

Rabih Alameddine's *the Hakawati*: Metafiction and the Arab- Islamic Oral tradition: Humanizing the Middle East

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Abstract: The paper examines the utilities of metafictional narrative self-reflexivity of the sub-genre of storytelling in Alameddine's *the Hakawati: A Story* (2008). Following the 9/11 attacks, in order to resist Orientalism, Neo-Orientalism and Islamophobia Alameddine exploits the orality of storytelling and folk myths for a manifold of reasons. Firstly, it demonstrates the performative powers storytellers and myths act on the experience of mankind. Secondly, it animates an authentic representation of the cultural identity of the Middle-East which renders as fellow human the inhabitants of the misrepresented geography. Thirdly, it chronicles the ramifications of the European Colonialism, American Imperialism and the Arab- Israeli conflict from the Arab perspective. Fourth, since Orientalism rests on the notion of having a unitary Western collective identity based on alterity, insinuated in the rigidity of the *langue* in Structural Narratology, by writing a narrative based on the hybridity of the *Parole* of the poststructural narrative theory, the novel envelopes heterogeneous myths, genres, languages, and histories, by so doing, Alameddine appeals for an alternative definition of the collective identity, characterized by fluidity and hybridity to advocate Multiculturalism in the place of monolithic Nationalism. Since the age of War on terror is epidemic presently, the appeal fails momentarily.

Keywords: Metafiction, Storytelling, Orientalism, Islamophobia, Multiculturalism

Patricia Waugh (1984) defines Metafiction as:

[A] term given to fictional writing which self-consciously and systemically draws attention to its status as an artifact in order to pose questions about the relationship between fiction and reality..., novelists have tended to become much more aware of theoretical issues involved in constructing fiction. In consequence, their novels have tended to embody dimensions of self-reflexivity and formal uncertainty... they all explore a *theory* of fiction through the *practice* of fiction (2, emphasis is original).

During the 1960s and 1970s, Western studies on semiotics have revealed that language does not transparently represent a state of the world that exists prior to the sign rather it constructs that reality. As such, authenticity of cultural writing's is questioned. In literature, the classical definition of the novel as a mimetic genre collapses. Since literature is the domain where language reigns, metafictional narrative or/and linguistic self-reflexivity becomes a methodology to revise cultural certainties. It demonstrates the ways in which traditional mode of thinking no

longer answers to the demands of the pressing historical context, thereof, change is immanent for the survival of all mankind. Traditional aesthetics foster the traditional perception about the world; metafiction proposes new ones to propagate the aspired change.

Since fiction is a narrative practice, self-reflexivity on the practice of the narrative design becomes a methodology of metafiction. It demonstrates the ways in which truths or realities are a product of the narrative practice, which employs a distortion of reality that remains unrealizable to the human mind. Metafiction builds on Post-structural narrative theory that finds the narrative practice is not a trait of literature solely but is at work everywhere. Some of which are media, news, history, psychology, and philosophy. The man and the culture of mankind is the creation of narrative. Mark Currie (1998) asserts that for Post-structuralism: “narrative is central to the representation of identity, in personal memory and self-representation or in the collective identity of groups” (2). Between 1970s to 1980s, literary studies have shifted from Structuralism and Russian formalism which deal exclusively with the formal literariness of a literary product, separating it from the historical context into Post-structuralism. The latter combines an interest in the form and the content of the text. Self-reflexivity in the poetics of the literary work grows to be actively involved in the politics of the culture; subsequently, interdisciplinary becomes the trait of literary studies. Utilizing narrative self-reflexivity, *the Hakawati* develops on such perception of the performative seriousness of narrativity.

The attacks of 9/11 provide a praxis to the theoretical Orientalists stereotypes about the Middle Eastern Arab-Muslim males as violent savages, warlike and bloodthirsty. Because religion is the sole wellspring of the pressing radical hostility, in Neo-Orientalism, the term jihadists or terrorists is used, triggering the phenomenon of Islamophobia. Muslims come to be perceived as a formidable threat to the security of America and the World alike. Not only is Islamophobia epidemic among the populace; it additionally disturbingly dominates, and orients the Western official policy, threatening the very existence of the diasporic Middle Eastern and Islamic communities in the West, in addition to those living faraway in the homelands, particularly evident in Afghanistan and Iraq, who have suffered the ramifications of the retaliatory crusades, officially called: the War on terror. Diasporic Arab-Muslim communities have suffered discrimination and abuse on the official and communal level alike. Orientalism, Neo-Orientalism, and Islamophobia are the results of the Western discursive narrative based on the concept of alterity. As a progeny of Scheherazade, to defend the self as part of a collective identity against the deprecating narrative, the Anglophone Lebanese “cultural mediator” (al-Maleh, 2009, x), Alameddine resorts to storytelling as a tool to produce a counter-narrative, the text represents a first-hand animation of the Arab-Islamic cultures and history to the Western readerships. To address the Western reader, writing in English does not suffice; metafictional postmodern formalistic formula and thematic notions are needed as well.

Alameddine is a celebrated Lebanese-American author whose experimental writings tackle a variety of themes such as Arab, Arab American, diasporic transcultural identity, displacement, the Lebanese Civil War, and Arab Israel conflict, just to mention just a few. Alameddine’s writings fall into the larger category of the postcolonial diasporic literature that aims to inscribe the previously marginal colonized voices into the Western mainstream narrative. In *the*

Hakawati, Alameddine narrates oral folk tales borrowed from Eastern and Western tradition and theology. This amalgamation serves manifold of functions: one is to address the Western readership with relevant myths, which establishes an intimate link necessary for the aspired mutual understanding; other is to transmit the perspective of native culture into the Other, Thirdly, instead of a unitary narrative discourse, a heterogeneous one is utilized to inculcate a mode of worldly interconnectedness, and hybridity so to advocate a humanist perspective of cultural identity urgent for harmonious living among different cultures in a globalized world. Furthermore, it inscribes the narrow local oral tradition into the broader body of world literature.

In the novel, two levels of narrative are weaved: one represents a realist narrative about the social life of the Middle Eastern Arab-Muslims; the other portrays a fantastic perception of reality. The narrative unfolds on the confluent implicit allusions to *The Arabian Nights* and Chaucer's medieval text *the Canterbury Tales*. *The Nights* conjures Orientalism; to offer a counter-narrative, to render the Arab Muslims as human, into the Arab social life, *the Hakawati* knits allusions, archetypes, and parallel plots borrowed from *the Canterbury Tales*, which functions as a text of Western way of being. On the fantastic realm, to travel freely in time to reach the Middle- Ages, *the Hakawati* transposes "the Knight tale" into the Middle Eastern context where Arab-Muslim heroes defend their land against Chaucer's crusaders. Historically, the Arab- Islamic cultures have defended their geography, identity, and being against the Western colonizer; the struggle has not ended yet. The Zionists are the inheritors of the European Colonialism; they, with America's unlimited support, have colonized Palestine and established the national State of Israel, dooming the local Palestinian into a life-long diaspora. It is a traumatic historical event that haunts the Palestinian being, the Arab's, and the Muslim's alike.

To offer a space for a universal dialogue, and to represent the Arab-Israeli conflict from the Arab vantage of point, as intertext, *the Hakawati* reworks with Ibrahim's theological tale that Judaism, Christianity and Islam share with different versions. Sara sentences Hager and Ismail to an eternal diaspora. The West sees the myth from Sara's powerful perspective; the East adapts Hager's marginalized view, which the novel focalizes. The text rewrites a fantastic version of Ibrahim's tale, attempting to neutralize the polar antagonistic relationship between Sara, as the Arab's stepmother or the Judeo-Christian mother, and Hager, the Arab mother. Owing to the heavy burden of the antagonistic history in addition to the operational Western ethnocentricity, the endeavor continues to be a fantasy.

Folkloric tales propagate the traditional notion of a unitary identity of a culture. To make life socially ordered, human communities create myths to mold a homogenous collective identity. They consist of a readymade cluster of motifs; accumulate a repertoire of universal themes and archetypes that resonate with variation across cultures. According to Kevin Smith (2007), folk narratives have become Mecca for structural Narratology scholars, who delineate prescribed structures to myths. Structural Narratology bends Saussurean linguistics to narrative ends. It disregards the individual variations of the *parole* and advocates the *langue* as a totalizing system that underlies all narrative utterances. The notion of structure insinuates uniformity in the social structure and in the literary creation, and propagates a perception of reality that exists prior to the tale (Currie, 1998). It fosters the traditional mode of thinking. To refute the structural

Narratology, the poststructuralist narrative theory draws the attention to the fact that the structuralist's reading methodology manufactures the structure, in other words, the structure is a man-made formula whose function is to localize and anchor a naturally free and diverse entities, or to cluster into a uninformative whole a wide range of diverse phenomena, to fabricate an essential order out of the chaotic universe. By emphasizing the diversity of the *parole*, Poststructuralism demonstrates such formal constructing reading methodology practices to substantiate the underlying system of thought. *The parole* (be it the writer, the individual, the culture, or the tale) bears the nuances of a whole, it is a sign of difference. The tale is the epitome of freedom, and tolerance; the oral tale is elastic, morphs constantly with accordance to the historical or the geographical context, testifying for the temporality of cultural certainties, and the artificiality of the structure. The *Hakawati* pin points the temporal and spatial movement of the tales, and registers the moments of morphing to refute any claim of unitary perceptions of cultural identity. In addition, such technique demonstrates the constructed nature of the narrative discourse. To mold a particular collective identity is a positive universal cultural practice, the variations of myths testify for the diversity of human identity. Nonetheless, when a nation believes that one's version of the tale is singularly good and valid, the culture sinks into Chauvinism, the wellspring of evils: some of which are exaggerated Nationalism, Xenophobia, and Islamophobia. A narrative of heterogeneity and tolerance is of vital importance to human to live harmoniously in a contemporary globalized world.

Julie Sanders (2006) attributes postmodernist writer's fascination to adapt the oral tradition to the latter's inherent metafictional traits. Myths, folktales, fairy tales evokes the anti-real, the marvelous, and the supernatural vandalizing the mimetic illusion. In addition, Sanders demonstrates that the oral tradition's tendency to "persistently draw[ing] attention to the role of the storyteller," intersects with metafictional writer's inclination to reveal the artifact and reflects on of their literary texts. Ansgar Nunning (2004) asserts that metanarrative intrusions are germane to narrative prose fiction. In the middle Ages, Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales* includes metafictional self-reflexive comments especially in the Prologue, where the narrator insinuates that orality implies the unreliability of the narrative. In prose narrative, metanarrative comments discuss the process, aesthetics, and poetics of narration, deliberately disclosing the fictionality of the prose narrative. *The Nights* is a metafictional text *per se*.

As text of hybridity, *The Hakawati* mingles real stories about a Lebanese family with fantasies drawn from different sources. From Los Angeles, in order to spend Eid al-Adha, the Islamic pilgrimage, Osama al-Kharrat comes back to Lebanon where his father lies on his death bed. Alluding to Chaucer's pilgrimage as a framing story, Osama's return triggers the storytelling; he tells the story of his grandfather Ismail al-Kharrat, the hakawati, who involuntarily flees to Lebanon to become the Druze bey's (master) entertainer. Osama recalls the worm brotherhood of his father Farid and his hakawati uncle Jihad. He offers an account to his parent's marriage, which echoes motifs and the plotline of Chaucer's "The Knight's Tale." Mainly, two brave men sharing a brotherly relationship fall in love with a single woman. Farid rescues the life of his sister in law, subsequently is described as a "real life hero" (10). Osama considers Jihad his hero. From the beginning of the novel, Alameddine creates an illusion that

Osama's mother, Layla and Jihad share a mysterious affection. Belatedly, the reader knows that Jihad's storytelling is the source of the mysterious intimacy. Farid and Jihad's representations introduce a humane image of the Arab male. In addition, al-Kharrate's family is multi-religious, and multiethnic reflecting the diversity of the population of the geography contradicting the Western homogeneous representation of the geography as consisting of violent Arab Muslims.

Osama remembers his childhood in a once cosmopolitan vibrant neighborhood where Muslims, Christians, Druze, and Jews live in harmony. In animating the local social life, *the Hakawati* utilizes prototypes borrowed from Chaucer's: some of which are Griselda as the archetype for submissive and enduring wives, represented in Layla who endures her husband's infidelities, in addition to the rebellious lady of Bath who urges women to marry more than once, challenging the religious and social dogma with this regard represented in the daring Fatima who flaunts her multiple marriages. Fatima is the dramatic persona of the fantastic. The text habitually portrays women as strong characters that serve to contradict the profiling of Arab-Muslim women as deprived of well and power. The utilizing of *Canterbury Tales* tropes and archetypes in the realistic representation of local society renders both cultures identical; the mythologizing of War heroes is no exception. In the fantastic story, Islamic wars heroes are mythologized in a manner similar to Chaucer's crusaders. Both cultures fill the actant of the worrier with traits of heroism, chivalry, and romantic sensibilities. Against such idealized representation, the present worrier, Elie is bleak in characterization and in fate.

When the family moves to the mountain because of the Civil War violence first, then due to the Arab-Israelis Wars, Osama reminisces about his friendship with Elie who, as a result of the Western interference with the affairs of the Middle East, transforms from an ordinary young man to a militia fighter, suffering a tragic life and fate. The novel gives a historical account about the role European Colonialism and American Imperialism have and continue to undertake in fueling wars in the Middle East. Both offer unlimited support to the Zionist's occupation of Palestine. The historical religious conflict over the holy has triggered wars in the Middle East; as such variations of Ibrahim's tale with Sara, Hagar, and Ismael are utilized as intertext. The tale becomes a loop the narrative keeps rewriting, attempting to reconcile the relation between Sara and Hager; nonetheless, the heavy burden of history aborts the mission. In theology, Ibrahim and Sara are couples without children; Ibrahim marries the Egyptian maid Hager who breeds Ismael, the father of Arabian tribes, later on, Sara gives birth to Isaac, the father of Jewish tribes. In *the Hakawati*, because of bigotry, Sara becomes spiteful of Hager and her son; she kicks them out of their homeland, as Israel does to the Palestinian. Sara metaphorically stands for the West, the mainstream, the powerful, and the stepmother to the Arab; Hager is the East, the marginal, and the motherland. The diasporic Osama, our modern storyteller, reaches out to his father American mistress who is positively portrayed, builds hybrid allegiances, but there is no universal hybrid collective consciousness to integrate into in a world dominated by polarity. His hybrid storytelling aims to build such humanist common ground vital to his survival.

The Hakawati attempts to neutralize the polar antagonism in the fantastic realm. Ibrahim's tale morphos into another version, the fabula tells of the Egyptian maid Fatima and her son Layl, on the one hand, and emir, his wife, and Shams their son, on the other. Layl and Shams becomes

inseparable. The evil emir's wife does not like the unorthodox brotherly relationship between dark and night, slave and master; she conspires and succeeds to end the harmonious companionship. Nonetheless, Osama continues in his practice of storytelling as a hopeful sign for future conciliation as the novel ends with "Listen" (513).

Lorrain Adams maintains that: for the Western audience, reading *The Hakawati* evokes Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* since both works employ oral storytelling, frame story, and embedded stories. Adams celebrates Alameddine's diversity of resources. Adam concludes by stating that: after 9/11 attacks, the West conceives the Middle East as a geography inhabited by terrorists; Alameddine's work contradicts this dominant vision and widening the narrow-minded Western prejudices. Steven Salaita prefers to read the novel aesthetically due to Alameddine's remarkable literary craftsmanship. Alameddine employs a variety of devices such as foreshadowing, complicated dialogue, embedded stories, and dazzling ancient stories. The present investigation believes that the text is deeply involved in the poetics of narrative as a way to engage in the politics of the present as the narrative practice operate as agent of resistance against the hegemonic ethnocentric Western discourse, to counter Orientalism, and to neutralize the notion of the Other, to offer a fluid hybrid perception of individual and collective identity. Osama is an emigrant, who according to Homi Bhabha occupies a third space where cultures mingle therefor suffers from ambivalent allegiances and identity, which aim to advocate ethos of multiculturalism (Bhabha,1995). Osama is torn between two hostile cultures, as individual, Osama's identity is fluid but cannot integrate into a correspondingly tolerant collective culture.

The Hakawati's complicated narrative discourse is artistically sophisticated and expressive in a manner that amounts to the convoluted references underpinning the text's complex dynamics of intertextuality. Amounting to the level of flamboyancy, and affectation betraying the artificiality of the novel, the fabric of the narrative is artistically interweaved suturing together heterogeneous threads of the fantastic, the real, and the historical. The narrator hyperbolically orients the attention and admiration to the activity of weaving colorful and heterogeneous threads into a unified resplendent textual bravura. The novel is episodic; Alameddine's craftsmanship is manifested initially in the artistic diversity of techniques employed in the shift from one scene into another, no pattern lingers enough to become a trait; yet the diversity of the narrative does not produce anarchy, on the contrary, they are discursively sutured to weave a unified text that animates a single social life characterize by hybridity. The novel consists of four "books". In the first, the shift initially regularly alters between short fantastic scenes and paralleled brief real ones where repetitive names, chain of motifs, thematic concerns link the two realms; when the reader senses the monotony in the narrative melody, Alameddine alters the length of the episodes and the linkage techniques, some of which are: sudden shifts, and metanarrative comments that vary from a direct addressing to the reader, to the traits of good teller and of tales. When the hakawati, Ismail al-Kharrat is delivered, one of the most heavily, narratively- laden episode is weaved. The narrative pace accelerates, heterogeneously intertwining the marvelous, the mythical, the real, the historical and the present, creating an "atmospherical index" (Barthes, 1975, 249) of narrative practice that insinuates the birth of a master storyteller of a kernel importance to story. Besides, the episode mirrors the

diverse mode of the narrative styles the text employs as a whole. The frame story is the arch-umbrella to the eclectic mix of not only of tales but also of literary genres, modes, and languages. The emphasis on the plotting practice is a technique of self-reflexivity pinpointing the moments of artificial connecting between inherently disconnected entities, mirroring that of the novel itself. It is logical to infer that such mode of narrative practice is an inventive variation of metalepsis; Alameddine's artistic talent haunts the text; the reader continuously admirably remembers the author's ingenious craftsmanship.

Writing a novel, which a written genre, in oral tradition is another stratagem to inculcate a narrative mode of hybridity and fluidity instead of adapting the notion of the purity of the genre. The novel flourishes with the advent of print in the Nineteenth Century; it is a written genre with an omniscient narrator; oral prose narrative is archaic with unreliable storytellers. In *the Hakawati*, the odd amalgamation defies generic categorization that cuts the novel from its roots in the oral prose narrative (Zipes, 2004). Robert Irwin (2006) mentions *The Arabian Nights* as the sole text of folktales along with Scheherazade that are known not only to the Western readership but also across the globe. Though Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* is the product of late Middle Ages prior to the appearance of the first translation of the *Arabian Nights*, Irwin cites the indirect influence of the later on the former. Written in verse, the *Canterbury Tales* structurally resemble *the Arabian Nights* in employing the frame story as a unifying devise for a diversity of stories. Ulrich Marzolph *et al* (2004) notes various parallels between the two texts; one is the use of flying horse in the Squire's tales and the Ibony horse, in addition to others. Chaucer mentions Muslim figures but there is no direct link to *The Nights*; the influence probably was mediated by earlier European literature (518). The allusions to *the Arabian Nights* and *The Tales* defy any claim about the purity of the literary product and foreground the interconnectedness of world literature.

The official literary criticism does not register Arab contribution to the development of the genre of the novel. *The Hakawati's* conjuring of the storytelling and *the Arabian Nights* reclaim the denied right. In the Occident literary criticism, Defoe's realistic novel *Robinson Crusoe* is the first fully matured novel. The novel initially was printed episodically in the printed newspapers transforming the manners of storytelling into print (Zipes, 2012). The canonical novel adapts Realism as the mode of representation. The novel mocks the mimetic perception about fiction as the grandfather expresses his opinion about the English storytelling: "The doctor wasn't a good storyteller ... Well, he wasn't bad, but he certainly didn't have the gift. And he was English after all...No imagination, to mirror is a trait of bad storyteller" (61). The metanarrative comment belittles principles of realism in the English classical novel whose assumed truth value breathe a spirit of supremacy over the falsehood of the supernatural prose narrative. In *the Storyteller* (2006) Walter Benjamin asserts that the storyteller's tales are rooted in the human practical experience which transmit an "epic side of the truth" (364), which is wisdom derived from the actual experiences of generations extending from the primordial times to the moment of transmission. Benjamin adds that the collective experience is the concern of the oral narrative whereas the novel has flourished out of the solitary mode of living of the modern capital society whose individuals have no experience to pass on. According to Benjamin, a storyteller enjoys a

distinguished narrative performance unlike the banal narrative form of the traditional novel that is a sort of capital commodity manufactured for public consumption. As such, Alameddine chooses a unique narrative style, *a parole*, to stand tall among, *the longue*, of literary figures.

According to Fludernik (2004), the title is always a paratextual metanarrative authorial intrusion betraying the nature and major concern of the text. *The Hakawati* states the novel's affinity with oral tradition whose inherent self-reflexivity offers critical reflections on poets and the poetics of literature. In Middle Eastern societies, *al-hakawati*, an itinerant storyteller, denotes meanings of ““exaggerator”, “teller of tall tales,” “a liar”” (Alameddine, 2006, 9), and the vocation is socially derogatory; lower class members are the sole practitioners whose lies entertain. The text parodies such preconceptions and asserts the utilities of poets and their art works. The plot unfolds on establishing the craftsmanship of the poet, the use of stories in molding collective and individual imagination and social experience. They assure contentious flow of tradition from the past to the present upon which the future is built. In order to modulate a new definition of identity that correspond to the urgent multicultural context, Osama goes back to his grandfather's tradition, the slightly modernized Jihad's follows, wherein his unitary identity, which has been molded to live in a specific cultural environment, is no more livable. The continuum flow of the storytelling based on a unitary definition of identity reaches an end at the present moment of interconnected world geography, Osama is bereft of a collective narrative to integrate into, therefore, he embarks on molding a new one, which does not only suit the particular existence of the expatriate but the global citizen. Osama is the inheritor of the profession as his grandfather informs: “You're my boy, my blood” (182). Osama feels the burden of transmitting the heritage as indicated in the imaginary fabula; the emir is waiting for a son to ensure the continuity of his heritage; in the reality, Osama is next to be the head of his family as his father is dying.

Of the many stories told to “council” (Benjamin, 1969, 364), there comes a story about the significance of poets in nation's life. It goes as follows: Heroin al-Rashid, the Abbasside Great Caliph, passes through mothers weeping for their diseased sons; one mourns her son who used to provide for her living for whom Haroun could compensate; the other is a uniquely great poet whom Haroun cannot replace therefore tells the mother “ Weep on, O mother of a most gracious son... Cry and shed more tears, for no one, certainly not I, can comfort you or make good such a great loss. And Haroun al-Rashid Wept” (293). The story establishes the unique identity and the vital function of poets in human cultures.

One mode of the diversity of the multicultural context is the multiple storytellers. It avoids the traditional omniscient narrator to depart from a mode of monotheism into that of dialogism. Osama, Jihad, Ismail, the emir, Anthropologies animals, in addition to others, who belong to different cultural background, social status, and gender, focalize multiple voices, perspectives, and histories into the novel. The storytelling is a personal activity conducted in service of the social interest. It makes the storytelling situation present as the narrator directly interlocks with a narratee, suggesting a dialogical interaction between cultures. In the novel, people who listen to one other share an intimacy and understanding, unlike those who do not, Farid and his father's hostile relationship and lack of sympathy is a case in point. Both are “obstinate,...., which is

why they could hardly speak to each other. Each wanted the other to see the world his way, but neither was willing to share spectacle” (33). Analogously, insinuating the West-East relationship, because of the Western ethnocentricity, the Other’s perspective is muted. Owing to the lack of information and the subsequent sympathy, the Other is judged harshly. *The Hakawati* directly addresses the Western reader, offering information and knowledge about the geography and the inhabitants, thereof it establishes a connection or a friendship with the Other.

The typography of *the Hakawati* betrays metafictional agenda. It includes four chapters or “books,” each of which begins with a paper dedicated to paratextual epigraphs cited from worldwide literary criticism. The paratextual epigraphs offer some of the axioms about poets and the poetics of literature. They roughly deal with the origins, nature, uses of poetry and poets. With regards to literature, the epigraph reiterates Aristotelian viewpoints about the matter. Literature teaches through pleasure, has therapeutic cathartic effect. Storytelling is a technique of making sense of the self and of the world. There is no clear-cut separation between the realm of reality and imagination. In real life, we encounter weird stories that no poet’s imagination can yield. Oral folk narrative is a common currency that is revised, distorted, as many as there are retelling. Tales do not belong to the teller; once uttered, everyone is licensed to retell. Without fiction, life turns into hell. With regards to the nature poets, the desire for creation is a trait of the gods, with which poets share. Whereas the poet highly of their talent and utility, commoners along some philosophers think otherwise, creating an ontological anxiety in the poet’s psyche.

The Hakawati affirms, expands on, or parodies the paratextual intrusions. For example, by demonstration the importance of storytelling to understand the self, to mold a collective identity, to link people together, the text established the utility of poets and poetry. Yet, the accusations of lying come with benefits, the storyteller can escape the consequences of tackling extremely sensitive social issues. When Ismail brings into the spot the sectarianism of the Lebanese society, young Osama inquires the truth-value of his grandfather’s. Farid rebukes: “how many times have I told you not to believe any of my father’s stories? He’s a hakawati. He makes thing up” (226). Poets offer a truthful diagnosis to the illnesses of society. It is a daring practice that others prefer not to undertake. Farid’s denial is naïve since the Lebanese civil War testifies in favor of the hakawati’s remark. Likewise, bigotry controls the West: unless they convert, English missionary schools have not educated non-Christian Lebanese. With regards to the utility of storytelling, tales are used to sooth the pains of living; to escape the pain of the reality of his father’s death, Osama tells stories; when the family is trapped in the basement during the War, Jihad narrates; when Fatima suffers the torture of giving birth, only the best of stories sooth her pain.

The storyteller’s characters are positively portrayed, and their storytelling comes with utility. For example, Farid focalizes the traditional discourse of looking down at storytellers. When Farid and Jihad wishes to establish a car agency, which would elevate their economic and social status, it is Jihad’s storytelling that makes it possible. Jihad shares stories with a multitude of people establishing social strings and reciprocates humane passion of coziness and warmth; as a result, they contribute to the capital of the new business. Farid and Jihad are poor descendants of a poor hakawati, who magically have become capitalists. When telling the marvelous story of the new business, Farid uncharacteristically becomes a storyteller as he refers to those who have

helped them as an “army of angles” (423), whose marvelous interference has turned the impossible into reality. It is an allegory of the way people transforms a real experience into a marvelous one. It is a matter of imagination combined with language codes, metaphors, and imageries. Farid’s angle story is of the simplest allegories of mythmaking. Osama says: “Uncle Jihad used to say that what happen is of little significance compared with the stories we tell ourselves about what happens. Events matters little, only stories of those events affect us” (450). As such, stories are not mimetic rather correspond to one’s imagination. More complex allegories to folkloric or historical mythmaking permeate the novel. For example, the historical representations of war and war-heroes are mythologized while in realty wars bring only misery. The novel falls into the sub-category of historiographical metafiction, it deals with history as a discourse of narrative or of mythmaking, thus refuting the archaic mode of perception.

The hakawati Ismail disseminate meta-comments on the poetics of storytelling. The most simple and direct ones are: “A story needs to be bewitching” and “A hakawati’s timing must always be perfect” (38). The second of which is of particular importance to the narrative discourse. It implies the complications of pinning the exact time to cut the narrative of the scene on hand and shift into another; the shift is not haphazardly detected; the reader must feel the suspense without frustration; the formula of giving and withholding information is one of the most crucial steps to the mastery of narration. Of the most self-reflexive comments is “no matter how good a story is, there is more at stake in the telling” (96). In the art of retelling, the practice of plotting is the very individual blazon to the familiar story.

Ronald Barthes (1975) notes that a storyteller corresponds to Chomsky’s notion of performance in contrast to a theoretical competence (238). One’s competence in *the langue*, or the grammar of narrative does not necessary entails a corresponding performance in the *parole*, which bears individual craftsmanship in real life situation. Barthes notes as well, a storyteller is “[r]omantically conceived as a personal, hardly explicable secret” (238). Thus, the sophisticated plotting arrangement testifies for the performative traits of Alameddine. The plotting practice is focalized, the shifting practice among episodes foregrounds the moments of integration between heterogeneous entities, insinuating the present historical context of Multiculturalism, as well, the shift moves from one geography into another, connecting Lebanon, Turkey, Europe and America suggesting a narrative that is international, transcultural and trans-historical. Furthermore, the narrative practice straddles between levels, the moments of integration are focalized as a result the reader actually feels the temporal progressing of the unfolding of the plot, thus the motif of movement and temporality is inscribed into the narrative formula; the form and content become one entity, as such sign and the meta-sign, fiction and its theoretical aesthetics are inseparable. The narrative progression becomes musical; the mediating essence of language is nulled. Like a melody, the narrative operates unconsciously on the reader, demonstrating the bewitching competence of stories. The enchantment of the aesthetics is at work; it is performative demonstration of the doings of the ones who master the art of narrativity. Accordingly, the doings of stories and storytellers are the true objects of the novel. The text naturally offers its own metalanguage: the following lines suggest such homologous relation between music and the plotting:

Each *maqam* is related to a specific mood through its structure and modality. When you play a *maqam*, the technique should become invisible, so that all that remains is pure emotion. The intent is to induce a certain mood in the listener and yourself. The intended mood will determine what *maqam* and what kind of improvisation you will play. For example, if you want to induce a sad mood, you can pick one that's very microtonal, like *Maqam Saba* (164).

The mode of tolerance and diversity are the intended mode of the narrative structure, set against the very notion of a structure. The code of the narrative discourse is not to create an order, an emblem of monotheism, but to perform a flow of artistic sequence of diversity. Thereof, the very essence of structure is turned elastic and fluid, not rigid and narrow thereof the concept of the word is altered.

The grandfather describes origins of tall-telling; it is a desire that inflames the soul. Young Ismail describes his responses at seeing a hakawati at work for the first time:

He sat on his throne like a sovereign before his subjects... I moved closer and heard his silky voice. Magic... how can I describe the first time I encountered my destiny? A God's fire burned in my breast, my heart aglow... Ah Osama, I wish I could make you feel what it is like when you finally align yourself with God's desires for you. I had received the call (89- 90).

A tormenting desire for creation drives the poet's being. Ismail perceives of the storytellers as a king who reigns over the listener. Young Ismail senses the magical powers of tales. Zipes is an authoritative scholar in the domain of folk narrative and fairy tales, despite the extended studies on the subject, Zipes states, no one yet can explain the irresistibility of folk narrative to mankind. Arthur Frank (2010) boldly believes in the performative powers of stories that once uttered turn into uncontrollable lively entity that breathes a soul into the listener sense of the self. They latently exert influence in human experience. Inspired by personal experience, Frank continues to say that: one becomes the sum total of the stories heard during one's upbringing. Due to different types of stories, Osama becomes a storyteller; Elie turns into a worrier. In the fantasy, to have a son, Fatima advises the emir to tell his pregnant wife adventure and War stories, which males favor unlike females who love romance.

Young Ismail enjoys the company of an experienced critic of art inculcating the characteristics of good storytelling. Most emphasized concern is about the poetics of recycling folktales. In the oldest form of prose narrative, recycling has been the norm, not originality. The story of Antar is the first story Ismail hears from a professional hakawati. The story mesmerizes the nascent boy; the experienced critic locates weakness and strongpoints in the tall:

' I have heard it woven more lusciously.' ' The story of Antar is one of the standards. This man tells it well, yet it seems that romance is not his forte. He does wonderfully with the travails and triumphs of the poet but seems to consider Abla, his enchantress and beloved, a trifle. We're getting half a story (96).

The tall of Antar is one of the most recycled. It is about a great Arab warrior, poet and lover. Serhat Effendi criticizes the current hakawati's version that puts emphasis on Antar as a War hero, and disregards tales of the poet and the lover. It belongs to the type of stories that inculcate hostile masculine ethos into men. The next story is purely about love. Zeki is next to Ismael to hear. Telling the traditional story of Majnoun and Layla is his forte. Since two weeks are the prescribed duration for each hakawati, and the Majnoun's needs eight months, the story of Antar is conveniently offered. A perfectly knitted story requires a proper amount of time and effort. The audience insists on hearing the new story thus an exception is allowed. Since the narrator and the narratee are at present, a more democratized mode is inscribed, the poet has to answer to the demands of the listener. The coffee house allows Zeki the proper time to tell his master peace. "Zaki, the master storyteller of Istanbul, bewitched our little town for eight months straight" (97). Serhat Effendi rescues young Ismael from appreciating the morals of War. Therefore, Ismael gives birth to a series of peaceful hakawatis, and civil citizens not warrior. Unlike Elie, whose household flourishes on stories about the holiness of War and War heroes?

The hakawati learns the vocation by imitating previous master hakawatis, Zaki is Ismael's influencer: "Studying him wasn't as easy as it sounds, because I had to be two different people simultaneously. My first listened to the story and lived in its world, and my second studied the storyteller and loved in his" (98). Ismael describes the split psych of a poet. The poet needs to mediate the world of reality and otherworldliness. As Smith (2007) believes: in metafiction the storytelling is about the self, Osama's double psych is demonstrated in the narrative. The novel begins with an anonymous narrator who reports the fantasy; his identity remains ambivalent, yet some clues suggest Osama as the mysterious persona. To begin with, Osama clearly chronicle the real story, at this realm, his narrative style and language is as mundane as reality, occasionally, the energetic narrative style of the fantastic with precise images erupts into the earthy mode. One of the occasions is "I heard my voice speak. And the doctor told the poor father, 'The only way to heal your son is to take his heart.'" (17). In addition, Fatima is Osama's friend in reality, she is characteristically rebellious, Fatima is the dramatic persona of the fantasy, and is as daring as the real counterpart; the double wears necklaces of the blue eye engulfed with a hand. The double psych is another way to defy a unity in identity.

The novel opens with allusion to *the Arabian Nights*. A variation on once upon a time opens the tales: "A long, long time ago," (1). The text uses motifs of the magical, the jinn, and the flying carpet. Rana Kabbani (2008) demonstrates aspects of Orientalism in *the Night*. To begin with, the representation of the despotic Shahryār inscribes in the Western imagination an image of the violent oriental male, who abuses women. As Kabbani reviews, the French travelling Orientalist Antoine Galland has delivered the first printed rendition of the folk tales. The text has fascinated the French and the later the European audience. Galland's translation has not been faithful to the original and has entertained the stereotypical perception of the East as the Other. The printed text is a Western manufacture as the tales is oral and come from heterogeneous Eastern cultural backgrounds that have been clustered into a homogenous representation that does correspond to the reality of the East. In their homelands, the tales do not enjoy any artistic merits in contrast to the prestigious literary merits imposed by the West. For

Arabs, poetry resides at the top of the hierarchy of literature. It is the nation's literary voice. According to Kabbani, to reduce the Arab literary heritage solely to *the Nights* is a variation of Orientalism; it disfigures the literary scene in the homeland. As such, *the Hakawati* begins with offering a bit of Arab poetry to the Western taste. It cites one of the greatest poets al-Mutanabbi whose "verse so expressive it has been known to make snakes recoil in horror for not matching its venom" (23). By so doing, Alameddine corrects the abuse in the Western course of the literary studies about the Arabic culture, but is not sure of the success of the effort: "[b]ut will the discoverers understand Arabic or appreciate poetry" (420).

Osama's fabula offers a counter narrative to the Orientalism in *the Night*, Osama tells stories that animate the social life. One of the oriental images portrays the Middle East as geography of wars, political upheaval, and despotism. Osama implicates the Occident in creating the havoc. Alameddine directs the critical eye into an oriental painting of Ibrahim's tale, then utilizes it as intertext:

The Dutch painter Adriaen van der Werff,... painted a Biblical scene of Sara offering her Egyptian slave girl, Hager, to Abraham. Of course, Hager looks nothing like an Egyptian. Chestnut hair- close to blond.... She kneels beside the bed..., submissive, excluded from the discussion between Sara and Abraham (47).

The lines are missiles directed to attack the European Orientalism whose misinterpretation distorts the reality of the Middle East; ethnically Hager could not have been blond; more importantly, Alameddine brings into the spot Hager's muted voice which the text vocalizes. Abraham's tale opens a window to the ancient past where the roots of the religious and political struggle over the holy land lie and continue to cause upheavals in the Middle East. Following years of Colonialism, to the hands of the sons of Sara, the West unjustly delivers the land that belongs to the sons of Hager. Ismail informs Osama that Palestine is "where the sons of Sarah are still trying to cast out the sons of Hager" (62). The Lebanese civil War is an outcome of the Arab-Israel conflict; Lebanese and Palestinian refugees are the result of such historical injustice. As such, the political conflict in the Middle East is a world issue and is not a local one; Britain, France, America participate in creating and sustaining the conflict. The politicized of Palestine cause and adapting the Zionists version of history is the wellspring of evil, fundamentalist radical Christian and Jews stimulates fundamentalist radical Muslim responses. The majority of Arab-Muslim individuals are peaceful, are traumatized by the Palestinian uprooting. The terror is a response to a sense of political indignation; it is not motivated by religion. In the revised fantastic tale, Fatima, Hager's counterpart, whose voice controls and orients the narrative, which suggests that the text narrates history from Hager's perspective.

The story is echoed on a family level. Al-Kharrat family serves as a prototype to the social dynamics of the Middle Eastern ways of life. Ismail Al Kharrat is born in the birth-place of Abraham in Urfa in Turkey presently called Sanliurfa, and is illegitimately born to an English Doctor and his maid; the wife is hostile to Ismail who is casted away to Lebanon. Ismail begets five boys and a girl, but the emphasis is laid on Jihad and Farid, who enjoy the warmth of brotherhood despite their contradictory personalities; Farid abhors his father's vocation and is

sturdy in nature, Jihad is as magnificent storyteller; softness is his forte. As a progeny of one mother, in other words, of belonging to one the collective identity, they have been able to transcend their contradictory nature to enjoy the companionship and support of one other, a companionship the expatriate Osama lacks. Yet, earlier, young Osama integrates fully into the Middle Eastern collective identity as indicated in his friendship with Ellie, who educates him with the antagonistic history of the West and the East.

At Elie's household, Osama first hears about the Arab-Israel conflict. The family has been deeply invested in the Six-days War. On the other hand, Al-Kharrat family suffers a political apathy; they have been talking about music lessons for Osama and his sister. Elli offers his political view about the 1967 War, "there are five great countries... We have Russia and China on our side, and they have America and England on theirs," as a francophone colonial subject, Elie believed the France is going to take their side, it is the secret weapon that would turn the result of the war into the Arab's favor. France behaves otherwise (147). When the Arab lost the war, Elie blames America "it's those. American... We can crush the Israelist, but we can't fight the Americans" (155). Later on, Elie says: "We'll never lose" (155). When Arab does, Elie is totally disappointed. Ellie focalizes the sense of bitter defeat resulting from the interference of the West with matters of the Middle East, which is the mainspring of hostility; it is outcome of Western Colonialism and American Imperialism. After al Nakba in 1948, Osama's mother breathes a sense of eternal defeat "All is lost." His sister Lina says: "I've lost my childhood innocence... How can I witness the suffering of the Palestinian children and remain childhood-innocent?." On television, the family watched "thousands of Palestinian refugees arriving in Lebanon" (158). Such bitter event Osama witnesses and the narrative of the Palestinian occupation, and the resultant Lebanese's of civil War inculcates.

To reach deeper into the history of French colonialism, Ibrahim's tale is utilized. The repetition of the Ibrahim as intertext becomes a loop that creates farfetched affected coincidence, displaying the artifice essence of the text. The life story of Farid and Jihad's matriarch echoes that of their patriarchal side. The maternal great-grandparents are a Druze doctor and an Albanian maid talented in playing oud. The Druze doctor has lived in London for a while, so the fate of the two doctors intersects on a ship, the narrator anticipates the sense of disbelief in the narratee stating that: "Yes, it's true. Settle down. There are differences, and that's what makes for a good story" (215). The recycling of the tales serves various ends, the variations yield the deferent reference. The story goes as follows:

But here are two facts, documented and checked: My great-great parents Dr. Mahdallah and Mona Arisseddine and their son Aref, boarded a Belgian-registered ship, the *Leopold II*, from England to the port of city Beirut, in June 1889. My other great-father, the esteemed missionary Dr. Simon Twining, accompanied by his recently betrothed, the heart of darkness sailed from England to Beirut on the identical ship, the *Leopold II*, in June 1890 (224).

The documentation provides information that usually serves to authenticate the truth- value of the referent. The dyad parodies the mimetic effect. The recycling of the tales becomes a strategy

of the making of meaning; in other words, the loop becomes pragmatic serving different referents. This version of the tale introduces the theme of Western Colonialism. On the same ship, whereas, the Druze doctor travels westward to gain knowledge; the western counterpart moves eastward disguising as a teacher, serves in a missionary task, hiding the true colonizer face. The explicit allusion to Conrad's *the Heart of Darkness*, makes evident the colonial theme. The allusion correlates with the evil wife, Ismail stepmother, which functions as indices to the horrors of colonial interaction between the West and the East.

To Arab expatriate, in addition of the historically rooted anonymity with the Western Christendom, a heavy heritage of colonialism is added. Osama's family history involves a bitter experience with the colonial France. Jalal, his grate uncle:

[W]as jailed three times by the French colonial government... Every day he spent in prison, his aged mother brought him food, though she fasted in protest. She could barely walk, but she refused to have anyone carry the meal for her. She waited outside the prison doors on the day of his release (228-9).

The expatriate Osama has to deal with memories of the sufferings of his matriarch. Postcolonial literature unilaterally deals with the destructive ramifications of colonial history on the self, simultaneously, bilaterally, faces the West with its own history.

The aforementioned loop gives a historical preview about colonial encounter; the Zionists are the inheritors of the colonialism with the support of Europe and the American imperialism that Osama experience firsthand. Osama witnesses the tragic fall of his childhood friend, thereof, the novel brings into life the ramifications of such history on Arab individuals, families, and the nation. Elie's character represents the image of a modern worrier. Christianity is his religion; the sense of political injustice is epidemic among the population of the Middle East transgressing issues of religion and ethnicity. Syrine Hout (2012) focuses on the warrior Elie to reveal the destructive impact of wars on young generation who join the militias. Elie transforms from a patriotic, and idealist youngster into a shell-shocked, drunken, and mad man. Elie is the victim of a narrative that glorifies war heroes, is a victim to the socio-economic context within which he lives, is a victim of Western interference in the geography. He is a poor boy desperate for attention, which the image of the warrior fulfills. As a teenager, joining the Lebanese Armed forces allows him an opportunity toward self-fulfillment necessary to assert his manhood. It equips him with the image of the knight, which conjures traditional ideals of heroism, strength, and authority, which guarantee him instant females' infatuation. The bourgeois boys admire his blossoming masculinity, which operates as a magnet attracting the most beautiful girls particularly the femme fatale Mariella. Elie experiences lustful relationship with her. Later on, unexpectedly Elie impregnates Osama's sister Lina. In the wedding party, Elie's apologetic plea to Osama goes as follow: "It's not my fault. It was supposed to be just for fun." His plea implies late awareness of the predicaments his childish and superficial impulses have put him into.

Initially, Elie appears as an enthusiastic patriotic teenager who is eager to fight the Israelis since the War in 1967. The initial promising days of the War in 1973 feed his illusions about

Arab heroism; he says: “We’ll never lose” because “God is on our side,” on which Osama comments: “he looked as if he believed” (155). To compensate for the bitterness of his disillusionment, he becomes a militia leader in the Civil War. His involvement in the violence of the War ruins not only his life but also the lives of those related to him. Mariella becomes a prostitute for militia soldiers, which leads to her death. After leaving Lina at the wedding night, she forsakes the idea of marriage, and solely raises their daughter. His damaging effect extend to Marilia’s sister, Fatima who is traumatized by her sister tragic life and destiny. Therefore, she is unable to settle in a marriage. The final appearance of Elie portrays him as shell-shocked, sleep-deprived and paranoid man. A traumatic death is his tragic fate. By narrating the ramifications on individuals, the novel betrays the falsehood the Western myth about the civility of colonialism. It faces the West with the ugly image of its superior ethnocentrism. Since the West continues his unjust policy toward the region, Osama’s attempt neutralizes the antagonism fails. In the fantasy, it is Sara who murders Layl’s fellow.

The expatriate has to find home in the oppressor’s homeland. Osama adores his mother, maintains a healthy relationship with his father’s American mistress. The expatriate’s affinity and allegiance are questioned in the home and the host cultures alike. At home, cousins call Osama “the American”. In America, he is an outsider, profiled as a terrorist. Arriving at America, Osama notes: “The line was moving quickly as the customs official gave passports a cursory glance and let everyone through. When it was my turn, he didn’t even look at mine, but directed me to two other customs officials” (267). Osama is treated according to the stereotypical image of the Middle Eastern as terrorist, though Osama is irreligious. He continues to feel as an outsider to the two cultures community as insinuates in the lacking of companionship. The expatriate Osama writes the poetics of the “Third space” (Bhabha, 1994, 54), where two contradictory cultures intersect, characterized by representations of “undecidabilities and aporia” (42). It is the space of “enunciation” (Bhabha, 1995, 207) of cultural differences where differential relations among signs and symbols are at work, before reaching a meaning. The poetics of third space defies our “sense of historical identity of cultures as a homogenizing unifying force, authenticated by the originality of the past, the disruptive temporality of enunciation displaces the narrative of the Western nation” (Bhabha, 1995, 208). The poetics of the third space offers the aesthetics of multicultural present and a humanist cultural identity, as Bhabha purports. As such, Osama does not aim to reestablish the polarity from the marginal perspective rather he seeks the West and the East to reconcile their historical differences but for the time being the endeavor is impossible.

Osama enunciates his double consciousness by his allegiance to music instrument. When having a unified Arab cultural identity, Osama reminiscences: “Once upon a time, the oud was my instrument, my companion” (Alameddine, 2009,143). Istiz Kamil tells Osama that “ you’re hitting the right notes, but there’s more to this than that” (209). As a postcolonial diasporic subject, living in heterogeneous present, he focalizes untraditional sense of hybrid consciousness: He takes the piano, a western musical tool, to play an Arab *maqam*:

I had to improvise. I slowed down, allowing myself more time to adjust.... I switched to maqam Bayati... images of the great desert seared the back of my eyelids. The notes seemed so naturally logical.... it had a soul (342).

Osama suffers a unique heterogeneous allegiance, therefore cannot integrate fully to a unitary identity neither in the mother or a stepmother land. As an act necessary for his social survival, storytelling is used. As Bhabha notes that for the subject who inhabits an in-between space, the cultural differences he experiences are evident in aesthetics of his storytelling, the *Arabian Nights* negotiates with *the Canterbury Tales*, the West with the East, the oral with the written, the real with the anti-real, the past with the present as such Osama reaches a space of uncertainty. Osama lacks an existing collective consciousness to integrate into as the motif of lacking the companionship of a friend in the homeland and the stepmother motherland alike. Both cultures hold on to the traditional perception of having a totalizing unitary identity that no longer suits the diasporic Osama.

Osama shows affinities with the cause of his homeland The Occident colonial past and imperial present holds responsibility for mutual antagonism, in the fantasy, it is the stepmother who murders the companionship between Shams and Layl. Yet Osama loves and understands the West, which needs to acknowledge that Colonialism is not a humanist enterprise. Exploiting the Eastern oral tradition, to resist Orientalism and the pressing Islamophobia, Alameddine introduces a modern version of an Arabian Nights that actually correspond to the reality of the Middle East. The text chronicles the history of the territory in relation to implicate the West with the havoc of the region. The text belongs to the postmodern postcolonial diasporic literature that seeks to revise the notions of unitary identity, nationality, and the notion of a particular culture which no longer suit not only the diasporic space but also to the present historical context, characterized by globalization and Multiculturalism. Therefore, Alameddine embarks on writing a literature that is heterogeneous, transnational, and transhistorical. Nonetheless, the narrative of hybridity fails to deliver a mode of fluidity because of colonialism; imperialism continues to govern the relation between the Occident and the Middle East. Osama fails, but he keeps narrating as “ [r]eality never meets our wants, and adjusting both is why we tell stories” (435), as cultural certainties are essentially temporal. There will be a future where a globalized collective identity reigns.

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