

Mustafa Murrar: The Man, his Concepts and his Works¹

Jamal Assadi

Abstract

This paper presents Mustafa Murrar's the real man, provides information about his works, explores his ideas and concepts and introduces three of his short stories: "Al-Qatāryz", "Hello, Nations!" and "The Day of the Calf". These three stories, which will appear in my *Mustafa Murrar: "The Internal Pages" and other Stories* (2010) are not necessarily the most celebrated stories by Mr. Murrar. My aim rather is to introduce Murrar to scholars and readers interested in Arabic literature in English, a language they can cope with more easily. While casual readers will taste the flavor of a different culture, scholars interested in Arabic literature will be provided with new arenas for academic evaluations and critique.

The Man

Mustafa Murrar was born to parents who farmed the land of noble families in Jaljulia, Tul-Karem district, in 1929. As was the custom, during his childhood he cultivated the land and worked in the camps of the English army on holidays and weekends. When he finished the secondary school, he joined the Teacher Seminar, Jaffa, Tel Aviv, and graduated in 1952 to work first as a teacher and afterwards as a principal. Later, during his work he enrolled at Bar Ilan University where he received the B.A. degree in Arabic and Political Sciences. Despite his commitment to teaching, he retired in 1982 to devote his whole time to writing.

His Works

In addition to his work in the field of teaching, he worked as an editor of several children's magazines like *Sinbad*, *Majalati* and *Zahrat-sh-Shabab*. He was also an

¹ . A version of this article will appear in my *Mustafa Murrar: "The Internal Pages" and Other Stories* (2010). I would like to thank Martha Moody, writer of *Office of Desire* and *Best Friends*, for her notes.

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active member in the editorial staff of *Al-Hadaf*, and *Al-Anwar*, all of which were affiliated with Dar-en-Nashr el-Arabei. Moreover, he shared his experience with editorial staffs of other famous magazines like *Sada-t-Tarbiah*, the magazine of Arab teachers in Israel. He also wrote and presented a children's program for the Arabic section of the Israeli Radio for four years.

Murrar wrote hundreds of short stories, essays, social and educational stories and children's stories which were published in Israel and abroad. His writings were well received by both casual readers who savored the special taste of his works and academic critics, such as Abdul Rahman Abbad and Tareq Abu Hajalah, who found in his stories a new sphere for academic evaluation and study.

Murrar received numerous awards for his writings many of which were translated into foreign languages. He has just finished writing his autobiography and is now busy writing children's stories which he hopes will appear soon.

Murrar is married, father of six sons and daughters, and grandfather of eight grandchildren.

His Concepts

In the following interview with Murrar, I hope to obtain information which will give the reader the chance to know Murrar's world, cultural background, ideas and traits so as to better understand the selection of short stories in this volume.

"When did you start writing?"

"During my teenage years. I fell in love with a beautiful girl and wrote poetry for myself. I also wrote a novel which was a love story depicting a violent, teenage period in my life".

"How do you write?"

"I don't think that writing is confined to a special way, time or period. Ideas simply come to me. Whenever I have an idea, I write it down on a piece of paper or in a pocket book. Later, the idea is developed, given the right form and placed into the appropriate literary content. In general, writing requires a reasonable amount of

free time. Even then, it is not tied to a certain hour. There are no sacred times for writing. I live, I write".

"Who is your audience?"

"I write for all age groups. Sometimes I have an idea for a story which I think is suitable for the old but I soon discover that it leads me to the world of children. The opposite can also occur. Ideas transcend age. A writer then should know how to give it a form that suits the targeted age".

"When did critics and readers start getting interested in your works?"

"My first work appeared when I was twenty. It was well-received but I cannot tell whether it was related to the distinction of my writing or the scarcity of writing at the time. The readers were thirsty for books".

"Do you first write the title or the story?"

"I never thought of this question. I first write the work without any intended plan for a title. I don't remember ever having planned a title. It is often an expression or a word that appeared in the story. It could be a pretty face, a smile, a kiss or anything else".

"How do you choose your characters? Are they derived from your imagination? From the real world?"

"There is no clear-cut answer. The characters of every story, whether real or fictional, emerge and develop. Very often each character is a combination of various real life characters given fictional touches".

"What is your favorite story?"

"I have written hundreds of stories and find it unfair to name one. Let us do something else: I will name ten stories that I remember and we should take them as the stories that I like best. What shall I choose? Ok. I will mention stories which also bear the name of collections of stories: "The Tent with Holes", "The Road of Pains", "The Snake's Necklace", "My Son in the University", "Satan's Funeral", "Al-Qataryz", "Iben Ayyosh" and "Biar Adass"."

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"What are the topics you discuss?"

"The list is long: the human psyche; the every day life such as traditions, social relations and love; war; poverty; injustice; revolution; hope; happiness; misery and freedom".

"Do you read other genres? Can you name a novel, a story or a poem which had an impact on you?"

"As for the story, it is *Coverer is the Night* by the Egyptian novelist Jathbiyyah Sidqi; the novel is Pearl Buck's *Good Earth* and as for poetry, I am fond of Ahmad Shawqi's poem, "Jabal at-Tubath".

"What do you prefer: short stories or the novel?"

"When it comes to reading, I don't have any special preference. Clearly I write short stories, though more recently I have manuscripts for novels directed to children".

"Have your stories been reviewed by critics? How did you respond?"

"Critical reviews of my works were written by scholars in the Arab world rather than by local academics. Abdul Rahman Abbad for example wrote a whole book on my stories in 1993 and Tareq Abu Hajalah wrote his book, *An Introduction to Mustafa Murrar's Literature* in 2006".

"Is there an element of humor in your stories?"

"A lot, although it is very often bitter".

"Do you write about women's function in society?"

"Women have a strong presence in my books. I am sure men envy them".

"Do you write about your village?"

"My village is the stage where the events of my stories take place".

"Many believe that your political stories are sheer propaganda that lack artistic complexity!"

"I don't agree, of course. But critics have the right to give their opinions".

"What are the problems that face you today?"

"On the personal level, I have no complaints. On the literary level, however, I am concerned with the issue of publishing and distribution. I have dozens of completed manuscripts but it is difficult to locate major publishing houses or educational facilities which are willing to promote local literature. I am very upset by the increasing suffering of our people. I hope their pain can be alleviated soon".

"What are your hobbies?"

"I love talking with children, especially my grandchildren. I often make up scenes and enjoy seeing their reaction. I receive more from them than they from me".

"Do you think that people read more or less these days?"

"I have no statistics but I feel there is a real crisis. The number of readers is very low and now with the advent of technological advances which compete for potential readers' time, it is on the decrease".

"Now that you are retired, what do you do apart from writing and reading?"

"I retired from teaching to dedicate myself to writing. It is a chronic disease from which I hope not to recover".

"Thank you!"

"Thank you, too".

A Sample of his Short Fiction

In the remainder of this paper, three short stories by Mustafa Murrar will be introduced: "Al-Qatāryz", "Hello, Nations!" and "The Day of the Calf". These three stories, which will appear in my *Mustafa Murrar: "The Internal Pages" and other Stories* (2010) are not necessarily the most celebrated stories by Mr. Murrar. My aim rather is to introduce Murrar to scholars and readers interested in Arabic literature in English, a language they can cope with more easily. While casual readers will taste the flavor of a different culture, scholars interested in Arabic literature will be provided with new arenas for academic evaluations and critique.

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"Al-Qatāryz"²

It looked as if the whole village stood on two feet. It shook whenever the name of Ahmad al-Iraqi was mentioned.

Everyone was keen to serve him.

The old and the young competed to offer him food and drink, to wash his clothes or invite him to feasts.

Everybody in the village had offered Ahmad al-Iraqi a certain service. Why shouldn't they?

Wasn't he a soldier in the army fighting to save our homeland?

It was enough for him just to appear on the village's main street for the women to let out shrieks of pleasure and the children to rush to greet him and kiss his hand which held the rifle, the symbol and tool of liberation. The old, too, respected him a lot. They carried his rifle if he happened to sit, stand or point toward it.

If a few troops of the Rescuing Army came to the village, the news would spread faster than the blink of an eye and the whole village would come to greet them and exchange their news: "The Syrians came and the Iraqis went". The identity of the Arab volunteers stamped the form of the Rescuing Army. The majority of people who heard about this army had a strong belief that its members were either Syrians or Iraqis.

This might seem natural from the outside.

Nothing was shameful about it.

When we grew up, they told us,

"As for the troops, the young volunteers, the children of our nation, they are most dear to us. We respect them and place them over our heads and eyes. They were motivated by their enthusiasm to save the holy places and the people's sacred things. But the leadership, oh, young people! It was in essence and structure a

². The story is taken from Murrar's, *Al-Qatāryz* (Nazareth, published by the ministry of Education and Culture, Israel: 1994):137- 146.

malicious, and organized type of propaganda. Its intention was to make our people doubt their ability to liberate themselves. Whenever there was a Palestinian rage or revolution, illusive and imaginary characters were created to head the new events. It was most unlikely that these characters had ever walked upon the lands of Palestine. Worse, this leadership besmirched the national loyalty of thriving young leaders. Their misleading and low-level activities went beyond that. Sometimes the thriving young leaders were eliminated, both physically and spiritually".

Day after day, the scenes of enthusiasm supporting the Rescuing Army intensified. People of the village became more attached to Ahmad al-Iraqi, especially when he managed to carry out any operation behind the enemy lines.

All these scenes which captured the big and small hearts of the villagers could not be compared with the glamorous atmosphere I saw created in the city in support of the Rescuing Army.

I loved my village.

But my love was in the city.

And I loved the city

for the sake of my love.

Because the Rescuing Army was in the city I loved the city more,

for the sake of my love.

In the village there was a sound for enthusiasm

whereas in the city enthusiasm had a picture.

The picture was huge and it moved in all directions.

The city was full of enthusiastic activities. Everybody was recruited to serve the troops of the Rescuing Army: the barber shops, cinemas and pubs. People decorated their shops with glittering signs welcoming the troops:

"No charge for the Rescuing Army!"

"Free service for the liberating army!"

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The soldiers walked with vigorous strides in their green uniforms, spotted *kofiyyas* and heavy, bright boots.

What increased the city's magnificence and loveliness, as well as the elegance of the troops, was the presence of my love in the city!

I watched the movements of the troops, the way they talked, how they held their free cups of tea and their rifles and how they greeted their officers when they met them on the street.

I used to place a third soldier between every two of them, a soldier who was in his formative stage and soon he would become an officer. He would proudly pass along that street wearing his uniform, then along the alley studded with protruding stones. He would not stumble for he knew every hole, every stone and every rock. His girl would open the door whenever she heard the musical sounds of the troops' footsteps. If Mukhtar was among them, she would open both halves of the door and would not hesitate to invite the soldiers, the *mujahedeen*, to drink tea. Nobody would dare accuse her of deviating from the appropriate mode of behavior that typified our culture. Surely the people would respect the fighting spirit in her.

These were not bad days.

Rain fell heavily for a few consecutive days.

The land was soaked. Plowing or farming was not possible because the ground was saturated with water.

The plowmen talked nonsense in social meetings around the fireplace and drank big kettles of sugar-free coffee, walked in the sun along the public squares or passed the time playing different games.

And the *Qataryz*³ released the cattle in the pastures and spent their time playing football or watching women going to fill their jars with water.

I was the child of a plowman.

³ . It is a name given to people who do inferior and mean work. The name tells about a very low social rank.

I hadn't yet passed the phase of *Qatrazah*; I belonged to a group of previous camp workers who, after the English retreated and removed their camps, were no longer able to get back to agricultural work. Rather, we simply waited patiently for the *Qataryz* to be unemployed so we all could share passing the time their way.

Unemployment was always seasonal but mine was nonstop until we got a country which would employ us in its camps.

A country?

Camps?

How did I not think of that?

Our country was witnessing its birth now.

Its camps would soon be filled with soldiers.

I spent four years serving the occupation forces during which I wished to get a rifle. I even planned to get two rifles at once when I worked in the camps of the British army, but I failed.

So why didn't I become a soldier? As soldier in the army of my country being established right now? These were its soldiers. The Rescuing Army was also its soldiers. Ammunition was available!

And Ahmad was in our village.

There were tens of Ahmads in the city getting ready for more important battles. On the horizon there was a crucial war. With the power of the Ahmads' shoulders, our country would be formed.

One of the *Qataryz*, Kayed, a friend of mine, and a fellow member of the unemployment club, said, "Nowadays there is unemployment, Mukhtar. Why don't we go to Deir al-Ghosun? It's not far from here".

I said, "Shall we go together?"

"No. You go today and if you don't come back, I will follow you tomorrow. I won't run away like the *Qataryz* did during the Second World War. They saw the military as an escape from the oppression and enslavement of land owners. I will

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leave this place and go away with my head lifted and in the daylight. No one will accuse me of running off in full hope that the master will bless my steps".

The shepherds, *Qataryz* and the rash youngsters were the fuel of the war. Or so believed the villagers after the majority of them had abandoned their jobs of plowing the fields and tending to cattle and voluntarily joined the occupation army in search of the scent of beef, American cigarettes and the green military uniform.

But our people were in good hands. See! The *Qataryz*, at least, in our village were in the forefront of volunteers for *jihad*; they were led by nothing but the scent of Paradise and inspired by a sense of sacrifice.

When Kayed expressed his desire to go to Deir al-Ghosun, he told me about the books he had read recently especially those which centered on *jihad* and patriotism. He also told me that he and his *Qataryz* friends had agreed to join the Rescuing Army, the revolution army. Then he said with a tone hopeful of the future, "We have never had the chance since we lived in this holy spot to serve in an army that really belonged to us. My grandfather served the Ottomans, my father helped the English and you and I perhaps are fated to be the generation of saviors".

That night I slept with my eyes open counting the pieces of wood which held up the tin roof of our house. Whenever I reached the last piece, I forgot the number, and so I had to repeat the process until the heart of the night. Then it was the time for me to design the plans for training and leadership. Suddenly, the rows of wood pieces in our roof became well-equipped troops reviewed by an elegant officer whose hair dangled to his shoulders. He gave his orders softly, dreamily. His face was familiar to me.

The officer must have been from our village or from the city; otherwise why did I like him?

I wanted to hug him. I tried to touch him, to know him.

What was the matter with the men of the young country, our country?

What happened to its courageous army? Did they submit their leadership to a woman?

Step by step, the face of that leader started to reveal itself to me. It was the face of my beloved girl from the city.

I remained awake for the remainder of that night.

I was young.

I was rash, inexperienced, or, better said, without any experience. Yet, I saw myself rush to the military to be a hero in the eyes of my beloved. A young man whom I knew got out of the lines. He was from the *Qataryz* but he wasn't Kayed. I asked him,

"Did the *Qataryz* precede us, Kayed, my brother!? So we were not the only ones to think of sacrificing our souls for the homeland! All of them thought of it and made up their minds to do it while we were still thinking and dreaming.

The *Qatrutz* said,

"Mukhtar! What happened to you? What makes you hesitate? I, too, have fallen in love and my love pushes me to volunteer, to go for *jihad*. You are in love and your love urges you to come with us. What stops you? You will fight to protect your beloved, your people, land and country. Don't you love your country? You will fight for the sake of two loves combined in one".

The hair on my face had no color to it yet.

And my moustache? In spite of my continuous care, it had no shape.

The bus stopped at the entrance of Deir al-Ghosun.

My movements and distracted gazes pointing at the houses and the people indicated that I was a stranger who was about to ask about something or many things.

I encountered a farmer leading a big she-donkey exhausted by the load of two big olive logs despite its huge size.

Although the load was heavy, the donkey was tired and the farmer was placing his hands over the two logs to prevent them from falling. He stopped his donkey to ask me, "Whose house do you want, boy?"

I restrained my anger and answered, "The recruiting center".

The tired man started to measure me with his gaze. He did not dare to laugh or perhaps there was nothing to make him laugh. Instead, he smiled and said in a tone forced to sound encouraging,

"There, my child! Behind those trees you will find a big house with a wide garden full of soldiers". He poked his donkey while I walked towards the trees above the hill. In spite of his suffering and the donkey's, the farmer was conquered by a strong sense of curiosity so he ordered the donkey to stop again. He turned to me and asked, "Tell me, my boy, do you have relatives in the camp?"

Overwhelmed by courage and something of philosophy, I said,

"Everyone there is my relative!"

The man did not add anything. He pushed his donkey and said, "Haa!"

The she-donkey walked on and so did the farmer.

I walked, too.

The rising smoke was the first sign of living people existing behind the hill. Another sign occurred: the wheezing of the bullets, some of which passed over my head and others, as the echoes indicated, went in all directions. After a few steps, I was in the yard of the big house. The smoke I saw rising behind the hill was in fact emerging from a fire burning under huge cooking cauldrons fixed in their places. A few old people held scoops and stirred the contents of the cauldrons. To their side lay three or four young men. Rising on his feet and removing the dust off his trousers, one of them spoke to me while the rest continued their talk,

"Welcome, young men!"

The trait of manliness given to me provided with me with satisfaction and pleasure enough to forgive the offence of the farmer, who called me a "child".

"Thank you".

"Are you looking for somebody... something?"

"I have just found what I am looking for".

"What is it?"

"You".

"We are at your service. Do you need anything specific?"

"Yes".

"What is it?"

"I want to volunteer".

"Volunteer?"

He said it with a tone of someone who did not believe what he had heard.

"Yes, volunteer. Is it forbidden?"

"I did not mean that. What can you do?"

In front of my eyes stood the image of my beloved which fostered my determination. I said,

"Myself, sir. I am willing to sacrifice my soul for my homeland".

It seemed my voice was so high that it aroused the attention of the group lying on the ground. They all rose and came to us.

"What does the boy say?" somebody asked in apparent underestimation. I could not control my anger. After all these obstacles, I wanted nothing more than to prove to myself that I was a determined man. I said,

"The boy says that he is a man and that the revolution needs men, not mere talk and lying people".

The youngest of the group, who seemed to be the officer, walked towards me and placed his hand on my shoulder and shook me as a sign of encouragement and then said,

"Follow me!"

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"Hello, Nations!"⁴

Smoke is coming from the base of the pole.

All the trains, albeit few, are diesel fuelled.

In the past days they were fuelled by coal.

Every summer during the harvest season a passing driver, a bastard, used to rake a shovelful of embers from the train's furnace and throw it on both sides of the rail line, setting the fields of corn and parsley on fire. The peasants would be alerted. They would call each other and rush into the fields carrying their sticks, rakes and brooms, risking their lives to fight the fire.

But it was stronger than them and their primitive equipment.

That season most animals and a great many people would starve.

The smoke rose higher than the telephone pole, which was empty of wires.

More than twenty years had passed since we applied to the telephone network for a telephone installed in our house.

During this period houses were built on the lands of our village for the newcomers especially the Persians and the Romans.

The houses became neighborhoods.

Towns were planted.

Once the houses were built, the neighborhoods and the villages were connected to nets of telephones, electricity and running water. Our village was still creeping.

Tribal quarrels were held.

Wars were launched.

Peace treaties were signed.

Our village was still creeping on the track of development. It swayed but did not fall.

⁴ . Taken from Mustafa Murrar, *Iben Ayyosh* (Maktabat ash-Shaab, Qufr Qassem: 1997): 63-72.

We were still waiting for the telephone.

One of the famous experts in the history of wire and wireless communication said,

"Do you still keep a copy of the form you submitted to the authorities twenty years ago?"

"Yes".

"Fold the form, wrap it with nylon, put it into a glass box then bury it for archeological-site excavators, in a place where it will be easy to dig it up in two thousand years".

"Then?"

"And then fill in another form".

Another twenty years passed.

We were told the company lacked trained manpower and that if we wanted to help ourselves, all we had to do was to go to the company's stores and receive the required number of poles. We had to plant them and wait for our turn in the waiting list.

We carried the poles.

We planted them.

Our children danced around them.

By Shadyah's permission, they sang to the poles,⁵

Hello, Hello!

We are here!

We have succeeded

In telephoning.

The children confirmed they talked to the poles; they did talk to them. They also received answers. Then they ran to us with their faces beaming as if they wanted to give good news,

⁵ . Shadyah is a famous Egyptian artist.

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"The telephone is coming! The telephone will reach our village. We heard that!
Hello! Hello!"

We asked, "Where did you hear that news, children?"

"There, near the poles. They talk; the poles can talk!"

The children grew up.

They became fathers and mothers.

We were still waiting.

A bastard-conductor had assassinated our children's pleasure. He was the second
bastard. His weapons were the embers.

These were the same embers shoveled by the first bastard from the train's
furnace into the peasants' fields.

You said this train is fuelled by diesel? Let it be so. That did not change the
heart of the matter. The embers were embers whether they fell by themselves, were
allowed to fall or were thrown off the train.

Only the train could carry these embers.

"But it was fuelled by diesel?"

"Even so. The diesel is turned into embers when it is meant to be. Similarly, the
telephone will reach our village, if the poles remained fixed".

The smoke covered a big space of land around the pole.

The fields were green.

The embers threatened the life in every green stick.

Even the animals, in this era of emitting, veiling and rising smoke were able to
understand some of the foreign languages.

It, however, maintained its fixed status on the scale of languages. *It* remained
dead and continued to be injected by strange syringes, with a mixture of dreams
and superiority.

In order for this hieroglyphic language to remain private and secluded and live between life and death, those who pretended to love it insisted that it was a unique language spoken by the gods and the angels. If these false lovers had known that a day would come when donkeys would talk in every language which was considered unique and worth being kept hidden, they perhaps would have erected a gold statue for the donkey and worshiped the image of the god-donkey who had bray and wind.

Our she-donkey said, and she was the sincerest of donkeys, "He is the son of the she-Saxon. He is the one who shoveled the embers from the train's furnace and threw them into the pole and prevented communication".

"But, our wise donkey, the train is diesel-fuelled".

"I know that! Do you think I am a donkey!?"

"Where on earth did the conductor, the second bastard, get the embers?"

"He must have brought the embers with him from Czechoslovakia and Bulgaria to the nation of the blind and the leftists. As for the second bastard, the moment he went down the stairs of the plane, he went ahead a few steps, stood on a spot of high ground leaning on his spear and declared, 'These poles were planted in my land.'

"Listen, donkeys of the earth! He says this land is his! 'Damn you, son of a worm! You haven't yet set up your tent but you are already giving orders and making plans! Who did your father buy it from? Did you bring your official documents with you from Bulgaria and Czechoslovakia? Who knows? Perhaps uncle-whose-name-I-can't-mention has sent people to excavate your grandfather's grave with its inscription in the hidden language.'

"The Czechoslovakian-Bulgarian, who carries under his arm a yellow book chewed by dogs, answers, 'It is the same whether it is my land or somebody else's. That does not change a bit of reality. You should know that I control the land; let whoever thinks he is stronger than me come and drag me out of it!'"

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Our donkey is still tuning her ears towards the west. "What did he say, oh, our blessed donkey?"

He said, "These Arabs, who live in houses of clay, will use the telephone to transfer our security secrets outside the borders of the settlement to the enemies of our homeland". He fixed the black, perforated cap over his head and stated, "They won't have any telephones! By the gods of the Nile, Dijlah, Furat and all, if our government was made to resign and, in consequence, all governments of the world followed suit, these Bedouins will never get telephones".

"Damn you, son of the Saxon woman! And damn whoever brought you here! Be assured, insane guy, that there is a line and it is hot. We speak through it already. We speak from the top of this pole and with the old man himself".

And the old man speaks, too.

Hello! Hello!

Hello, nations of the world!

"May *Allah* have mercy on Tawfeeq, son of ad-Daqr!"⁶

And now,

"Hello, nations of the world!

Our mouths are shut.

Our hands are chained.

But no one listens?

Hello!

Hello, nations of the world!

Don't you want to answer?

Never mind!

Rain was sent to us in abundance!

The earth throws flames and stones.

The fire was extinguished.

⁶ . He is a famous Egyptian actor who played evil roles.

Their fire.

Hello, nations of the world!

The smoke drifted off.

The pole stands lofty and proud,

Carrying the lines,

All the lines.

Today we have a telephone.

"The Day of the Calf"⁷

"I swear by *Allah*, you will not be happy with it!"

Theban ran after the calf in a final attempt to return it to the barn.

And Faheemah took a pot and went to milk Shannarah.

As for the boys and girls, rascals all, they were invaded by bouts of laughter which made them sway. Then one devil in the group gathered them around him in the yard of the house and declared, "The old man swore he would divorce her. Now clap your hands and sing after me!"

They children accepted the initiative with great enthusiasm. The devil started to sing while the children sang and clapped their hands after him,

"Blessed is your bath, oh bridegroom!

"It is indeed a godly moment!"

And every day,

From time to time Theban had to be involved in funny situations which made him the center of the neighborhood's talk. Then the whole small village talked about him and his family with a fondness paralleled only by the villagers' love of the flute-playing poet who used to visit the Mukhtar's *divan* every Thursday

⁷. The story is taken from Murrar's, *Lodd opposite Ramleh* (Maktabat ash-Shaab, Qufri Qassem: 1997): 36-40.

afternoon to celebrate the night which no man or woman ever missed. Left on their own, the children profaned the sanctity of the alleys, the ruins, the gardens and the houses. They ran, jumped on each other, played "Hide and Seek" and trained to fire on the English with voices and sticks they pointed at each other. With a minimal exercise of violence, the children attacked each other with the considerable amount of ripe fruit they brought from the orchards, not far from their houses.

Farraj, the dumb servant, who had been serving Theban since he was ten, said,

"My uncle, Theban, may *Allah* protect him, made me laugh today. But when he saw me leaving the mule and the plough and rolling on the plowed land giggling hysterically, he diverted the whip from the back of the mule to my back. At that moment I noticed the pot of food walking on four legs. A hyena had sneaked into the place where we left our food together with the mules'. First it swallowed the loaf of bread that dammed the opening of the pot. Once the beast reached the 'altar' and the 'incense' of cooked gumbo filled the air, it was engulfed with awe. So it inserted its head into the 'niche' and started to 'pump' the food cooked by my aunt, Faheemah, the wife of my uncle, Theban.

"My uncle, Theban, wrapped the whip around the stick and dashed towards the beast. He struck it on its 'pot,' believing he had killed it. He did not know that the hyena was saved by the strike instead. The pot in which the head of the animal was stuck was broken.

"When the hyena realized what happened he ran away carrying part of the pot around its neck like a necklace of pottery perfumed with the odor of gumbo cooked by my aunt, Faheemah, the wife of my uncle, Theban.

"No one tried to follow the beast. It would have been vain to do so. Then, my uncle Theban stood shaking his head and let out his famous saying, 'Where will you go, hyena? You are marked, aren't you?'

"As of then, people of the village started to say, 'marked like Theban's hyena!' The saying became a bit of folk wisdom.

"I should add that women who brought water used to go out to the well immediately after the *Muezzin* declared the dawn prayer. After the prayer, Theban, who was naked, stopped the women and shouted,

'Where has she gone, the bitch? Where has Faheemah gone?'

"The women veiled their faces and shouted at him,

'Shame on you, Theban! It appears the man has been driven mad! May *Allah* take him!'

"It seems Theban was not aware of his own condition. He looked at... part of himself and was struck, as a result. He shouted vehemently and flashed back.

"The real story beyond his behavior is different. He, may *Allah* be of his help, returned home from the field and asked his wife to boil water for him to bathe. He entered the bathroom and sat on a wood log. He filled the cup that was in the basin with water and poured it on himself.... His wife was not lucky. She had forgotten to cool the boiling water and the man was burned. He rose on his feet raging,

'Do you mean to burn me, Faheemah? Do you want to burn me, damned bitch? Where has she gone?'

"When Faheemah heard his roars and threats, she realized her mistake. So she ran away going this way and that while he followed her naked. Eventually she managed to escape from him in one of the alleys. He kept going until he ran into the women at the well. Then he had to go back home dishonored.

"One day a calf of ash-Shwaili's jumped over the walls of the barn and Theban failed to capture it. He alerted every member of his family. After they had all gathered together and he had taken lead of the alerted 'force' he issued an order that all members should hold hands and advance towards the calf until the circle around the animal got small. Then it would be easy to capture him and take him back to the barn. Before they walked a step, Theban swore,

'I will divorce your mother, Faheemah, if the calf manages to sneak under the hands of any of you. Worse, I will scr... him!'

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"Then he turned back to look for a piece of rope he had left next to the woodpile. Faheemah seized the opportunity and shouted at her children who had joined their hands in obedience of their father's command

'Oh! Children of nasty parents! Your father is nuts. I think it is like him that he will fulfill his threat!! I beg you save us disgrace and let the calf pass under my own hands! Do you understand?'

"They narrowed the circle around the calf and started to walk forward until they failed to catch him and let him pass under the weak link. But Theban was too smart to miss the trick. He shook his head and said sharply,

'You did it Faheemah, didn't you? I know why you let the calf sneak under your hands. But, by *Allah*, I won't have this pleasure, whore!'"