Iraq must see the end of foreign intervention, the destruction of its culture, its people and its history . . . The US has simply erased whole segments of what the Iraqis hold dearest; libraries have been burnt, and so has culture – the soul. Americans like to do that: to encroach on a people and destroy its identity.[15]

The silencing of Iraqi intellectuals and cultural figures is what Saadi Youssef, the prominent Iraqi poet, has called " 'bullet censorship,' where alongside military and economic colonization there is cultural colonization."[16]

To counteract this colonization and to defend Iraqis' national identity, various modes of cultural resistance have become a powerful weapon in emphasizing that, contrary

to what the occupiers would have the world believe, the diversity of Iraq's national identity is rooted in our history; it is a source of our pride in our existence, our history, and our many achievements in the worlds of art, music, science, literature, archaeology and architecture.

One of the most important forms of cultural resistance is song, which is considered particularly influential due to its powerful combination of poetry and music – both highly regarded by Iraqis – its accessibility to the masses, and the impossibility of banning it. Furthermore, the occupiers have found Iraqi singers extremely difficult to recruit – unlike politicians and some journalists.

The occupation and its medieval sectarian proxies fear the influence of *aghani al muqawama*, or songs of resistance. As many as seventy-five well-known singers have been killed since April 2003[17]; music stores selling CDs and DVDs have been ransacked and forced to shut down, while their owners have been arrested or have disappeared, never to be heard of again. Most of these attacks are carried out either directly by the occupation troops or by their mercenaries, and by local militias nurtured by the occupations' puppet government to silence one of the most popular forms of resistance.

In this climate of fear and death, while well-known media personalities, singers, and poets are intimidated and silenced, anonymous resistance songs are widely distributed among the masses. Famous singers continue to contribute from exile, and young people have been inventive in making up new ways to challenge the occupation, so that CDs are replacing the absent voices. Crisis Group Middle East Report noted that:

> For increasing numbers of Iraqis, disenchanted with both the US and their own leaders and despairing of their poor living conditions, solace is found in the perceived world of a pious and heroic resistance. CDs that picture the insurrection's exploits can readily be found across the country, new songs glorify combatants, and poems written decades ago during the post-World War I British occupation are getting a new lease of life.
>
> A 1941 poem on Falluja written by Maaruf al-Rusafi has been rediscovered . . . More generally, insurgent videos are widely distributed in mosques and readily available in most Baghdad movie-stores.[18]



In Iraq, poetry has an important political and social role to play. The poet enjoys a special status as the spokesman of his neighborhood, community, tribe or people in general, expressing their hopes, aspirations, and problems. In some cases, the role of the poet is equivalent to that of a journalist or a press officer. In other cases, the poet – be they man or woman – can inspire people to act, to defend their country, or simply to unite and love each other.

Saadi Youssef was asked why he thinks poetry is so central to Middle Eastern culture. He replied that "The oral tradition is very important. Partly this stems from censorship. The first thing to be searched for at Arab airports is not drugs or guns, but books! But poetry you can smuggle across borders. Novels can be censored easily, but poetry stays in the head."[19]

Iraq is also famous for its poetical lyrics and rich musical heritage, which, originating in antiquity, gained sophistication and momentum during the height of the Islamic Empire between the eighth and the thirteenth centuries. The lyrics are either in classical Arabic, the language of the Quran, or local dialect. Among the instruments often used by Iraqi musicians and singers are the *oud* (or lute), the *al-qanoun* (a rectangular stringed instrument), the *tabla* and *daf* (both