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مجلة في الآداب والعلوم الإنسانية

كلية الآداب والعلوم الإنسانية بصفاقس
جامعة صفاقس
الجمهورية التونسية

المدير المسؤول :

محمد بن محمد الخبو



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شكر

تشكر «إدارة بحوث جامعية» جزيل الشكر الأمانة الكين أسعموا في
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Poem, Sermon and/or Soliloquy? «September 1913»: Speech pattern revisited

Lamia Jaoua⁽¹⁾

Abstract

A poem the theorist of Masks wrote in 1913, «September 1913» shows how strategic wearing masks is in a world where art and politics intermingled, fought and often parted company. The Dublin of September 1913 was a city in trouble, yet also a city in motion. Yeats' «September 1913», written in the period of the Dublin Lockout has often been appraised as a poem and hardly as a direct speech. For this reason, the present paper will seek to explore this very dimension. It will read the poem as a speech delivered by some pivoting voice, a voice that represents the greedy conduct of money and prayer amassing as both rational and pious a kind of behaviour. In doing so, however, this voice commits itself to no final judgement. The deviant motion of the text will therefore be considered in the light of its belonging to two traditions at a time: the sermon and the soliloquy traditions. In the two parts of this article the poet's permanent change of masks will be shown to have contributed to creating a mobile, plural and even vertiginous view of the speaking voice's attitude to the theme of Romantic nationalism the poem seems to appraise. This strategy will be shown to have spared Yeats the trouble of judgement.

Key Words

sermon, soliloquy, intention, moral code.

Résumé

Un poème que le théoricien de Masques a écrit en 1913, «September 1913» montre comment porter des masques peut être très stratégique dans un monde où l'art et la politique se sont entremêlés, battus, et souvent séparés. Dublin en Septembre 1913 était non seulement une cité souffrante de troubles mais aussi une cité qui bouge. Le «September 1913» de Yeats, écrit dans la période du Lockout qu'a vécu la cité, a souvent était apprécié en tant que poème et presque jamais en tant que discours directe. Pour cette raison, le présent article va essayer d'explorer sa dimension discursive. Il va lire le poème en tant que discours délivré par une voix qui pivote, une voix qui présente comme rationnel et pieux le comportement avide de ceux qui amassent de l'argent et des prières. Ce faisant, pourtant, cette voix ne s'engage dans aucun jugement final. Pour ce

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willing to counter or avoid cultural stigmatization. Yet either the denial or acceptance of the stigmatized identity represents an ethnic attitude and, thus, constitutes enough evidence of the existence of primordial ethnic feelings.

However, Hassan's new identity is not the mere impact of a causal relationship between a prejudiced opinion and a consequent decision to Americanize; it is rather the outcome of the confrontation of two distinct cultural sets of identification. Indeed, using his personal story and exilic experience, Hassan constructs his new identity comparatively on the remnants of his former one that he rejects as no longer suitable for his self-achievement. This typical attitude of Anglo - conformity tends to lead to cutting ties with ancestral culture as a sacrifice to make in order to gain acceptance within the dominant, mainstream culture. But the sacrifice in question may return like a boomerang some time later to revive old memories and, perhaps, demand autobiographical confessions as an exorcism to get rid of ethnic remorse!

and repeated self-questioning that seems necessary, as if to repress the constant disturbing profound awareness of being ethnically different.

Celebrating ethnicity is a matter of individual choice. And some exiles decide to avoid it. This is at least what the case of Ihab Hassan reveals; a case that also offers an empirical illustration of the strategic approach to identity attitudes, mainly those that tend to shun ancestral culture, in contexts wherein it is stigmatized and, rather, to accommodate to the host culture. Equally significant through this illustration is the confirmation that individuals construct their identities thanks to ethnic comparability, even when their identification process entails acting in conformity with the dominant culture and not with ethnic differentiation.

On the other hand, Ihab Hassan's exile is not forced. No doubt, his attachment to ancestral ethnic identity is not deep either, but his ethnic feelings tend to survive even within a long life of successful and productive assimilation. Although he neither seeks ethnic roots nor takes pride in ethnicity, he does admit that while he is not willing to return to his past, he cannot escape it either.

In the case of Ihab Hassan, finally, Anglo - conformity manifests itself rather in the guise of a typical orientalist attitude that conceives of the East or Orient as a sterile land, offering no prospects for growth or prosperity, and of the West, conversely, rather as a place of opportunities, success, and self-achievement.

Conclusion

An exilic narrative in this particular case, the autobiographical account provides Ihab Hassan with a propitious means to deal with his psychological identity conflict involving two diametrically opposed cultural systems. *Sensible* Ihab Hassan has opted for a new cultural identity dimension abiding by the American norms, but *sensitive* Ihab Hassan still holds emotional thoughts and nostalgia for his old national identity rooted in his native Egypt.

Ihab Hassan could have chosen ethnic differentiation in his exile wherein Arab culture and Islam are subject to devaluation; but he has deliberately taken the opposite path to indulge in a rather successful assimilation process as an individual strategy of identification, probably to negotiate ethnic devaluation in his own way. Hassan's denial of the Egyptian identity and efforts to be in conformity with the American identity is a common identification strategy among minority people

identity memories or landmarks that are left for Hassan to remember his Egyptian identity by. Perhaps the complete or partial disappearance of these landmarks would entail the impossibility for him to identify as Egyptian and would thus necessitate the construction of other landmarks, whether genuine or borrowed. Meanwhile, in the case being, the dissolution of the fundamental structure of ancestral culture in the mind of the exiled individual leaves room for the possibility of reviving a nostalgic form of ethnicity. Nostalgic ethnicity, thus, becomes rather yet another expression of ethnic feelings that tends to confirm the persistence of primordial ethnic identity through what in all likelihood seems to be a revival of ethnicity experienced by Ihab Hassan, some forty year after his self-exile, as is evidenced by the publication of his autobiographical account.

In the final analysis, the Egyptian exile also possesses limited ethnic landmarks to the American identity at the beginning of what Ihab Hassan calls «selfish hegira». Yet, deliberate ethnic isolation and almost no contact with the old ethnic culture are enough to push the self-exiled young Egyptian to look for alternative identity landmarks as cohesive sources of support and stability in his new process of identification. From this perspective, when it is deliberate and the outcome of the individual choice of deserting ethnic identification, cultural exile should rather be renamed cultural conversion—or to be more precise—nationality conversion, as it were, from «Egyptness» to Americanness.

4.3.5. Findings

The selected passage reflects how the autobiographical account is used with mastery by Ihab Hassan who, till the end, remains wondering about the reasons behind his need for this account. He asserts that he intends this account as a justification for his choice of Americanization and all the related achievement possibilities his ancestral culture could not provide. Yet, judging by this passage, Hassan's autobiographical account also reflects how the denial of ethnic roots cannot endure as the author is unwittingly experiencing primordial ethnic feelings that have remained embedded in him for long before transpiring in this account in the form of negative terms and attributes corresponding to the widespread opinion about his ancestral culture in the host cultural environment, as if to avoid mentioning any positive image about Egypt, for fear that it would cause him remorse. The conflict between Hassan's rejection of Egypt and his concern for the past in this passage represents a genuine version of ethnic struggle, i.e. the continual

is certainly impossible for Hassan who, however, is instead able to endorse the negative opinion about his ethnic origins.

After all, it is perhaps the general negative treatment that his ancestral culture receives in his new cultural environment that keeps ethnic feelings alive in Hassan's mind, although he is not targeted personally through direct social interaction, as he has integrated quite well into the geographical place he is unfalteringly willing to call «home». Indeed, in terms of pure ethnic attitudes, the passage under study mentions no perceived social or cultural adversity in Hassan's new context of social and cultural interaction.

On the contrary, his identification strategy should be expected rather to be seeking how to avoid (making mention of) the negative public judgment about his culture of origin. To this end, not only does he assimilate to the dominant one, but charges his native society to be itself causing the devaluation, by depicting mother land himself in negative terms. Or perhaps, like Shaheen, Hassan is «hurt», too, but manages to conceal it and, instead, seeks to idealize the host society to attenuate the pain. In other words, in the impossibility of being able to combat the stigmatizing stereotypes, he would imagine or invent a reality of his own that makes cultural devaluation bearable.

Whatever the interpretation, both strategies would be indicative of primordial ethnic feelings as far as Ihab Hassan is concerned. Probably the biblical reference to the Prodigal Son, also known as the «Lost» Son, represents additional evidence of Hassan's ethnic feelings and bewilderment. Is it remorse and a quest for redemption? It is hard to know, within the limited scope of the passage under consideration. What is sure, nonetheless, the passage offers a prototypical attitude about the alleged «superiority» of Western culture over the Eastern one, as it insists on the limitations of prospects and growth for Hassan in Egypt and emphasizes the possibilities of success and progress in America for ambitious intellectuals; an attitude that Edward Said considers «might very well be accounted one of the special triumphs of Orientalism.»⁽¹⁾

Similarly, the question about the revival of disrupted childhood memories evoked by Hassan in the reference to Wordsworth (lines 8 - 10) is left unanswered. The revival actually concerns the disrupted

1 - *Orientalism* 322.

renouncing ancestral identities, values, and creeds, along with parents, family, and friends.⁽¹⁾

4.3.4. General interpretation

No doubt Ihab Hassan «navigates» between two cultural worlds and precisely two identity dimensions: one is primordial, indelible, and imbedded in the mind, as it is obviously associated with his memory of belonging to Egypt; and the second is borrowed but represents his personal choice of identification as a naturalized American enjoying life in his new country. There is no hesitation in Hassan's choice of identity, which connotes determination in his quest for self-identification. Simultaneously, there is no living meaning to Hassan's ethnicity; he is not, actually, reproducing any ancestral, cultural symbols in his new life and new identification, except perhaps in his mind, through remembrance and intellectual and, also artistic, production of an autobiographical account referring to his ancestry. Yet, for sure the dilemma of Hassan's cultural exile does not lie in the loss of contact with primary ethnic symbols. Hassan assumes his choice for American identity till the end; there is no expression of doubts or regrets whatsoever in his account.

However, Hassan does not manage to get rid of his primordial ethnic identity in his American exile, though what remains optional in Hassan's ethnic identity seems to stem only from allusions to the past. It seems as if Hassan has first to refer to his «tribe», i.e. his primary identity matrix, before authorizing himself to Americanize. As if the «warrant» he talks about in the passage would be this justification of his predilection for American identity through the autobiographical account; a justification he deems necessary for him to gain some benefit—perhaps quietness—through confessions made public in order to communicate he is not that ungrateful towards his ancestry even at the pinnacle of glory of his Americanness.

Whatever his ethnic objective—a warrant to change allegiance or gratitude towards primordial ethnic ties—Hassan remains undoubtedly haunted by primordial ethnic feelings, as is testified to by the present narrative, written four decades after the departure of the author from his native Egypt. For he can proclaim his Americanness and speak highly of it and at will, but he could never make such a statement as—*when I was Egyptian or Arab!* Thus, the denial of the Egyptian ethnic identity

1 - Malewska - Peyre 126.

In social sciences, the strategic approach to individual identification and to attitudes pertaining to identity in general provides a convincing explanation. Indeed, social scientists who have studied this phenomenon consider that specific situations of social interaction in which the minority identity is stigmatized may force social actors (or individuals) to negotiate their identity position. Such a negotiation involves both the internal/private identity and the external/public one, in order to focus on the aspects of the latter identity intentionally to meet the expectations of the majority. Social actors tend thus to avoid deviating from public expectations in order to save face.⁽¹⁾

In similar situations of social interaction, social actors (or the individuals) tend to shun the negative identity in order to avoid internal cleavages. They will then maneuver their identification through strategies that are likely to help them ignore (or forget) the cultural or historical characteristics that make them distinct, directing their identification efforts rather towards the adoption of the cultural characteristics of the dominant.

Essentially these individuals will assimilate to the dominant, majority group in an effort to get rid of the minority identity status that is often denigrated or devalued in such situations of social interaction. Hence it is common among individuals belonging to minorities to observe expressions of identification that resort to specific strategic attitudes or tactics in order to avoid devaluation. These tactics can take several forms, such as the change of names, the exclusive use of the language of the dominant, the achievement of a high socioeconomic status, the avoidance of both the ghetto - like, ethnic concentrations and the meetings with compatriots, etc.; they all represent identification strategies that turn inappropriate to—or sometimes bluntly negate—ancestral identities and, therefore, allow for valorizing attributes, so that the users of these strategies gain acceptance.⁽²⁾

This phenomenon is not unknown in the United States of America, the country of myriad minorities *par excellence*. Specifically, this strategy of assimilating as close as possible to the dominant is dubbed «passing». It mainly consists in imitating or adopting the dominant's lifestyle, accent, etc; a strategy of identification that may go so far as to

1 - Lipiansky, Taboada - Leonetti, & Vasquez 15 - 16.

2 - Lipiansky, Taboada - Leonetti, & Vasquez 22.

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attributes to describe both his memories pertaining to his native land and his experience in his new home testifies to this obvious opposition expressing the paradoxical duality of his feelings. Table 1 encapsulates this dichotomy and corroborates the idea about Hassan's propensities toward the great capacity for advancement available in the host society; capacity he doubts his country of origin could have provided him with, had he stayed in Egypt and turned a deaf ear to the call of America, as he confesses «I sensed that something other, larger, than myself was at stake» (lines 37 - 38).

Table 1
Juxtaposition of Contrasting Words and Expressions Denoting Ihab Hassan's Two Cultural Worlds

American experience	Egyptian memories
Poesy (line 11)	Memory (line 11)
Home (line 2)	Fled (line 35)
Like (lines 2;3;6)	Had not liked (line 34)
Adored (line 12)	Detesting (line 36)
Heaven (line 39)	Hegira (line 39)
Openness (line 32)	Dark conceits (line 19)
Spacious (line 2)	Caverns of the past (line 21)
Blue - green (line 5)	Gray (line 11)
Changing colors (line 5)	Stirring (line 9)
Tan (line 5)	Impure (line 9)
Candid (line 4)	Intrigue (line 18)
Spectrum of fluid shades (lines 5 - 6)	Shadier (line 17)
Grow (line 34)	Roil (line 9)
Scope (line 32)	Loss (line 23)
Private space (line 33)	Conceal (line 25)
Viable (line 33)	Death (line 23)

Source: Own Table

4.3.3. Explanation of the references

The choice of words made by Ihab Hassan to express his identity preference and determination reflects some bitterness engendered by agitating old memories. This situation of identification is typical of exilic individuals who deliberately give up their ancestral identities in favor of the identity of the host society or the dominant group, mainly in contexts of biased or negative public opinion about the cultural origins of the exiles.

about the necessity for the exile to recall old memories without any clear objective, «like a blind speleologist, in caverns of the past» (lines 20 - 21). On the other hand, the author does not conceal his ethnic confusedness, which is all the more obvious in the semantic crescendo about exilic objectives. Indeed, the «American self-exile» (line 14) becomes a «psychological exile» (line 17) and then a «self-banishment» (line 22).

The exile's motivations hide something else: «a deeper exigency» (line 25), which is ambiguously defined when Hassan quotes from Rainer M. Rilke's *Malte Laurrids Brigge* (lines 27 - 30). The quote makes mention of the biblical Parable of the Prodigal Son and suggests the rejection of family love provided during childhood. But is this really what Hassan is meaning through this Parable or is it redemption, the other implication of the Parable? Hassan provides no obvious answer. However he is sure it is not «holiness» that he has «really hoped to discover in America» (lines 31 - 32). What is it then? The answers Hassan suggests – as «scope», «an openness of time», «a more viable history», and «some private space wherein to change [and] grow» (lines 32 - 34) – do not need to be deciphered; they all connote obvious sympathy for his new environment.

Similarly, Hassan is unequivocal when he deals with his country of origin, «Eternal Egypt» that he says he «left», but then immediately corrects «no, fled» (line 35), which implies Hassan's determination to abandon his native land and leave all the twenty - one years spent in there behind him. Paradoxically «Eternal Egypt», where now Hassan feels estranged, could offer him no destiny, no hope, as is clearly indicated in the instructive statement «for I did not like what I foresaw of my life in Eternal Egypt» (lines 34 - 35). Conversely, after his «hegira» (last line) and settlement in American society, Hassan does «like» (lines 2; 3 & 6) all about his current living place of which he offers a poetical description in the opening lines of the passage, namely the Midwestern city of Milwaukee that Hassan definitely considers as his real «home» (lines 2 - 6); a description that implies he now has roots in there. Actually, the passage opens with a realistic depiction of the author's place of predilection then it closes with a rather metaphysical justification of his «self-exile»; both seem to be the most important aspects of Hassan's current life.

Of Egypt Hassan keeps sad and gloomy memories, whereas his new cultural universe is joyful and colorful. Hassan's choice of words and

sion producers, together with Arab Americans themselves in order to eradicate misrepresentation.⁽¹⁾

No doubt stereotypical representations are harmful and express superiority and adversity. Ihab Hassan could not deny it either. However, unlike Shaheen, he does not seem to react defensively. For sure, in the passage under analysis, he does not show any concern for such calls as Shaheen's to indulge in the rectification of misconceptions about his ancestral culture. Hassan seems rather protecting himself against the surrounding defamation and adversity through a juxtaposition of expressions plainly highlighting his preference for Americanness or Americanity.⁽²⁾

4.3.2. Hypothesis & references to the passage

It is the hypothesis of this paper that, in the passage under examination, the need for an autobiographical account corresponds to Ihab Hassan's overt proclamation of his Americanity, which paradoxically betrays his primordial ethnic feelings. How does confession of Americanization as a deliberate choice betray ethnic feelings?

This particular passage has been selected for the study because, although it is situated in the heart of the closing chapter of the book, it still contains a series of fundamental questions that are left unanswered by Ihab Hassan and whereby he wonders about the timing and need for an autobiographical account. Indeed, evoking the current quietness of his life in American society, Hassan asks «[b]ut why this autobiography now?» (Line 8); then evoking his childhood, he questions whether autobiography is his «own warrant for American self-exile?» (lines 13 - 14). Arguably, for Ihab Hassan the purpose of writing an autobiography stems from the need either for a permit to justify the choice he has made of quitting the imposed Egyptian identity, or for a therapy to fight the memories that come to agitate his life (lines 8 - 9), now that his Americanity is beyond question.

Hassan then makes mention of the general, habitual motivations behind any act of immigration (lines 15 - 16), but he excepts the exilic immigrant from this general pattern as a dubious kind of immigration, i.e. «shadier, thicker with complicity and silent intrigue,» in Hassan's own words (lines 17 - 18); words that he extends to wonder again

1 - Jack Shaheen, «The Media's Image of Arabs» 10.

2 - Both terms refer to American identity and are used indifferently in this paper.

the author is giving up his Egyptian identity and, instead, giving preference to the American one. It is undoubtedly a confession about an individual experience of disjunction and disconnection with ancestral culture; but also an experience of meditation about a deliberate adventure of self-exile; still a meditation (re -)calling on old memories, nay, a personal mental test of recollection, as if to fill the cracks he feels about his hesitant dual identification and, thereby, his indecisive ethnic duplicity.

Hassan's identity bewilderment evolves in a cultural environment incriminating his ethnic feelings, not much for his being comfortable with acculturation and Americanization as his being aware of the negative portrayal of his ancestral culture reflected in both American media and popular culture.

American popular fictional literature, comics, cartoons, Hollywood films, etc. all depict Arabs as «terrorists», «wealthy oilmen» and «wom-anizers». Yet, «although most authors now focus on the Arab - Israeli conflict instead of the harem - filled days of early orientalist writings,» according to an Arab - American scholar and activist, «the nature of the [negative] message regarding Arabs has not changed.»⁽¹⁾ Arabs are also portrayed as lacking unity, dominated entirely by nomadic life. Islam is targeted too, as a phony religion and Prophet Mohammed represented as an imposter.⁽²⁾

However, the denigrating images conveyed by malevolent fictional, artistic and media productions are not kept unchallenged by Arab - American contemporaries of Ihab Hassan. Indeed, these Americans with Arab background are careful to rectify what they deem as wrong representations of their ancestral culture in American public opinion. Jack Shaheen, who authored *Reel Bad Arabs*, among other works,⁽³⁾ is one of them. For Shaheen, «stereotypes hurt»; they blur the vision and corrupt the imagination. And they cannot disappear without collective efforts that should involve intellectuals, politicians, movies and televi-

1 - Suha Sabbagh, *The Image of Arabs in American Popular Fiction* (American Arab Anti - Discrimination Committee Issue Paper 3): 6 - 7.

2 - Edward Said, *Orientalism* 5.

3 - Jack Shaheen's widely - known publications are *Reel Bad Arabs: How Hollywood Vilifies a People* (2001 & 2009 for the revised edition of the same book); *Arab and Muslim Stereotyping in American Popular Culture* (1997); *The TV Arab* (1984); etc.

14. American self-exile?
15. Men and women have flocked to America, fleeing or
16. seeking, driven by the most diverse motives. But the
17. psychological exile stands apart, his case shadier, thicker
18. with complicity and silent intrigue. Who are these beings,
19. full of dark conceits, rushing to meet the future while part
20. of them still stumbles about, like a blind speleologist, in
21. caverns of the past? What urgency speaks through their
22. self-banishment?
23. All leaving is loss, every departure a small death – yes,
24. journeys secretly know their end. Yet self-exile may also
25. conceal a deeper exigency. Thus Rilke's Malte Laurids
26. Brigge:
27. It will be difficult to persuade me that the story of the
28. Prodigal Son is not the legend for him who did not want to
29. be loved. When he was a child, everybody in the house
30. loved him ... But as boy he sought to lay aside such habits. ...
31. What, then, had I really hoped to discover in America? It
32. was not holiness: rather, scope, and openness of time, a
33. more viable history. I also looked for some private space
34. wherein to change, grow; for I had not liked what I foresaw
35. of my life in Eternal Egypt. And so I left – no, fled –
36. detesting all arguments from the blood and suspecting the
37. force of my own detestation. Always, though, I sensed that
38. something other, larger, than myself was at stake, as if my
39. selfish hegira could still evoke a small, wry smile in heaven.

4.3. Commenting on the selected passage

4.3.1. Theme & background

The passage under consideration is an extract from the middle pages of the closing chapter of the book. In this passage, Ihab Hassan wonders about the reasons behind his need for an autobiographical account after some forty years of self-exile away from Egypt.

For Ihab Hassan an autobiography provides an opportunity to find out one's identity position, although he clearly shows he still does not know *his* exactly, but just ventures an explanation likely to lighten the way for him and the reader alike. Yet the title of the autobiography itself remains disturbing in this respect. Indeed, *Out of Egypt*, an otherwise biblical reference, as his story begins in Egypt and continues in America, a sort of Promised Land for Hassan, as it were, suggests

of Cairo to be trained to become an engineer.⁽¹⁾ Aged twenty - one in 1946, Hassan left native Egypt to further his graduate education in the United States of America, where he settled once and for all, married an American wife, and turned a naturalized citizen.⁽²⁾

A distinguished scholar, Hassan published a lot of academic works. His writings include some fifteen books and a considerable number of articles mostly in literary criticism.⁽³⁾ In 1986, sexagenarian Hassan published *Out of Egypt*. It is an autobiographical exilic narrative of a young male who left his native country sailing from Port Said «bound for New York», never to return. It is also the story of a life of solitude, resolutions, and achievements; still a story based on blurred childhood memories in a wealthy family, telling fragments of the author's experiences starting with his departure day, recounting his feelings, and sharing his thoughts. Hassan's successful assimilation to American life and society is beyond question in this story; but Egypt remains alive in the author's mind, as suggested in many instances throughout the present autobiography that Hassan has tailored according to his wishes, if we refer to the preface of this book subtitled «scenes and arguments of an autobiography».

4.2. The passage under consideration(4)

1. I complete –complete?– this autobiography in Milwaukee,
2. where I live and teach, now home. I like this spacious
3. Midwestern city, except in the reluctant spring. I like its
4. candid cityscape, spare population, fitful lake, forever
5. changing colors from tan to blue - green through a spectrum
6. of fluid shades. I like even its cold climate – let others seek
7. the Sun Belt.
8. But why this autobiography now? What's this that has come late
9. to roil my life, stirring impure memories, as if to prove
10. Wordsworth right, that «the child is father of the man»?
11. Yes, Memory is sister to Poesy, poorer sister clad in gray
12. garb of recall. And Poesy is what I adored–next to Spirit–
13. when I was young. Or is autobiography my own warrant for

1 - Hassan, *Out of Egypt* 49 - 52.

2 - Hassan, *Out of Egypt* 1 - 2.

3 - As far as the articles published by Ihab Hassan, some observers go so far as to suggest their number to be three hundred.

4 - Hassan, *Out of Egypt* 105 - 107 (abridged).

exercise motivated by the desire to avoid recourse to psychoanalysis? Dictionaries could bring no answers. They merely define autobiography as «an account of a person's life written by that person.» Scott Berghegger defines autobiography as «the account of the things that have happened in a person's life, selected and made ready for public consumption»; then Berghegger inquires whether the purpose of autobiographical accounts would be to deduce truth from subjective experiences.⁽¹⁾ Ihab Hassan, too, stresses the subjective and personal character of autobiographical writings. He subscribes to Henry Miller's views when Hassan comments on Miller's autobiographical production saying that «[f]or him, writing is autobiography and autobiography is therapy, which is a form of action upon the self.»⁽²⁾ Jerome Klinkowitz, who forewards *Out of Egypt*, considers Hassan's autobiographical account a «personal imaginative self-study.»⁽³⁾

Is it therapy that Hassan has learnt from Miller's autobiographical writings? What pain would this therapy relieve? Or is autobiography a mere work on—and an exploration of—the *self*?

Besides, the common denominator of opinions about the need for writing an autobiography revolves chiefly around the fact of seeking psychological benefits that tend to correspond to three major axes: (1) a need for self-affirmation, (2) a reaction to frustration, or (3) a response to culpability. Ihab Hassan's *Out of Egypt* seems to fit into the three of them.

4.1. *Out of Egypt*: Presentation & author

Ihab Hassan is currently a retired, emeritus research professor at the University of Milwaukee, Wisconsin where he taught English and Comparative Literature from 1970 to 1999. Hassan had first graduated in electrical engineering at the University of Pennsylvania in 1948, and then left the field to study literature and won a PhD in English in 1953. Hassan was born in Cairo, Egypt, to an aristocratic family. His father served as governor in many Egyptian provinces, which forced the family to move constantly throughout the country and compelled young Hassan to be tutored at home till the age of ten. He then attended the Saidiah public secondary school and then the University

1 - Berghegger 1.

2 - Hassan, *The Literature of Silence* 9.

3 - Klinkowitz 118.

the case of Black Muslims. It is the change from having been Christian to becoming Muslim that marks the distinction between an obvious ethnic identity taken for granted and conversion to a totally different religion with specific cultural symbols.⁽¹⁾

In the third case, the condition of ethnicity for the individual is based on the sole memory of symbols of an ethnic culture. This condition is due to either the deliberate avoidance or mere absence of structural ethnic networks. There is no ambiguity about the individual's cultural past or identification, but the symbols of ethnic identification—such as visible residential ethnic enclaves or ghettos—are missing in the individual's environment; but ethnicity may transcend kinship and face-to-face interaction.⁽²⁾ In this situation of cultural exile, unlike cultural conversion, not only is the individual isolated from mother culture, but also removed from ethnic past, voluntarily or involuntarily, to be transplanted in a new cultural environment. American history offers numerous examples of such a cultural transplantation; perhaps the most telling case was slavery, though the United States still receives displaced individual refugees from all over the world who illustrate this exilic situation perfectly well on a regular basis.

This exilic condition of up - rootedness may result in identity crisis, and may lead to—or just border on—the pathological identity state in some instances, mainly when self-representation or self-image no longer corresponds to the one reflected to the exile in the new cultural environment.⁽³⁾ Of course, identity crisis, in this respect, is understood in the sense that the exiled individual is brought to wonder about the protracted effects of ethnic solitude. In *Out of Egypt*, Ihab Hassan himself admits identity cracks when he says: «I have said: 'I can recall little bitterness in my life, and recall even less remorse.' Does the statement disguise dire evasions? Perhaps psychoanalysts can tell - I have not sought their help.»⁽⁴⁾

4. Manifest Ethnicity (Between Two Cultures)

Does in the case being writing an autobiography serve to revive the past and make confessions about it, or is it just a *self*-exploring

1 - Damak 13 - 14.

2 - Isaacs 35.

3 - Vasquez 164 - 65.

4 - Hassan, *Out of Egypt* 8.

Conversely, ethnic differentiation is opposite—and sometimes represents a response—to Anglo - conformity, because of the pressure on ethnics to assimilate. Advocates of ethnic differentiation insist that ethnics can swear allegiance and loyalty to the United States while remaining faithful to their ethnic heritages.⁽¹⁾ This situation permitting cultural diversity both grants past histories their due importance and transforms the ensuing differentiated cultural lifestyles into a mosaic of coexisting experiences capable of providing social harmony and providing cultural contributions. That is why, in the eyes of the advocates of this view, specific ethnic components do not have to disappear, so that they enrich the national American culture.

3. Conditions of Ethnic Identification for the Individual

The individual ethnic experience does not necessarily correspond to the dichotomous minority experience of Anglo - conformity and cultural differentiation. The individual ethnic may or may not be directly connected to a given minority or subgroup. And although there are many minority groups and as many corresponding differentiating ethnic expressions and identities in the United States, both the individual attachment to ethnicity and the degree of involvement in ancestral culture remain actually matters of personal choice. Individual adoption of either Anglo - conformity or cultural differentiation depends on the interpretation of the perceived pressure to assimilate and on the impact of the dominant, supremacist attitude.

As a matter of fact, there are about three major conditions involving individual attitudes vis-à-vis ethnicity that can be observed in the American context. The first pertains to the presence and obviousness of ethnic symbols and ties in the host society. In this condition, the individual is constantly provided with shared awareness of the distinctive aspects of cultural origin. Hispanics offer the most obvious case in this respect.

The second condition of individual ethnic experience relates rather to the ambiguity of ethnic culture and the uncertainty about ethnic symbols. This is often the case of religious converts who experience confusion due to the disconnection from primary, original ethnic symbols and the assumption of new symbols indicative of the adopted cultural identity. This situation of cultural transition is well illustrated in

1 - Abramson 105 - 52; Herberg 29.

On the other hand, belonging to a given culture implies being recognized by that culture wherein certain essential rules, norms, and values are expected to be observed by all (social actors). In situations of migration in which foreigners join a new society and have to adjust themselves to its cultural rules, often newcomers would be granted some time for adaptation, but afterwards they would be expected to conform to the specific cultural norms and values of the host society. Yet, any resolution to conform is a rather painful attitude in contexts of social interaction with asymmetrical relationships based on stigmatized or stereotypical representations of the cultural aspects of the newcomers, as is often the case of immigrants from the southern hemisphere living in Western societies.⁽¹⁾

In similar situations, as in American society, individuals tend to determine their identity objectives according to a dichotomy: either they have recourse to cultural differentiation, in order to demarcate themselves from the dominant culture or, on the contrary, they manifest attitudes of conformity abiding by mainstream cultural rules and meeting the expectations of the dominant group.

2. Anglo-Conformity versus Ethnic Differentiation

As its name indicates, Anglo - conformity (or Americanization) implies individuals with ethnic backgrounds are expected to conform to the norms and values of the *Anglo* majority in American society. Anglo - conformity is actually an ideal highly appreciated by white people who, despite acknowledging the great diversity of the American population, expect ethnics to imitate Anglo - American culture as an expression of gratefulness and loyalty to the United States. More than imitation, they emphasize the necessity of assimilation to the dominant political, cultural and linguistic establishment. This view prevails in the United States as the English language is almost wholly used; the English manners, though modified now, predominate; and the spirit of the English legal and religious cultures animates American society as a whole. Consequently, the loss of former ethnic distinctiveness and fundamental structures of ancestral identities are taken for granted by the proponents of Anglo - conformity, as the best means to achieve social integration and assimilation; that is why Anglo - conformity is now often referred to as Americanization.

1 - Vasquez 146.

narrative; precisely, how this genre reveals the revival of ethnic feelings that seem to have been dormant for long, and how the ethnic identification works its way through the autobiographical discourse in this example. The main hypothesis of the paper attempts to explain that the resurgence of primordial ethnic identity is unavoidable when discrimination prevails, which may urge the cultural exile to make an identity choice in favor of the dominant culture; this mere choice reveals primordial ethnicity insofar as it represents a deliberate ethnic camouflage in order to conform to the expectations of the dominant in terms of assimilation.

To this end, the paper first considers some theoretical aspects about primordial ethnicity, ethnic differentiation, and the conditions of ethnic identification for the individual; then it devotes itself to the commentary proper that comprises the theme, background, and references to the passage along with the explanation and interpretation of its content, with regard to the main hypothesis, to which the findings lend support.

1. Theoretical Considerations: Individual Ethnic Identification

It is a general, widespread consensus among social scientists that identity—be it personal, social, or cultural—is multidimensional.⁽¹⁾ Accordingly, cultural identity comprises national, religious, linguistic, and regional dimensions, along with ethnic ones, which are generally the most tenaciously indelible of all cultural identity dimensions. In addition, cultural identity could be reinforced with dimensions borrowed from cultures of adoption; naturalizations and religious conversions are the most common illustrations in point. Actually social scientists consider that individuals (or social actors) have two kinds of cultural identity dimensions at their disposal: existential dimensions that are deeply - rooted in the self or primordial dimensions, if we refer to Harold Isaacs;⁽²⁾ and optional dimensions that are made up of the different identities that individuals can adopt from other cultures during their life time.⁽³⁾

1 - Barth 205 - 36; Gordon 27; Isaacs 35; Lipinsky, Taboada - Leonetti, & Vasques 13 - 26.

2 - Isaacs 30.

3 - Steinberg 250 - 52; Patterson 308.

that pushed Hassan to appropriate the dominant identity at the expense of ancestral culture? And what explains his late need for an autobiographical meditation evoking roots and reviving old memories, despite Hassan's confession that his voluntary cultural exile has been a choice he still claims and assumes? This paper hypothesizes that contrary to all appearances, Ihab Hassan has not managed to abandon or get rid of his primordial ethnic feelings, despite his undeniable efforts to conform to the dominant, mainstream culture.

Key Words

Americanity – Americanization – Anglo - conformity – Arab Americans – assimilation – autobiographical account – Cultural Studies – ethnic identity – exilic narrative – Ihab Hassan – minorities – *Out of Egypt* – United States

Introduction

The intricate play between the private and public in autobiographical accounts attests to the probable need of authors for self-portrayal and confession with a view to bringing potential readers to witness what these authors intend to share with them and, perhaps, catch their sympathy and support. In *Out of Egypt*, Ihab Hassan does not break with this tradition in the sense that he offers his readers a narrative dealing with his personal story. In the passage selected for analysis in this paper, Hassan recounts the individual, private life, feelings, and experiences of a cultural exile who deliberately left his native country to establish himself in another one that is entirely different by all standards.⁽¹⁾ Hassan's cultural estrangement of exilic experience reflects a troubled, somehow original, if not skewed, version of ethnic identification offering a perspective on ethnicity that remains very much unknown. For despite a life of successful Americanization, the author is unable to conceal his identity bewilderment through the many questions he addresses himself about the necessity of recalling old memories.

Methodologically, the passage is explored through the lens of the civilizationist viewpoint in that the study combines the commentary techniques pertaining to content analysis,⁽²⁾ together with the sociological approach to identity attitudes involving cultural exiles, in particular, and to people dealing with two cultures, in general. The paper mainly examines the role of the autobiographical account as an exilic

1 - 105 - 107.

2 - Monica Charlot, Suzy Halimi, and Daniel Royot 3 - 9.