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The *Barzakh*: Mohammed Azeddine Tazi's Fez

by

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS
(AFRICAN LANGUAGES AND LITERATURE)

at the
UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON

1997

My deepest gratitude to Simon O'Meara, for sharing with me his experiences of "being" in Fez, which greatly assisted in both my undertaking and completion of this thesis.

Many thanks also to Mostafa Ouajjani, who proofread the first drafts of the translations of "The Pigeon Coop" and "The Directions of the Letter," and to Mary and Dick Wehner for providing a sheltered space.

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Introduction

"Fez is dead," proclaimed ʿAbd al-Laṭīf ʿAlamī at a recent conference on that city. He claimed that, as the central point of dissemination of Islam and of Arabic (the language in which the Qurʾān was revealed), Fez has signified in the Moroccan imagination the historic, religious and mythical source of the Word and of writing. With the coming of the twentieth century and many major changes in the city, however, Fez has lost this significance, and therefore can and does no longer act as inspiration for the contemporary writer or artist. The artist has had to turn to other cities, such as Marrakech, Tangiers, Rabat or --more often-- Paris, for the city-muse that once was Fez. ʿAlamī concluded: "Fez's meaning has been lost. [...] Fez is the text which one can no longer understand, a text waiting to be torn up."

The present thesis will consider the work of another Moroccan, who similarly explores the role of Fez as muse. We can assume from the outset that Fez *is* a muse of some sort in Mohammed Azzedine Tazi's collection of short stories, *Manzil al-Yamām*.[1] These stories, filled with memories, dreams and contemplations of Fez,

[1]A working translation of *Manzil al-Yamām* is included at the end of this thesis. Future references to the work will be made to this translation (*The Pigeon Coop*); page references list the original Arabic text first, then the translation.

Mohammed Azzedine Tazi: (1948-) was born and raised in Fez. His first short story and several literary articles were published in 1966, while he was still in secondary school He received his baccalaureate degree in 1967, and began university studies of literature in Fez. Tazi has taught in primary and secondary schools, and currently teaches at a teachers' training school in Tetouan. A bibliography of works by this author is included with this thesis.

could not have been written were the city itself not acting in some way as inspiration. The question raised by Tazi, then, is not "Can Fez inspire?" but more specific questions on the nature of Fez as muse which will be explored in this thesis, namely: 1.) In what form does this muse present itself in these stories? How does it inspire? What qualities does it possess that urge on the imagination and creative powers of the writer? 2.) And even in this work that it has inspired, is the city nonetheless presented as a meaningless text waiting to be torn up? Is it a muse with only a waning power to inspire? A corpse, emitting the "smell of death," able only to inspire a nostalgic eulogy? In this thesis, I hope to trace the process by which Tazi undertakes to answer the above questions and to come to an understanding of his possible answers to them. This study will treat the content, structure, and general themes of the six stories in *The Pigeon Coop*, paying particular attention to the role of the imagination within them.

In the course of the present thesis, it will become clear that the stories of *The Pigeon Coop* comprise a short story sequence, rather than wholly independent pieces brought together only for book-length publication. With the underlying unity of the collection established, the individual stories become much more meaningful and the progression of images throughout can be traced. Robert Luscher defines the short story sequence as follows:

> [A] volume of stories, collected and organized by their author, in which the reader successively realizes underlying patterns of coherence by continual modifications of their perception of pattern and theme.

> Within the context of the sequence, each story is thus not a completely closed formal experience. Each successive apocalypse in some fashion prepares us for the next, shedding light on the compact worlds to follow. The volume as a whole thus becomes an open book, inviting the reader to construct a network of associations that binds the stories together and lends them cumulative thematic impact. (Luscher, 148-49)

Luscher's definition is particularly appropriate when looking at *The Pigeon Coop*, in which each story is self-contained (a compact world), yet is much more fully understood in light of those that precede and follow. It is also fitting as it in no way implies a consistent narrative voice. While all of the stories in *The Pigeon Coop* contain similarities-- in taking the city of Fez as setting or theme, for example-- that all six stories comprise a short story sequence is not at first glaringly apparent, particularly given the incongruent and perhaps unsatisfying title story. One can easily imagine that the last five stories share one narrator-- an unnamed man from Fez, perhaps a writer, who is reflecting on his past and his experience of the city. While "The Pigeon Coop" is also written from the first person perspective, the narrator here is "Tuhami," a farmer from outside of Fez who, while observant and sensitive to his surroundings, is not extraordinarily reflective on his own past or his present motivations and decisions. What, then, is the nature of this distinction between narrative voices in the collection? And why, in a presumably unified collection of stories, is there this marked asymmetry of narrative voice?

Although the narrative in "The Pigeon Coop" never leaves Tuhami's consciousness,

the reader is aware of another voice lurking behind his-- the author's. Tuhami relates what he perceives, but the reader sees more than he: we (particularly if we are readers familiar with Fez) understand the laughter in the Fassis eyes as they watch the country bumpkin carrying his unwrapped purchase under his arm like a farm implement. We suspect the trickery of Lalla Btul's daughters long before he does. And it is almost inconceivable to imagine this timid man-- observant yet not extraordinarily thoughtful-- actually writing this highly stylized piece of fiction. Neither is Tuhami a completely convincing character. In his voice we read: "Oh, salty girls, don't dance around me like that, because my sweat has become salt, and the salt has become salt, and my eyes are salt! Eat the salt up and let me return to heaving in the earth's mud and mire, kneaded with wind and water." (9, 56) Does this ring true in our (perhaps prejudiced) ears as the voice of a simple farmer? And while Tuhami seems to notice all the details around him-- the tar on the water jug, the edge of a foot-- he does not see that the women on display are the same girls who had just danced, unveiled. Isn't he too observant of the world around him to be duped by such a simple ruse?

The narrator of the next five stories, on the other hand, is less a character whose actions and motives are laid out for the reader to scrutinize, as he is a narrator asking us to share his perspective and participate in his questionings. This narrator, whose style remains relatively consistent throughout-- and at times brings to mind passages in "The Pigeon Coop"-- is indistinct from the author, completely creating and

controlling what we see, as an author does. There is no other identifiable voice peeking out from behind his; and we find an occasional hint that the narrator is in the process of writing, and is the writer of the book we are reading: "And here I am thinking of him today, as I write stupid words that think with a cat's claws and see with crocodile eyes." (21, 68)

The Story: *"The Pigeon Coop"*

Why, then, is "The Pigeon Coop" written in a different voice? What is the role of this story? It is the piece most resembling a traditional story. Despite its deictic opening and innovative temporal shifts, it has a clear beginning, middle and end: Tuhami has come to Fez to bring the accounts of the land he farms to its owner, a recently widowed woman named Lalla Btul; and his rather roundabout story recounts his experience in Fez and the circumstances leading up to his marriage to this woman. He comes, waits, walks, watches, and marries. In contrast, none of the subsequent stories are so easily summarized by what "happens" in them and are somewhat less self-contained than the first.

"The Pigeon Coop," I will suggest, is *the* "story," the writing of which establishes the working images of the rest of the collection. It sets the author off on a quest to discover what lies behind its writing, asking himself, "How did I come to write this story?" and attempting to answer the question inherent in the abrupt ending-- "Even

so, I went back to the pigeon coop."-- why does one return to the place of one's own entrapment? That this is a "story" written by the subsequent narrator is supported by objects that appear on the set of "The Pigeon Coop," and return in the later stories as memories or dreams-- the orange tree, the stairs, the water pot, the shoes, the fish, etc. While the content of the story is never directly referred to again, its images subtly reappear throughout the stories that follow.

Thus "The Pigeon Coop" introduces unrefined and unexamined images that the subsequent narrator may then refer back to and expand upon. In this raw state, these images are by no means a metaphorical reduction of larger concepts. They are poetic images, which Gaston Bachelard (to whose work I shall refer in greater depth later in this paper) explains, are "essentially *variational*, and not, as in the case of the concept, *constitutive*." (xix) The poetic image is "the most fleeting product of [the creative] consciousness" (xix) and is "incapable of repose." (36) The images introduced in "The Pigeon Coop" are the stuff of dreams and memories, raw material providing a starting point from which questions are raised and the narrator is spurred on in his "quest." Because of this story's singular role, it will prove worthwhile to discuss in some detail a few of its relevant images-- the "outsider" and the "insider," entrapment or suffocation, women, the city-- as well as to provide some historical and social background to these images.

The tension between outside and inside is most strikingly introduced here as one

between the "outsider"-- Tuhami-- and "insiders"-- the Fassis. This social tension is a useful introduction to other, later oppositions between inside and outside, for "you feel the significance of [the] myth of outside and inside in alienation, which is founded on these two terms. Beyond what is expressed in their formal opposition lie alienation and hostility between the two." (Jean Hyppolite, quoted in Bachelard, 212) With only a few telling phrases, the very real dynamics between "us" and "them" at work in Fez are evoked for the reader: "the passersby watched and smiled at me with a tinge of mockery or laughter;" "the sarcasm and scorn that surrounded me;" and "The shopkeeper didn't wrap the shoes in a bag or sheet of newspaper when I bought them." (8-9, 54-55) This last moment in itself is cause for the stares Tuhami receives, for, as every Fassi knows, if not offered a bag or wrapping, one must insist-- one never carries a purchase uncovered for all to see (and covet? and criticize?). Even the story of the girl and the fish-- isn't this an "inside" joke that Tuhami didn't get? The stories Fassis tell to explain to the farmers how they acquired the farm, not wanting to reveal their real wealth. Tuhami does not see the improbability of the story, but instead wonders which of the girls in the room found the fish, and naively asks himself, "Behind every farm a Fassi buys, is there a fish that asked a girl for its freedom? So they say." (10, 57) Tuhami is the country bumpkin, easily duped; and the Fassis, with derision in their eyes, see him as a simpleton.

The visitor to Fez, and particularly the emigrant to Fez-- as Tuhami must ultimately become-- is not new to the city; and Tuhami may easily exemplify the very real influx

of rural Moroccans to the city, filling in a gap left behind by another exodus *from* Fez. In the 1920's and 1930's, the city saw many of its large families leave for more promising opportunities in Casablanca and Rabat; and in the 1970's, another wave left the medina[2] for French villas in the Ville Nouvelle and ever-growing suburbs outside of the French-built city. Although some of these families still maintain empty-- and now often crumbling-- homes in the medina, this exodus encouraged large numbers of Moroccans from the countryside to repopulate-- and overpopulate-- the medina.[3] While established "Fassis" continue to make a clear distinction between their ranks and the "non-Fassis" in their midst (even if residents of the city for several generations), immigrants to Fez are by no means a new phenomenon.[4] An old saying goes: "No one was born of Qarawiyyin fountain." That is, everyone can trace his family to a more distant origin. Even the family name "al-Fassi" finds its origin in

[2]I use the term "medina" here in reference to the walled cities of Fez al-Bali and Fez Jdīd. While the Arabic word means "city" in general, it is also used in Morocco to refer specifically to the walled city or the "old" city, often in contrast to the French-built "Ville" or "Ville Nouvelle."

[3]An accurate population count of Fez is hard to come by, but there are approximately 300,000 people living in the medina and about one million in the greater region of Fez. (I owe some of the statistics in this paragraph to Simon O'Meara and much of the historical content to a lecture on the social history of Fez given by Mohammed Mezzine.)

[4]The earliest waves of immigration to Fez, in the ninth century, came from the Andalusian city of Cordoba and the Tunisian city of Qayrawan. The most significant increase in population, however, took place between the tenth and fifteenth centuries, with significant numbers arriving from the northern and eastern regions of Morocco; immigrants or slaves brought from Mauratania, Senegal, Algeria, Mali, and Niger; and refugees from the Spanish Inquisition, who came via Tetouan. The basic social makeup of Fez was established by the fifteenth or sixteenth century, at which time it closely resembled the population that exists in the twentieth.

families that moved *to* Fez, not those who are *from* Fez. Despite the uneasy claim that anyone is a "true" Fassi, however, a very clear distinction exists, based upon lineage, and is easily identified by name, specific mannerisms or *ādāb*, and accent.[5]

The Fassis of "The Pigeon Coop" are presented as ever-watching-- with judgmental or mocking eyes. Tuhami is watched on the street, watched by Lalla Btul and her daughters (as he repeatedly lowers his eyes, afraid of being caught watching *them*). Even alone, he feels the censorial eyes of the deceased husband/father, still wearing telling Fassi garb, surveying him from above.

Tuhami is not the first to have felt these eyes upon him. The Fassis are famous for their pride and disdain for outsiders. I will quote just a few observations that have been made over the years on this point: from Ibn Abi Zarʾ al-Fāsī's early fourteenth century book, *Rawḍ al-Qirṭās* "The inhabitants of Fez are always of a more subtle and acute intelligence than the other peoples of the Maghreb;" (quoted in Aubin, 215); from Eugene Aubin in 1903: "The Fassis claim, with justice, to represent the chief oasis of culture in the Empire, among savage Berbers of the mountain, and the boorish Arab or Arabised peoples of the plain. The man of Fez is a Fassi before he is a Moroccan, and it is seldom that he loses a chance of displaying his scorn for his less

[5]Geneologies and accounts of the Fassi families-- the Sqallis, the Bennanis, the Fassis, etc.-- have often been recorded by historians (see, for example, *Salawāt al-Anfās*) and continue to be carefully traced and distinguished (see, for example, the importance given to identifying family lineage in the recent Moroccan television documentary, "<u>Dh</u>ākirāt al-Mudun: Fās").

civilized compatriots;" (215); and from Titus Burkhardt in 1960: "The city dweller has a slight contempt for the untutored countryman, and while the latter may admire the former, at the same time he despises him as a weakling and mistrusts him as a merchant." (84)

Tuhami appears neither to despise nor mistrust the Fassis. Instead, he *is* the easily duped country bumpkin-- the outsider perhaps as represented by the Fassi? Whatever his feelings for the people around him, he is clearly not at home in the city. Although he enters it comfortably enough ("I looked at the people on the street, listened to the sounds, and inhaled the aroma of spices. Then I knocked on the door and went in." [7, 54]), as soon as he enters the house for the first time and is left to wait, he is reminded of his position here and is overcome with discomfort and a sweat that eventually covers him unbearably. He is "baffled" by all that surrounds him in this house turned in on itself, and his only clear moment of satisfaction occurs as he pictures himself wearing the newly-acquired shoes in the open fields back home, there receiving looks of admiration and jealousy rather than of laughter and scorn. In Lalla Btul's house, though, he feels melancholy-- "*ka'āba*" which can also indicate distress and discomfort. He sweats uncomfortably in the heat until the sweat covers him, "cloaks" his eyes. The salty sweat in which he is "drowning" is Fez, the house, and all that is in them. Even when he feels exhiliration and is tempted to look on, Tuhami is unable to laugh; the pleasure he derives from watching the women is checked by his discomfort and shame. When he finally returns to the house-- which

is also Fez-- he calls it "the pigeon coop"-- a cage inside a cage inside a cage, filled with the smell of death.

This sensation, too, is not one new to Moroccan thought. In 1675, the scholar Sidi Lahsen Al-Yūsī wrote a letter to the sultan, Mulay Isma'īl, under whose protection he had been when living in Fez.[6] In it he explained his motivations for leaving Fez and returning to his home in the Middle Atlas, a rural area not far from the city, probably not too unlike Tuhami's home. He explained that he was at heart a bedouin-- a *badawī*-- a word derived from the verb "*bdā*" to be apparent, clearly visible. The *badawī*, according to Al-Yūsī, can only survive in a place where he is surrounded by open space and can see the horizon stretching unobstructed before him. In Fez, he wrote, he was slowly dying in the narrow streets flanked by tall buildings which closed in upon him and obscured his line of vision.

A further similarity that might be drawn between Al-Yūsī and Tuhami is their assessment of women's roles in Fez. Al-Yūsī complained that in the city the roles of submission between men and women had been reversed. Where in the countryside women remained in the house, in Fez they could be seen openly on the streets; and in the city, it was the men who were subservient to the women. Likewise, Tuhami

[6]This letter was recently brought to light by Abdellatif Kilito, and is briefly discussed by Jacques Berques (58-9). In a conversation, Kilito expressed to me his personal motivations for his examination of the letter-- he, too, upon entering the Medina of Fez (which he does as seldom as possible) is overcome with an almost unbearable sensation of claustrophobia. (I regret that I have not yet been able to obtain the text of this letter, and so am only able to paraphrase from excerpts and the summary provided by Kilito.)

appears taken aback by the women in his story, particularly by the woman (or girl) in the green jellaba: "I didn't dare say that her calves were bare. How could I marry a woman who went out on the street like that?" (11, 58) and "The slit in the green jellaba that revealed the calf-- that was what I didn't like, for I would like to see my wife by myself, and for no one else to see her with me. I could have told her that, and then locked her in the house after we were married." (12, 59)

Fatima Mernissi has written generally on the spatial restrictions of women in Morocco, as well as providing specific evidence, from a 1969 survey of rural youth, on the assumptions about women in the city. The "survey revealed that when a rural youth visits a town he assumes that any woman walking down the street is sexually available." (Mernissi, 143) And from this same survey, quotes some young men from the country: "In town women walk with heads uncovered, wearing short dresses; you can always take a chance with them. [...] If you try to leave the village with a girl who is more than twelve years old, more than thirty people will follow you. They start throwing stones and shouting at you. It is not like in town...." (Mernissi, 100) A lengthy discussion of the conventions and rules regarding women's appearance in public spaces is not required for the present paper. It will instead prove more useful to focus on a subtler aspect of gender segregation in the city-- and one intrinsically connected to that of women's physical limitations-- the restriction of vision.

Mernissi highlighted the importance of sight in a discussion of Al-Ghazālī's[7] writings on women and sexuality. According to Al-Ghazālī, she wrote, "the eye is undoubtedly an erogenous zone in the Muslim structure of reality, just as able to give pleasure as the penis." (Mernissi, p. 141) And she later quoted from his *Ihyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn* ("The Revivification of the Religious Sciences"): "To look at somebody else's wife is a sinful act.... The look is fornication of the eye...." (142) This "sinfulness" is clearly the source of much of Tuhami's discomfort. In Lalla Btul's house, we follow a constant visual game of hide and seek-- looking away, taking a peek, catching someone looking at someone else, etc.-- and Tuhami tells us that he repeatedly looks down at the floor, out of respect, out of fear: "I lowered my gaze." (10, 57) "I remained silent, looking at the floor while they laughed and winked at each other." (11, 57) "I quickly lowered my gaze, lest he see me looking up at the high windows." (8, 55) "I wouldn't focus my sight, out of diffidence for the lady, and afraid of embarrassing the [other] woman." (12, 59) By participating in the "spectacle" the women put on for him, Tuhami feels that he is performing a shameful act, even as he allows his eyes to roam and gives in to the temptation of observing women: "I watched the women." (6, 52) " But I was consumed with watching. There I was, watching women." (12, 59)

Simon O'Meara has forcefully argued that this forbidden act of "watching" or seeing

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[7]Abū Ḥāmid Muḥammad al-Ghazālī (1058-1111), labelled the *mujaddid* ("renewer") of Islam, wrote extensively on both theology and Sufism.

women is one of the most powerful concepts underlying the physical development of the medina or "The Islamic City" as we know it.[8] I will take the liberty of quoting him at some length on this point, as it may also prove useful later in this thesis. Following a discussion of regulations governing the building and placement of walls in the city,[9] O'Meara writes:

> The ruling principle for these regulations is the avoidance of vision between neighbour and neighbour, passer-by and neighbour, even between the man who calls to prayer and neighbour. In the words of Ibn ar-Rami, even if two neighbours agree to maintain windows that overlook each other, their agreement is void, and the windows must be bricked-up because this type of vision is "illicit". So illicit is it that when an "empty plot is to be developed, its owner has to plan the building in order to prevent being overlooked from the existing openings of his neighbour." Similarly, "(i)f a window or door is created that would overlook an existing neighbour's courtyard, then it is ordered to be permanently shut [...]."
>
> From these rulings, and others like them, we can think of the medina as a place possessed of a very certain vision, one defined by exclusion: that of 'overlooking', itself an act of exclusion.
>
> Whilst this act of exclusion is legitimated and regulated in walls, what is the actual object of the exclusion, that actual object of sight, which all un-regulated, irregular and illegitimate overlooking might give onto? One very persuasive answer, and one pursued separately by Moncef M'halla and Jamila Binous - another Tunisian - in particular,

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[8]O'Meara attributes the source of his argument, in part, to Moncef M'halla, a Tunisian architect, whose work on this subject-- which I believe to be as yet unpublished-- I have not been able to locate.

[9]These regulations, and others quoted in the passage, come from a fourteenth century "manual": *Kitāb al-I'lān bi Aḥkām al-Bunyān* (The Book for Communicating Wall Rules) by Ibn al-Rāmī of Tunis.

> and Fatima Mernissi in general, is that the excluded object is feminine. Feminine, either in the form of the private household: the accepted domain of women, or in the form of a woman in person: the 'pudenda' [...] ("ʿawra") of Islamic culture, and that which is to be excluded from public view.

Rules governing the apertures within walls (doors, similarly, may not face directly across to a neighbor's), the building of walls themselves (if a wall that provided privacy for a neighbor collapses or is taken down , the owner may be forced to rebuild it), and the height of walls (which may not be built so as to allow one to overlook one's neighbor) are therefore established in order to prevent "illicit" sight. Janet Abu-Lughod has also pointed out that blind alleys, consisting of three walls around a usually small open space in front of a house, also serve this purpose. (168) She reaffirms that "[line] of sight distance, rather than physical distance, was the object of [Islamic] urban design." (167) The design of the city then, its very construction, is established upon sight restrictions. Tuhami, sitting in the private, domestic space of Lalla Btul's home, allowing his "eyes to roam" and watch the women, breaks the most fundamental law of the city. He defies the barriers the city has erected against him and sees in the city that which it does not want him to see.

To conclude this discussion of "The Pigeon Coop," it is only appropriate to turn our attention to the story's conclusion. Although Tuhami has performed an act of defiance, he is not presented as a strong or defiant individual. Rather, he has given in to the temptation of the city, lured in and tricked by Lalla Btul and her daughters. As

soon as this deceit becomes apparent to him, he flees, "baffled" by the place and drowning in his sweat. Finally, we reach the abrupt and anti-climactic closing line: "Even so, I went back to the pigeon coop." All that the reader is left with is a question: Why? Why does he go back to a place in which he was uncomfortable, drowning; where all pleasant smells were obscured by the smell of death; where he had always been treated as an outsider, forbidden access to the stairway leading up to the private quarters; and where he felt like a caged bird? Was he seduced by the woman he had been too shy to look at directly? Hoping to see more forbidden sights? Overcome with a desire to ascend the stairs that had always been forbidden to him? Hoping to "captivate the minds of the country youth" (8, 54) back home with a Fassi wife, as he had with the Fassi shoes? We are not given the answer; the following stories. however, explore this unexplained desire to return to the place of one's own discomfort, where one might see that which the city tries to conceal. "The Pigeon Coop" has set the scene for those that come next, such that, rather than a period, the final sentence might be more appropriately punctuated with a colon, opening up onto the "compact worlds" to follow.

Memory and Imagination: "The Directions of the Letter" and "The Unparalleled"

I will only briefly touch upon the next three stories in order to establish their role in the short story sequence. Although each of them could stand as a unified story,

meriting an in-depth study unto itself, what concerns us in this thesis is their significance in the quest to understand Fez-as-muse. "The Directions of the Letter" and "The Unparalleled" may be loosely grouped under the heading, "Memory and Imagination." Here, the narrator (now the "author" of "The Pigeon Coop," who will almost entirely control the narrative for the rest of the book, and to whom I will henceforth refer as "the author"[10]) begins an exploration of the creative imagination, where images take form and stories come into being. In order to begin to understand the source of these images-- their inspiration, "muse"-- he turns to his memories of the city. Although it is repeatedly hinted at and implied, the muse is not the focus of "The Directions of the Letter" and "The Unparalleled;" instead, we examine here its direct result-- the imagination. In both stories, the author recounts memories from his childhood in Fez. Integral to these memories of real people (a calligrapher, his father, a local *faqīh*) and real places (his home, his father's shop, *Al-Bashāra* Alley, the Qarawiyyin Mosque) are the fantasies that were built up around them in childhood.

In "The Directions of the Letter," the author tells us of a calligrapher with whom he was fascinated as a boy. He watches the man draw, and follows the creation of a work of calligraphy ("Every soul shall have a taste of death" written in the shape of a bird), which is then posted in his father's shop; he conjectures on its fate after his father's death, and is revisited by it-- in the form of a bird-- in the present. This

[10]While this label may seem unclear at times-- is it the author of "The Pigeon Coop" or the author of *The Pigeon Coop*?-- this is an ambiguity present in the book which I would like to retain.

calligraphy is the author's introduction to the act of creation in writing; and he paints a very powerful picture of a young man faced with the turmoil and decisions of approaching adulthood, wanting that creative power of words to work for him, wishing that the calligrapher could write for him "a house, an economy, warmth, children, blue clouds [...] a day, a street, a demonstration, a political party, a class war, a laugh...." (21-2, 68)

Throughout most of the story, which is framed within a dream, the author is self-absorbed and introspective, presenting a very intimate perspective on his childhood memories. But he is ultimately and abruptly awakened from this dream, when the bird announces that "the play has ended now." (24, 70) It has all been play-acting, a dream. In his moment of awakening, he sees, instead of the red man of his dreams, the blue women of the *Sūs*. These are the Tuaregs who live in the desert in the south of Morocco. Much better known are the "blue *men*" of the *Sūs* who wear blue or black scarves over their faces. Amongst the Tuareg, the men are veiled, the women are not-- the antithesis of the customs of veiling in the city. That a contrast between the two is being made is clear through the surprising juxtaposition of "blue women" and "red man." It is a contrast between dreaming and waking, between the desert with its openness, where sight is not hindered, and the city with its high walls and twisting streets, where sight is everywhere restricted. It is an opposition that remains with us after the conclusion of "The Directions of the Letter," and that will be taken up again more fully later in *The Pigeon Coop*.

In "The Unparalleled," the author explores another memory, again filled with and transformed by the childhood fantasies that surround it. Here we see Sīd al-ʿAbd, a local *faqīh* whom the children imagine to have wings: he was "the source of [their] far-flung fantasies. And then again, maybe the cape itself was the source of those fantasies, or that movement Sīd al-ʿAbd made in the middle of the street, opening the flaps of the cape as if opening his wings." (26, 74) The children imagine his wings, and in the story, framed within the neighbors' collective fantasy, he comes to have them. Sīd al-ʿAbd is unmarried and lives alone-- an unusual situation, providing all the more reason for the children to wonder about him as he moves around in his house, unhampered and unmonitored by anyone else. In the story we see his daily activities and private thoughts as imagined by the neighbors who watch him on the street, and spy on him with their "personal telescope" (27, 74)-- their imagination-- after Sīd al-ʿAbd has closed himself in his house, out of sight.

Many of Sīd al-ʿAbd's thoughts and activities are expressed in the terminology and imagery of Sufism. Sufi doctrine identifies several states through which the mystic passes in an attempt to unite with God, passing from the "imaginary" world, which we mistake for reality, to the "real" world, where God is fully revealed. The ascension through these states towards God is often seen as an upwards flight; the story of Mohammed's "night journey," in which he travelled up through the seven heavens, is repeatedly referred to in Sufi literature, and the power of flight and

levitation is often attributed to Sufi saints.[11] Likewise, Sīd al-ʿAbd, the Sufi mystic, has grown wings, and with them, the author tells him, "you are flying...until you touch the fine dividing line between you and the lotus tree of the outermost limit."[12] (32, 80) The lotus tree marks the outermost threshold of paradise, and here we find the ultimate Sufi state: *fanāʾ* or "annihilation,"[13] in which human attributes are replaced by the Divine (Rahman, 135). Here, the soul has surpassed the "imaginary" world of the physical body.

Sīd al-ʿAbd has at least shunned if not surpassed the physical. Although celibacy is generally frowned upon in Islam,[14] he has not married, and "if he had a choice, then

[11]For example, Zaynab al-Qalʾiyyah (Ibn al-ʿArabī, 154) and Abū Saʿīd ibn Abī al-Khayr (Nicholson, 1921, 14)

[12]During the prophet Muhammad's Night Journey (*isrāʾ*), he ascended to the limits of heaven, on the outermost border of which he found a lotus tree (*sidra*), marking the ultimate transition between this and the next world. The lotus is a thorny tree, and often symbolizes heavenly bliss. "*Sidrat al-muntahā*" has also been translated "the Lote-tree beyond which none may pass" (ʿAbdullah Yūsuf ʿAlī's translation of the Qurʾān, 53:14) as well as "the lote tree of the uttermost limit" (*Encyclopaedia of Islam*).

[13]Some hold that *baqāʾ* ("Abidingness") follows *fanāʾ* and that the mystic returns from "annihilation" to his previous state, since he "would be incapable of doing a single thing connected with his life in this world and his members would necessarily be useless for performing religious duties" if he remained in the state of *fanāʾ* Others argue that *fanāʾ* is the final stage, and that "if [God] were to return the mystic to his own attribute [after his attaining *fanāʾ*], He would be taking away what He had given, and recalling what He had accorded, and this would not be at all in keeping with God's nature." (Abū Bakr al-Kalābādhī [d. 990], quoted in Cragg and Speight, 179)

[14]Note, for example the following *hadīths*, or sayings of the Prophet Mohammed: "There is no celibacy in Islam." (quoted in Cragg and Speight, 87) and "[Those] of you who can support a wife should marry, for it keeps you from looking at strange women and preserves you from immorality, but those

books would have given birth to him. He would have forgotten his mother and his childhood home and friends..." (30, 78) Sīd al-ʿAbd shuns these physical ties because (the author suspects) they would only drag him down "to the level of vermin," (30, 78) where the inevitable practical concerns of educating and supporting a family would distract him from loftier thoughts. It is even implied that he embraces an extreme view on the superiority of the esoteric way over the exoteric, preferring to be born of a book and to "remember nothing but what appeared to him in his magic water" (30, 79) (this water resembling the intoxicating wine of divine love commonly found in Sufi poetry). This extreme view is taken by a small minority of Sufis, who have claimed that organized religion and the *sharīʿa* (Islamic law) could be a hindrance, rather than a guide on the path to God.[15] So, even "breaking ablution will not disturb" Sīd al-ʿAbd's search for "the purity of the moment." (32, 80)

From the mystic's attainment of *fanāʾ* in which human attributes are replaced by the Divine, arise the controversial "*shatahât*," or "ecstatic statements," in which the mystic claims to possess the qualities of God. Well-known is Al-Hallāj's "*Ana al-Ḥaqq*" ("I am the Truth") or Abū Yazīd al-Bisṭāmī's "Glory to Me! How great is My Majesty!" (Quoted in Dennys, 260). In a like manner, Sīd al-ʿAbd proclaims

who cannot should devote themselves to fasting, for it is a means of suppressing sexual desire." (Al-Bukhārī and Muslim, Quoted in Dennys, 300)

[15]This extreme view was held most notably by the ninth-century *Malāmatīs*, who went so far as to publicly disobey the *sharīʿa* in order to gain reproach, emphasizing that one's piety is not to be done for the praise of other Muslims. (see Denny, 259-60)

"I am Eternal" and says "How awesome is this eternity, and how awesome am I as I am exulted and beheld," (33, 81) using a verb ("*ta'āla*") which is generally reserved for God. Sīd al-ʿAbd sees the "truth" "in nothing but the wings," (32, 80) as the astronomer had seen the truth in a hair from his eyebrow, which appeared to him as the new moon heralding *ʿīd al-Saghīr* two days before it was due. This "truth" exists only in the realm of the imagination, (a "space" that the author will clarify in greater depth later), for "The World of the Imagination [...] is the closest thing to a denotation (*dalāla*) of the Real." (Ibn al-ʿArabī, quoted in Chittick, 1989, 115) If one tried to remove this truth from the realm of the imagination and explained it in the "rational" world, it would only be met with skepticism and accusations of "*fitna*."

While the characters of both "The Directions of the Letter" and "The Unparalleled" remain physically within the city, they also reveal a desire to break free of it. Possible flight from the city, however, is never seen in a physical leaving. The author as a boy does not dream of going to another city and does not imagine Sīd al-ʿAbd travelling physically outside of the city (although "He too wanted to travel" [27, 74]). The possibility of flight, rather, is found in the imagination. Without the imagination, we see only a piece of paper with bird-shaped calligraphy; but within it, the words drawn by the red man take flight in the form of a bird which the author can see "flying in letters." (23, 70) In his dream, the "bird of letters" has become a "real" bird that lands on his head and looks around. Likewise, without the imagination, we see an ordinary, private *faqīh* and astrologer, who lives alone and can occasionally

be seen on his roof, watching the night sky; but within it, the man known as Sīd al-ʿAbd also takes flight, sprouting wings made of the pure stuff of the imagination: "Tears of the jinn," "the clouds of heaven," "Shrouds of the dead," "Nighttimes' weaving," "the eye's insolence." (27-28, 75)

The City: "Halting at the Ruins"

In both "The Directions of the Letter" and "The Unparalleled," we looked inward: at the secret dreams of a boy, at some children's fantasies of the inner, spiritual life of a private man (a Sufi perspective, itself, is generally seen as an "inward" one, as opposed to the outward religion dictated by the *sharīʿa*). Now, in "Halting at the Ruins," we the readers are called upon to look with our own eyes. We have been caught in the act of voyeurism, snooping on the author's intimate memories and his personal exploration of Fez. We will be allowed this voyeurism-- and are in fact invited into the room of a house in Fez and encouraged to spy on the people living there. We must be active readers now: "I am truly asking you, oh lazy reader, staring at a page of the book. How urgently you need a slap to bring you back to the consciousness of reading." (40, 89) We must be alert, exploring our own dreams if we are attentive to those of the author: "all passivity disappears if we try to become aware of the creative acts of the poet expressing the world, a world that becomes accessible to our daydreaming." (Bachelard, 47).

As the author gradually steps back from an exploration of personal and shared memories of the city to gain a broader perspective of the city's nature, he can no longer remain isolated or unaware of the fact that others have their memories and dreams about the city. In "Halting at the Ruins," he is no longer directing our eyes, through his stories, to *his* Fez, but now turns to *our* Fez. This is a rather difficult task for an author, and one which is executed quite well here. He does this first by introducing the task and informing the readers of the roles they must play as investigators, dreamers, creators. "Is it Fez? Come and name it yourselves. Erect your fantasies around it." "And we-- you and I-- will begin the creation of this world, from fantasy and possibility." (35, 84-84) He then shifts the narrative to another voice: a man in the room with us, taking his turn to speak before we take ours. This man (Mulay ʿAlī) gives us the most skeletal of descriptions of the city, in the form of directions to a cobbler's shop. He is speaking to ʿAbd al-Salām, but the reader can easily assume him or herself to be the "you" addressed, and we are directly challenged: "*you* must, if you can get to the cobbler's shop, bring the proof." If we have been paying attention, conscientiously following the directions, we have walked through the city with the narrator. He gives us no superfluous description-- only enough information to keep us moving through the city, passing "a blacksmith, next to whom is a seller of make-up and perfume, next to him a man who fries fish, peppers and eggplant, after him a carpenter, then 'Lalla Mimuna's' house." (41, 90) We are only told what to do and where to go, given no details on how it *feels* to walk through the streets, other than assumed fear in front of the youths, assumed disgust at

the smell of sweat from the Tae Kwon Do club.

But do we feel refreshed as we step out into an open square? Do we feel stifled in a dark alley? How does the city effect us? Mulay ʿAlī's practical description of a route to a cobbler's is one that-- if we know Fez-- we quickly fill with these sensations and with details from our own memories and fantasies of Fez. The mere mention of the corncob seller evokes smells and memories, perhaps daydreams that came to us once while standing in line. The admonishment to not stop and play cards might bring to mind memories of such a card game in such a cafe-- the hope of winning, the disappointment of losing. The author has engaged the readers in his exploration of the city and opened it up from an exploration of his very personal city (which would inevitably be a very cramped "Fez," restricted by the limits of his own memories and imagination) to that of a much broader city, around which all of these "dreamers and readers and snoops and spies" may "erect [their] own fantasies." (37, 87) He can only express his own memories and dreams, and, with an understanding of them, will only be able to seek out the nature of his own Fez-as-muse. We, however, are expected to conduct our own inquiry, which will join with that presented in *The Pigeon Coop* and that of other readers or seekers, perhaps resulting in an understanding of *our* Fez-as-muse.

As we turn our attention to the last two stories, in which the author finally comes to identify the nature of Fez-as-muse, it is only natural that this thesis turn its attentions--

as the author has done, and as we have been called upon to do in "Halting at the Ruins"-- to the city itself. Specific locations in the city-- Ras Jnān, Bab Makīna, Bab Boujeloud, Jnān Sbīl-- are scattered throughout the stories as references, settings, but seldom subjects upon which we are required to linger. The names remind us of where we are, and situate us when we, as readers, have begun to slip too far away, and have begun to ask the narrator his own, oft-repeated question: Is it Fez? It certainly has aspects of other cities (houses, inhabitants, streets, etc.) and could take on a somewhat universal status (The City, The Islamic City, The Walled City).

Granting certain universal qualities or symbolism, one may tend to question where the emphasis lies-- is the specific place simply an appropriate model found to suit the author's needs or do his or her conceptions of space arise from the place itself? The narrator himself asks this very question, when he repeats, "Was it Fez?" (15, 61) "Is it Fez?" (35, 84) "And is this Fez? Is it Tangiers, that grows rich daily on foreigners' dollars and goes to bed poor each night? Is it Oran or Tlemcen, or Damascus or Cairo[...]?" (59, 109) He admits that aspects of this city may resemble those of others-- "[Old] buildings from the colonial era, which could easily be in Fez or Meknes or Casablanca, as if we were on Mohammed the Fifth street in any one of these cities, or as if there were no differences between them." (57, 107) So, although the author has chosen what appears to be Fez as his focus, and although this city has given rise to many personal and generalized conceptions of home, flight, alienation, the act of writing and creation, etc., could these thoughts just as easily have found

place in any number of cities?

The author's answer is "no." He hints at the uniqueness of Fez at times, with phrases like, "Fez's summers, that are unlike the summers of other places," (44, 94) and "a salty thirsty story, that [belongs to] no place but Fez" (50, 100) and he concludes: "But when I looked and made certain, I was convinced that it was the only city that could sleep and awake in this way, and whose war could be like this." (60, 110) The city which he dreams of, leading to a dreamt city which he writes of, is Fez. Before looking at the representation of space in *The Pigeon Coop*, then, it will prove useful to have at least a general understanding of the "space" of Fez. As a familiarity with the topographical layout and basic history of Fez is often assumed in *The Pigeon Coop*, I will here provide a very brief introduction to them for the readers of this thesis not fortunate enough to know the city.

In this century, Fez has often been recognized by western scholars as the quintessential "Islamic City," and has frequently served as the model in an ever-growing field of study on the topic.[16] While a discussion of this area of study is not within the scope of the present thesis, it will suffice to say that many aspects of this city's general layout (street patterns, location of mosques, public facilities, markets and cemeteries) are not unique to Fez, but may be equally applied to other cities in Morocco, in the Islamic world, or even in Muslim neighborhoods of non-"Islamic"

[16]See Janet Abu-Lughod's *isnād* or geneology of researchers taking Fez as their model for "The Islamic City." (155-60)

cities.[17]

Fez consists of three distinct "cities:" the *Ville Nouvelle,* built as an administrative center by the French Protectorate in the twentieth-century; *Fez Jdīd,* built by the Merinides in the 13th century to house the Sultan's residence, its employees, and soldiers; and *Fez al-Bālī,* founded in the late eighth century by a Muslim saint and direct descendent of the Prophet Mohammed.[18] The latter of these could also be divided into two distinct parts: the Andalusian and the Qarawiyyin quarters, named for two early waves of immigrants.[19] These two quarters, separated by the *Bū Khrārab* river, seem to have functioned as separate-- and sometimes rivalling-- cities, until the Almoravids destroyed their dividing wall and built a new city wall uniting the two in the eleventh century.

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[17]See, for example, Abu-Lughod's examination of Muslim quarters in India, Sub-Saharan Africa, Indonesia and China. (160-61)

[18]While it has been suggested that the city was founded by Idriss I (who probably did choose the site for the new city), Roger Le Tourneau has argued convincingly that it was his son, Idriss II, who actually began construction on the site. (Le Tourneau, p. 7) There are several competing traditions surrounding the founding of the city of Fez and the source of its name. "Fās" may mean "pickaxe," and one tradition claims that a golden pickaxe was found while the first foundations of the city were being dug. Another, less known and not commonly accepted, claims that when building the foundations of the city, an angel came to Idriss and informed him that he was building on the site of an ancient city named "Sāf." The name was then turned around and became "Fās." Archeological studies have never found any basis for a claim that an older city had existed. (Le Tourneau, p. 6) For a study on the foundation of Fez, see Lévi-Provençal's *La fondation de Fès,* 1939.

[19]See footnote #4.

Fez al-Bālī-- which has been called "the true Fez, the centre of Morocco" (Aubin, 213)-- is situated in a narrow valley, its main streets descending towards the center of the city and ascending outwards to the surrounding walls and outside of the city. At the bottom of the valley, in the very heart of Fez, stand two important religious and historic sites worth mentioning-- both easily identified from a distance by their green tiled roofs, and both attracting large numbers of visitors to the city over the centuries. The tomb of Mulay Idriss II (giving rise to the city's nickname "The City of Idriss") has long been a major site of religious pilgrimage, drawing in Muslims from throughout North Africa and beyond to visit, pray, and seek blessings. The great spiritual status accorded this site is seen in the fact that the area surrounding Mulay Idriss, was *ḥurm*, or sacred ground, until the beginning of this century[20], possibly making it only the third Islamic site after the city of Mecca and the Prophet's Mosque in Medina which non-Muslims could not enter.[21] Close by stands the Qarawiyyin mosque, founded by Fatima Al-Fihri in 859.[22] This mosque inhabits a vast plot of

[20]The sacred space surrounding Mulay Idriss was inadvertently trespassed by a Christian missionary in 1902, who walked down an alley next to the sanctuary. He was killed for this, but his murderer was in turn removed from Mulay Idriss (which had until then always served as an inviolable asylum) and executed by order of the sultan, Mulay ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz. Sometime following this incident, the *ḥurm* of Mulay Idriss ceased to be respected. (Munson, 57-8) (My thanks to Simon O'Meara for pointing out this reference.)

[21]Morocco, following Maliki law, is one of the few countries in which non-muslims are not allowed to enter mosques. The *ḥurm* surrounding Mulay Idriss, however, was unique in that it included not only the sanctuary, but also the adjoining streets.

[22]It is interesting to note that the two main mosques in Fez were both founded by women-- the Qarawiyyin by Fatima Al-Fihri, and the Andalusian by her sister, Miryam.

land in the center of Fez al-Bālī, and also functions as a university, which ranks with the al-Azhar in Cairo as the oldest university in the world. Although it now plays a very minor role in the Moroccan system of higher education, the Qarawiyyin University long drew in scholars from throughout North Africa and the Islamic world, and because of it Fez came to be known as Morocco's "Intellectual Capital." Abū al-Ḥasan ʿAlī Ibn Maymūn wrote near the end of the fifteenth century:

> In Fez one can find masters of all branches of intellectuality, such as grammar, law of inheritance, mathematics, chronometry, geometry, metaphysics, logic, rhetoric, music, etc., and these masters know all the relevant texts by heart. Whoever does not know by heart the basic text relating to the science about which he speaks, and who cannot, on any question, quote it verbatim, will receive no attention; as a scholar, he will not be taken seriously. Since I left the city-- it was in the year 901 (1495 A.D.)-- I have seen nothing that can be compared with Fez and its scholars, either in the other cities of the Maghrib such as Tlemsen, Bujâya, or Tunis, or in any part of Syria or the Hejaz. (Quoted in Burkhardt, 108)

Looking at the more general layout of Fez, the city may be further broken down into many distinct *ḥūmas*, or neighborhoods. These neighborhoods formerly often had doors between them, which, like the doors to the city, could be closed at night. Each neighborhood generally contains the same basic facilities-- the *masjid* (mosque), *ḥammām* (public bath), *saqqāya* (public fountain), *farrān* (public oven)-- and, of course, houses. Traditionally, the houses are built around a central, open courtyard. The rooms face inwards to the courtyard, rather than outwards to the street; windows onto the street are rare (and their placement restricted, as was mentioned earlier).

Within reasonable distance of each cluster of *ḥumas* are the daily markets and larger mosques where Friday prayers are held; and, just outside of the city walls, within a reasonable distance for all inhabitants of the medina, are the cemeteries and *mṣallas*, where the *ʿīd*, or feast day, prayers are held. The walls that currently exist around the medina, interrupted by several *babs*, or doors, date from various periods, and in many places are under restoration.[23]

The Ville Nouvelle figures little in *The Pigeon Coop*, and will figure little in our description here. It is significant in that it exists, in varying forms, in many other cities of Morocco. The "new" city is built at a distance from the "old" city (in the case of Fez, quite a great distance-- about one kilometer), introducing wide streets, houses with the gardens *around* them, rather than inside of them, and generally housing all of the main administrative buildings. While the French have generally been praised for their urban design (in Morocco) and for preserving the historic medinas by placing their new administrative centers outside of their walls, the *Ville Nouvelle* inevitably lacks the distinctive character that the medina of Fez has developed over the course of ten centuries.

Although the medina's infrastructure has been maintained much more completely than that of other North African cities, the city has been markedly altered by twentieth

[23]In 1980, Fez was declared a "World Heritage Site" by UNESCO. Various restoration projects are currently underway throughout the city by that organization, as well as by local and national bodies and private Moroccan and international foundations.

century changes. New roads were built into the city, providing greater access to automobile traffic and breaking the protective chain of walls and doors that define the limits of the medina. The role of the Qarawiyyin Mosque, so long renowned as a center for traditional Islamic education, diminished with the establishment of large, secular universities throughout the country and with increasing reliance on the French language in higher education. The construction of the Ville Nouvelle, and transfer of the national capital from Fez to Rabat in 1915, led to the administrative and commercial marginalization of Fez medina and to the exodus of many leading figures and families that was mentioned earlier in this paper. Despite these changes within and the marginalization of the medina of Fez, however, it remains one of the most important cities in the country, and even those who left the city for Casablanca or Rabat still refer to themselves as *Fassis*.

This brief background to the city will, it is hoped, help to provide the most basic awareness of the city the author has taken up. We are meant to remember that, whatever universal themes or generalizing ideas that may seem to arise from the city, it is, in the end, Fez-- with its rich history and its unclear future-- that we are exploring. That said, let us leave the realm of dates and dimensions for what this city is for the author, since "[space] that has been seized upon by the imagination cannot remain indifferent space subject to the measures and estimates of the surveyor. It has been lived in, not in its positivity, but with all the partiality of the imagination." (Bachelard, xxxvi)

The Muse: "The Remains of the Cities" and "The Dust"

When looking at the city in *The Pigeon Coop*, the author's focus is not so much on the specific sites and local references as it is on even more familiar and everywhere-present pieces of the city-- its streets, its houses, its shops, its walls. While there are many aspects of spatial representation which may be touched upon, and many of which could easily become the focus of an independent study, I would like to focus on the juxtaposition of and interaction between exterior and interior spaces, especially as expressed in "The Remains of the Cities."

As does Gaston Bachelard in his *The Poetics of Space*, the author focuses most of his attention throughout his collection of short stories on interior space-- inside rooms, inside homes, inside the city. The great "outside" is mostly implied, threatening to invade or destroy the interior spaces man has constructed for himself and in which he feels secure of protection:

> People have dug out houses from within the thick walls of the city, and inhabited them. There they are, living in the heart of the walls. They know that the wind will not uproot their homes and that an earthquake will not demolish them. They have made the shops in deep holes within hollows in the walls, and there they are selling dates and groceries and spices in them, and working in them as barbers, carpenters, shoe repairmen and other professions.

Here we find Bachelard's "inhabited space," which shelters and protects.[24]
Bachelard's *The Poetics of Space* is enormously relevant to Tazi's collection of short stories. The former work examines the impact of space on the imagination and the expression of this space in poetic images. Likewise, the author of *The Pigeon Coop* attempts to seize hold of the impact a place called "Fez" has on his own imagination; and, in an attempt to convey the essence of that impact, he provides images of this space. For Bachelard, the sheltered space (the "house") is indispensable for imagination. Within the sheltered and familiar space of home, the individual is free to let his or her mind roam: "the house shelters daydreaming, the house protects the dreamer, the house allows one to dream in peace." (6)

Daydreaming and fantasizing generally does occur in the house in *The Pigeon Coop*. On sleepless nights, in the protection of the house, the young boy of "The Directions of the Letter" stares at the ceiling, memorizing the words of his note and watching (imagined) spirits invade the ceiling. We the readers must enter Mulay ʿAlī's room in order "to give our imaginations free rein." Only within it, "cut off from observation," may we begin "the creation of this world, from fantasy and possibility." (35, 84) Although it is a room, it is also "a tribal tent [where] everyone enters without being asked who they are or what they want or who they've come to see." (37, 86) The tribal tent (if this means something to us culturally), is a space in which

[24]While Bachelard specifically identifies the house as his "sheltered space," it can equally be expressed in many other familiar places (a shop, a city-- perhaps especially a "walled" city). Marilou Awiakta, for example, has even identified the Appalachian forest as Bachelard's "house."

none of us are strangers, and all of us can feel at home and join the author in a shared daydream. And again, in the final story, "The Dust," the narrator is at home, in the middle of some insignificant activity, when he loses himself in dreams and memories of the city. To dream-- and to remember-- we return to the sheltered space. Even the city of a dream, as it tries to remember itself "hear[s] that bird warbling in the courtyard of an ancient house in '*Ras Jnān*,' with an old orange tree rising up through its center." (15, 61) It returns to the house.

The sheltered space, then, may provide a space in which one may dream. And, as Bachelard points out, it may also provide the content of one's daydreams, one's imagining: "[The] places in which we have *experienced daydreaming* reconstitute themselves in a new daydream, and it is because our memories of former dwelling-places are relived as daydreams that these dwelling-places of the past remain in us for all time." (6) Just so, in his memories and stories, the writer revisits the house, his father's shop, the city in which he had once daydreamed. These revisitings are almost always framed within dreams or fantasies, from which the author awakes or is awakening.

The house provides this space for dreaming and imagining most notably because it protects one from the "universe" outside, most strikingly represented for Bachelard in the winter storm. During the storm, freezing blizzards threaten those who leave the house, and the world is covered with a negating and unifying whiteness. The outside--

vast, negated, threatening-- finds its expression in *The Pigeon Coop* as the desert: sand, like snow, is outside the walls, covering over and negating the world outside. "The walls continue to encircle everything inside, opening onto the desert, harkening to the voices of the dead and the violent howling of the winds." (43, 93) "The walls like a door to the desert." (59, 109) The city is threatened by the "desert of Yūsuf bin Tashfīn and Mahdi bin Tūmart," (49, 99) two invaders who came from the desert, occupied the city, and founded new dynasties. From "the desert of salt and thirst" came the locust, flying and flying, "opening its wings over the cities and the walls and the roofs of houses until thirst brought it to the land of Fez...." (49, 100) Within the walls of the city and the houses and the shops-- which are not merely situated inside the city walls, but are "dug out from within" them-- the individual is protected from this outside, the desert that threatens invasion.

Only occasionally do we get a glimpse of how things of the outside may defy the protection of the city walls by coming into the city (the *Haddāwī*, the locust); and only once do we get a little more than a glimpse of what lies outside of the city. What we see of the outside of the city is emptiness, and, in the shadow of its walls, the preparation for war. We see the shadow of a soldier holding (an imagined) spear, with which he appears to be trying to pierce the vast openness and emptiness of the space before him. He aims towards the furthest point, which is "like an imaginary goal in which appears an imaginary enemy." (45, 96) Here, we see preparation for the "war of the city" mentioned in the next story-- fighting the enemy (shown here as

the emptiness on the horizon) and defending the walls against intruders from without.

Yet we see that intruders do slip in, through the doors, over the walls, infiltrating the society and way of life the walls, "with all of their history, mythology and murderous insularity," (43, 93) are trying to protect. The locust travels all the way from the desert and comes over the walls, bringing with it the "Gh"-- that distinctive "r," which is internalized and becomes a distinguishing trait of the Fassis-- just as he brings all of the conventions of Fassi life. The homeless *Haddāwi* comes from anywhere or everywhere, and introduces the *"ruqʿa"*-- cloth? cloak? rags? shroud?-- that covers every body and becomes so "Fassi" that it is still "in Fez even when it is in another city, in all cities-- in Meknes or Taza or Sale...." (44, 95) The walls are not impregnable; they have not been able to keep out these things that have gone on to become integral and internalized parts of what is inside. And yet the city continues its war, trying to prevent such penetrations into the city and providing shelter for those inside.

This sheltered space, although it may provide the space *for* imagining, in which one may "dream in peace," is not the space *of* the "imagination" or the "image." To clarify this distinction, let us look at the 12-13th century Sufi scholar Ibn al-ʿArabī's distinction between "*khayāl*" and "*mithāl*." "The basic difference between the manner in which he uses the terms is that *khayāl* refers both to the mental faculty known as imagination and the objective world 'out there' known as imagination,

whereas *mithāl* ['image'] is never used for the faculty. The root meaning of *mithāl* is to resemble, to look like, to imitate, to appear in the likeness of." (Chittick 1989, 117) The space of the imagination or image is an even more specific realm than that in which the mental faculty takes place; it is one in which the imagination-- the "dreaming consciousness"-- meets with the universe and interacts with that which is outside of the self, discovering in this union something new-- the imagined, the image. Early in this thesis, we set out to identify this "space" where the images come from-- the muse, inspiration.

To understand not simply the space *in which* one may dream, but Tazi's "space of the imagination," we must look at the interaction between the inside (the interior of the city, the sheltered-I) and the outside (beyond the walls, the not-I). This intersection, in "The Remains of the Cities" particularly, is presented as a piercing, a penetration. We see it first in the above-mentioned soldier. First, he is beneath the city walls, his shadow blending into their shadow, then he breaks away. We watch the shadow of the body, holding an imagined spear, aim towards the horizon and throw. The very concrete, physical object-- the spear-- is not physical here, but the implied image of a shadow. It is a shade of reality that pierces the unseeable universe of the empty outside. And just as the (imagined) spear extends from the shadow of the soldier, so his shadow is a violent extension of the city walls: "The shade from these walls intersects with the shadow of the body standing in the middle of the open square like an unsheathed sword or a spear protruding into the empty space." (44, 95) The author

tells us that this is his body: "This is I, having passed into the spirit of one of the Sultan's soldiers, who do their morning exercises in the arts of killing beneath the walls, behind one of the historical doors." (46, 96) The author, too, practices the arts of killing and of war outside the city walls, penetrating the threatening non-I, against which the city has erected its walls.

But what do the walls defend? The author does not give us a bright picture of what lies inside:

> The dirt and rubble of the collapsed buildings, and stories of thieves and caravans and wars of kings and *al-Sība*, and entry tolls into the city, and the rights of exportation and the rights of shipping produce. The funeral processions and the weddings. The prayer for rain and the children carrying big white water jugs from every direction, making the rounds of the roads and alleyways. The lanterns lit. The water flowing. The tombs. The rain. (43-4, 93)

And even this is penetrated. The locust flies over the walls; and where, on the outside, we saw the body and the spear as just a shade of their corporeal forms, now we see the intangible "gh" come from the desert via the locust, dropped into the water, and physically imbibed, infiltrating the city. There is no defense against this infiltration: it comes unawares, in an unsuspected and simple form-- a drink of water. A more violent penetration-- one that *can* be protected against, yet that threatens even in the defensive network of the neighborhood[25]-- is rape. The stranger-- the

[25]See Abu-Lughod (169-71) for an interesting discussion of how the neighborhood functions as a defensive unit.

Haddāwi who raises his *ruq'a* to reveal his erect penis-- lurks even inside of the city, although networks of physical walls and human camaraderie are in place against the threat he presents. As the soldier's spear represents an attempt to penetrate the space outside of the city, so the Haddāwi's erect penis represents an attempt to penetrate the interior, the woman's body, which exemplifies the most carefully guarded of the city's secrets.

The author introduced the image of sexual intercourse earlier in the book. In "The Directions of the Letter," setting out on the exploration of memory, he writes

> the kohled and lipsticked women of *Jnān Sbīl*[...] I will not go near them, lest speech force me to rape[26] them. I must keep my distance from the place whose name is Fez, and the river whose name was "The River of Pearls." And yet here I am approaching, drawn to the place despite myself. (16, 62)

Rape of the city's women, then, becomes clear as an entering into the most central of the city's secrets, for, as was discussed earlier, concealing the woman is the basis for the infrastructure-- the very walls-- of the city, which have been built in such a way as to prevent the outsider from seeing them.[27] In Tazi's city, however, the sight of women is not what is being defended. The defense erected against outside eyes that

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[26]A literal translation would render this "break their hymens," rather than "rape them."

[27]It should be pointed out here that it is not simply sight of women in general that is protected against, but specifically that by "outsiders," who do not stand in specific familial relation to the woman.

we were aware of in "The Pigeon Coop" has now grown to a more all-encompassing defense of the city's traditions, its *ādāb*, its history, its very self. And just as Tuhami defied the city by watching women, so the narrator, by investigating memories in "The Directions of the Letter" and "The Unparalleled," by entering the private, daily life of the city in "Halting at the Ruins," and by questioning its nature in "The Remains of the Cities," defies the city. And just as the author told us "This is I, having passed into the spirit of one of the Sultan's soldiers" he tells us "I am the *Haddāwī*." (47, 97) The author, trying to understand the nature of the city for himself fights the "war of the city" on both fronts, in doing so piercing both the outside and the inside.

Already we can see one image of the "space of the imagination," where the "dreaming consciousness meets with the [universe]." The two opposing spaces of inside and outside intersect and join each other in that space which defines them-- the walls:

> Walls. Definitions of space, thresholds, frontiers or boundaries marking simultaneously, sites of difference and commonality, and this, in the words of the Frenchman, Michel de Certeau, is the paradox of the wall and frontier: "created by contacts, the points of differentiation between two bodies are also their common points. Conjunction and disjunction are inseparable in them." (O'Meara)

In the walls-- and in the ceilings, too, for they also separate inside from the openness above-- we see not the dreamer or the dreaming, but the dream itself. Again and

again throughout *The Pigeon Coop*, the image is repeated.

> I looked around that ceiling and saw what both the sleeper and the waker would see. (19, 66)

> The ceiling is high, and the layers of peeling paint reveal a multitude of colors, and reveal holes and shapes that look like maps and faces of humans and dogs. My own face can be seen amongst those shapes [... and] one of those shapes seems capable of kaleidoscopic changes, ever transforming itself to give an illusion of mirrors whose images change in accordance with what they reflect. At first it appears to be a street.... (36, 85)

> [Those shapes on the wall] dream, and push us-- you and me-- to dream or reminisce. But then the shoe's shape is traced just so, suddenly, in the middle of the maps and faces of humans and dogs. A big worn-out shoe with a thick sole, swollen and splitting from its clearly old, orange-colored leather. Maybe that isn't its color, since there couldn't be a man's shoe that color unless it had been used in the circus. Or then again maybe the color of the layer of paint there had made it orange, or maybe it was really like that, and I've simply been talking drivel. (36, 85)

> Keep in mind that this shoe, visible on the face of the wall, as clear as if we'd created it from fantasy, will become a subject in the story. (36-37, 86)

> [Maybe] I was reading a book or a newspaper, or lost in contemplation as I stroked my beard and looked at the wall that became a maze in which appeared shapes and colors and places near and far-- the loved ones and the enemies, the strange and familiar faces, the cities and train stations and ways of leaving, separation and death, the graves, the shops and streets and alleyways, the places of pilgrimage and the courthouses and the wilds of the imagination.... (55, 105)

Even the letters in the shape of a bird could not live-- or inspire one to see in not just paper and ink, but a bird capable of flight-- until they were "returned [..] to life on the wall of a shop or a house." (21, 68) (And the wings of Sīd al-ʿAbd that the narrator had fantasized about as a child, "appeared first on the walls of an alley in Nether-Fez." (25, 72) The canvas created by walls, on which familiar faces appear, mazes unfold, and the shadows of the edges of things dance, becomes the space of the imagination, a barrier between inside and outside, between the pure and ungraspable moments of sleeping dreams and the concrete world in which children must be educated, money must be earned.

This is the "space of the imagination"-- what Ibn al-ʿArabī labelled the *barzakh*. Often translated as "isthmus," "[a] *barzakh* is something that stands between and separates two other things, yet combines the attributes of both.... The term *barzakh* is often used to refer to the whole intermediate realm between the spiritual and the corporeal. In this sense the term is synonymous with the World of Imagination (*khayāl*) or Images (*mithāl*)." (Chittick 1989, 14) In this space the spiritual and corporeal are no longer in direct contrast, but meet and become one. In it a solid spear may become an imagined shade of its "real" self and pierce emptiness, and an intangible "gh" may become something tangible-- transportable and digestible.

As with Ibn al-ʿArabī's, Tazi's *barzakh* is ever-present and ever-shifting. It finds place in the *ruqʿa*, the cloth, which delineates what is inside of it (the body) from

what is outside of it. It is not coincidence that the *ruqʿa* may be a cloak, a covering, just like Sīd al-ʿAbd's cape, which exists as wings in the imagination of the child. Like the walls, it "protect[s] against the nightly cold." (44, 94) It separates, yet unifies, such that it may be shared with another body without leaving the first naked, and everyone can wear it. Through the *ruqʿa*, the opposites "filled" and "empty" meet, "as if with the *ruqʿa* we fill the empty space or as if with the *ruqʿa* we empty out this world filled with nothingness, we empty out the filled and fill the emptiness." (46, 96) In the *ruqʿa*, opposites (I/not-I, empty/full) come together, as they do in the "World of the Imagination:" "One of the effects of strength [an attribute of God] is the creation of the World of the Imagination in order to make manifest within it the fact that it brings together all opposites (*al-jamʿ bayn al-addād*). It is impossible for sense perception or the rational faculty to bring together opposites, but it is not impossible for imagination." (Ibn al-ʿArabī, quoted in Chittick, 115) And in the *ruqʿa* is everything, including the creator and the created: "I am the *Haddāwi*. I am the *ruqʿa*, and nothing is in Fez but the *ruqʿa* and in the *ruqʿa* is God." (47, 97)

We also find the *barzakh* implied in the physical union with that which is outside of oneself-- through sexual intercourse. In this act, the body may interact with the world, with what is not itself. Bodies' protuberances and cavities (their "irregularities" that can be concealed or revealed by the *ruqʿa*) allow them to meet in the space of the *barzakh* and to become other than just a strictly delineated whole. This type of physical union is only implied and sought for in "The Remains of the

Cities," never consummated, and finds its most intriguing expression in the form of a cat. We hear the yowling of a male cat, in search of its mate, yet unable to find her because of the walls and roofs that separate them. His voice-- a frustrated voice, longing for union-- is echoed by the walls and fills the city, spreading from one cemetery to another. This longing, expressed by the whole city that reverberates with the call, is for that union that is found in the *barzakh* and for the rebirth that may occur there. Just as the "birds of letters" in "The Directions of the Letter" "died their first death before someone came to pick them up from the ground and returned them to life on the wall of a shop or a house," (21, 68) needing to be in that space where worlds meet in order to be reborn, so must the city enter this space for rebirth.

The possibility of rebirth is entertained in "The Remains of the Cities," revealing the *barzakh* once again, this time in the body of a woman giving birth. The cat's meow "greatly resembles the scream of a woman suffering in pain when she goes into labor. In the alley, we can hear the cat's meow and the woman's scream as she suffers-- all of the city walls echo them together, and the night of the dead is revived by them...." (51, 102) Childbirth is one of the most common of occurrences within the city. The activities surrounding it are well-known and laid out for us as a routine everyone knows by heart: "Water must be heated up and a sharp knife fetched to cut the umbilical cord. Thighs must be spread and one or two pillows put between the bed and the woman's back. The man and children must be sent out of the room so no one but women are left. And there must be a little salt to keep away the jinn and devils,

and patience, waiting for the labor pains to come." (51-2, 102) And yet, in this most commonplace of events we see a most improbable one-- the birth of a city by a woman. In this image we can see many of the characteristics of Bakhtin's "grotesque body." It is a a body characterized by its ability to unite opposites, and whose most important features are its protrusions (nose, penis) and its concavities (mouth, vagina). Within the "convexities and concavities" of the grotesque body, "the confines between bodies and between the body and the world are overcome: there is an interchange and an interorientation." (Bakhtin, 317) And in it, highly spiritual events are "degraded and uncrowned" in becoming commonplace physical acts (eating, defecating, copulation, childbirth). As with Rabelais' birth of "the word," the birth of a city-- a new Fez-- is "degraded and uncrowned by the transfer to the material bodily level of childbirth, realistically represented;" and "thanks to degradation [it] is renewed; one might say reborn." (Bakhtin, 309)

The woman's scream, too, is one of the *barzakh*, giving testament to the place of becoming, and filled with the potential for the city's rebirth. Crossing the outer limits of the womb, on the threshold of the world, the city exists within and embodies both the interior and the exterior. Here, in the "space of the imagination" where real and unreal meet, anything is possible: it is possible for a woman to give birth to a city, and it is possible for Fez to be "reborn." It is significant to note that this reborn city always remains in the *barzakh*, on the threshold, and never appears. The reborn city's fully emerging from this liminal space remains a potential and future occurrence: "the

newborn has *not yet* seen light;" "as if she were *about to* give birth to a city;" "She *will* give birth to another Fez;" "*if* this woman gives birth to another city." (51-2, 102-103) (my emphasis).

In this city, where "night enters into night, and the walls send back the echo of the voices of the dead," (53, 103) the only voice that "leaves the silence of the darkness" is that of the cat, filled with longing and the potential for rebirth. It is a city filled with the hope of rebirth, and the author, in his moment of waking, sees the "*sidrat al-muntahā*," the lotus tree marking the border of paradise, in *Sūq al-ʿAṭṭārīn*, the very center of the city. Is this then not hope? A vision that even as Fez is dying, filled with the voices of the dead, it is still a "muse." In its very moment of death, it stands at the most powerful and transformative of *barzakhs*, being reborn. Although it is a dying muse, the city is here "revived" in the possibility of rebirth.

As we turn to "The Dust," we see this muse once again, the source of inspiration revealing itself to the author as a labyrinth across a wall. On the page of Fez's walls is written its history ("in the words tightly lined up across doors and entryways, walls and *miḥrābs*" [15, 61]), the fate of its inhabitants ("Every soul shall have a taste of death."), and their dreams and memories ("the strange and familiar faces, [...] the shops and streets and alleyways, the places of pilgrimage and the courthouses and the wilds of the imagination, the books, the songs and moments of coursing blood, nakedness,[...] nights of illumination and insomnia, [...] the eyes of the imaginary

woman who came and didn't leave..." [55-6, 105]). In its walls-- the *barzakh* of the city-- lies the potential for Fez's rebirth; however, in "The Dust" we see these walls sealed. There is no communication between the inside and the outside. The post office door is rusted, and there is "[no] one sending or receiving letters." (57, 107) Covered in dust and bird excrement, the walls are sealed, unable to allow movement through them and suffocating those within. These are the walls of "murderous insularity," so obsessed with protecting their city that they do not see the death within. "What war could turn the face of Fez from this picture?" (59, 109) the author asks.

He tells us, "I had no more strength for breathing in this air thick with dust, and maybe-- before suffocating-- I had to do something that resembled returning to the womb from which I'd emerged into this world." (59, 109) He returned to the sheltered space-- the "cradle of the house" into which man is laid before being "cast into the world" (Bachelard, 7)-- where he could dream and thus create these stories of Fez. "When we dream of the house we were born in, in the utmost depths of reverie, we participate in this original warmth, in this well-tempered matter of the material paradise. This is the environment in which the protective beings live." (Bachelard, 7) Although this dreaming may be "running away" from the war of the city, into a safe haven, it allows him, for a while at least, to shed light on the city. "The lamp [the author's pen?] is in my hand, and here I stand directing its beam toward the city of darkness. As the light brushes over the roofs of the buildings, the city grows clear as

if it has left the war and entered a place of forgetfulness." (59, 109) Within his imagination, Fez has been reborn, and within *The Pigeon Coop*, the reborn city has come to light.

Yet we all perceive the city's suffocation differently, and some may be able to experience its rebirth while others' imaginations will be extinguished before it comes. Perhaps "Khuya Hasan" will once again be enlivened by letters arriving from foreign lands, once a refreshing rain has come to Fez and washed the dust from its walls; and perhaps the author will have died before it returns. We, the other dreamers of Fez, must still look again and make sure for ourselves if the city of *our* dreams and inspiration is, in fact, Fez. As for the author, at this moment of waking, he is "convinced" that it is Fez-- the city whose sheltered space he returns to for dreaming, and the city-muse that appears to him in dreams: that "real" city that exists in the *barzakh*, "as if it were Fez." (60, 110)

The Pigeon Coop: Notes on the Translation

"Many myths tell of gods and Muses appearing to poets, but none shows a divinity giving aid to a translator."

(Erich Segal)

Translation, it often seems, is not an inspired act, but one that proceeds as much as anything from a rigorous and disciplined marching through the meaning, words, and style of the original work, even if it be the most delicate of poetic language. Only after the march is through and one is confident of never having stepped unnecessarily out of time can one go back with a lighter step, revisiting and beautifying familiar ground.

If this is the case, then the following translation of Mohammed Azzedine Tazi's *Manzil al-Yamām* is still mid-march. It is neither an inspired work nor yet a very useful contribution to Arabic literature in translation. Despite this, I feel that it has been a successful undertaking, providing me with a challenging, and often enlightening introduction to the processes and difficulties involved in literary translation.

The following stories are in varying states of completion, and none free of inconsistencies and misinterpretations. I am aware of many of these errors and slights made to the author; others I only suspect. I hope, however, to be able to significantly revise this work in the future, after further studies of Arabic and an eventual meeting with the author. For now, I hope that it may stand as a marker along the way of translation, and a hazy guide to the reader of the preceding thesis. I preferred to include all six stories, despite the serious shortcomings of some. Page numbers of the original Arabic text are included in the margins for the benefit of the Arabic-speaking reader.

The Pigeon Coop

Whose melancholy? Mine or this house's? [6]

It was one of those stifling summer days in Fez that makes the sweat flow in a constant stream. Despite the shade and the greenery and the fountain, I was burning up that day. The heat flared up and scorched my eyes until it sent me out of melancholy and into sleep.

I was sitting by myself in the *brṭāl*[28] smelling the scent of death. Bent over now, its branches shrivelled and dishevelled, the old orange tree gave off none of its former aroma. Both the clay cooling jug and its tar adornments had dried up, and retained no scent.[29] The only smell was that of death, seeping out through the doors of the rooms above and descending the stairs-- and it may have even flowed out through the foyer into the alley.

I was waiting for the lady to come downstairs to see me, when that exhilaration came, making me forget the melancholy and the heat and the smell of death. It was this exhilaration that drove away my drowsiness and tempted me to look on. But I did not laugh. In fact, I wished that the laughter I felt deep down had burst out. At first, I wasn't sure if I were burning up, or if despondency and sleep were still trying to entice me. Once I was taken in by the spectacle, I began to forget my drowsiness in the Fassi summer and to forget the smell of death. I watched the

[28] *brṭāl*: an open room, sometimes on a raised platform, attached and looking onto the central courtyard in many traditional Moroccan houses.

[29] Clay jugs, used to keep water cold, are often adorned with tar dots and stripes which glisten when the jug is filled with water.

women. As I let my eyes roam freely, I was lifted from my stupor. One after another, the women came forward. Each came from somewhere nearby, each came after a short wait. A few beads of sweat fell, accompanied by the frequent bowing of my head out of diffidence for the lady who by now had come down in her pomegranate-colored caftan closed with a silk belt, her head wrapped in a blue scarf. With that squint in her left eye. Smiling, she greeted me and sat down next to me in the *brṭāl*. She didn't ask about the list of expenditures or the other things I'd brought along in my canvas bag. She didn't ask how I was or how the land and the crops were. She didn't ask after the tree with its green tendrils under which she used to sit drinking tea smelling of freshly-picked mint. She didn't recall the abundant happiness she'd felt upon seeing the cows and donkeys, and upon breathing in the country air and enjoying the pure *laban*, fresh butter and *maḥrāsh*, *barkūkash* and *bāddāz*[30] [7]

She didn't speak, as if the state of the farm didn't interest her and as if what I'd come for meant nothing. She came down the stairs facing the *brṭāl*-- those stairs which I'd never in my life gone up. Some voices came down to me from above-- boisterous, girlish voices shouting with laughter. And even though I raised my eyes to see the windows fitted with iron bars, and looked at the potted plants in the hallway between the rooms, still I did not ascend those stairs down which the lady had come after my wait.

She did not speak and I did not speak.

She asked about nothing and I said nothing.

She greeted me and sat down.

I returned her greeting and we remained silent.

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[30] *laban*: a kind of buttermilk; *maḥrāsh*: a type of pan-bread; *barkūkash*: a dish made with grits and milk; *bāddāz*: a kind of couscous.

Before that, I had come through *Bab Boujeloud* and walked down *Ṭalʿa*[31] until I got to this house. I looked at the people on the street, listened to the sounds, and inhaled the aroma of spices. Then I knocked on the door and went in. I waited, suspended between my streaming sweat and the smell of death; and when she still hadn't come down her staircase, I went out to the streets, ever climbing and descending. The passersby watched and smiled at me with a tinge of mockery or laughter as I went from *Ṭrāfīn* to *Shrābliyīn*,[32] carrying a pair of red shoes-- deep red like a piece of raw meat. The shopkeeper didn't wrap the shoes in a bag or sheet of newspaper when I bought them. I was pleased with their bright color and low price; and I knew that they would captivate the minds of the country youth when I wore them out to the market, worrying about them amidst the stones, thorns, and the water in the hollows and irrigation ditches. I only carried them in my hands for a little while, before tucking them under my arm, just as I would with an uprooted plant or a goat or a shadoof or anything else. The stares I received distracted me and made me forget the disheartening wait. They took my mind off of the cooing of the pigeon suspended in a cage in the heart of the *briṭāl*. A white pigeon they call "*Dhikr Allah*,"[33] that repeats its verses and raises and lowers its head, as if prostrating itself in prayer. He remembers

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[31] *Bab Boujeloud*: One of main entranceways to Fez al-Bālī. *Ṭalʿa:* a main street through Fez al-Bālī, which slopes down towards the center of the city.

[32] *Ṭrāfīn, Shrābliyīn:* neighborhoods in Fez al-Bālī.

[33] *Dhikr Allah:* a type of pigeon, which, it is said, only lives in captivity. As mentioned in the story, it is given the name "*Dhikr Allah*"-- remembrance of God-- because of the manner in which it bobs and coos, reminiscent of the rhythmic bobbing and chanting of some Sufis performing a *dhikr*, rocking back and forth as they repeat a short phrase or word, such as "Allah, Allah, Allah....."

God while my sweat rolls down and I smell death. The water in the tiled fountain gurgling out. The pigeon's cooing. The old orange tree in the middle of the house. The floor tiled with mosaics and marble, and the fountain in the middle. These sounds of the water and the cooing-- these were some of the first sounds of Fez that I was listening to in a distant and brutal place. Whenever I thought of Fez after that, I heard the gurgling of the water and the cooing, and smelled the scent of death.

The lady slept beautifully as I waited.

When I raised my eyes I saw the large windows enclosed by metal grillwork painted green, and it was as if I saw him looking down. The red fez wrapped in a white turban. The yellowness of death. The sunken eyes looking down. But I quickly lowered my gaze, lest he see me looking up at the high windows. I didn't know if he'd always looked down from there-- even dead-- or if it were the place of his surveillance that made me see him.

Still I waited, then left.

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When I returned with the shoes under my arm, the girls gathered around me and began to laugh with each other. Nameless girls. I'd forgotten their names. They began to surround me, dancing, their breasts jiggling. The girls had grown, and the breasts had grown. They danced around the orange tree and around me. Short with black eyes, wearing diaphanous gowns. I could see all of this in dreams, in that fire that had been lit in my eyes, in the world of devils and satans, on a Fassi summer in this pigeon coop. But the game couldn't have assumed this form-- and what happened couldn't have happened-- without his looking down in his red, turban-wrapped fez, and shouting for the game to be put to a stop, thus releasing me from the sarcasm and scorn that surrounded me. But if he had come and released me, I wouldn't have watched the women, and I wouldn't have let my

eyes roam freely, I wouldn't have been lifted from my stupor. And I wouldn't have married "Lalla Btul."

Still my sweat streamed down and cloaked my eyes. I now saw all that saltiness. Fez of salt. House of salt. Girls of salt. Dance of salt. These two salty eyes seeing salt in everything, feeling the sweat's saltiness as it flowed down. Jellaba of salt. Couch of salt. *Brṭāl* of salt. Pigeon of salt. Tree of salt. Oh, salty girls, don't dance around me like that, because my sweat has become salt, and the salt has become salt, and my eyes are salt! Eat the salt up and let me return to heaving in the mud and mire of the earth, which is kneaded with wind and water. Stop dancing your salty dance that way! I see nothing but salt. I see girls made of salt, and fire like salt, and tears as if they were salt.

The dance did not end. There were four girls who covered over my eyes. One was the girl whose deceased father had brought fish for her to clean and fry. He had selected her from amongst her sisters to undertake this task. Her father [10] used to buy river fish from the *Rṣīf*[34] market. The fishmongers there are famous--as are the customers. The girl sat in front of a stream of water, cleaning the fish. But one of the fish slipped from her hands, as if greased with soap. Eyes looked at eyes. Eyes of a fish into eyes of a girl. The fish's eyes said to the girl's eyes, "If you free me I will make you rich. All fish are my sisters, so take your wealth and give me my freedom." The girl stopped short in amazement as the water continued gurgling up from the fountain, and the fish slid away in the stream of water. She found pearls in the bellies of the other fish. Her father was overjoyed and kissed the young girl's hands as he took the pearls and put them in his pocket. Then he

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[34] *Rṣīf*: a neighborhood of Fez Medina. While there is still a thriving market here, river fish are no longer a particular speciality, due to the pollution of the local rivers.

bought a farm. Is this why all the Fassis rush out to buy river fish? Behind every farm a Fassi buys, is there a fish that asked a girl for its freedom? So they say.

I didn't know which of the girls had freed the fish. When the lady had come down her stairs, greeted me, and sat down, the girls came again. They gathered around us, standing-- they did not sit-- and their flimsy gowns revealed the outlines of their bodies. I lowered my gaze. I remained silent, looking down at the ground, waiting for a word from the lady. But she married me instead. She was the one who married me; and I didn't dare raise my eyes to the windows, afraid that he would be looking down, seeing some of what happened. I wished that the laughter I felt deep down had burst out. The spectacle had made me forget the smell of death, and my streaming sweat, and the melancholy that the pigeon's cooing sent through the house. I forgot all of those things when I began to watch the women who came in, one after the other. The girls said to me, "ʿAmmi Tuhami[35], you should get married." "Why haven't you married yet, ʿAmmi Tuhami?" "We have lots of neighbors who are widowed and divorced. Surely one of them would suit you." "We're going to get you married today, ʿAmmi Tuhami." I didn't say anything. I remained silent, looking at the floor while they laughed and winked at each other. When I looked, up I saw one of them signal to the others. And their mother looked at them and called for them to show some decorum. Nevertheless, she too wore a mysterious smile, and some kind of amusement showed through in her face. The girls left for a while, and I remained sitting with the lady in the *brṭāl*. She looked at the ground, and I waited for her to ask me about the crops and the property, but she didn't. Then one of the girls, wearing her flimsy nightgown, came in with a woman in a green jellaba. The

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[35] *ʿAmmi:* literally, "my uncle." Here it is used as a familiar address for an older male family acquaintance.

jellaba, and the veil, and the black shoes. I could see the opening in the jellaba, revealing her calf, as her shoe revealed a bit of her foot. The girl held the woman by her hand, and they stood in front of me, looking at me while I looked at the floor. The girl said, "This is the neighbor I told you about, ʿAmmi Tuhami. If you don't like her, just say so and don't be shy." I didn't dare say that her calves were bare. How could I marry a woman who went out on the street like that? I kept quiet. So the girl said to the woman, "Come with me. ʿAmmi Tuhami didn't like you." After they had been gone for a time, the girl came back with another woman, wearing a black jellaba and red shoes, veiled and wearing glasses. Short like the first one. And I was entranced. How could I speak when I was entranced? When I said nothing, she took her by her hand and said to her, "ʿAmmi Tuhami didn't like you either. Come." They left together and I remained staring at the ground. And when I looked up from time to time at the lady's face, I saw her smile, as if she approved of what her daughters were doing, and enjoyed watching me and the women.

Next came the yellow jellaba, then the orange jellaba. Are they all short? Why is it that all the women of Fez are short? The lady got up from her seat and left with her daughter and the woman in the orange jellaba. The sound of water flowing from the fountain reached my ears. I couldn't raise my eyes to the windows above. They each came in silently. Led by her right hand, one would enter, moving slowly as if blind, wary of bumping into something. As if, in her blindness, *I* were that thing she were afraid of bumping into. The girl would hold her by her hand, raised above her shoulder, her gaze fixed on something close to the ceiling, preventing our eyes from meeting. I would raise my eyes from the floor just once, looking vaguely at the figure of the woman standing in front of me. Not focusing on the eyes or the face under the veil. But when our eyes

[12]

suddenly met, the woman would start, as if she'd seen the Tuhami that no one else saw: a man with horns and a goatee, or with three eyes-- the third one growing from the middle of his forehead. I wouldn't focus my sight, out of diffidence for the lady, and afraid of embarrassing the woman. And yet I didn't see fear in the eyes. When I stole a few glances, I would see sparkling, lowered eyes. The dark pupils of Fassis. How could the girls say that any of the women didn't please me? Who told them that? I liked the one in the orange jellaba. But the girl rushed and took her away. The slit in the green jellaba that revealed the calf-- that was what I didn't like, because I would like to see my wife by myself, and for no one else to see her with me. I could have told her that, and then locked her in the house after we were married. But the girl led her out by the hand. Was she making fun of me? Had "ᶜAmmi Tuhami" become the object of ridicule? Was this the world of devils and satans? Where were the other girls hiding? Every now and then I heard muffled laughter coming from the foyer. But I was consumed with watching. There I was, watching women. Divorced or widowed-- it didn't matter. What mattered was that one of them be mine.

When the two of them came out, walking unhurriedly, each holding a woman's hand, I stayed frozen in my place, while the copious, salty sweat rolled down from my forehead and attacked my eyes. And when I raised them, I saw the squint in the woman's left eye and I knew it was her. It's "Lalla Btul." It was the first time I had uttered her name. I don't know how the name so unconsciously fell from my lips. They began to shout and dance their salty dance around me. My head began to spin and I almost collapsed. Two more girls had come from the foyer to join the others and they all began to dance around me and shout. "He knew her!" they said. "ᶜAmmi Tuhami knew her! He said 'Lalla Btul!' Did you hear him?" "I heard him. He knew her, and when he knows her he must marry [13]

her."

I looked up at those high windows, and it was as if I saw him looking down, in his red, turban-wrapped fez, the yellowness of death cloaking his face. When I got ready to leave I saw their confusion, and they were silent and stopped laughing and dancing. I found all of the jellabas in the foyer-- the green, the black, the yellow, and the orange, but I didn't find the white one, because Lalla Btul was still wearing it. I also found some of the shoes. You might imagine that I took them with me and left the house. But I didn't take them, and if I had taken them I would have had to have married four women-- without being able to marry Lalla Btul. But I left. And if only I hadn't left.

When I left the house, I was drowning in my salty sweat. His unseen eyes in the other world, his surveillance from the window above, the stairs I had never been up, the old orange tree, the gurgling of the water from the fountain, sleep, the clay cooling jug with its dried out tar-- it all baffled me. Even so, I went back to the pigeon coop.

The Directions of the Letter

As if I didn't tell you-- [15]

For perhaps cities have memories, and *they* are telling this. The city I saw in a dream was lost amongst gaps in the words tightly lined up across doors and entryways, walls and *miḥrābs*.[36] It was searching for a name and a meaning in what history had written. And every time it forgot its name, or remembered it, it turned back to the gaps in the words engraved in wood or plaster or tiles, and it heard that bird warbling in the courtyard of an ancient house in "*Ras Jnān*,"[37] with an old orange tree rising up through its center.

I went up the stairs or went down.

My voice was lost and didn't speak.

That was in a dream. Was it Fez? The bird didn't exist, as if, just then, he had landed on my head as I was suspended between the columns, pillars, white marble slabs, and the smell of worm-eaten wood-- and as if *he* were the one who wanted to look down towards the fountain and the *miḥrāb*, turning his back to the sellers of candles and offerings.[38] Then that bird, whom I thought had landed on my head, turned and looked around him, returning to the carved doors to peck at them as if he were playing or flirting. His small claws clutched the recessions and

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[36] *miḥrāb:* a recess in a mosque indicating the direction of prayer (towards Mecca).

[37] *Ras Jnān* a residential neighborhood in Fez al-Bālī.

[38] *nudhūr:* offerings, often given to fulfill a pledge. These offerings often take the form of candles, incense, etc. bought from the area around Mulay Idriss, where the founder of Fez is buried.

engravings, and he almost fell, then raised himself up a bit and flapped his wings against the doors.

He drank from the fountain and pecked the tiled floor, then flew away, taking one of the letters with him.

A nameless bird. With shape, color and movement-- but there is no need to describe him. His is the wing which will leave its mark on what follows, after the red man[39] comes from the streets in the shape of a letter. And maybe the bird [16] forgot that he had pecked out the letter and drunk water from the fountain that was unlike water. He turns towards me, standing in the midst of blaring *Melḥūn* songs, and towards the shouts of the vegetable and river fish vendors, and towards the cafe prattle and the kohled and lipsticked women of "*Jnân Sbîl*."[40]

I will not go near them, lest speech force me to rape them.[41] I must keep my distance from the place whose name is Fez, and the river whose name was "The River of Pearls."[42] And yet here I am approaching, drawn to the place despite myself. I will approach that red man, whom this moment willed to be its

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[39] *aṣhab:* reddish, reddish brown. It is clear that " *aṣhab*" refers to the color of the man's hair, but rather than use the awkward translation "red-headed man" or the odd "auburn man," I preferred to maintain the contrast that appears later in the story between "red man" and "blue women."

[40] *Jnān Sbīl:* public gardens on the edge of Fez Jdīd.

[41] More literally translated as "to deflower" or "to break their hymens."

[42] "The River of Pearls": *Wad Fez*, which splits off into several tributaries that run through the Medina. On the importance of this river to the city: *Zahrat al-Ās* "It is called the river of pearls and arises in the plain to the west of the city, about six miles away, from about sixty separate springs. Its pure waters, which glide over bright gravel, are wonderful to behold. Its movement is scarcely visible until the point where it enters the town. Here it breaks into a sheaf of rivulets which flow to the various districts, feeding the fountains of the mosques, streets, and individual houses, driving mills, filling baths, irrigating gardens, and removing, on leaving the city, all refuse and impurities." (Quoted in Burckhardt, 67)

subject. The red man and the bird are two images of the same thing: the bird is a letter, the red man draws the letter.

From an alleyway, in the darkness beneath low ceilings[43] that block out the sun, they emerge illuminated by the glowing furnace of a public oven or hammam; and fire shines in their eyes.

Then, when he comes from one of the open spaces and sees light, he begins his solitary game with the letters. From them arise the marble slabs, the columns and pillars, the walls and doors and *miḥrābs* made of wood or mosaic tiles, of plaster or paper, embroidered from golden thread and sapphires.

I will learn how to drive this bird from my language and die one death after another until I arrive. As the bird came from the orange tree, I caught the smell of death. When he returned to land on my head and look all around, he said: "Every soul shall have a taste of death."[44]

Does he refer to his death or mine?

Or is it the death of the age of old Fez which has now returned to act out its death?

The bird says it; and the red man writes it in the shape of a bird, while flocks of birds circle over the walls around "*Bab Makīna*." My father hung the picture of the bird of letters on a wall of the shop, amongst the pickled vegetables and *mḥammaḍat*[45] and olives-- green, red, yellow and black. Bottles of wine vinegar. Pickled lemons, cucumbers, peppers and hot chili paste. My father in his black

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[43]I believe Tazi is referring here to a *sābāṭ*, an upper passageway between two buildings on opposite sides of the street, the floor of which becomes a "ceiling" for those passing in the street below.

[44]Qur'ān: 3:185 (trans. ʿAlī)

[45] *mḥammaḍat:* usually vegetables, cured in lemons.

caftan turning his back to the death spoken by that bird. Caftan buttoned up to the neck; the stocky, energetic body; eyes open to the shelves and the passersby and the facing shops.

I forgot about the bird, just as he had.

The red man came again and I watched him draw some letters. Whenever I wrote after that, I pictured that red man as he made the quill's tip quiver, then from these tremblings formed black letters which he smilingly sold for a ryal of that time. He whetted his lips, and his amber eyes flashed. His beard was red, his laugh like a teardrop. His eyes, focused on the page, could not see the things in the shop, nor anyone who might steal a peak at the birth of his quiverings from the tip of the quill. A sorcerer entranced with viewing what lay behind the letters and beyond view, but of course it was inevitable that some of the other things vanish and leave the picture. And as he slipped out of the shop, after having conjured up the spirit of the letter, the bottles of pickled peppers and wine vinegar, their necks wrapped in white rags, reappeared once again. My father was meticulous about their being very clean before stopping them up with the cork. Sometimes a bottle exploded. The vinegar would spill and shards of glass scatter. The smell spread; then my father would say, "This is a black day." I knew it was a black day when a bottle exploded, because they only exploded on black days. He would roll up his sleeves to pick up the pieces of glass, and wipe up the vinegar from the ground and the shelves. The smell remained strong and pungent, reminding him of the darkness of the day as he shuffled his stout body around the cramped shop and muttered some obscure, muffled words to himself, his lips moving silently. Every now and then, he would turn around to look at the picture of the bird.

[18]

The red man enters the shop like an intruder: he doesn't ask leave to enter, doesn't look at the wares or at the shopkeeper's expression to see if his entry is

met with happiness, indifference or grumbling. He quickly sets his white paper down wherever it strikes him and writes:

"The Merciful"

or

"Humility is the Beauty of Faith"

or

"Knowledge is Light"

Birds of letters fly as he released them from the quill's tip. From a stroke of his magic wand and from the smiling of his amber eyes. When these letter-birds invade the emptiness of the place, he looks at them and laughs, revealing a gap between his front teeth. He earns one or two ryals for leaving the paper, the birds and the letters in the shop, or takes them all away with him if he isn't paid. Then he goes to write the same aimless letters that fly away from him, bursting into another shop in the same manner, and leaving with one or two ryals.

I have no wind.

This city has no memory.

There is no bird but the one whose picture was literally imprinted on paper, after having swooped down from atop the orange tree and landed on the page. He drew his letters, looked around himself, drank from the fountain and pecked the delicate engravings in the plasterwork and wood as if kissing or playing.

[19]

That bird endured in the letters,

in my eyes,

in the streets of Nether Fez,

in water and stone,

in Attaghat mountain and "The River of Pearls,"

in the stories and sayings and tidings, and the tears and songs of young

girls,

in everything,

in nothing.

Was it I who wrote that note, who set down pen upon page and made the letters become letters? I must remember. I memorized the words and left the letters to decay in my pocket; the page crumpled then smelled-- the smells of sweat and of coins and paper. I haven't read it for years. Why should I read it? I know its words letter by letter. I memorized it in Fez's bitter cold and hot nights, and during the invasions of spirits across the high ceilings whose plasterwork swelled with the cold and joined the levels of dreams. With that same color in which I see everything-- ages, and blossoms and the new moon, the furthest degree of silence and "becoming one" and forgetting. I memorized it in my forgetfulness while I looked around that ceiling and saw what both the sleeper and the waker would see.

That piece of paper remained folded up, unopened in a jacket pocket. Every time I changed the jacket I took it out and put it in a place near my heart, along with my identity card and the few small bills I possessed. No one read it. Even she for whom it was intended did not read it. I didn't hand it to her and I didn't send it to her by mail; and I couldn't bring myself to send it with one of the neighbor's small children, so shy and unsure was I, afraid of taking advantage of the child's innocence. And perhaps I was also afraid that with the passing of years [20] it might lose some of its meaning, or that she would get married and let it fall into her husband's hands, or that she would tear it to shreds or burn it or throw it into a sewer. And so, despite being the source of tremblings or desire or flight, it remained close to my heart these many, long years. I left it to grow yellow and crumpled, steeped in foul smells. But I didn't throw it away that day or somehow

rid myself of it, and remained unable to explain why. Just as I was unable to allow it to shed light on the tops of the dead orange tree, or on the highest of the ever-multiplying minarets of Fez, or the highest limits of the soul.

It wasn't a love note-- if it had been, it would have lost its importance as memory grew weak, and I would have torn it up once the phase had passed.

I imprisoned the letters, and yet they did not reveal to my heart a map to people and paths.

Maybe the letters shrivelled up or died, or maybe the pocket tore and they slipped out; and so I did not write and did not speak.

The red man alone stayed with me in all that I'd written in my life: that one folded page in the jacket pocket. The letters

"Patience is the Key to Happiness"

shining in the candlelight despite the dust and yellowing of the paper. But even with all that patience, there was no relief. Instead, the key rusted. A big key, covered in rust, it had begun to corrode and afflict the hand that carried it with coldness and death. The hand struggled to hold onto it, even as it was overtaken by weakness and shaking, and stained with rust covered over with a layer of green corrosion.

How often I used to stare at those letters and see my father turn his back to them to face the customers or passersby. I can see the bird and smell the scent of death mingled with that of vinegar and olives.

The letters glimmered beneath the light of the oil lamp, which stretched out its fiery tongues. Then came the gas lantern, which lit up the letters during the evenings in which darkness descended early and the sky weighed down upon the soul, warning of an oppressive nightmare or of a wailing in the night or of a regaining of consciousness. Then the electric light came and gave the letters their

[21]

own special light. The bulb dangled from a cord and every scratch on the wall or crack on the shelf appeared clearly, despite the shadows' dancing with its movement-- even the nails' rust and some stains and spiders in the corners, all of them became clearer. And my father's nose, when he turned a little, and the bottles and edges, cast their slanting shadows. Everything had its own shadow, until my father died and the shop was locked up. Perhaps the letters still stuck out amidst the dust and silence and darkness, remembering the owner of the pen who had drawn them. Or maybe they forgot, or the sheet of paper floated down and slid to the ground, and they too died their first death before someone came to pick them up from the ground and returned them to life on the wall of a shop or a house.

We didn't re-open the shop after my father died. We forgot about it. But I did remember what those letters in the shape of birds' wings had forgotten. I tried to come up with a new idea, like making from letters a city or a dream or a wager. And like making the beginning start with these letters.

On that day almost twenty four years ago-- the day on which I wrote the note and left it in my pocket-- it was inevitable that I would remember the red man. And here I am thinking of him today, as I write stupid words that think with a cat's claws and see with crocodile eyes. I wanted him to write me

a house

an economy

warmth

children

blue clouds

[22]

or to write for me in letters

a river

a street

a demonstration

a political party

a class war

a laugh

a shout

And to write all that is spoken by

the nighttimes

and chatterings

and moments of silence

And to imprint

love

and moaning

and the eternity that troubles

and blood

and the devils

Then I said, This happens in life and could happen within the space of letters, just as life happens in the meanings of the letters

daydreaming

and seeking inspiration

and imagining, [23]

And so my father died, the shop was locked up and the red man went away never to return. His letters entered were placed in the realm of the impossible, and I then had to dream of the possibility of my letters that I learned in *"Ras Jnān"* and that I heard pronounced in *"Rṣīf"* and in *"Al-ʿAshshābīn"*

And I didn't tell.

As if I didn't tell.

I didn't see him again after that time long ago; his letters died, and the memories of the medina are what remained to tell. Only they know him and know his calligraphy that was once posted on every wall or butcher shop or carpenter's or blacksmith's or grocer's-- memories issuing from the *miḥrābs* and columns and entryways and the Quranic schools and courts. The letters died and their race died out with them. The red man disappeared. All of them died and left the shops to their children, and the new merchants and craftsmen. They left nothing to nothing; and that city whose name was Fez lost its memories.

The red man.

With him are the letter and the city.

There are no letters for me in the Fez that died. And the new-born letters have no place and have every place-- they come with the nightmare of that bird I'd imagined had landed on my head and looked all around-- then I saw him flying in letters as if they were the scent of green corrosion or molten clay or resin or tin or the smell of camomile. And then I saw him again on the streets of some city or other as if he were giving a speech to people-- their faces bloody, with eagle noses [24] that cast no shadows. They were clapping and cheering, and I was one of them; and they say "no," I along with them. Then he laughs, and says "The play has ended now. Do not believe your roles in this theater." The people shout and say "no!" wiping the blood from their faces to see whether it is paint or coagulated blood from their arteries and veins. And when the bird begins to fly all of those faces disappear and I disappear with them. I lose myself and don't know where I am, and nothing remains but those letters that the bird had brought, and had drunk from the water that is not like water.

I must forget all of that, for the bird has returned to the old orange tree and the light has gone out from around the letters. And when I think back, I can recall

having seen the hair of the blue women of the *Sūs*, who didn't paint their faces[46] and the black woman with blue eyes. But I didn't see a red man-- so perhaps I saw him in the city of letters, in Nether Fez.

[46]More familiar are "the blue *men*" of the *Sūs*, or South-- the Tuaregs. They are so-called because these men are veiled, their faces covered with blue or black scarves, the dye of which may stain their faces. In contrast, the women are *not* veiled.

The Unparalleled

His name was Sīd al-ʿAbd.

[25]

A man he was.

And unique he was with respect to his wings-- two wings of paper or feathers or henna branches. Perhaps they were tattoos or fantasies-- a legend of one of those days. In the beginning, they appeared on the walls of an alley in Nether-Fez, sagging and drunk with lethargy and drowsiness, as if they'd been stolen from a stuffed bird.

While "*Al-Bashāra* Alley" was asleep in listlessness, gloom, and a sluggish breeze, children from the neighboring streets snuck in and drew the wings. They mimicked the *faqīh*'s[47] gesture as he opened his arms from beneath the black cape he wore over his jellaba, resembling a bat opening his wings.

The sight of the *faqīh* in the middle of the street, making this unexpected motion as if he were getting ready to fly, so obsessed the children that they snuck into "*Al-Bashāra* Alley." The wall was not smooth, and they grazed their fingers on its bumps. They attached no head, nor body of person, bird or animal.

They satisfied themselves with the two black wings, spread across the length of the wall, sure that the *faqīh* would break his ablution[48] when he left his house and saw them. Or that he would turn towards the entrance of the alley and

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[47] *faqīh*: a lawyer, expert in Islamic jurisprudence, and possibly a teacher at a Quranic school.

[48] *break his ablution*: the children presumably expected the *faqīh* to urinate-- from anger or fear.

swear. But when he left his house, which stood at the bottom of the alley, he saw nothing in the darkness. He left more than once without seeing anything. And when he did see the wings, he turned back to knock on the door with the fist-shaped knocker, as was his habit whenever coming home, even though he lived alone and didn't expect anyone to open the door. Then he would take the large key from his chest and go down the stairs to disappear for the whole day. [26]

Why did the *faqīh* always knock on the door before unlocking it? Was he alerting the resident spirits to his arrival, or did he imagine the presence of someone in the house? The *faqīh* hadn't married; but maybe he dreamt there was a woman inside, and with his knock was telling her "I'm home." Then he might have cleared his throat as he went down the stairs and passed into the foyer, smoothing his cape down from the shoulders with that strange motion that we likened to a bird getting ready to fly. And maybe his not marrying was one of his personal secrets-- like his not having children and no one's knowing what he did all those hours, holed up at home without a movement being heard from him, sometimes for days.

No one knew what he did, yet we could imagine his moving between the rooms, going upstairs then down, sitting in the *brṭāl* with down-turned eyes, troubled, his head resting in his hand. He starts to leave, then turns back up the stairs to the roof to look at the minaret of the Qarawiyyin Mosque, and the site of his former position. In his hand he holds the small and large telescopes, as he opens one eye and closes the other, looking with his penetrating vision at the farthest stars. He wears the black cape to shield himself from the cold. And when he goes downstairs he sets it on the edge of the bed and lets its fringes hang down to the floor, not bothering to lift it up or hang it on a hook. He wanted anything, and did nothing. But surely sometimes he did something during those moments of

which we were ignorant. of our ignorance. This was Sīd al-ʿAbd, the source of our far-flung fantasies. And then again, maybe the cape itself was the source of those fantasies, or that movement Sīd al-ʿAbd made in the middle of the street, opening the flaps of the cape as if opening his wings.

[27] During our times of ignorance-- when we lost sight of him and could no longer survey his activities through our own personal telescope-- he must have done something or other. He may have dyed his pointed beard with henna or dabbed his temples with "*Ghālia*"[49] or put on a cologne of "the Prophet's perfume." Or perhaps he opened the box and looked at some of the old instruments, or read a page from the book or performed his ablutions. Or maybe he ate some bread and olive oil or opened the book of shapes, spheres and signs and looked at some drawings or slept a little, then arose feverishly and went up to the roof of the house to see his place at the top of the Qarawiyyin minaret. Then when Fez's winter night had chilled his chest, he returned to bed to wrap up in his warmth and look at the wings.

The wings were tattooed on his arms or maybe he had seen them in a picture or a fantasy or in his sleep or in the page of a travel book. He too wanted to travel, so he sprouted the wings as ʿAbbās Ibn Firnās[50] had done, and when he saw them in his very secret, private mirror, which he kept in a special place, he said: "I have grown wings." The wings are new and I am eternal[51] and the world is eternal, God is eternal and heaven and hell are both eternal. Ships and planes

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[49]*Ghalia*: musk and ambergris

[50] *ʿAbbās b. Firnās* (d. 274/1887): Andalusian scholar and poet, who built mobile wings covered in feather and leapt from a precipice. He hovered for a moment before falling, but did not die. (see *Encyclopaedia of Islam*)

[51] *Qadīm:* old or eternal; one of God's attributes.

are eternal as well, and the surface of the earth and the clouds and the heavenly bodies, the planets and moons and stars and the seas, the days, the crops, the livestock and all the descendants of Adam-- all of them are eternal. How awesome this eternity and how awesome am I! In this body is the whole world. The body of a *faqīh* and the son of a *faqīh* and scion of the house of *faqīhs* and of the city of scholars-- Fez which was built by Mulay Idriss son of Idriss of old, before this world existed.

Feather or fur?

Leaves or henna branches?

Jinn's tears or heaven's clouds?

Shrouds of the dead?

Dust of age and decay?

[28]

Seaweed?

Nighttimes' weaving or the eye's insolence?

Are the wings made of all this? This is another of "Sīd al-ʿAbd's" lies. Wings of bats, eagles or owls, with which he ascends to the stars and heavenly bodies and planets to see up close what he had already seen from afar. He would submerge his dim-sighted eyes-- floating as if they were two glass beads-- into his magic water, which would clarify everything for him with the sound of the water rushing from the bottle into the glass basin. He sees the water. When he draws the precise telescope near to himself, the dome of the blue sky appears with its bending arch, and the basin comes to resemble the earth. As he searches in that dome for the position of the heavenly bodies and the stars, he is reminded of the story of that astronomer who saw the new moon heralding *al-ʿĪd al-Ṣaghīr* on the

evening of the 28th of Ramadan.[52] He had checked again with the telescope, and saw the new moon in a clear blue sky. He could tell this to no one. But when he saw it and saw it and saw it again, he thought of the disorder of the cycle of the days and months and years. He checked all the calendars. Once again he surveyed the apparent new moon, clear as day. He performed his ablutions in the fountain of the Qarawiyyin Mosque and prayed the *maghreb* prayer[53]. When the astrologers saw him repeatedly raising up his telescope from the mosque's courtyard towards the sky and he saw them look at him with curiosity, he said to them, "I saw the new moon. The new moon of the *ʿĪd* is clear. I saw it. You can see it with me. There it is-- that is the new moon of the *ʿĪd*"

None of them believed he had seen the new moon on the 28th night, or that *al-ʿĪd al-Saghīr* would take place on the 29th day. Had the astronomer gone mad? Was this a laughing matter? Was it *fitna*?[54] Did this astronomer want to mislead the people in their religion? This was Ramadan! Month of fasting! Month of penance and forgiveness! And so, did this astronomer want to mock the people and their religion?

[29]

The *qāḍīs*[55] came for prayer and ordered the spyglasses and telescopes to

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[52]The Islamic calendar, established on a lunar basis, consists of twelve months, each either 29 or thirty days in length. (It is never possible to have a month of only 28 days.) The ninth month, *Ramaḍān*, is a holy month of fasting. As all months, its end is marked with the sighting of the *hilāl*, the new moon. The new moon, marking the end of *Ramaḍān* also marks *ʿĪd al-Fiṭr*, or *al-ʿĪd al-Saghīr*, the Feast of Fast-Breaking. In Morocco, the announcement of the new moon and the end of *Ramaḍān* is made from the Qarawiyyin Mosque.

[53]*Maghreb prayer:* prayer performed at sunset.

[54]The term "*fitna*" indicates "temptation" or "trial of one's faith," but may also be translated as "revolt," "dissension" or "rioting."

[55] *Qāḍī:* judge, particularly concerned with infractions in Islamic law.

be raised, but the crescent moon did not appear to any of the time-keepers or astronomers. It happened by chance. It was pure chance that pushed that astronomer to raise up his telescope on the 28th day of Ramadan. And what if he had raised it on the thirteenth day, or on the ninth day or the fourth? Undoubtedly he would have seen the new moon on the thirteenth day or on the ninth day or the fourth.

Sīd al-ʿAbd began to laugh as he gazed into his magic water. Now, at that moment, he laughed and we heard his laughter. How amazing these times in which the scholars and *faqīhs* have begun to laugh, for we had never seen them other than scowling, feigning sobriety and science in everything. Nothing funny makes them laugh and nothing sad makes them cry, for they are the strongest of God's creations and do not submit to pleasure or give in to temptation, They don't laugh at the things that make one laugh or cry at what makes one cry, as if they were made of granite, as if their heart were made of stone. As if they were outside of time, all time. And every age has its humor that makes the eyes well up with tears of laughter-- were it not for laughter, the line of Sayyidna Adam[56] would have died out, and no one but the scholars and the *faqīhs* would have remained on this earth, for they know in their own way how to resist all that must be resisted, including laughter and tears and extinction.

Sīd al-ʿAbd laughs. There he is laughing and here we are listening to his laughter. He laughs until his eyes fill with tears. He passes his fingertips over the fringes of his long eyebrows. Still he laughs, for he had seen a white hair from his eyebrows and thought it was the new moon of the *ʿĪd*.

From what will he weave the wings?

From fur or from henna branches,

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[56]*Sayyidna Adam:* "Our lord Adam." *Sayyidna* is a venerative title used for saints.

or from tears of the jinn?

From the clouds of heaven, [30]

or from the shrouds of the dead?

From dust or from the eye's insolence?

And where does he get all of this? From tears and pain and sleeplessness? From the all-night vigilance over the yellowing books and the attempt to invent the world anew? As for the *faqīh* Sīd al-ʿAbd-- he was born but did not give birth,[57] no woman ever entered his house, and he never told us if a woman's coming into his house and his life, would have spoiled his magic water, or would have altered the positions of the stars. Or if it would have transformed him from a man who enjoyed his sanctuary into a dull spirit who eats breakfast with his wife and children then busies himself with teaching them to read and to do arithmetic, and preparing medicine for those with upset stomachs, and occupies himself with obligatory laughter and slander and expense, and all the obligations that would make the forbidden allowed and would make him forget *fiqh* and Quranic interpretation, and mathematics and astrology, such that he would become one of the common people, the vermin that have spread out across the earth.

He never told us if the evil posed by women were of this gravity, such that he would sink to the level of vermin. But we saw him lowering his eyes whenever he saw a veiled woman cross "*Al-Ḥajar*" Alley on his route to the Qarawiyyin. A woman gave birth to him and he knew that this happened eternally, just as the world is eternal and God is eternal and all that will come is eternal and every invention is eternal. Yet if he had a choice, then books would have given birth to him. He would have forgotten his mother and his childhood home and friends,

[57]An allusion to the Qurʾānic verse: "He begetteth not, Nor is He begotten." (112:3; trans. ʿAli)

and he would remember nothing but what appeared to him in his magic water. The vermin give birth to little boys and girls, everyone-- even the descendants of the Prophet and the rich and the high-born -- give birth to little boys and girls; but who gives birth to books? Who was born of a book? Whose lineage is traced through books, and who has books for descendents? In whose blood does their blood flow, and whose eyes are lined with the kohl of their letters? Who has a book of his own? Who has borne books but he who was born of a book? Wouldn't you agree with me that no one has been born of a book except he who had a book of his own? Books give birth to books. Books give birth to us and we give birth to books and leave them to future times so that they may bear books in their turn. I am a book and the son of a book. I am the book. A book wrote me and I wrote this book. The book that is on the right and the book that is on the left, all of them are books born after I was born, and here are their offspring multiplying. Wouldn't you agree that no one has been born of a book except he who had a book of his own?

[31]

The book on my right
The book on my left.
It was one drop[58] from the books that produced this whole lineage of books.
Pleasure in books
in maps and shapes and circles
and the magic water
and the telescopes
and wings of feathers and fur
and tears of the jinn

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[58] *nuṭfa:* drop, sometimes translated as "sperm," from which man was created. See, for exampe, Qur'ān 23:13, 16:3, 18:37.

and clouds of heaven

the book is everything

and he who has no book is born of adultery and he is sterile

Laugh, Sīd al-ʿAbd

Laugh

Indeed, that astronomer had seen a part of himself in the truth, and so believed that it was the whole truth. Laugh, and don't be ashamed of yourself as you climb halfway up the stairs then suddenly turn back down, as one who searches for something lost, as one who doesn't search for anything, or as one who has found something without having looked for it. Laugh as you see the dome of the sky in your magic water, and see the curvature of the earth, and see the whole truth. Laugh while you see the truth in nothing but the wings, which are of feather and fur and of jinn's tears. Laugh. Here are the tears of the jinn and here are the wings. Take them. Here they are, and there you are flying with them until you touch the fine dividing line between you and the lotus tree of the outermost limit.[59] Laugh, Sīd al-ʿAbd, and don't break your ablution , for your mother is a book and your father is a book and your children are books, and your lineage is that through which you lost your keen vision-- through the writing of letters and drawing of circles and shapes and symbols. Here are your children gathered around you. Here is the first baby-like utterance of the letter. Here is the laughter and the crying and here is the confusion of the clear moment. And you must go up and down the stairs to the roof as often as you wish, searching for the purity of the moment that the breaking of ablution will not disturb.

[32]

Here is our personal spyglass

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[59]See footnote #13.

With it we see you, Sīd al-ʿAbd

This is a small telescope with which the children of *Al-Bashāra* Alley amuse themselves, and any busybody or snoop could borrow it from us to spy on your comings and goings, and the secrets of your magic water.

When Sīd al-ʿAbd left the house, he paid no attention to the wings drawn on the wall. He took the way to the Qarawiyyin, and climbed the stairs of the minaret; he withdrew the heavy key from the belt beneath his cape and jellaba, put it in the lock and turned it twice. This is the small room on the stairs of the minaret-- the place of the timekeepers and the astrologers and astronomers and the muezzins. Red rugs and carpets on the floor. Great clanging clocks. Astrolabes. The precise instruments and the books and the maps. A solitary window in which [33] birds nest. Sīd al-ʿAbd knew that he was in a special place, and with only a few steps up the stairs he would find himself in the highest part of the minaret. Here are the shapes and the maps and the drawings and the symbols, the quadrangles, and the circles and the polygons and the symbols. Mass and matter. Shapes of the soul that reach back to the eternity of this world. The shapes are eternal and the world is eternal. The meanings are eternal and the books are eternal, and every invention is eternal. Exposed and unrevealed secrets, the cities and the celestial bodies and the doors to heaven, and death and life, and heaven and hell and the call to prayer and time and dawn, the setting of the sun, and a third of the night and a fourth of it and a fifth and a sixth and all of time and all things. All of that is eternal, as I am Eternal. How awesome is this eternity, and how awesome am I as I am exulted and beheld.

And this is the earth of Fez in which is the body. As for the spirit, it is suspended between the heavens and the earths. This is the city of rising and

falling, the talkative salesmen, the minarets, and the used book markets to which people who lived a long time ago, and who are still living in the past, gave birth. And because they had given birth to children, the children shut out the books from their hearts and sold them at auctions. This is Fez, this is verdigris and lime and green corrosion, and everything that covers the shapes of things or changes the appearance of the substance.

Fez of verdigris,

of lime,

of green corrosion,

Fez is the Fez that was of old, which, in its darkness, is protected by "*Al-Bashāra*" Alley. And when the *faqīh* Sīd al-ʿAbd descends the stairs from the Qarawiyyin's minaret he is afraid of tripping on the tails of the cape and tumbling and plunging down like the stars that were made missiles for stoning the devils. He fears becoming a star cast at a devil, and the star plummets and the devil escapes from its trajectory and flees to an open space for other stars to pursue him. How many stars and how many devils? How many *faqīhs*, and how many those who gave birth to books? How many?

[34]

When Sīd al-ʿAbd was afraid of tumbling and plunging down, he would open the wings of his cape and become a bat or a raven and the wings would become feather or fur, mint leaves or henna branches, tears of the jinn, or the clouds of heaven or the shrouds of the dead.

Sīd al-ʿAbd drank his magic water. He slumped over a little on the bed and died. He didn't dye his pointed beard with henna or dab his temples with "Ghalia" or put on a cologne of "the Prophet's perfume." He didn't eat bread dipped in olive oil or open the box of strange instruments. Sīd al-ʿAbd remained decaying. We saw him through our telescope as he decayed. And we saw the neighbors

break into the house to find the *faqīh* with his eyes rolled back, surrounded by the shapes of pairs of wings-- some of them of jinn's tears and some of them of heaven's clouds and some of the others of shrouds of the dead.

Halting at the Ruins[60]

I have been waiting for the chance to start. Maybe I will crack the egg shell, or peek through a hole in the door, or maybe I will imagine. I waited for this moment and began putting down on scraps of paper something shaped like writing-- or maybe it was shaped like the wind, or like death and the impossible. The narrator is here with me and I will give him the opportunity to speak, so we can both present you with some observations, revelations, and visions. You may present them to yourselves. Don't expect anything out of the ordinary. The place is simple, known to some of you who've lived in common neighborhoods of a city whose name flourished in bygone centuries. Is it Fez? Come and name it yourselves. Erect your fantasies around it. And if there is a given object of the observation, then it is a room of medium size in which two men live and innumerable people are sheltered at various times of the day and night. It would be difficult for us to describe the city or the fantasies we have around it, since that would probably lead us to daydreams and memories without beginning or end-- and then the narrative would inevitably lose its logic. This observation is ordered through lines of words and becomes disordered through everything. And maybe it isn't observation or spying or snooping or investigation. It is the bewilderment that accompanies things awakening and their rising up like the ghosts of rainy nights in the streets of lower Fez. My bewilderment, as I remember and try to not refer you to something that you know or don't know. And we-- you and I-- will begin the creation of this

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[60] "*Al-Wuqūf ʿala al-Aṭlāl*": This title is in reference to a recurring theme found in much Arab poetry, both pre-Islamic and modern-- that of returning to and standing over the abandoned encampment or pillaged city.

world, from fantasy and possibility.

The room could not be any other way-- cast into a corner of an empty space that no one can quite identify-- is it a courtyard? ruins? a cemetary? There are no graves. The trees are dead and the dust on the ground is dry and black. Roofs, windows and balconies are visible in the distance; and if one looked even further one could see minarets and towers. [36]

The door to the room is always open; even so, it is filled with the smell of cigarettes and sleep and food. One ground-floor room in this corner. No windows. The ceiling is high, and the layers of peeling paint reveal a multitude of colors, and reveal holes and shapes that look like maps and faces of humans and dogs. My own face can be seen amongst those shapes-- the big nose and the mole on the left cheek-- as well as the narrator's face with his bulging eyes and his perpetual pallor, and other faces that are difficult to recognize at times, except that one of those shapes seems capable of kaleidoscopic changes, ever transforming itself to give an illusion of mirrors whose images change in accordance with what they reflect. At first it appears to be a street, its sidewalk lined with varieties of river fish and seasonal fruits, on which the voices of hawkers and peddlers could be heard. Then the street, in this city of ours, becomes European, glass facades and hats appear along the sides of it, and the colonizers' laughter is heard.

Those shapes dream, and push us-- you and me-- to dream or reminisce. But then the shoe's shape is traced just so, suddenly, in the middle of the maps and faces of humans and dogs. A big worn-out shoe with a thick sole, swollen and splitting from its clearly old, orange-colored leather. Maybe that isn't its color, since there couldn't be a man's shoe that color unless it had been used in the circus. Or then again maybe the color of the layer of paint there had made it orange, or maybe it was really like that, and I've simply been talking drivel.

[37]

Keep in mind that this shoe, visible on the face of the wall, as clear as if we'd created it from fantasy, will become a subject in the story. Think about this from now on. A story about a shoe! Isn't this the height of sarcasm? But whom are we making fun of? And who is the story mocking? The suckers who bought the stinking river fish? The Christians' hats? The readers? Or does the story mock another story?

Shall we go in?

We may as well go inside, since we've already seen everything-- or at least some of what we can see in the room. If you haven't come in yet, then you are now in that ambiguous space that defies definition as courtyard or ruins. Perhaps you're stealing a peek into the room through its open door. Come on in. You won't be turned out by the man sitting on the edge of the bed slightly raised up on iron legs. A bed like those in prisons or hospitals. He won't see you, and even if he sensed your footsteps, he still wouldn't inquire. This is a tribal tent, and everyone enters without being asked who they are or what they want or who they've come to see. A room, but it's like a tribal tent. Are you the only one who's still standing and hasn't come in with us? How many are we? Tens? Hundreds? Thousands? Tens of thousands? I won't ask you who I am, who we are, and what we are doing in this place. If one of you won't come into the room, then at least come up to the threshold. Now you're entering. Come stand here, and you there. There must be someone to direct/organize this movement but there's no need for the police in that. Let the man sitting on the edge of the bed-- or me or one of you-- direct it. The police would make a case out of this gathering, but we only gather here to give our imaginations free rein to recreate the room once we have discovered it-- and this is not a police matter.

We will rally together and resist. The swearing and punching will begin, and

the room won't be big enough to hold so many dreamers and readers and snoops and spies on the life of the man sitting on the edge of the bed who doesn't even see us. Rumors will spread. Some victims will fall, and only when we cut ourselves off from observation will no problem occur. [38]

There must be description.

Each one of us will describe this room.

There are, of course, other possible descriptions.

Here I am now describing it for you.

Two large beds, at the end of which is a space for cooking or standing. The red blanket piled up in a heap somewhere on the floor. Kettles. Dried out mint leaves. Egg shells. Books. Pants spread over the back of a chair. High walls on which appear several colors, like layers of overlapping paint. The smells. Etc.

The moment of description could start at another time, the things in the room could have shifted and moved into other positions, insisting, however, on a spirit of disorder and chaos-- some dishes, for instance, with leftovers in them appearing on the floor, together with plastic sandals and shoes-- one of being them that same shoe that has now come down from the wall. We had imagined it was there but now here it is, next to other shoes and sandals.

I have described the place's objects, but forgot to describe its people for you. I don't need to do that. Because as I describe the people, I might end up describing you, piling up, sitting or standing inside the room, maybe inside this text, and I might then reduce you to watching or reading eyes. It is, however, up to *you* to describe the people in this room-- to describe yourselves And when one of you, or each of you, has described it in his own way, then this text will not end, and will become a mere reflection-- of me and of you, and of the man sitting on the edge of the bed.

[39]

If you stepped back a little now, you'd see a man sitting on the corner of the opposite bed. His eyes bulge and their pupils show white as he turns or gently lowers his head. He said, "We are going to begin. I will start with Abu Nuwās. He is *al-Hasan ibn Hānī*... and he came to the Persian source of inspiration-- the grapevine, and the ebony-eyed non-Muslim, a full moon atop a branch,, and the wine poems, the hunting poems, and the ascetic poems." Then he recited a number of random verses from memory, all the while turning his head, the pupils of his eyes almost falling out on the ground, his lower lip hung down, his golden tooth visible to the other person who was listening and preparing some examination questions.

This might be the beginning of something.

Maybe something will start happening in this room. No one will die. The police won't break into the room to charge us with illegal assembly. Abu Nuwās himself won't come to refute any of the rumors about his life or to read us the poems that were omitted from his collected works, putting a narcissus blossom in the buttonhole of his English suit, celebrating writing and refusing to be called "poet." The narrator's memory will not become spotty. The epidemic will not befall the alleys of lower Fez and the city will not become a shelter. Qasim, a famous character from an unknown novel who wore clothes of newspapers painted with saffron, will not come out to you from the ruins. "Biniti" won't return from the grave a second time, the way he did in a book that was ill-omened for its author, after Mughīt, a character in the novel, drew his knife that he had been sharpening for days. The writer confused the distinction between the Mughīt who drew his knife and the Mughīt who is in the book, and so he traveled off into the sea. *I* will not die, and so this text will remain unfinished and you will not complete it as long as we all know the rest of the story. The sun of Fez will not be

eclipsed as it was at the end of the last century and those obscure things that the author intended to tell you about in an as yet unwritten novel will not happen in daytime darkness. The city will not appear in the blazing fire of a child's palm and it won't disappear with the fire's extinguishing. The room, in one of whose corners we now crouch, won't clarify anything; and this courtyard or ruins or cemetery will make no statement; and Fez the Mute, which laps up mud and [40] blood, and which is drawn as a weapon against the winds of Mount Zalagh, will not speak, all the while fleeing towards the east, like the greatest of doves, and recalling what *faqīh* used to say to *faqīh* and craftsman to craftsman and man to woman. Maybe you can help me to rule out other things that won't happen. What *will* happen then? I am truly asking you, oh lazy reader, staring at a page of the book. How urgently you need a slap to bring you back to the consciousness of reading.

We could suppose that the man sitting on the edge of the bed turned his head seventy times, or 95. Who among you kept track? He had stopped reciting what he had learned by heart with the last turning of his head. He stopped speaking and raised his head towards the ceiling, relying upon his memory and not waiting to be quizzed. He lowered his head a little, then turned the tip of his nose towards the door and called ʿAbd al-Salām. The man sitting on the edge of the other bed didn't dare to begin reciting what he had memorized. He posed no question. He remained looking at his friend or at us or towards the egg shells or the dry mint leaves.

He was waiting for ʿAbd al-Salām to come from the edge of the courtyard or the ruins or cemetery-- that place that defies description. Like us, he continued to wait, and after two or three calls separated by a moments of silence, ʿAbd al-Salām came. The man sitting on the edge of the bed said to him, turning his head, you're

going to go to Bab al-Silsla where you know the tobacconist. Next to it is a donut shop, next to it a coal seller. You'll enter the alleyway. On your right you'll find "Lalla Khira's" house. If she's looking down from the window tell her that the pants she washed for me still smell. After "Lalla Khira's" house there is a public oven, after it a greengrocer, then a butcher's shop, and next to it is the soldier's [41] house. Don't greet any of the people from that house. In front of the soldier's house is an alleyway. Go down it and you'll find some youths standing on your right smoking-- they're always like that, day and night. Say hello to them and walk a little faster until you pass them. Don't go too fast so your fear doesn't show. And don't go so slow that they have an opportunity to stop you. Try to pass by them in a normal manner. It's not necessary to alter your pace. If one of them gives a broken whistle don't turn and look back behind you; and if they come up from behind and grab your arm give them what's in your hand and try to maintain your composure. After you pass them you'll find a blacksmith, next to whom is a seller of make-up and perfume, next to him a man who fries fish, peppers and eggplant, after him a carpenter, then "Lalla Mimuna's" house. If you catch her standing in the door tell her to take better care of her daughter, because she's been going astray lately. Be careful not to stop at the cafe next to Lalla Mimuna's house to gamble in a game of cards. You will inevitably lose. Keep on going. Tell Al-Birnusi to look for some stuffed intestines for me if there are any that aren't too spicy like the last time. And when you go down the slippery road be careful not to fall or drop what is in your hand. Look out for the deep holes through which they clear the sewers of "Bu Khrâreb."[61] The odors will give you a cold. There's an alleyway on which is found a Tai Kwan Do club. Plug your

[61] *Bū Khrārab:* effluence river.

going to go to Bab al-Silsla where you know the tobacconist. Next to it is a donut shop, next to it a coal seller. You'll enter the alleyway. On your right you'll find "Lalla Khira's" house. If she's looking down from the window tell her that the pants she washed for me still smell. After "Lalla Khira's" house there is a public oven, after it a greengrocer, then a butcher's shop, and next to it is the soldier's house. Don't greet any of the people from that house. In front of the soldier's house is an alleyway. Go down it and you'll find some youths standing on your right smoking-- they're always like that, day and night. Say hello to them and walk a little faster until you pass them. Don't go too fast so your fear doesn't show. And don't go so slow that they have an opportunity to stop you. Try to pass by them in a normal manner. It's not necessary to alter your pace. If one of them gives a broken whistle don't turn and look back behind you; and if they come up from behind and grab your arm give them what's in your hand and try to maintain your composure. After you pass them you'll find a blacksmith, next to whom is a seller of make-up and perfume, next to him a man who fries fish, peppers and eggplant, after him a carpenter, then "Lalla Mimuna's" house. If you catch her standing in the door tell her to take better care of her daughter, because she's been going astray lately. Be careful not to stop at the cafe next to Lalla Mimuna's house to gamble in a game of cards. You will inevitably lose. Keep on going. Tell Al-Birnusi to look for some stuffed intestines for me if there are any that aren't too spicy like the last time. And when you go down the slippery road be careful not to fall or drop what is in your hand. Look out for the deep holes through which they clear the sewers of "Bu Khrâreb."[61] The odors will give you a cold. There's an alleyway on which is found a Tai Kwan Do club. Plug your

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[61] *Bū Khrārab:* effluence river.

nose so you don't smell the stench of sour sweat that seeps out of a lower window near the ground. Viscous sweat. Do you know the Tai Kwan Do club? You're almost there. There is a woman selling mint and parsley, and next to her is sitting "Hamouda" who sells single cigarettes. In front of him is *Al-ʿArabi* hammam. [42] You'll find people standing in front of the house of ʿAyusha waiting turn, and observing her looking down from the window from time to time to reassure them and settle their quarrels about who's next. Here is A'lilu who sells grilled corn on the cob. On your way back, buy us two ears-- one for me, and the second for this poor man who didn't understand anything about Abu Nuwās.-- Don't laugh. It's not the Abu Nuwās you know. We read the poems of this poet. Now you're there. In front of the grilled corn seller is Si ʿAbbas the shoemaker. Give him this shoe and tell him that "Mulay ʿAlī" says to fix it and tell him when you'll come back for it. Here. Do you know Si 'Abbas's shop?

What were we doing all this time? And what was that man sitting on the edge of the facing bed doing? And what was ʿAbd al-Salām doing? Could one of us get to Si ʿAbbas's shop to take Mulay ʿAlī's shoe for the repair? Was that the orange shoe that appeared on the wall? No doubt it was, And if not, then why did Mulay ʿAlī need to expend all that energy in describing the way to the shoemaker's, and why was it necessary in the writing to put some of the names in quotation marks, as if they had come from outside of the language and speech? And if it weren't the writing, then the speech of Mulay ʿAlī (as he called himself), would falter, and bursts of laughter or arguments and various disturbing voices would interrupt his pleasure in dominating the course of the text, even though he was blind. I am blind. You are blind. Let's all pull out and leave this space empty, for I have lost the opportunity to start that I'd been waiting for. But I will try to peek from a hole in the door, and *you* must, if you can get to the cobbler's shop,

bring the proof.

The Remains of the Cities

I. The Remains of the Cities [43]

Something of what remained-- like the end of a picture or a scene-- might be here with us right now. And maybe the last of what remains are the city walls, portioning out their shade between the inside and the outside. The city walls, with all of their history, mythology and murderous insularity, stretching out into people's lives and houses and shops, as if drawing fixed borders for the city, outside of which one cannot move. Have you ever seen a house inside of a wall? People have dug out houses from within the thick walls of the city, and inhabited them. There they are, living in the heart of the walls. They know that the wind will not uproot their homes and that an earthquake will not demolish them. They have made the shops in deep holes within hollows in the walls, and there they are selling dates and groceries and spices in them, and working in them as barbers, carpenters, shoe repairmen and other professions. Like the end of a picture or a scene.

The walls continue to encircle everything inside, opening onto the desert, harkening to the voices of the dead and the violent howling of the winds.

Towers overlooking.

Holes in which flocks of birds nest.

Doors.

The dirt and rubble of the collapsed buildings, and stories of thieves and

caravans and wars of kings and *al-Sībā*[62], and entry tolls into the city, and the rights of exportation[63] and the rights of shipping produce. The funeral processions and the weddings. The prayer for rain and the children carrying big white water jugs from every direction, making the rounds of the roads and alleyways. The lanterns lit. The water flowing. The tombs. The rain. [44]

Then there are the walls, creating for the city an outside and an inside, like the last word; and here I am, like the one outside the doors in the walls, who never enters. One who lives outside the city-- in the gardens that grow mint and artichokes and gourds; or lives under the bridges, the "Sbu" bridge or the railroad bridge; or in the Iqbab cemetery, where he sees the Sultan's soldiers at *Bab Ftūḥ*, doing their morning exercises in the arts of killing.

I have fallen apart after the collapse of the spirit. In the land of Fez, there no longer remains even one body in no way differing from human bodies-- none with wings or fins, in whom muscle pushes me to walk or run. Were it not for the cloth, then this body would have extinguished or burned up, or become rubble with this rubble, and then returned to dust.

The body is in the soil of Fez and this is its state. And the spirit is everywhere. The body is wrapped in the cloth protecting against the nightly cold; and its irregularities are concealed by the *ruqʿa* in Fez's summers, that are unlike the summers of other places, and the *ruqʿa* is better than clothes of silk and brocade and of raw silk and a shawl and all other garments of this age. The *ruqʿa* that I

[62] *al-Sība:* lawlessness, chaos, disorder. Until about the middle of this century, regions of Morocco were often categorized as either "*Blād al-Sībā*" (which resisted the ruling dynasty, and fell outside of its control) or "*Blād al-Makhzan*" (which functioned within the dynasty, paying taxes, etc.).

[63] In particular, the laws of exportation applicible at the doors of the city on commercial objects exported from Morocco by Europeans.

tailored with my own hands, andwhich can be useful worn by everyone, fitting the dimensions of every body; and the senses of whoever wears it change with time and place, it is in Fez even when it is in another city, in all cities-- in Meknes or Taza or Sale, near "Sidi `Abdallah bin Hsun" and "Sidi Al-Hajj bin `Ashar." Even outside of the walls, he can see everything within. He can hear every sound and feel everything that happens as if it were happening before his eyes. He sees the setting of the stars of the city of Idriss after the wars that the Almohads launched against it, and sees how the city became two cities with only a river [45] separating them: one for the people and one for the soldiers and sultan's workers and subjects of the Merinid state. He sees the conditions of the Arabs and the Berbers and non-Muslims, and sees the fortresses and the forts and the times of setting out for war, he sees everything. But the walls torture me, and if it weren't for the *ruqʿa* which expands time and place for me, I would have suffocated from this weight and this pressure I feel when I'm under these walls-- whether inside or outside.

This is the debris of the cities,

the remains,

the tail end, before obliteration and forgetfulness begin.

The shade from these walls intersects with the shadow of the body standing in the middle of the open square like an unsheathed sword or a spear protruding into the empty space. The hand holds the spear, with the forearm relaxed and the target is far. Shadow on shadow. The feet are sprouting upon the earth, and the shadow of the body extends until it enters into the shadow of the walls, and the head loses its shadow. This is I, with the body breaking away from its place and running into the middle of the square, out in the open, until the body's entire shadow appears, leaning when the body leans, running when it runs, standing up

when it does, dropping to the ground when it drops. The shadow of the forearms appears, with its grip on of the lance in sight. The lance sticks out while the hand prepares to throw a long distance. It appears hesitant to move. Trying and then pulling back. Standing and concentrating on the furthest point--like an imaginary goal in which appears an imaginary enemy-- the hand tries to throw towards it with an imagined lance that only the body sees, wanting to see the motion in its shadow.

This is I, who have passed into the spirit of one of the Sultan's soldiers who do their morning exercises in the arts of killing beneath the walls, behind one of the historical doors, the state of that soldier having overtaken me as I saw him like me wearing the *ruqʿa* And he is like me, like one outside the door of those walls, never to enter them. I gave him the *ruqʿa* and then saw him put it on-- without my being left naked, because the *ruqʿa* had could cover my body; and he gave the *ruqʿa* to one of the soldiers and remained covered by the *ruqʿa*, as if with the *ruqʿa* we fill the empty space or as if with the *ruqʿa* we empty out this world filled with nothingness, we empty out the filled and fill the emptiness. So said the *Haddāwi*. Emptiness is the source of everything and we must fill it with what we wish, and emptiness is our personal mirror in which we see all possibilities. I am the *Haddāwi*.[64] I am the *ruqʿa*, and nothing is in Fez but the *ruqʿa* and in the *ruqʿa* is God. [46]

When the *Haddāwi* enters Fez and burns down the walls or enters through one of the doors, he comes in the form of a bee or a flying ant or a swallow or a bat or a locust. He comes from the end of a picture or a scene, kneaded in dirt and water.

[64] *Haddāwa*: "An order of beggars in Morocco who specifically venerate cats, the animal greatly admired by the Prophet Muhammad. They claim to be an offshoot descended from the Qadiriyya [Sufi order] and practice strict poverty." (Spencer, 60)

He brings his breath with him, stored up in his lungs, so as not to smell the air from the sewers, and the stench of Bu Khrâreb river and the smells/stench of the slaughterhouses and markets selling stinking fish and the dirty water of the public baths and the streets. He comes to it in Fez's summer drowsiness, which is unlike drowsiness, when the birds doze and the plants doze and the people doze standing up for prayer, and when the shopkeepers doze in the shops and everything dozes, He comes to it from Mount Attaghat or Mount Zalagh or from the road to Taza or Ashraka.. or al-Wlad Jamiʿ. Even if there were only one road, the *Haddāwi* would come from all the roads, living in the midst of the oven's ashes and warming himself by the fire. He stays outside of the walls or enters Fez with his eyes which bring the distant near. He bathes in that strange space-- not in the "Sidi" hammam, its ground and walls splattered with henna and milk on nights of receiving/receptions brides, or in Bab Boujeloud hammam in which washing water mingles with the menstrual blood of the soldiers' women and the whores of Mulay ʿAbdallah neighborhood. The *Haddāwi* keeps his distance from places of water, remains calm by the fire and the ashes. The *ruqʿa* bathes in the ashes and no fire burns it, for it is burning in its own blaze and is burnt by a fire that is not fire. All of Fez comes in the *ruqʿa* and nothing is outside of it, and here is Fez contained in the *ruqʿa* and in the *ruqʿa* is Fez and in it is God. [47]

I am the stranger. I am the *Haddāwi* I am the *ruqʿa* and there is nothing in Fez but the *ruqʿa* and in the *ruqʿa* is God.

2. The Locust

Si `Abd al-Mulay said to me, laughing:

This is the year of the locusts.

I didn't know what the occasion was for saying this, so I didn't laugh. Locusts had attacked the whole desert in the south and extended to other areas. But Si `Abd al-Mulay started to cackle and said:

"The locust"

"What about it?"

"The locust that fell into the jug"

I wanted to ruin his joke:

"Say the donkey that fell in the well, or the rat that fell in the barrel of oil, or the bee that fell in the glass of tea."

He continued to laugh until his eyes watered.

"I said to you 'the locust.'"

[48]

"What about it?"

"It fell into the jug."

I wanted to make him angry:

"And the elephant that fell in the boiling pot of couscous, and the rhinoceros that fell in the mouth of a yawning man, and the dinosaur that fell into the bosom of a bathing woman and the bat that fell between cat's claws."

He tried to follow my lead as he laughed:

"And the moth fell in the flame of a candle and the fox fell between the teeth of the lamb, and the holy spirit slipped in between the thighs of the Virgin Mary. Ha. Ha. Ha. Is that something to laugh about?"

I said to him as I looked at the tears of laughter rolling down his cheek:

"When you stop laughing, tell me, what about the locust?"

"What about it?"

"Yeah."

"It fell into the jug."

"Si `Abd al-Mulay, what are you saying?"

"I told you that the locust fell into the jug and said frrrr

Ha. Ha. Ha."

When he saw that I was clearly in earnest and wasn't accepting this kind of joking, he dropped the subject of the locust, and moved on to another topic. Then he drank his tea and left, and left me thinking about the locust. What is Fez but that locust that fell into the jug and said frrrrrrrr.... Fez is a locust that came from [49] the salt of the desert, the desert of Yūsuf bin Tashfīn and Mahdi bin Tūmart,[65] and the desert of the desert and the desert of salt and thirst. Then when the locust found a jug of water speckled with tar that glitters from soaking up the water that the clay absorbed, and with the moss, growing on its rim, comes the lily, and the story, and Idriss, then Idriss the son of Idriss then Fatima al-Fihriyya[66], and the religious scholars come, and the craftsmen come, and various livelihoods come and various homes and clothes and conventions of speech and conventions of marriage and divorce and burying the dead and consoling the neighbor and conventions of laughter and conventions of war and conventions of spite and conventions of killing and conventions of addressing kings and the upper classes and conventions of writing letters and conventions of making complaints and conventions of buying and selling and conventions of laughing at beards and conventions of showing off and conventions of the marketing of ruined goods and conventions of the appropriation of lands from the country farmers neighboring

[65] *Youssef Bin Tashfin* (d. 1143): founder of the Almoravid dynasty, took control of Fez in 1069; *Mehdi bin Tumert* (d. 1130): founder of the Almohad religious movement; the subsequent Almohad dynasty took Fez in 1146, after a nine month seige.

[66] *Idriss I:* Idriss b. ʿAbdullah (d. 791), who fled the Abbasid regime to the Maghreb in 786, and chose the location of Fez; *Idriss II* (d. 828) founder and patron saint of Fez; *Fatima al-Fihri*: Founder of the Qarawiyyin Mosque.

the city, and conventions of drinking a glass (of tea) and conventions of men's meeting women and conventions of fasting and conventions of congratulations and condolences and blessings and conventions of silence and conventions of talking and everything has its own conventions, and the locust is what brought all of these conventions.

This is the etiquette of Fez. And maybe that small child had drunk some water from the jug and with that it started to pronounce the coarse "r" of the desert-- like a soft and pampered "gh;" and maybe it is the locust,maybe it is Fez or something that resembles it in the desert or in dreams, maybe it is the thirst-quenching drink that the locust coming out of the desert desired, after having flown and flown opening its wings over cities and walls and the roofs of houses until thirst brought it to the land of Fez and it fell in the jug...

The jug is a locust.

The locust is a jug.

And the locust brought with it the Haddāwi's *ruq'a* and fell in its jug leaning against one of the walls, dotted with tar in which cold water glitters and with green moss grows on the rim. Then when the desert spread through Fez, and the *ruq'a* spread, no one remained to mediate the spreading except the locust which fell into every water jug and made the people drink the "Gha" along with the water. And this is the source of the story and its origin is from the desert. A salty thirsty story, that belongs to no place but Fez. [50]

The Fez that is in illusions remained, as if it were a drop of blood, as if it were a fig tree on the edge of a grave, or a pomegranate tree growing out of the side of one of the walls of the city, as if it were the wind of the desert, or thirst or salt. Then the jug was shattered, the dots of tar were scattered, and the moss wilted, and the locust drowned in the water that had quenched its thirst. And yet its "r"

remained on every tongue.

III. The Alley

The last of what remains inside the city is the meow of a cat that wounds the silence of the darkness on a cold, rainy night. And the meow extends and spreads over Iqbab cemetery and from there extends to "Sidi Bū Bakr bin ʿArabi" cemetery on the other side of the city, spreading between the sidestreets and alleys, enveloping the night of the dead. The city walls return and disperse its echo from one direction to another, from neighborhood to neighborhood from alley to alley, from Fez al-Bālī to Fez Jdīd. The meow of one male cat, whose eyes glow in the darkness as he scales the walls of the houses, then jumps down to the ground with force and bluntness, his body crashing to the ground, as if he wanted to crack his skull or crush his bones or "extinguish the light of his eyes." His wounding meow is a mad cry to a lonely female cat who moved from one housetop to another and settled down in some place to rub its neck gently and with pleasure. She hears the meow of her lonely mate but doesn't respond. And the male cat rests for a moment, listening all around with his ears; the light in his eyes glows, then his meow becomes like the moaning of one injured or wounded. A stallion cat, who's worn out his voice from meowing and has begun to take pleasure in the aching of his bones that he had shaken all along the walls, having darted with all his strength in a desire to extinguish the light of his eyes or to crack in his skull. But all of his seven spirits would not give up the ghost. Just one spirit, if it remained, would suffice to torment him with all of this suffering. Then the morning came and he had settled down in one of the alleys, wiped out with sadness and his bones' pain and fatigue, looking out with one eye, the other closed after having

[51]

half slept. But when that solitary female cat did come to him, he had just closed both eyes to catch one or two winks.

The alley in which that cat had slept was "Pomegranate Alley" or "Stone Alley" or "Water Alley." It had the taste of pomegranate. The water and the stone become one in a wounded meow that greatly resembles the scream of a woman suffering in pain when she goes into labor. In the alley, we can hear the cat's meow and the woman's scream as she suffers-- all of the city walls echo them together, and the night of the dead is revived by them, while the newborn has not yet seen light, while the woman suffers as if she were about to give birth to a city. She will give birth to another Fez, from the womb of another history. And before the midwife comes someone must know her house and there must be a candle or lamp to light the way, and there must be pounding on the door, and few entreaties accompanied by much gravity and grumbling activity which is meaningless for them now. There must be intimacy and camaraderie in an alley, where the worst fear is the appearance of a man with two horns or the soldiers on their rounds, or a *Haddāwī* wearing the *ruqʿa*, which he lifts up to his waist to reveal his erect penis to the woman passing by in the darkness of the night. And the *Haddāwī* might do just this during the day, under the people's eyes, but that would be all the more shameful during the day, for the *Haddāwī* doesn't dare rape a woman in front of onlookers. And so there must be intimacy and camaraderie. Water must be heated up and a sharp knife fetched to cut the umbilical cord. Thighs must be spread and one or two pillows put between the bed and the woman's back. The man and children must be sent out of the room so no one but women are left. And there must be a little salt to keep away the jinn and devils, and patience, waiting for the labor pains to come. [52]

A woman gives birth on "Pomegranate Alley" or "Stone Alley" or "Water

Alley." And if this woman gives birth to a city-- another Fez-- then the city will give birth to children who will grow (up) in cribs that the carpenters of Fez have always been successful in making. And everyone who has visited Fez or has seen it in a dream or seen it in the desert, everyone to whom Fez has appeared as cities appear in daydreams knows the story of the cradle. Those are the cradles and the umbilical cords of joy and the cooing and the first words, and the step in the room out towards the street, and these are the conventions of speech and silence, and conventions of marriage and divorce and burying of the dead and conventions of consoling the neighbor conventions of buying and selling, and all the other conventions such that the sons of the city become sculptors in wood and plaster, decorators, mosaic tile makers, makers of lanterns from Iraqi glass, embroiderers of horse saddles, hassocks, sellers of tar and nails, butchers or sellers of river fish, or reciters of praises of the Prophet, or Melhoun masters, *Haddāwa*, *Hamadsha*, or *Darqāwa*, land owners or astrologers, carriers of the dead whose daily prayer is:

Whatever my reward in it is, I master it.

Scholars of jurisprudence and theology and of the secrets of rhetoric, engravers in stone or marble or water, calligraphers of

The Verse of the Throne

The Name of the All-Merciful

[53] Then, as the muezzin says, the night goes with its darkness;[67] and when their light is gone from the eyes, night enters into night, and the walls send back the echo of the voices of the dead-- nothing but the voice of a cat yowling in the alleys wounds the silence of the darkness.

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[67]Beginning of morning call to prayer: "The night is gone with its darkness, and the day appears with its glorious light."

There the cities, rather the essence of cities, awakened me in lower Fez, and I saw myself in the waters. Then I saw a lotus tree at tahe furthest limit, rooted where *Sūq al-ʿAṭṭārīn* opened up to me with a strange fragrance blending the scents of spices and burial perfumes and tar and homemade soap, and other scents I still smell to this day.

The Dust

I was sitting or standing, waiting or about to leave. Or maybe I was clearing [55] the way between me and the light and vision, or reading a book or a newspaper, or lost in contemplation as I stroked my beard and looked at the wall that became a maze in which appeared shapes and colors and places near and far--

the loved ones and the enemies,

the strange and familiar faces,

the cities and train stations and ways of leaving,

separation and death,

the graves,

the shops and streets and alleyways,

the places of pilgrimage and courthouses and the wilds of the imagination

the books,

the songs and moments of coursing blood,

nakedness,

attack and pursuit of enemies,

childhood in the poor alleys,

voices of the muezzins blending into and interrupting each other,

the sea and the mountain,

the stray dogs,

peddlers of cigarette papers, [56]

peddlers of tears and cheap words,

the police,

the witnesses,

the newspapers,

the words of the *faqīhs*,

blending of night into day,

the puppies and the cats,

the seasons of silence,

the desert,

the lost time,

feathers fallen from the wing of a bird,

the flowers,

nights of illumination and insomnia

the heat and the bitter cold,

the jokes that no one laughs at,

the eyes of the imaginary woman who came and didn't leave, you and I, and the writing on all of these pieces of paper that regret could not erase,

the cities,

Fez or Meknes or Casablanca,

the tattooed women of Imouzzert. All of these cities, yet there's no one there. All of these voices and walls, yet there's nothing there but the attacks and reports and the seizure of it all.

[57] The maze opens onto all these things and more. The cities and women and the other things crowd and compete with each other, some maybe unsettling others and preventing their appearance. But I've forgotten nothing of what I've seen, and so they all appear simultaneously despite coming from different times and places. And the same place appears in all of its ages, and in all of its histories inscribed in stone or preserved in the celestial ether in all of its primitive and ancient voices.

The whispers and glittering the mumbling and screams, the sermons and the curses, the racket and the rustlings,the moans, strange animal voices, and voices of the muezzins, and everything.

I walked in a forest or over a sea.

On crushed glass or over a silk carpet.

I left my enchanted place, that promised surprises and guidance, for a place that was not mine. No store or cafe. No passerby crossing. Dust across the walls and the ground and the surfaces of things, but no wind. The smells of rot and decay. Things forgotten and lost, as if they'd been misplaced or left behind by their owners. Old cars that don't look like they've moved for dozens of years. A post office whose metal door has rusted, and whose letter box has become a trash can for the remnants of goods that haven't been in circulation for ages. No one sending or receiving letters. No one drinking coffee in a cafe or a glass of wine in a tavern. Old buildings from the colonial era, which could easily be in Fez or Meknes or Casablanca, as if we were on Mohammad the Fifth street in any one of these cities, or as if there were no differences between them. Neighboring alleys used to belong to the Jews before they emigrated to Israel, and still harbor their smell-- a smell unlike all other smells. Excrement from pigeons and other birds covers the walls and its windows and outer passageways of the building that used to be a courthouse.

No more could "Khuya Hasan" park his car illegally on the sidewalk, urging the police with a friendly smile and a hand gesture to ignore it for just a moment, while he hurried into the post office, maybe taking out the key before getting to his box, then pulling out a bundle of mismatched envelopes, grasping them with childish glee, and hurrying back to the car, the way he had come. This was a daily activity, repeated every morning until it became one of "Khuya Hasan's" habits,

through which he sought the happiness that came from the letters filled with messages and news of friends. He would give the foreign stamps to one of his secret girlfriends-- or, that is, those whose relationships with him he believed were conducted in secret, even though everyone knew about them.

"Khuya Hasan" used to laugh until his brown bald head dotted with freckles shone. He would tell a joke, then laugh at it himself. Where is his laughter now? It's as if it had never existed, as if he'd never gotten the letters and his bald head hadn't sparkled/shone when he laughed, and as if the police hadn't overlooked his illegally parked car at the door of the post office for a few minutes or seconds. As if the police and the traffic laws and the post office-- all of them-- were things that didn't exist.

Excrement from pigeons and other birds

Rust

No letters

Dust, but no wind

No friends and no news.

No tears in the inner corners of the eyes

No flowers

No nostalgia or reminiscence

No city in this city.

I lamented, and tried to look for a ray of light to enlighten all of this darkness. [59] But no storm blew. I waited for the rain to fall, but it didn't fall, even though the street was wet. Maybe something had made it wet without rain having fallen. If not, then why didn't the rain wash the dust off the buildings and the doors and the metal plaques? Why?

The lantern

The lantern is in my hand, and here I stand directing its beam toward the city of darkness. As the light brushes over the roofs of the buildings, the city appears as if it has emerged from war and entered a place of forgetfulness. The stairs are like sewers or caverns. The walls are like a door to the desert. The buildings are like the cardboard models among which are numbered pen decorations.

City for dreaming.

City for imagining.

City for nightmares.

What war could turn the face of Fez from this picture? And is this Fez? Is it Tangiers, that grows rich daily on foreigners' dollars and goes to bed poor each night? Is it Oran or Tlemcen, or Damascus or the Cairo of *Muʿizz*,

City of cities?

City of mazes?

I had no more strength for breathing in this air thick with dust, and maybe-- before suffocating-- I had to do something that resembled returning to the womb from which I'd emerged into this world. So could one call that running away from confronting the war of the city-- a war coming from histories I know nothing about? Or could it mean the search for a breath of air, and that the city is still the city, and the dust still dust?

Maybe this lantern will continue to illuminate through a night not followed by days; and maybe rain will fall and wash the walls of the city and its rooms and its administrative buildings; or maybe another dust will cover over this dust, and another rust will cover over this rust. Except the city might rise up one morning and find me suffocating on a street or at the door to a building. And 'Khuya Hasan' might be surprised by a corpse suffocated at the door of the post office and recoil a little, forgetting his joy from/in the letters in order to attend to the burial

[60]

rites. Or he might step over the body, apologizing to the police for leaving his car at the door of the post office so long and assuring them that it won't happen tomorrow.

But when I looked and made certain, I was convinced that it was the only city that could sleep and awake in this way, and whose war could be like this. City for dreaming. City for imagining. City for nightmares. As if it were Fez,

The infested city

The newborn city

The buried-alive city

The promised city

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June 3, 1997

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