Without Telling

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Is all this really so?
Or is it the web spun by [the] … spider

And if it is true, what can be done?
And if it is not true, what can be done?

Tell me. Tell me.

Faiz Ahmed Faiz, *In Your Eyes and Mine*, 108.

For Halā Marrouchi

In the perpetual present of our global media-addled culture, the remembrance of things past is a growth industry. A peephole on the dream life of the late twentieth century provides ample evidence that history is the rarest commodity in an age of historical amnesia and market-driven neophilia. Of course, as heirs of the Enlightenment, we view not only history but also time and space as veritable shrines to a period before Microsoft and Nike, when things, from everyday objects to human emotions, had more heft; seemed somehow more grounded. Today, we believe that to produce space we need already to be standing *in* space, and, along the same line of thinking, that a new conception of time (perhaps even history) must have emerged in order to facilitate new understanding of each. In this context, reading the past serves something of the same purpose as any meditation on the soul-destroying paradoxes of the modern experience as told by the descendants of those displaced by the violence of the last century. They came of age to find the world they expected to inherit rent apart, turned nearly unrecognizable. For some, like Paul Bowles, to move forward has required allowing that ruptured, destroyed world to recede. For others, like Tayeb Salih, it has been a matter of survival to reenter the past and search its remains for the means to create a redemptive history through patterns of words, moods, and textures.

As a consequence, we see the *events* such artists as Salih and Bowles paint not only as elements on a vast, extravagant canvas, but also as incidents that haunt individual lives. Aware of the contradictions of history and character, they wield them to deft and often moving effect. While they ingeniously navigate their characters' complex dilemmas, it is they who are the most prescient about the fate of a collision of ignorance between the East and the West. To avoid that entrapment, they appeal to the notion of construction, overcoming the constrictive, arbitrary polarities that once doomed the world to being a merely reactive enterprise. This they do by fixing difference and universality as the root of representation. They also ask how we are to avoid fetishizing difference while simultaneously avoiding the snare of a globalism that is unconcerned with difference. When you are able to see everything, they seem to ask, can hidden meanings exist any longer? Or, is there a way, in this new century, as we become more and more jaded,that storytelling could regain its power? For Salih and Bowles, there is an evident contradiction between space and time. After all, they are hybrid *outsiders* who speak from the cultural margins of their adopted societies. Their constant references to space underscore the fact that, while they are *displaced*, they are simultaneously *well-placed* to write on the cultures they have embraced: Salih—who is originally from the Sudan—chose England, while Bowles—from the US—lived most of his adult life in Morocco. Their stories ring true and reveal not just another simulacrum, but the realities of pleasant times as well as brutal run-ins that occur between people of different cultures. On this view, their pronouncements may be said to stand among the richest and most serene contributions to understanding Islam and/or the Occident. Their subject matter centers on the strange, disconcerting collisions, the calm outrages that might occur in a dream; the tragic, even fatal mistakes that Westerners and Easterners so commonly make in their encounters with one another. Given the new imperial burden of the global, one can hardly imagine a timelier subject.

Yet, strangely, neither Salih nor Bowles appears on any of those rosters of writers mentioned in the aftermath of 9/11 or the invasion of Iraq. Neither takes his place alongside other authors whose work appears to signify across time and space, who helpfully address the crises and al-

tered realities (or, more accurately, altered perceptions) of the present moment by fastening on the current climate of mistrust, violence, and war, not to mention our dawning awareness of the hidden costs of disaster capitalism and globalization. Perhaps this absence is due to the fact that the books (*War and Peace*, *The Possessed*, *The Secret Agent*) that are commonly cited in essays such as David Levering Lewis's *God's Crucible*, Charles Taylor's *A Secular Age*, Mark Lilla's *The Stillborn God*, Olivier Roy's *Secularism Confronts Islam*, to mention but a few, seem, even at their darkest, to offer some hope of redemption, some persuasive evidence of human resilience and nobility, whereas the narratives of Bowles or Salih are the last places to which one would go for hope. Their unsentimental depictions of the state of the world, described using characteristic dry wit, may not be for everyone, but the points of view offered by these two writers are essential to an age in which everything seems to be turned upside down.

What makes Salih and Bowles best qualified to write on or speak about the West, as well as the rest of the world, is their determination to inscribe an unflinchingly honest narrative. And while Salih still makes his home in the Western capital city of London, Bowles spent nearly half a century living and writing in relative safety in Tangier. His nearness in spatial and temporal proximity to the East enabled him to weave a series of close relationships with its customs, traditions, ways of life, folk tales, music, food, and humour. Indeed, he even translated books of Moghrebi oral narratives like *For Bread Alone* by the dilettante and iconoclast Mohammed Chokri.[1] This proximity to the East led Bowles to become immensely proud and fiercely territorial about his knowledge of Islam, as evidenced by his brilliant work on the mysteries of the letter "*alif*," in which he follows Abu al-Abbas Ahmed al-Bhūni, the man who first explained how Arabic letters arose from the light on the pen that inscribed the Grand Destiny on the Sacred Table. *Allah* had ordained that therein should be recorded the deeds of all creatures, until the Last Judgment. After wandering through the universe, the light became transformed into the letter *alif*, from which developed all others[2]: the fundamental concept of *tassaouf* (Sufism), which includes *al-hakikiā*, *a-tarikā*, *a-chariá*—the *first* (*a-chariá*) constituting the nec-

essary and fundamental exoteric basis for the truth, the *second* (*a-tarikā*) or the path and the means to reach the truth, the *third* (*al-hakikíā*) or the truth;[3] his understanding of the concept of *al-kishra wa al-lub*, or the visible and the invisible;[4] and last but not least, his ability to appreciate the Arab culture around him or at least to admit, and know why, he would never understand it. At times, this led Bowles to make sweeping generalizations of the sort that cannot help but make one uneasy. At other times, he was exact in his diagnosis of the culture he embraced for so long and of which he wrote: "No Arab will ever tell you what he thinks, or does, or means. He'll tell you some of it and tell you other things that are completely false and then weave them together into a very believable core, which you swallow, and that's what's considered civilized" (qtd. in *In Touch* 105). The degree of irony is obvious here: although the portrait Bowles draws of Arab culture is crude, it remains true. But what would it mean neither to demonize an Arab culture nor to transform it into an idealized exotic reverie? Bowles proposes not that we abandon both views—they are too bound up in our sense of the world simply to discard—but rather that we place them in relation to each other in an act of cultural interpretation. For him, this impurity is not so much a liability of the culture in question as a source of its compelling power. Even so, we can but hope, and clutch on to such a portrait of a people as a kind of authentic text that sustains the faith of a writer who seems poised to inhabit the top of his art.

And yet the further we are from the work of representing *Otherness*—which is never done, since terms are no sooner defined than they change, split, subdivide into enclaves, variants, and oppositions—the more anxious we are to tell the story. Bowles plays at the edge, and so does Salih, whose portrait of another people, the English, requires a leap into the dark for language to attempt to convey a whole lexicon of nuance. This is the case in the following passage, which describes Mrs Robinson, an English expatriate who lives in Egypt:

> [She] was a buxom woman and with a bronze complexion that harmonized with Cairo, as though she were a picture tastefully chosen to go with the color of the walls in a room. I would look

> at the hair of her armpits and would have a sensation of panic. Perhaps she knew I desired her. But she was sweet, the sweetest woman I've known; she used to laugh gaily and was as tender to me as a mother to her own son. (*Season* 13)

The crisp narrative sugar-coats a morally indefensible description of a kind woman who acts as the perfect hostess to Mustafa Sa'eed when he reaches Cairo. In fact, Mrs. Robinson is poised to stand for European fragility in that she knows her limitations. She does not explain Africans to the world, and in failing to do so, she is telling us, by some other way of telling, that she cannot be too profound about somebody whose history, language, and culture is beyond her own. She knows the predicament of cultures too well. She in fact identifies with the *Other* because as a visitor of sorts to Egypt, she can see what the owner of the house has ignored. Sa'eed, on the other hand, a cultural amphibian *par excellence*, refuses to acknowledge the danger involved with living as he does on the border between East and West. In this regard, the central tragedy in Salih's work is that the time of our lives is wasted: by ourselves, through relentless, compulsive ambivalence and, in the Sartrean sense, sheer *force of habit*; by other people we really should not know; by a pathological inability to start or complete the only actions that could "save" us; in a larger, more annihilating sense, by a civilization rotten beyond redemption that dooms any effort out of our impasse—and the intolerable reality that everything comes to nothing in the end, that time erases us and everything we do. The darkest secret Sa'eed discloses is how indifferent we become to our own lives over time and how carelessly we chew up the hours between birth and death.

This raises the difficult question of the narrative tension and the obsessive narrator who is simply retelling a story that was told to him by a shadowy second figure. It is a complex polyphony of storytelling. Byron Caminero-Santangelo explains the frame of reference by which we (readers) may judge the actions and opinions of the characters and their ways of seeing and telling:

> The connection between these two men is the Conradian secret doubling relationship in which the double figure, in this case

> Mustafa, feels compelled to tell his story to the narrator, and the narrator, in turn, tells the story of his double after the double's death or disappearance. Mustafa and the narrator have both received a British education and, as in many of Conrad's doubling relationships, the affinity they feel is partly determined by this common educational background. (71)

Granted. But Caminero-Santangelo stops short of informing us about the three remarkable journeys that take place in the novel: first, Mustafa Sa'eed's actual journey up-river to Cairo; second, the larger journey that Mustafa Sa'eed takes us on from "barbaric" Africa to "civilized" Europe and then back to "barbaric" Africa; and finally, the journey the narrator undergoes as he sinks down through the many levels of the self to a place (the Nile) where he drowns. In all three journeys, Salih's restless narrative circles back on itself as though trapped in the complexity of the situation. It is organized around a never-closing wound. Its world is a dead world, a world in the process of total demolition, where the past can never be overcome or recovered from.

Still, what happens when one individual or group of people, supposedly more humane and civilized than another individual or group of people, attempts to impose themselves upon their "inferiors"? In such circumstances will there always be an individual who, removed from the shackles of "civilized" conduct, feels compelled to push at the margins of conventional "morality"? What happens to this one individual who imagines himself or herself to be released from the moral order of society and therefore free to behave as "(in)decently" as he or she deems fit? How does this man or woman respond to chaos? While Bowles resorts to sexuality to liberate his characters from the manacles that confine and prevent them from acting freely and spontaneously, Salih uses colonization, and the trading intercourse that flourished in its wake, to explore difficult questions about man's capacity for evil. In this sense, the end of European colonization did not render *Season of Migration* any less relevant, for Salih was interested in the making of a post-colonial world in which colonization was simply one fact. The uprootedness of people, and their often disquieting encounter with the *Other*, is a con-

stant theme in his work, and particularly so in this novel. His writing is meant to prepare us for a new world in which modern man has had to endure the psychic and physical pain of human pretense and self-deception. But does it?

This take on vituperation *à la* Beckett does not, however, explain the narrator's overreaching (of himself), which comes from his insecurity in his position as a "mimic man" who is found wanting to accept that he has been contaminated. (I will return to the idea of mimicry and to the devastating effects it has had on Third-World peoples). For now I aim to demonstrate the complicity of Mustafa Sa'eed in colonial discourse at key moments in its refusal to acknowledge both the nature and difference of the hybrid zone where he finds himself at cross-purposes, in the East and in the West. Indeed, he falls short of trying to understand (let alone respect) the code of the host culture or even that of his own when he goes back to his native Sudanese hamlet. As a result, his tale suffers from what Derrida has aptly called "double invagination."[6] Here, Derrida links the sacrifice of circumcision, understood as the first writing on the body, with another sacrifice that always shadows it: the sacrifice of Ishmael, the abandoned son, the exiled son, the son who disappears. In the instant on Mount Moriah, Derrida gestures toward *al-Aqsa* Mosque, to Arabic, to Algeria, and to Ishmael.[7]

Much of *Season of Migration* proceeds according to this sort of Derridean dialectic. Salih sets the plot around mental and physical injuries. The novel juxtaposes mental wounds and physical scars, perception and reality, surface and essence, truth and delusion, in order to question such binaries. In the process, the author leaves a number of his paradoxes intentionally unresolved, hanging in a delicate balance. Others just swing in the wind, loose ends he did not tie up—the result, perhaps, of his own apparent ambivalence about the art of storytelling (see Kundera 33–34). And if technology is the offspring of metaphysics, as Heidegger once put it, the ultimate source of language in the novel must be divine, whereas its later development may be attributed to the more banal activity of humans. For Salih, every system of thought is thus pervaded by this absolute principle of the origin of language. That *Season of Migration* was hailed an anti-colonial *summa* is not an accident. After

all, it is not wholly by chance that it does has much to say about colonialism. Rather its promiscuous mixing of peoples, myths, and languages functions as the author's riposte to delusions of racial purity. The compulsion to prove existence "impossible" seems to lie at the heart of Salih's aesthetics; his ideal artist is a purely negative force, an undercover agent whose mission is to undermine all forms of living: the writer "doesn't exist—he's a cipher, a blank. A spy sent into life by the forces of death. Then he can be given a mythical personality: 'He spent his time among us, betrayed us, and took the material across the border.'"[8] We may want to put it another way: his construction of his world—and, by extension, himself and the culture he represents—is strongly shaped by discourses and "structures of feeling" which were consolidated in a long process of historical sedimentation by Europe's engagement with, and representations of, Africa. For Salih, though the artist may appear to engage with the quotidian and the circumstantial, these involvements are only false fronts masking a supreme detachment; the true writer "never participates in anything; his pretenses at it are mimetic" (see also Hassan 44–45). Such comments are best understood in the context of European Existentialist writing, and reveal a particular debt to the pre-war writings of Beckett whose style of fragmented narrative marked Salih's writing for a long time.

The fact that Mustapha Sa'eed is able to recite English poetry to a gathering of young men back in the Sudan and yet claim "I am this person before you, as known to everyone in the village. I am nothing other than that" is a lie in that he underwent a radical change (Salih, *Season* 13). This indicates that the dissolution, as much as the consolidation, of his newly-acquired (Western) self involves some measure of complicity in colonial ways of seeing and telling. Returning to his native land and assuming the life of a tiller after so many years spent in the West, he has had ample time to reflect on his wasted potential and to ponder why he—unlike his lemon-orange tree—has not fulfilled the promise of cultural grafting. Even his so-called English conquests—his ritualistic murder of English women who represent Western values—are doomed to failure. He is unable to recognize that his colonial education has deprived him of any authenticity. In the end he is like a child

who has not been taught to think for himself, and when he grows up, he has nothing of his own—all his knowledge is on *a-dhāhir* or the surface of his being; his *bātin* or soul is no longer authentic for it has been stained by colonialism. From this angle too Sa'eed falls short of reaching *al-hakikíā* (the truth) because *a-tarikā* (the path) he adopts is a false one. Hence his inability to arrive at *sirr al-asrār*, or the heavenly secret, represented by *al-kibrīt al-ahmar*, or red sulfur (Guénon, 35–6).[9] In a sense, he has murdered who he is and can only rebirth himself in the image of dreams.

The haunted self of this person of many masks is unveiled in the trial scene where his fate is emblematic of cultural misconceptions that have plagued the East/West relationship since the two realms first came into contact with one another in the pre-modern period.[10] Even the trial of Mustapha Sa'eed cannot be taken as a realistic account of the legal process in an English courtroom. Indeed, the narrator's account describes a parody of the English judicial system, giving considerable detail of the pompous and hollow use of language as employed by both the prosecutor and defense attorney. This rhetorical language, which essentially says nothing at all, culminates in the lawyer's proclamation that "these girls were not killed by Mustafa Sa'eed but by the germ of a deadly disease that assailed them a thousand years ago," to which Sa'eed retorts: "This is untrue, a fabrication. It was I who killed them. I am the desert of thirst. I am no Othello. I am a lie" (Salih, *Season* 132). The link Sa'eed makes between himself and Othello is telling in that the Moor, like Sa'eed, is an archetypal mirage that stands between the cultures of the East and the West.[11] As the novel amply demonstrates, the "is," an existential one *is* Mustafa Sa'eed who brings into the lives of the Western women he kills. These women, moreover, are themselves caught up in the stereotypical fetishization of the exotic *Other*. Thus the ones Sa'eed meets with fall easy prey to his game of seduction—a game based on oriental fantasies—since they are already "contaminated" by the germ of the "fatal disease"; they suffer from "an infection [that] had stricken them a thousand years ago" when Europe and Islam collided (Salih, *Season* 140).[12] It is clear that Salih felt such a stark narrative conveyed undeniable truths as clinically as possible, but his meticulously indiffer-

ent prose continually alerts one to the personal animus directing events. The more he proclaims his own objectivity, the more uncomfortably conscious the reader grows of the constricting, over-determining aspects of his writing, which seeks to keep the narrator's home and village pure from the infection of modernity and Western influence. The cause is lost because oppression in the novel is not just rooted in colonialism; it is also embedded in certain features of the Sudanese tradition (corruption, excision, dictatorship, civil war, famine, illiteracy, polygamy) which act as shackles to keep the natives in a state of arrested development. Here Salih goes much further than earlier writers (Conrad and Kafka come to mind) in his *manner* of excoriating what he perceives as false and hypocritical. Despite the fastidiousness of his language and its lack of obscenity or even ordinary vulgarities, its galloping syntax and obsessive *fixes* remind one of Céline, who breached any sort of narrative convention to directly address the reader and to attack, with a calm energy, a vast jumble of unrelated irritants. Salih's favorite effect is one of sublime overkill, as in his comparison of Sa'eed with Othello.

The truth is that the hybrid Sa'eed cannot really negotiate the pleasing arrangement of parts, nor can he attain any sense of congruity. Unlike the Professor in "A Distant Episode," who manages against all odds to reconcile himself to the host culture by declaring: "I am one and the other," Sa'eed cannot strike that fine balance. Instead he proclaims, "I am neither black nor white, neither wholly Eastern nor wholly Western, neither completely European nor completely Arab" (Salih, *Season* 95). The reader who encounters this sentence can only deduce that Sa'eed is indeed trapped between East and West; as an intellectual, he represents what Said has aptly termed the "logic of irreconcilables" of the European colonial project in Africa and elsewhere Said, *Art* 19). To put it another way, Sa'eed has become "*almost the same but not quite*"; "*almost the same but not white*," to borrow a phrase from Bhabha (86). For Bhabha, mimicry is subversive in that it undermines the colonizer's gaze by presenting him with a distorted reflection, rather than a confirmation, of himself. For Salih, the tragedy is that Sa'eed does not attempt to rescue the idea of mimicry that Bhabha forwards but rather revels in his liminal status as a quasi-mimic man until it ultimately destroys him. The message of

Season of Migration is that life on the boundary line is an experience, or better, a vivid, imaginative conception or anticipation of a self that contains multitudes. Without these possibilities the pain of displacement is useless.

There is a real question, here, as to whether the novel is not without irony or humour. The cheeky title is one example where Salih reverses the order of things. For in migrating North, Mustafa Sa'eed swims against the current. From now on, he will be represented as constrained and fragmented by society, ideology, and the institutions of culture, including "Literature." His subjectivity is understood as radically decentered by the host of cultural and linguistic codes that organize society and that articulate the individual (see Moore-Gilbert). Irony is to be found in the question of what "modernity" might mean—both specifically, to a subject nation like the Sudan and/or Africa, and universally, to an ex-colonial like Tayeb Salih, whose argument is not only an unusually sustained and nuanced critique of modernity but also a subtle elegy of his own intellectual formation and inheritance as a third-world writer for whom irony must function as a double-edged sword. The kind of African who believed that modernity might be a universal condition has now passed into extinction. *Season of Migration* is in part a discreet inquiry into why that pan-African dream failed—and why "modernity" remains so resolutely European. The novel draws a clear distinction between modernity and modernism:

> Modernity is the classic example of a civilization that was invented two centuries ago, in Europe, and that spread to the entire planet. Modernism, on the other hand, imitates modernity, blindly follows it, and thereby is its failure, because it is considered dogmatically to be the best of all possible civilizations. In that sense, modernism is the mistaken ideology of modernity. (Benslama 33)

We may want to put this differently by saying that the desire to report experience truly, and the hope that the reader will respond to, and respect, the cost of this truth about modernity characterizes much of *Season of Migration*. Typically, Sa'eed faces an acute moral dilemma: he

is unable to reconcile what he *knows* to be true with what he *feels* to be true. Thus alienation and duplicity are his fatal flaws. Given the care with which Salih orchestrates his narrator's self-revelation it would be unfair to give away more of the plot. Suffice it to say that the process by which a writer makes—or takes—the truth is rarely without its casualties, and it is the process by which raw experience achieves formal coherence that concerns Salih. He has in fact become immensely adept at finding new ways of dramatizing the gulf between the world of fact and the fictions of the self. As a result, we never inquire about the surface solidity of his narrative. What we do question, however, is why anyone would court such violence (of the letter) in pursuit of telling a story truthfully. I would posit that Salih wants to do with Europe what Said did with the "Orient": to fashion a subversive genealogy of morals.[13]

However, Salih has no patience for Said's fiery narrative. Instead, he offers critique and self-criticism in equal measure. And if for Said the Orient is a Western construct, an instrument of domination, Salih suggests that the word "Eurocentric" is more problematic than we might think. Further, he implies that if Europe is a universal paradigm for modernity, then we are all modern savages of sorts. If modernity has *already* had its authentic incarnation in Europe, Salih asks, how then can it happen again, *elsewhere*? The rest of the world is therefore doomed either never to be quite modern or "in perpetual crisis," or to possess only a semblance or simulacrum of modernity because the West is determined to limit its progress. This is a view of history and modernity that has at once liberated, defined, and shackled us (ex-colonials) in its discriminatory and powerfully theological universalism, except that in this case the angels, both the blessed and the excluded, are real communities. The impatience with the inherited forms and assumptions of realism left Salih (and possibly us) cold, and his preference for direct and unadorned narrative resulted in his refusal to include a single story written in the modernist manner.

The compressed, telling image of an "imaginary waiting-room of history" is equally the pet theme of *Season of Migration* where Salih imparts a rich, penetrating language to deal with second-hand modernity and the colonial encounter, borrowing and mimicking, concepts weighted

with the historicism that gives Mustafa Sa'eed his sense of being a might-have-been, and his creator much of his pessimism. There is a barely concealed anger in Salih against the compulsion toward mimicry, and an unspoken nostalgia for a world in which mimicry is not necessary. For him the "West" is a notion that has many guises, and these guises have both liberated us and limited us, whichever constituency we belong to. There is, therefore, a valuable element of self-discovery in the narrative: to migrate to the West is not to vanquish or conquer it, no matter how hard Mustafa Sa'eed wants us to believe; it is, rather, a means of locating and subjecting to interrogation some of the fundamental tropes by which we define ourselves. The outcome is that *Season of Migration* is a provocative and disturbing piece of writing and, unlike so many of Salih's stories, it manages to reconcile what its protagonist thinks is the truth. But the novel can be read in another way, as itself an act of duplicity in which one person's story is at best indiscreetly passed along and at worst brazenly stolen like fire from the gods, that it may bring warmth and light to others. The sense of self-fashioning that leads to self-destruction in the narrative, which shows the quandary of a brilliant student and guest of honour in London who is obsessed with the West and consumed by a burning desire to bite the hand that halffed him, must be taken into account. This attitude is perhaps nowhere more obvious than in the way the prodigy uses and abuses his hosts by acting badly, which generally means brutally. In fact, he revels in the sadistic mutilations of the women with whom he sleeps. Here Salih has a well-nigh Kierkegaardian sense of the mind-bending mystery of being simply, eternally, oneself. It is just that it is of the essence of Life to keep on the move, just as it belongs to the quick of one's identity to blossom, wither, then flower again. Salih is more Hegelian than Nietzschean in this respect: if he draws in his work on Nietzschean conceptions of power, he jettisons the anti-essentialist implications of the Will to Power. In his eyes, the self is an essence because it is irreducible; as soon get behind the sun, he once observed, as get behind the self. This is how the narrator puts it. He in fact tells us that although Sa'eed's "mind has captured the essence of Western civilization, it has nevertheless destroyed his heart; he has in fact become a feather in the wind" (Salih, *Season* 87) and con-

cludes thus: every individual, including the enlightened Sa'eed, is capable of any crime, no matter how mindless or vile; is willing and able to do anything, that is, except understanding his fellow men and women. What mostly (if not entirely) exempts the protagonist from the charges of self-hatred that his portrayals of cruelty have at times occasioned, is the fact that his dispatches from the various frontiers of savagery and malice are so even-handed and broadly inclusive.

Salih's anxiety not to give offence developed early. In *The Wedding of Zein*, an autobiography of sorts—a self-portrait so unrevealing that one may call it telling the tale without intending to—Salih describes some of the ruses and deceits he evolved so as to avoid the wrath of his near-psychotic father whose methods of child-rearing seem to have derived from ancient Africa.[14] *Season of Migration* extends this view of man, I think, and gives it an existential context in which the very idea of survival stems from a certain deficiency even if the hero tries again and again, but in the end he fails better. The context is Beckettian through and through. The tremulous vibration that Salih felt may not have been anything so reasoned as the narrative, which is inspired more by places than by people. The desire for fresh locations is perhaps the most consistent theme of the novel. The protagonist is always happiest when in transit, particularly on trains and boats carrying him away from his native shores toward some untraveled region: Cairo, Alexandria, London. Even London, where Salih has been residing ever since he left the Sudan in the late sixties, figures in his writings less as a home than as a neutral stopping-off place in which he has indecisively lingered. The first thing visitors to his flat there notice is a vast pile of tagged and battered suitcases, and a stack of luggage lurks in the background of the photograph he used on the cover of the 1975 edition of *Season of Migration.* There can be no doubt as to the importance of such wanderings. They enable him to preserve the alienated consciousness central to his fictional ideals; nearly all his stories evoke particular landscapes in a style of dispassionate precision designed to make human strivings look blinkered and hopeless. Many climax in an image rather too obviously symbolic of the world's absurdity, and man's instinctive cruelty to man. It is in this sense that Salih reminds us of Bowles who, in "A Distant Episode," has

an idling French soldier take a pot-shot at the fleeing professor for luck, then watches a while, "smiling, as the cavorting figure grew smaller in the oncoming evening darkness, and the rattling of the tin became part of the great silence out there beyond the gate" (56). The end of *Season of Migration* is more gruesome still. It describes the murder of Jane, the narrator's lover, by Mustafa Sa'eed who "feels no love, only the Idea of Love." The scene is as alarming as the one we witness in "A Distant Episode," but contains more tragedy. It gives a brutish view of man as a puny creature defeated by a nature, or by a God, who is indifferent and does not care in the least. After the murder, Sa'eed's "vanity is not dead, but thrives" as Sylvia Plath would have it. The murder is also a telling sign of dissolution of the Idea of his life, an idea that had tyrannized him and prevented the "superb identity, selfhood of things" from entering his art (Plath 45–46). The way the novel ends is as much about the dispersal of this Idea as it is about the destruction of the self.

It is not, however, at all clear that Mustafa Sa'eed is any better or worse than the Westerners we meet in Bowles's remarkable *The Spider's House*, who round up all the young males in the medina of Fez (boys who have not wronged them and who do not even know them) and bring them into the police station to be tortured and possibly killed. "As far as I can see," Bowles informs us in a 1981 *Paris Review* interview, "people from all corners of the earth have an unlimited potential for violence" (42). True, for if we read *Season of Migration* to the end and then begin again, which is the only proper way to read Tayeb Salih, the apparently transparent first ten pages or so prove, like so much of his fiction, to have been deceptively straightforward, then calculatedly misleading; at the same time, they disclose previously unsuspected meanings. Although at first the narrator seems to disapprove of the coldness and passivity of his English hosts, he himself turns out to be equally dispassionate about the misfortunes that have befallen them. As the story reveals, Sa'eed becomes a monster without a myth, a prisoner of his own quasi-enlightenment, a man blinded by his own insight, a creator and destroyer at the same time, a descendent of Goya's giant.[15] The mythic giant belonged to the world between gods and humans before they were overthrown; they resent their fall, so are vengeful, devouring, and often cannibalis-

tic. In literature the giant represents the order and disorder of historical forces (see Stewart ch. 3). In classic tales from *Gulliver's Travels* to *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, the tragedy frequently lies in the threat–or result–of consumption. In Swift's narrative, for example, some of the most horrible images are of women's bodies as images of the consuming, a kind of grotesque realism of the gigantic. *Season of Migration* too has the potential to "swallow us as nature or history swallows us" (Stewart 54). It can also be seen as a metaphorical representation of a gigantic totality which is ultimately too complex to represent and too complex to comprehend.

So much for what might be called (though inappropriately) the cultural underpinning of Salih's narrative. But why this obsessive fastening on boundaries and border crossings which, at times, can lead to cultural misunderstandings and even tragedies? In the play of sense opened up by interpretation, I want to draw on an incisive and revealing passage near the beginning of *The Spider's House*, a title Bowles borrowed from Verse 41 of Chapter 29, *Al-'Ankabūt* (The Spider): "The likeness of those who choose other patrons than Allah is as the likeness of the spider when she taketh unto herself a house, and lo! The frailest of all houses is the spider's house, if they but knew." (*Al-Qur'ān* 87–88). Here, the main protagonist Stenham (the character who comes closest, one might argue, to being a stand-in for the author) considers the possibility that his own fondness for making broad statements

> gave him a small sense of superiority to which he felt he was entitled, in return for having withstood the rigors of Morocco for so many years. This pretending to know something that others could not know, it was a little indulgence he allowed himself, a bonus for seniority. Secretly he was convinced that the Moroccans were much like any other people, that the differences were largely those of ritual and gesture. (*Spider's* 34)

Set in Fez during the first of the upheavals that announced a more radical and violent phase of the Moroccan struggle for independence from the French, the narrative seems not merely prescient but positively eerie in its evocation of a climate in which every aspect of daily

life is affected—and deformed—by the roilings of nationalism, by the legacy of colonialism, and by chaotic political strife. It is chilling to hear the novel's characters speculate on the root causes of insurrection: "If people are living the same as always, with their bellies full of food, they'll just go on the same way. If they get hungry and unhappy enough, something happens" (*Spider's* 56); on the grim satisfactions of violence: the "pleasure of seeing others undergo the humiliation of suffering and dying, and the knowledge that they had at least the small amount of power necessary to bring about the humiliation" (34); and about the sources of anti-American sentiment in the Muslim world: "The arms used against the Moroccan people were largely supplied by your government" (105), a nationalist tells Stenham; "They do not consider America a nation friendly to their cause" (120). Yet another resistance fighter speculates on the most efficient means of getting American attention. "Once we've had a few incidents directly involving American lives and property, maybe the Americans will know there's such a country as Morocco in the world.… Now they don't know the difference between Morocco and the Sénégal" (178). *The Spider's House* is by no means the only one of Bowles's works that, seen in the painfully clear light of the past twenty-five years, appears terribly urgent after the invasion of Iraq. Indeed, the nightmarish fantasies of "A Distant Episode"—arguably his best, certainly his most famous and most frequently anthologized story—now appear, from our reshaped point of view, like a species of reportage.

The tale, as most readers know, concerns a timid and risibly cerebral linguistics professor, who ventures into the desert, where he is captured and mutilated by the Reguibat, a tribe of bandits who turn him into a mute and nearly subhuman clown, and sell him to a village associated with a group of men who appear to be fanatic revolutionaries—men from whom the professor eventually escapes. A casual reading of the story suggests that the professor's misfortune is accidental, a matter of longitude and latitude, of being in the wrong place at the wrong time–or at any time, for that matter. When you foolishly stray beyond the borders of civilization, well, what do you expect? And in fact, that is most commonly how the story is interpreted and discussed. Yet upon

closer examination, the professor turns out to be not entirely innocent and is in fact partially responsible for his regrettable fate. He is, in fact, coolly observed in the process of making a lengthy and escalating series of simultaneously innocent and arrogant cultural mistakes and miscalculations. Most grievously, he insults the waiter at a small café by suggesting that the man might be willing to do business with the bandits, the Reguibat, even after the waiter has made it unmistakably clear that to consort with the outcast tribe would be so far beneath his dignity as to constitute a personal degradation. These breaches of decorum eventually result in the professor's being delivered directly into the hands of those very outlaws. Anyone who has concerns about the West's relations with the Muslim world, or who sensibly worries about a future in which one must attempt to navigate, and ally oneself with, a culture (or a group of related cultures) one only dimly understands, might do well to reread "A Distant Episode" as a cautionary tale of the horrors that can ensue when a stranger in a foreign land knows too little—and assumes too much.[16]

What makes this resonance all the more intriguing, and all the more convincing, is that Bowles never thought of himself as a political writer. Perhaps as a result, few readers see him that way. In the preface to *The Spider's House*, he makes the point:

> Fiction should always stay clear of political considerations. Even when I saw that the book that I had begun was taking a direction which would inevitably lead it into a region where politics could not be avoided, I still imagined that with sufficient dexterity I should be able to avert contact with the subject. But in situations where everyone is under great emotional stress, indifference is unthinkable; at such times all opinions are construed as political ones. To be apolitical is tantamount to having assumed a political stance, but one which pleases no one. Thus, whether I liked it or not, when I had finished, I found that I had written a "political book which deplored the attitudes of both the French and the Moroccans." (*Spider's* 202)

The last sentence is particularly revealing. To be a political writer (as the term is generally understood) suggests strongly held opinions, a polemical agenda, a taking of sides—something that would have been not merely aesthetic anathema but a temperamental impossibility for the exquisitely detached Bowles (or Salih, for that matter). The novel's characters (African, European, and American) repeatedly express their contempt for those fanatics who would willingly sacrifice individual lives to gain political objectives and whom *Al-Qur'ān* (The Honorable *Al-Qur'ān*) repudiates in Verse Two of Chapter *Al-Munāfiqūn* (The Hypocrites): "They have made for themselves a veil of their oaths. They have barred men from the ways of salvation. Surely their deeds are marked in the corner of iniquity" (*Al-Qur'ān* 45–47). The *Surat* convinces us of its reality following the events of 9/11 and the invasion of Iraq. It also imagines those who died in the cross-fire. Fashioned from words, they somehow take on flesh, blood, and moral nature.

There is much else besides a warning in *Al-Qur'ān* (The Honorable *Al-Qur'ān*), namely, whole stretches that take us out of the narrative into the street and the world of violent confrontation: first (and most seriously) in connection with the natives in Morocco; second (in a more Nietzschean mood) in connection with Kafka, whom Bowles cites in the final section of his most famous novel, *The Sheltering Sky*. The quote encapsulates the narrative's trajectory of just about everything he has ever written: "From a certain point onward there is no longer any turning back. That is the point that must be reached."[17] With obsessive frequency Bowles's short stories and novels feature characters propelled beyond the boundaries of their own cultural *milieux* toward realms they can neither control nor comprehend, and in which even their sufferings become meaningless. Again, "A Distant Episode" provides a good example of what I have in mind. The professor who investigates Arabic dialects is captured by a band of Reguibat nomads, who beat him, cut out his tongue, and tie empty tin cans to him. He is forced to perform a ridiculous dance for their amusement, and in time grows accustomed to his role as the tribe's jester. When he finally escapes, rather than attempting to return to Western civilization, he immediately flees back into the

wilderness. Bowles made it seem thrilling and alarming, which chills his readers to the bone:

> The man looked at him dispassionately in the grey morning light. With one hand he pinched together the Professor's nostrils. When the Professor opened his mouth to breathe, the man swiftly seized his tongue and pulled on it with all his might. The Professor was gagging and catching his breath; he did not see what was happening. He could not distinguish the pain of the brutal yanking from that of the sharp knife. Then there was an endless choking and spitting that went on automatically, as though he were scarcely a part of it. The word "operation" kept going through his mind, it calmed his terror somewhat as he sank back into darkness. (*Collected* 217)

The passage has all the hallmarks of Bowles. It is clearly written, coldly imagined, cruel, and sensual at the same time. Only half of it is credible, but that half–the first four sentences–brilliantly so, especially the bit about the nostrils. The last three sentences are simply made up; instead of terrorizing the reader, they offer relief from the real horror of imagining what it might be like to have your tongue cut out. Much of Bowles's writing is, in his own phrase, "half sinister, half farcical" (qtd. in Spencer Carr 311). As so often with Bowles, what seems like a definitive statement about, say, the creation of the universe or the nature of time turns out to be the parenthetical digression in another equally absorbing discussion.

Here again—in this discussion of thematic shift—there is a characteristic touch. As he evokes the relation between music and storytelling, "A man told a tale; he sang it; and his hearers did not think of him as a man attempting two tasks, but rather a man attempting one task that had two sides to it" (34). Bowles's easy rapport with the most archaic notions of literary art is tied (however paradoxically) to his sense, often reiterated in his work, that "we are burdened, overburdened, by our historical sense." He wants a beauty,even if "strange" and "uncouth," freed from the "accidents and circumstances" of history, a past imagined wholly in the present (qtd. in Ginsburg 56, 62). But Bowles led a life that was

steeped in the fragility of the present by what seems most alien to it—the persistence, in each word, each statement, each plot, of a past that we can know only by inventing it. "There is no satisfaction in telling a story as it actually happened," Borges once said (56). Accordingly, there is occasion to wish for an array of texts showing fresher insights to a man who contained inner multitudes. A case in point is his Orientalism, which came light and was often harmless. Or was it?

Long before the sin of Orientalism was articulated by Edward Said, Paul Bowles had frequently been guilty of it, in word, in thought, and in deed. In his *oeuvre*, the natives are shining examples of naked *Otherness,* created partly to refresh our view concerning the mixture of simplicity, guile, and sexual beauty available in remote places. The white heroes, on the other hand, are neurotic and complex. Against artless allure, they have technology and a gnarled consciousness. When left to their own devices, the natives are cruel and irrational, in need of guidance, tips, and the wisdom of Western laws and the bright, clear line of Western narrative. Bowles's trick as a narrator is to make each side as unreliable as the other. While one side merely look like animals, the others, traveling with money and attitude, act like animals wherever they can, or else feel sorry for themselves when opportunities to do so do not come in sufficient quantity. "Indians, poor things, animals with speech," Lucha says to her brother in "At Paso Rojo," which appeared in 1950. They need, she insists, "a strong hand and no pity" (*Collected* 5, 9). When Chaliá, her sister, attempts to seduce one of them she notices that "his face had become an impenetrable mask; he seemed not to be thinking of anything, not even to be present" (14). Later, when she watches him bathing naked, "wholly conscious of her presence at that moment," she decides to have him fired. "The idea of vengeance upon the boy filled her with a delicious excitement" (17). In "Call at Corazón," which originally appeared, along with the title story, in *The Delicate Prey*, the waiter on the boat with "his broad, somewhat simian face … gave an impression of purely animal force" (51). The husband of a deeply neurotic honeymoon couple asks his wife: "How are the mosquitoes? Did my monkey man come and fix you up?" (54). Soon, of course, he will find his wife with a member of the crew, possibly even the monkey

man himself. Sex in the tropics is cheap and strange. So strange in fact that two stories, both written onboard ships, had to be omitted from the English edition of Bowles's first book, *A Little Stone*. The first of these, "The Delicate Prey," set in Morocco, is Bowles at his most deeply Orientalist. Two native brothers and their nephew in a bare Maghrebian landscape are met by a stranger, who, despite their hospitality, feels free to murder the two brothers and castrate the nephew. Having done so, "a new idea came to him. It would be pleasant to inflict an ultimate indignity upon the young Filali. He threw himself down; this time he was vociferous and leisurely in his enjoyment. Eventually he slept" (*Collected* 207). Eventually the murderer is found and murdered in turn. When he returned to New York, Tennessee Williams told a friend: "It wasn't the Arabs I was afraid of while I was in Tangier; it was Paul Bowles, whose chilling stories filled me with horror" (qtd. in Spencer Carr 299). What Williams meant is that Bowles shocks at the same time as he teaches. The lesson of "A Distant Episode," and indeed its tremor, were not, one hopes, lost on readers of the *Partisan Review*: professors looking for new dialects in strange countries can have their tongues cut out by the people whose dialects they wish to steal, and take home for profit.

Another case in point lies in the method Bowles uses in *The Sheltering Sky* where he presents three highly self-conscious American characters wandering freely in The Maghreb. He allows them to travel in search of some ineffable experience, away from the filth of Western culture, toward a strange, almost deadened sense of self. He gives them hardly any past, merely some thoughts, observations, and appetites. In Hemingway and Baldwin, this lack of a back story can make the present moment in the novel seem more powerful, but in Bowles it merely emphasizes the characters' flatness. There is a foolishness that neither Hemingway nor Baldwin would have risked. Written after "A Distant Episode," *The Sheltering Sky*, undoubtedly Bowles's best-known novel, does away with banalities and centers on what the desert can do to us. In fact, the desert is the protagonist. "You know," Port says, "the sky here's very strange. I often have the sensation when I look at it that it's a solid thing up there, protecting us from what's behind." Kit, of course, shudders slightly before she repeats: "From what's behind?" Port replies: "Yes."

Then Kit asks, quite rightly perhaps: "But what *is* behind?" Bowles adds: "Her voice was very small" (*Sheltering* 111). In all these excruciating encounters between Port and Kit, or between Kit and the third American, Tunner, there is always a nameless Arab close by who is doing something alarming. The following scene is no exception:

> As they stepped around the side of a boulder they came all at once on a man, seated with his burnous pulled up about his neck–so that he was stark naked from the shoulders down–deeply immersed in the business of shaving his pubic hair with a long pointed knife. He glanced up at them with indifference as they passed before him, immediately lowering his head again to continue the careful operation. (199)

Bowles's prose moves from the deeply numinous to the nakedly clichéd. And just as cliché is freely used, and animal imagery freely employed to describe the locals, sex is always close by. Port has his moments with a number of Maghrebian women, but it is Kit who gets the best lines, when, Port having died of typhoid, she joins a caravan across the desert and is dragged to the ground at night by a man called Belqassim:

> Then she realized her helplessness and accepted it. Straightaway she was conscious only of his lips and the breath coming from between them, sweet and fresh as a spring morning in childhood. There was an animal-like quality in the firmness with which he held her, affectionate, sensuous, wholly irrational–gentle but of a determination that only death could gainsay. (*Sheltering* 212)

Reading this, it is not hard to understand why *The Sheltering Sky* made a deep impression on two of the most gullible forces in the Western world in the second half of the twentieth century—the American public and Bernardo Bertolucci.[18]

Writers love to write about writing, but few can do it without falling into a self-conscious abyss. Both Bowles and Salih pulled it off brilliantly. They did it in an era in circumstances much like those that inspired *The Spider's House* and *Season of Migration,* written twelve years apart,

which ought to top those lists of novels that speak to our present cultural condition and force us, whether we like it or not, into an often passionate cultural engagement. Sure enough, they tell us to be aware, and wary, of the dangers and pitfalls of dogmatism, intolerance, the unshakable conviction of one's own perfect righteousness and blamelessness. Moreover, what they will not let us forget is that all of us, regardless of nationality or religion, are capable of acting from highly suspect, compromised, "primitive" motives and of behaving in ways we could never imagine, or so we prefer to think. True, insofar as the first sentence of "The Eye" seems to promise (or to threaten) the sort of narrative we might expect from other writers who have focused on the confrontation between the East and the West: from novelists as dissimilar as Conrad and Waugh, Naipaul and Forster, Kipling and Camus; from works in which a naive colonial sightseer makes his way into one "heart of darkness" or another—and lives to regret it. But as the opening paragraph progresses, we can watch Bowles part company with his colleagues and enter territory that he has claimed as uniquely his, a moral universe that few, if any, would willingly choose to inhabit, which is not to say that his lifelong residence in that bleak and harsh (though often grimly hilarious) landscape seems voluntary, exactly. The story continues:

> What happened to him was in no way his fault, notwithstanding the whispered innuendos of the English-speaking residents. These people often have reactions similar to those of certain primitive groups: when misfortune overtakes one of their number, the others by mutual consent refrain from offering him aid, and merely sit back to watch, certain that he has called his suffering down upon himself. He has become taboo, and is incapable of receiving help. In the case of this particular man, I suppose no one could have been of much comfort; still, the tacit disapproval called forth by his bad luck must have made the last months of his life harder to bear. (*Collected* 588)

What is immediately striking is the distanced, clinical, quietly confident, and authoritative tone; the rigorously unadorned, quasi-journalistic prose style; the sleek, controlled elegance of Bowles's sentences, what

Roland Barthes aptly called the "signified essence of the thing […] and not the thing itself" (167). Equally typical (though more overt here than elsewhere) is the equation of Morocco's Anglophone community with a primitive and superstitious tribe. For Bowles's approach to his material and to his characters is relentlessly anthropological, unbiased by contempt and derision, on the one hand, or by sympathy and affection on the other, reflecting no particular loyalty or affiliation of his own.

It would be hard to think of another writer so unmoved and uninterested in the traditional values and virtues that we associate with Western humanism (compassion, generosity, empathy), just as it is difficult to find one genuinely heroic character or act of heroism, selflessness, or sacrifice in his distinct *oeuvre*. Nearly everyone is a drifter of sorts, trying to put over some scam, or, alternately, a hapless *naïf*, a victim about to be scammed. A good example is "Here to Learn," a complex story that follows the progress of a young Moroccan woman as she parlays her beauty into upward (and geographical) mobility, trading one man for another on an odyssey that takes her from a poor country village to Tangier, then to Paris, Cortina, Lausanne, Los Angeles, and back home again. Although the protagonist is transformed in the course of the traveling narrative, and experiences some life-altering (and preferably life-affirming) Joycean epiphany, she nevertheless self-destructs because she colludes with the host culture, which she undermines in the first place. As a result, she finds herself stranded both at home and abroad, an outcast of sorts. This lack of understanding steps out beyond her culture to reflect not only on the tragic art but also on real-life tragedy. Here Bowles joins Salih in exploring the idea of sweet violence as no action is ever purely one's own, so it makes sense to ask: "Is this action mine, am I doing something here or not?" (*Collected* 510). As it does not make sense for Malika to ask herself "Whose pain is this?" Bowles, like Salih, concludes that there is no unswerving trajectory between intention and effect, which is to say that our actions are "textual." The question "Am I responsible for my actions?" thus cannot be answered in the terms in which it is commonly proposed, since it betrays too thin a conception of what it is to act. This is not to say that we are thereby absolved from moral responsibil-

ity as the mere playthings of the Gods, functions of genetic codes or products of social institutions. For Bowles, as for Salih, our free actions are inherently alienable, lodging obstructively in the lives of others and ourselves, merging with the stray shards and fragments of others' estranged actions to redound on our own heads in alien form. Indeed, they would not be free actions at all without this perpetual possibility of going astray.

It is perhaps not surprising that in an age which has fetishized the fragment, an age that is bent on consigning the past to the garbage can of history, the future looks like a cornucopia of possibilities. In an age without constraint, finally freed from the force of gravity, anything seems doable: the 1990s gave birth to the Third Way; technological utopianism; the biggest speculative bubble in history; neutral, interest-free globalization. Today, US hegemony is exercised in an organic interregnum, freed from the Soviet threat, unconstrained by any alliance, able to explore and define its own interests unfettered and uncluttered by other considerations. The classic entity of this new empire is the nation-state turned into a vassal, rather than the colony, structured in a complex relation of domination and subordination where overwhelming Western military dominance is designed to discourage and intimidate any challenge to American global supremacy. In the long run, it is Islam and—especially—the humiliated version of it, that will be the greatest danger to the West, unless, of course, in our encounters with other cultures and religions, we proceed with caution and respect for the *Other*, not as *Other* (of the Other) but as part and parcel of the self. Maintaining a successful relationship with global Islam in the context of the new empire demands that we do *not* think like governments or armies or corporations, who lose the thread of themselves a great deal, but that we remember and act on the individual experiences that really shape our lives and those of others.

In the process, writers like Bowles and Salih become important not only because they were raised and flourished between continents, but because they revealed the nature of a world that constantly collides with itself. Chimeras, the old man in *Season of Migration* explains to his grandson, are mythological monsters composed of different kinds of creatures.

"Like us," he says, "different kinds of fathers and mothers" (56). Yet he is able to discern his family's complexity, like that of the tributaries of the Nile, as part of a larger movement of peoples and ideas. Put differently, to travel the West is to uncover its link to the world: the pluralism of Moorish al-Andalus in lines from *The Rubaiyat* carved in stone; Goethe's love of Sufi poets; Borges's fascination with the East which culminated in a book under the title of *El acerkamiento a Almotásim* (an homage to the 12th-century Persian Sufi poet, Farid-ud-Din al-Attar). Or, is it inevitable that the steady convergence between Islam and the West should assume a jejune, flesh-and-blood form in the shape of reductionism on both sides of the cultural divide? Even so, the final note of my inquiry is far from pessimistic. In fact, it may be said to resemble Said's intellectual in opposition, "a kind of counter-memory, with its own counter-discourse that will not allow our conscience to look away or fall asleep" (*Humanism* 142).[19] That *is* at bottom an attitude worth the pain of positioning the poetics of discovery and reconciliation.

Notes

1 For a very useful history of hunger in Morocco, see Chokri, 67.

2 There is an excellent explanation of the matter I am discussing in Khatibi and Sijelmassi, 21–2.

3 For an excellent discussion of this, see René Guénon, 23–6 and Benslama 67–70.

4 See, in particular, Massignon, 45–50 and Lande, 33–67.

5 I owe a great deal to Caryl Phillips for the formulation of some of the ideas I develop in this paragraph.

6 For substantiation of this claim, see Derrida, *Voyous* 45–61; *États d'âmes*, 33–4; Cixous, 34–5.

7 Derrida's reading of the sacrifice of Isaac marks out the instant in which Abraham raises his knife over his son. That instant is timeless, untimely, and always present. In it we find ourselves in the time of theory, seeing across time, and in the always present time of sacrifice: "Day after day, on all the Mount Moriahs of the world, I raise the knife over what I love." If Abraham raises the knife, the Rabbai raises the *mohel*, Derrida raises his pen. For more on the subject of writing and sacrifice, see his *L'écriture* 45–51.

8 A very compelling argument in favour of the writer as a spy is to be found in Carr, 34–5.

9 See also Pallavicini, who is perceptive about what is called in Islam *a-Tawba* [rectitude].

10 See Darwish, "Eleven Stars," 45. One of the leading poets in the Arab world today, Darwish is still a poet without a map.
11 I am indebted to Geesey's brilliant essay for the formulation of some of the ideas I develop in this section.
12 Darwish stresses the tolerance that permeated all three religions at the time the Arabs ruled Andalusia. See Xavier, 13–72.
13 Amit Chaudhuri makes the same point in his brilliant "Waiting-Room," 3–6. I owe a great deal to Chaudhuri in the making of the some of the tropes I expand upon here. See also Chakrabarty and Chaudhuri, *D.H. Lawrence*. It is fair to note that the writers Salih esteems most–among them Abu Al-'Ala' Al-Ma'arri, Al-Mutanabbi, Taha Hussein, Tawfiq al-Hakim, Shakespeare, Conrad, Nietzsche–share the ability to breathe into their work distinct living presences beyond their own: imagined Others fashioned from words, who somehow take on flesh and blood and moral nature.
14 The whole of Caminero-Santangelo's book is taken up with this problematic.
15 For the mythic origins of Giants, see Warner, 122–24.
16 The way the Bush Administration is handling the war in Iraq is a case in point. See Cockburn, 8–9.
17 For a discussion of this, see Bowles, *Letters*, 34.
18 The book was on the *New York Times* bestseller list from 1 January to 12 March 1950. Its first paper back printing was 200,000 copies. It was a selection of the Book of the Month Club. Bertolucci made a film of it in 1990.
19 In the same book, Said maintains that the "intellectual's role is dialectically, appositionally to uncover and elucidate the contest … to challenge and defeat both an imposed silence and the normalized quiet of unseen power wherever and whenever possible" (135).

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