

Arabic Myths in Ibrahim Al-Koni's "The Ill-omened Golden Bird" and Zakaria Tamer's "Death of a Dagger."

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Arabic Myths in Ibrahim Al- Koni's "The ill-omened Golden Bird" and Zakaria Tamer's "Death of a Dagger"

Both the Lybian writer Ibrahim Al- Koni and the Syrian Zakaria Tamer highlight a couple of Arabic myths in their short stories “ The Ill-omened Golden Bird” and “Death of a Dagger” respectively to emphasize the value of their Arabic heritage. Al- Koni tackles the myth of the ill-omened bird which mystifies weak individuals and turn them distracted or even lunatic. In the story, Al-Koni describes the bird as an enchantress that tempts a little boy to steal away from his parents and follow it into the depth of the desert. His mother has saved him twice, but the third time the bird could successfully draw him into the desert where he meets his fate. Moreover, Zakaria Tamer treats the historical myth of Antara ibn Shaddad, the Saudi Arabian hero whose superb physical strength allows him to gain the respect of his masters and grow from poverty to riches. Tamer ’s story is an allegory of the Palestinian case. The partly colonized Palestine is represented by Khudr Alwan who has one of his ears cut off. Antara always secretly accompanies and guides Khudr. In fact, these two myths carry different meanings and make the short stories rich with ideas. The research mainly studies the significance of these myths and shows that the employment of myths in contemporary literature has become popular.

Tackling myth in literature involves a study of spiritual issues that might not sound rational. Living a spiritual life -- with or without God in it-- is healthy. Spirituality creates peace of mind, content and tolerance. Leading an only rational life, in my opinion, produces tension, imbalance and rigidity. Most secular thinkers, Realists and Naturalists seek rationality; and so, they reject the myth-based view of the world. Hence, they might not appreciate that research since it does not address the logical structures of the conscious mind as much as it discusses the unconscious.

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The study supports a non-traditional method proposed by the transcendentalist philosophers like Immanuel Kant (1724-1804), Ralph Emerson (1803- 1882) and Henry David Thoreau (1817-1862), psychologists like Carl Jung (1873- 1961), Joseph Campbell (1904- 1987), Northrop Frye (1912- 1991) and James Hillman (1926-) and anthropologists like Jessie Weston (1850-1928) and James Frazer (1854- 1941). All those thinkers highlight the power of the spirit in our lives and ,intentionally or unintentionally, help in offering a spiritual interpretation of literature. From this logic, the research tackles spirituality as a dimension of professional practice in literature showing how myths reflect on our lives.

Jone Johnson Lewis points out,

The Transcendentalists...[were] a generation of people struggling to define spirituality and religion (our words, not necessary theirs) in a way that look into account the new understandings their age made available.... [Some of them used to think:] God gave humankind the gift of intuition, the gift of insight, the gift of inspiration. Why waste such a gift? ... The Transcendentalists... also believed that at the level of the human soul, all people had access to divine inspiration and sought and loved freedom and knowledge and truth (n.p).

The term 'spirituality,' according to the structuralist Ferdinand de Saussure's concept 'logocentrism,' can be understood by its binary oppositional meaning which is 'not materialistic'. Hence, anything that is spiritual is intangible while a materialistic thing is tangible.

It can be said that semiotic analysis of texts is derived from a transcendental thought. Some critics "assume a transparent relation between signifier and referent, or between language and intended meaning" (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Logocentrism>). One can approach language with an imaginative thought because it is rich with signs. Jacques Derrida himself stresses the symbolic power of language claiming that a word can be a "transcendental signified," embodying various meanings (49). Julian

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Wolfreys notes that according to Ferdinand de Saussure and the structuralists "meaning is neither intrinsic to a word nor produced solely through reference to a signified or object, but in and through differential relation to other signifiers" (58). Hence, transcendence in interpreting literature is recommended. Even more importantly, mythic literature in specific needs to be tackled from a transcendental point of view because of its spiritual nature.

Not only nineteenth and twentieth- centuries transcendentalists but also contemporary writers like Ibrahim Al-Koni and Zakaria Tamer stress the power of myth in our lives. Generally speaking, contemporary postmodern fiction highlights spirituality, producing an insight into life, and so creating an atmosphere of individual security. The first theorist who elaborated postmodernism, Ihab Hassan (1925-) himself asserts the spiritual aspect of postmodern literature and

demonstrates, “I am interested in discovering, or rather rediscovering, the relations between the spiritual impulse of human beings and our daily lives in a culture of irony, kitsch, disbelief” (n.p.). Moreover, Niall Lucy points out that the real founder of the postmodern thought Jean-Francois Lyotard (1924-1998) relates postmodernism to Immanuel Kant’s idea of the sublime which justifies “communication-without-communication”(8). For instance, communication-without-communication is possible when two people talk discussing two different things. Besides, the e-mail messages nowadays have succeeded in crossing the physical borders among countries together with the imaginative Greenwich line of time. Hence, readers no way need to adopt an imaginative method in interpreting “The Ill-omened Golden Bird” and “Death of a Dagger.”

It is taken for granted that mythic fiction like “The Ill-omened Golden Bird” and “Death of a Dagger” is part and parcel of postmodern literature. Hence, it embodies transcendental thoughts. Like the transcendentalists Immanuel Kant, Ralph Emerson and Henry David Thoreau, the postmodern writers Al-Koni and Tamer tackle spiritual and philosophical issues, talk

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about unseen forces in the universe and highlight the reception of insight or inspiration or enlightenment; and this will be fully illustrated in the research.

Spiritual impulses are, then, expected to be found in Al-Koni and Tamer’s stories “The Ill-omened Golden Bird” and “Death of a Dagger.” These two mythical narratives are inherently derived from a mystic thought. Anthony Cowie et al. define mysticism as the “belief that knowledge of God and real truth may be reached through meditation or spiritual insight, independently of reason and the senses” (820). That is why, readers of mythic texts should meditate on the ambiguous events to unravel the hidden meanings beyond the lines.

Most secular writers, as previously mentioned, hardly accept to admit the power of myth, religion or any mysterious unseen power. If they approach mythic literary texts, they will disturb their chosen genre challenging the spiritual power by one means or another. John Mullan gives the example of Safran Foer, a secular writer who has written mythical novels then raised doubts about their truthfulness by mentioning “that it might all become whimsical, and therefore draws attention to his artifice” (119). On the contrary, the mystic writer Zygmunt Bauman remarks, “We learn ...to respect ambiguity, to feel regard for human emotions, to appreciate actions without purpose and calculable rewards. We accept that not all actions...need to justify and explain themselves to be worthy of our esteem” (33).

It is worth mentioning that Al-Koni and Tamer are not aesthetic writers. They do not believe in 'Art for Art's Sake.' Their short stories "The Ill-omened Golden Bird" and "Death of a Dagger" respectively convey a message of enlightenment to the Arabic communities. It seems that both writers agree with Edward Albee who asserts, "the usefulness of art in a more general sense has to do with the fact that it makes us understand consciousness and bring some order into the chaos of existence" (Charles Krohn 10).

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According to Al-Koni and Tamer, one reaches peace with oneself when one receives a kind of divine insight and understands the utmost truth of life. In "The Ill-omened Golden Bird," Al-Koni portrays a superstitious Bedouin couple who suffers from barrenness, so the husband and wife go on a journey seeking remedy. They appeal to sorcerers then a pagan fortune-teller rather than Al-mighty God to have a baby. By the fortune-teller's trick, the lady gets pregnant. The fortune-teller could deceive the husband and wife by confusing their senses between dream and reality. He asks them to spend three nights in a tomb to figuratively experience rebirth after death. He lets one of his servers secretly sleep with the lady and another with the man. Both husband and wife think they have only had sexual dreams. Later, the couple discovers the wife's pregnancy (19). After the baby grows to be a little boy, the ill-omened bird summons the boy up, and the poor boy responds to its invocation (14).

The story shows that God is angry with the couple for going to a magician. Being Muslim, they know that magic is illicit. The Isawi Sufis, who have previously kicked out the fortune-teller and his group out of the area, try to enlighten the superstitious lady when she laments the loss of her son. They tell the distressed mother, "He takes only from those He has liked, and He gives only to those He has loved" (Ibrahim Al-Koni 22). The Sufi dervishes try to show the lady that God loves all people but punishes those who disobey His orders. However, the story has an open ending. Al-Koni does not tell the readers whether the lady would receive enlightenment or not.

In "Death of a Dagger," Tamer delineates an immature protagonist called Khudr Alwan. He receives advices from his mother who stands for Pan-Arabism and guidance from Antara ibn Shaddad's ghost who represents Saudi Arabia. Khudr loses three important things: First, he loses his ear in a madness fit. Second, his dagger is confiscated from him at a coffee house. Third, he loses his life after being run over by a car. All his life, Khudr has been fooled. He proves not to be

reliable since he is always supported by others. Though he is a grown person, he sounds childlike. When the officer

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asks Khudr why he carries a dagger, he replies, “Because I like fruit...The doctor impressed on me ... that I should only eat fruit when it was peeled” (Zakaria Tamer 29). It seems that Tamer makes Khudr die at the end because he has failed to receive an insight into life. Tamer believes that confronting death gives hope in future re-birth. He means that admitting the existence of Israel is a step to negotiate for restoring other parts of the Palestinian land. In other words, the loss of one part of Palestine has become a fact.

The magical effect of the ill-omened bird in Al-Koni’s story and the existence of Antara ibn Shaddad’s ghost in Tamer’s story are indeed the spiritual elements that are to be investigated in the study. Before disambiguating the occurrence of the bird and the ghost within the realistic events, we should know whether the bird and Antara are myths or folktales.

People often confuse folktales with myths because both genres are closely related. Jon Stott defines a myth as “a story which forms part of the religious beliefs of the culture which tells it” (197). Moreover, Stott defines a folktale as “the embodiments of beliefs of specific cultures” (110).

J. Simpson and S. Roud note that myths are “stories about divine beings, generally arranged in a coherent system; they are revered as true and sacred; they are endorsed by rulers and priests; and closely linked to religion. Once this link is broken, and the actors in the story are not regarded as gods but as human heroes, giants or fairies, it is no longer a myth but a folktale” (254).

Other critics highlight the historical significance of myths: William Doty remarks that “a myth tells a true story while a folktale tackles an imaginary story” (114). William Bascom points out, “Myths generally take place in a primordial age, when the world had not yet achieved its current form” (9). Besides, the theory of Euhemerism asserts the same point. According to this theory, it is said that the new generations in Greece used to call historical figures ‘gods’ (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mythology#20th-century_theories).

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Despite the difference, both myths and folktales are similar in transcending

physical reality. Their spiritual effect on actions make the stories sound unbelievable. They might help also the common people in interpreting the world. William Seaburg and Pamela Amoss propose, "Myth and tale screens of nonliterate peoples functioned in ... ventilation and emotional release" (49). Paul Radin also notes, "folktale, myth and legend flow into each other continually and continuously" (368).

No doubt, Antara ibn Shaddad is a myth. Antara is a historical figure who used to live in Saudi Arabia in the Pre-Islamic period. Runoko Rashidi notes,

Antara ibn-Saddad al-Absi [525-615 A.D.] ...became in time Arabia's national hero. There was no individual equal to the valor and strength of Antara. He has been compared to King Arthur in the English tradition. ...He was the champion of the weak and oppressed and the protector of women. ...Antara's magnificent deeds spread across the Arabian Peninsula and throughout the world (n.p.).

H. T. Norris compares Antara to king Arthur in championship (127). Norris states that some people think that the Absi Bedouin hero Antara "somehow mirrored the image and ideal of western medieval chivalry" (126). Similarly, J. A. Rogers compares Antara to the Greek hero Achilles in Homer's *Illiad* and says that he is even greater than Achilles and Homer himself (138). Indeed, the historical story of Antara shares certain features with other myths in the world. M. Habib quotes Ronald Barthes, "the very principle of myth: it transforms history into nature" (74). By 'nature,' Barthes means 'universal significance.'

However, the ill-omened bird is one of the folktales that has risen to the state of myth because it becomes popular and gains a universal aspect. This Lybian folktale of the bird is similar to both *El-Naddaha* in the

Egyptian folklore and the troll in the Scandinavian counterpart. In Egypt, the peasants sometimes mention the seductive strange lady who appears at dark nights in the open fields. She is called *El-Naddaha* because she calls somebody by name. That person, hearing his name, hypnotically follows her where she goes. After a while, he is found either mad or dead. In other cases, the person disappears forever (<http://ar.wikipedia.org/wiki/%D8%A7%D9%86%8n.p.>). Besides, Anthony Cowie et al. determine that the troll is an "evil giant or mischievous but friendly dwarf...in Scandinavian myths" (1371). The Norwegian dramatist Henrik Ibsen

notes in his play *The Master Builder* that Hilda is a ‘troll’ because she leads to the hero’s destruction (356). Hence, the ill-omened bird, *El-Naddaha* and the troll are all sources of evil and perdition.

The research basically employs mythic and Jungian criticism to interpret the two short stories “The Ill-omened Golden Bird” and “Death of a Dagger.” In fact, Jung has started his theory from Freud’s idea that there are psychological forces inside man that control his actions, then Jung adds that these forces are ‘archetypal governed’ (The Ares Press n.p.). Joseph Campbell argues,

Living myths are not mistaken notions, and they do not spring from books. They are not to be judged as true or false but as effective or ineffective, maturative or pathogenic. They are rather like enzymes, products of the body in which they work; or in homogeneous social groups, products of a body social. They are not invented but occur, and are recognized by seers, and poets, to be then cultivated and employed as catalysts of spiritual (i.e, psychological) well-being (6).

Archetypal criticism is often attributed to Carl Jung who claims that a human being unconsciously follows certain patterns in all ages and places. J. A. Cuddon defines an ‘archetype’ as a ‘pattern’ or “a basic model from which copies are made” (55). Cuddon adds, “An archetype is ... universal, [and it is] the product of ‘the collective unconscious’ and inherited from our ancestors” (55). William Seaburg and Pamela Amoss notes that Jung’s “so-

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called ‘archetypes,’ ... supposedly received development at the hands of folklore recitalists everywhere” (46).

The Jungian critic Tom Chetwynd believes that “the individual shares in a communal fate, the communal destiny of Man” (xi). Chetwynd asserts that ‘human destiny,’ which is incarnated in the macrocosm, is attached to ‘individual destiny’ that is reflected in the microcosm (ix). Therefore, there is integration between what happens in both realms. For example, Chetwynd says that the symbols in our unconscious life, like the dreams, corresponds to the symbols in our conscious Ego like the tangible events (viii). Chetwynd argues, “[T]he individual should soon be able to make the symbolic connections for himself” (xv). He adds that one has to conceive of the “symbols within and without” in order to lead an integrated life. The symbols within are inside oneself while those without are outside an individual, that is, in the materialistic life (xv).

No doubt, mythic literature involves a semiotic study. It finds order beyond the apparent chaotic events in a text. For instance, the dominating effect of the bird on the child in Al-Koni's story and that of Antara on Kudr in Tamer's story is enigmatic. There are ambiguous signs that need to be disambiguated. Bernard Toussan thinks that there are linguistic and non-linguistic signs in language. According to Toussan, the linguistic signs are mere dictionary vocabulary whereas the non-linguistic ones are words with visual, tactile, olfactory, auditory or iconic denotations (30). Daniel Chandler puts it further that the denotative signified is the linguistic sign while the connotative signified is the non-linguistic sign, and the latter "is used to refer to the socio-cultural and 'personal' associations (ideological, emotional etc.) of the sign (n.p.).

On the one hand, there are linguistic signs all over the story that relate the characters to their tribal nature such as "tent," "bird," "desert," "rope," "hills," "valley," "wolves," "oases," "cave," "mountain," and "waterskin." Such vocabulary helps the readers to imagine the Bedouin nature of the place. There are other linguistic signs that highlight Al-Koni's criticism of

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the couple's superstition like "sorcerers," "talismans," "amulets," "pagan fortune-teller," "the Quran," "Hausa" and "the Tuareg tongue of Tamahaq.

It is worth mentioning that the writer observes proxemics to look realistic. Mohamed Enani defines proxemics as the effect of place on people's nature and speech(179). Since Bedouins are isolated in the desert, they receive limited education about religion. They recite the Noble Quran but do not understand what the holy book says. As a result, the husband and wife adopt a superstitious way of thinking; and so, they are easily fooled by the fortune-teller who has sent two of his followers to commit adultery with them. He makes them believe that adultery has been the Jinn's treatment of their barrenness. Al-Koni narrates, "she hid her secret from her husband without knowing that he too had hidden his secret from her....The fortune-teller had bestowed on them a pagan spell for the awaited heir apparent and he refused to take payment for his rites" (19). Then few lines later, Al-Koni describes the man as "the stupid husband" to show that he has been deceived by the fortune-teller (20). Moreover, the fortune-teller uses Hausa as foreign language then Arabic in a local dialect, the Tuareg. The latter is used in Adrar oasis in Lybia.

It goes without saying that the archetypes in the story are non-linguistic

signs. The Old Wise Woman, the Child and the Tomb of the tombs assert mythical ideals: First, Al-Koni narrates the thoughts of the distressed mother whose sole child is being seduced by the bird,

The old [wise] women in the desert say that it [the bird] appears only rarely but when it does, many victims will fall to it, for its appearance is linked to drought and lean years. The old wise women in the deserts of Timbuktu confirm that the secret of its evil omen lies in its golden feathers. Thus, wheresoever the sparkle of the devilish gold flashes, ill-luck makes its appearance, blood flows, and the accursed Satan is at work (20).

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Second, the child in mythic literature represents stubbornness and naivety. He loses if he does not become mature enough to differentiate between the right and wrong. Archetypal children often undergo journeys of quest. The anima inside the child seems to urge him to experience an adventure. Edmund Thomas and Eugene Miller define the anima as “a term used by Carl Jung to refer to the feminine side of man’s personality” and the animus as “the corresponding masculine side of the woman’s personality” (249).

Third, the fortune-teller’s choice of “the oldest grave in the world- the tomb of the tombs” stands for death and the hope of rebirth (Al-Koni 19). He uses the couple’s bad need for having a baby to follow his instructions (19). The fortune-teller asks the husband and wife to experience a symbolic death sleeping in an old tomb for three nights. He succeeds in changing their thoughts and confusing actual adultery with dream. Symbolic death is common in mythic literature. Tom Chetwynd notes, “Most heroes in myths have to face death, or the land of the dead, at some point. ...The dead are raised to reveal the truth which lies buried in the unconscious. ...[T]he Great Death is the symbolic experience of extinguishing the conscious Ego, by cutting off all sensation and thought” (116).

Besides, there are more connotative signifieds in the story. For instance, the story begins with a kinetic image that connotes seduction. Al-Koni describes the bird’s seductive movement as follows:

He walked toward it fascinated. ...The golden bird did not move, did not heed his approach. It waited for him until he was

standing in front of it. The child stretched out his hand until it was almost touching the bird's feathers, which glowed under the rays of dusk, then it adroitly flew down and moved a couple of paces beyond the reach of his hand. The mesmerized child advanced farther, almost grasping hold of it. Again it evaded his hand and ran a few more steps (14-15).

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The writer's description of the bird is striking. He extends his personification throughout the story delineating the bird as a professional temptress. He narrates in another part of the story,

...the extraordinary bird prepared itself for a long chase. ...the golden messenger of enticement ...moved coquettishly, flirtatiously, as it made its escape.... The wonderful golden bird would wait proudly until the child reached it and was about to grasp hold of it, when it would slip away, gracefully move off a pace or two..., and then stand waiting (15).

Al-Koni asserts his personification by opening his story with a vignette. He introduces his idea of a controlling bird through the voice of another author from the twelfth century A.D. In the vignette, Al-Koni quotes Farid Al-Din Al-Attar Al-Nisaburi in his book *The Conference of the Birds*, "Abdullah worshipped for four hundred years, then occupied himself with the singing of a bird on a tree in the garden of his house. He was repaid for this by God ceasing to love him" (14).

This vignette is part of the story's paratext. Jean Dubois et al. remark that the paratext is the illustrative items that are inserted all around the main text like preface, list of characters, summary, notes, bibliography and the like (344). Actually, the vignette carries the same moral message mentioned by the Sufi dervishes at the very end of the story. Al-Nisaburi says that not only it is possible that birds control men's thoughts but also God punishes those who are led astray. Moreover, it seems that both Al-Nisaburi and Al-Koni share similar spiritual ideas. Mohey Al-Din Al-Lazquany points out that Farid Al-Din Al-Nisaburi is a Muslim mystic writer who lived in the Middle Ages and was regarded as a 'chosen man' because of his supernatural power (n.p.). Al-Koni's mysticism is also obvious in the guiding role he gives to the Sufi dervishes of North Africa.

Other non-linguistic sign is the auditory image found in describing the boy's

distress, “The child ...was woken by the howling of wolves and

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heard the conversation of the djinn in the open air. He recited the chapter of Unity, which he had learned from his mother...” (Al-Koni 16). Similar auditory image is clear in the writer’s reference to the fortune-teller, “He addressed them [the couple] in Hausa. On realizing that they did not understand it, he condescended to talk to them in the tuareg tongue of Tamahaq” (18). Al-Koni makes his readers hear various sounds and voices that constitute the Bedouin couple’s life.

Besides, the visual image in “The child found himself soiled with sweat, urine, and fatigue.... Before they found him...with bloodied feet and cracked lips” (16) and the olfactory image in “They found the rotting body [of the boy] on the following day under a solitary and desolate lotus tree” (21), both stress the fatal effect of the bird on the child. These signifiers arouse also feelings of disgust and fear in the readers’ hearts. Though the bird has caused the child’s death, the Arabic readers hardly sympathize with the boy because he is an illegitimate son. Despite the fact that the parents are sinned against rather than sinning, they are blamed for their stupidity and ignorance. Therefore, the bird, in this context, is a source of glory more than evil. The bird is the purge that filters the community of ‘unclean’ individuals. The story pinpoints the social fact that illegitimate children are not welcomed in Arabic societies.

“Death of a Dagger” is also rich with linguistic and non-linguistic signs. Zakaria Tamer uses some linguistic signifiers like the presence of “Antara ibn Shaddad, the Arab hero”(28), Khudr’s name which is derived from ‘greenness’ in the Arabic language denoting naivety, Khudr’s mother’s Islamic way of prayer “May God be pleased with you” (28), the mother’s use of Arabic proverb “A mother whose son is a monkey sees him as the most beautiful gazelle” (28), Khudr’s smoking “a narghile” in “the Quweiq lane café” (29) and Khudr’s habit of carrying “a dagger with a curved blade” (29). All these signs form certain mental picture of the Arabs’ life, helping the readers to visualize the Arabic way of living.

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Moreover, there are two obvious archetypes in the story: First, Khudr is the Child figure despite his apparent manhood. Khudr acts like a stubborn child. He rejects his mother’s direct advice to have a plastic surgery to mend his missed ear. His conversation with his mother sounds more sarcastic than comic. Khudr mocks

his mother in his reply, “And do you want to go back to being a young girl of twenty?” (Tamer 27). This is a negatively polite speech. Geoffrey Leech says that negative politeness rests on the fact that human beings disrespect one another’s presence, privacy and physical space (7).

Khudr’s negative polite speech leads to the mother’s face loss. According to the linguists Brown and Levinson’s Face Threatening Acts Theory, “Face is seen as a kind of public ‘self image’ which speakers in a society claim for themselves” (Paul Simpson 172). Hence, Khudr threatens his mother’s positive face by offending her and obliging her to hear things she dislikes to hear.

Khudr has been in a state of pre-fall innocence; that is, representing Father Adam whose anima initiates his desire to approach the forbidden tree and experience the unknown. Like Father Adam, Khudr has to leave home on a journey of quest. Tamer narrates, “Khudr Alwan left the house, after kissing his mother’s hand” (29). Ravenna Helson says, “In Jungian personality theory, the important developments of the first part of life are that the individual becomes separated from his original state of unity with the mother and that the ego is strengthenedThe individual develops the ‘ego-qualities’ of independence...then leave home” (117). This idea might explain why Khudr has been rejecting his mother’s advice before he leaves her.

Nonetheless, leaving home on a journey of quest involves hardships not entertainment. Tom chetwynd determines, “the Ego figure... is left alone to confront dark, sinister and destructive forces [in his quest journey]” (1). Khudr feels humiliated when the policemen confiscate his dagger. Tamer narrates, “Khudr sat in his chair aghast and abashed, as though he had been

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stripped naked” (29). He says further, “Khudr Alwan had the sensation of having become without any protection, a defenseless prey, he yearned for an air different from the one he breathed” (31). However, Zygmunt Bauman offers an existentialist note remarking,

The postmodern mind does not expect any more to find the all-embracing, total and ultimate formula of life without ambiguity, risk, danger and error, and is deeply suspicious of any voice that promises otherwise. ...The postmodern mind is reconciled to the idea that the messiness of the human predicament is here to stay. This is , in the broadest of outlines, what can be called

postmodern wisdom (245).

Second, Khudr's mother is the Mother Earth whose harshness overcomes her tenderness at a time. Tom Chetwynd points out that a mother is supposed to nurture and care for her child until he is grown; at that time, she pushes him away into the wild life to face hardships and learn to depend upon himself (271-2). In the story, the mother confronts Khudr by his age. She tells him, "You're now more than forty years old, so are you going to stay a bachelor your whole life?" (Tamer 27). She makes him feel he is late in not starting a new life as a husband and father of children (27). She wants him to leave her home to have a new home of his.

The mother means to hurt her son's feelings telling him, "Who will marry you if you stay with just one ear? ...Do you know...that the women of the quarter have forgotten your name and call you 'Lop-Ear'?" (27). She adds, "You neglect yourself...; you shave off all the hair from your head and make yourself look bald; you let the mustache grow too large; you don't take care of your clothes. ..." (28). The mother is actually trying to pressurize him into having an operation and fixing his shape. At last, when she fails in changing his opinion about independence, she helplessly tells him, "May God come to your aid with that twisted mind of yours" (29).

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Khudr acts like a negligent child because he suffers from an infantile complex. He is dominated by a child-self despite his age. Tom Chetwynd says, "The [balanced] individual must not let the child alter him, but nor must he (or she) just chastise and correct it in trying to make it grow up" (78).

Intertextuality can be said to be a non- linguistic sign in "Death of a Dagger." Margaret Meek defines intertextuality as the reading of subordinate texts within the original one (4). Chris Baldick also notes that "intertextuality ...[is] a term coined by Julia kristeva to designate the various relationships that a given text may have with other texts" (112). It may be contended that intertextuality is a contemporary term of an old narrative device named 'collage.' In the nineteenth century, cubist painters and writers have started using the collage in their paintings and literary works by inserting bits of other texts in their works.

Intertextuality is part and parcel of mythic literature, and it is closely related to semiotics. Both writers Ibrahim Al-Koni and Zakaria Tamer have made an

admirable job of myth adaptation in my view. Adaptation is one form of intertextuality. The research analyses Al-Koni and Tamer's adaptation of myths mainly through a Jungian point of view. Al-Koni and Tamer, as previously mentioned, make use of the mythic texts of the bird and Antara to indirectly convey their points of view. On the one hand, Al-Koni shows that faith, not superstition or magic, is the way to salvation. On the other hand, Tamer highlights the moral assistance of Saudi Arabia to the Palestinians.

Some critics though dislike the Jungian analysis of mythic literature . For example, Naomi Goldenberg proclaims her rejection of Carl Jung's ideas about the universal effect of myth. She declares, "it is not necessary for human beings to share the same myths, images, symbols. Instead, it is more important that human beings share the process of symbol creation itself. This is an age which pluralism is a fact of life" (53). K. K. Ruthven argues that some people believe that no 'patterns' are repeated in the world

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through myths (24). Ruthven explains that those people call everyone to look for what is different, not what is similar, in myths---they hate to see literary writers relating the pagan Greek and Roman myths to the Christian counterpart wondering "Can a pious fable, and a dirty story, share in the total literary glory?" (29). Moreover, Ravenna Helson claims, "Jung's formulations have been regarded as too complex and mystical to test" (118). Nonetheless, there are other critics who find Jungian analysis and structuralist semiological criticism convenient for tackling mythic literature.

Allegory, which is another form of intertextuality, is a non-linguistic sign in "Death of a Dagger." Darleen Rotozinski defines allegory as "a story with an underlying meaning parallel to but different from the surface meaning" (31). Jean Dubois et al., moreover, remark that allegory is a didactic story that lies beyond the main text conveying a spiritual idea through concrete examples (24).

There is a deep level of meaning in "Death of a Dagger." Khudr's story is allegorized by reflecting the Palestinian case. It shows how the Palestinians have passed by a cycle of misfortune. As Khudr loses his ear and dagger, the Palestinians have lost their land and power. The United States of America had supported the Israelites in 1948 to colonize Palestine and proclaim the rise of Israel. Since that time, the Palestinians cannot restore their usurped land.

Najeeb Al-Baqqar stands for the United Arab Emirates. Tamer refers to him

as “the man in the quarter with the most wealth and the most influence” (30). Al-Baqqar is pragmatic enough to tell Khudr “regard your dagger as a friend who has died” (31). The dagger symbolizes the Palestinians’ political power. However, Antara bin Shaddad, representative of Saudi Arabia, is the source of hope and moral support in the story. Antara is, more or less, a godfather to Khudr. He urges Khudr to accept his recent shape and not to feel ashamed of his status. That is why, he tells him, “Don’t pay any attention to your mother’s feeble-minded talk” (28). He means that Khudr should not lose time in dreaming to restore the old glory. In Antara’s

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opinion, losing one ear is not a problem. That is to say, the rise of Palestine is more important than eliminating Israel from the map. Antara urges Khudr with great zeal not to give up and keep trying to restore his lost dagger. He tells Khudr, “He who gives up his dagger is not a man and deserves to sit only with women (29)...[;] a man without a weapon is a woman who will not escape being raped(31).”

Antara’s moral assistance to Khudr is stressed at the end of the story. Antara tells Khudr at the death bed, “You have lost nothing, so don’t be sad; die unconcerned” (32). Tamer regrets that the Arabic world does not realize the important role Saudi Arabia is playing in the Palestinian case. Tamer shows that Saudi Arabia is the closest country to the heart and mind of Palestine. This is emphasized through Antara’s secret escort of Khudr throughout his life. Tamer, moreover, highlights the Palestinians’ gratitude to Saudi Arabia. He narrates, “Khudr Alwan was proud of the fact that Antara had been part of the [funeral] procession but was sorry that the inhabitants of his quarter did not know that” (32).

Though Tamer shocks the readers at the end by Khudr’s death in a car accident, he thinks of death as *instructive* not destructive force. Echoing the thoughts of a deceased person is another non-linguistic sign that asserts Tamer’s optimistic point of view. Khudr’s previous thoughts show his death as both actual and symbolic. Though he has experienced physical death, he is consciously awaiting for resurrection. Tamer shows that rebirth is possible. Tom Chetwynd says, “death alternates with life” (228). According to Chetwynd, “there can be no rebirth without passing through DEATH, whether symbolic or actual” (229). Hence, the story reflects Tamer’s prediction of the rise of the Palestinian state in the future.

Susan Suleiman proposes that intertextuality reveals “several discourses in a

single (inter)textual space” (43). The term discourse- in my own words- is the argument between two groups of people of two opposed

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forces. However, Julian Wolfreys defines a discourse as a speech of an ideological function that emits from certain historical and cultural disciplines (68-69).

Significantly, “The Ill-omened Golden Bird” and “Death of a Dagger” embody political undertones since Al-Koni and Tamer mean to resist some kind of imperialistic forces and glorify the Arabic tradition. First, Al-Koni in “The Ill-omened Golden Bird” announces the victory of the Mustansir dervishes over “the Magian fortune-teller” (17). Then the fortune-teller dies and most of the Bedouins proclaim their “pride that Adrar had been cleansed for evermore of the filth idols” (22). Second, Tamer in “Death of a Dagger” exhibits the victimization of Khudr. A policeman takes his dagger and sells it to “some foreign woman tourist” (31). The latter is an image of the western oppressor.

It cannot be disputed that the political conflict affects the structure of both stories. Al-Koni and Tamer use the genre of magic realism to indirectly reveal their political points of view. They challenge the imperialistic forces and assert their Arabic identity.

Marc Maufort points out that magic realism is a literary movement that appeared in the 1920s representing postcolonial culture highlighting “the more collective, societal or mythic” (249). Magic realism as a genre occupies the same conceptual ground with postcolonial literature. Anita Mannur notes, “postcolonial studies ... focus on the experiences and practices of non-western countries, especially as they relate to western cultural, economic, and political domination (210). Edward Said (1935-2004) argues that people react against “the old authoritative, Eurocentric models” because of the ‘anticolonial liberation theory’ that has imposed itself in contemporary literature due to “actual processes of enlightenment and liberation in the world” (67-68).

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Joan Mellen puts forward that the themes of magic realist literature are

limited to “history and racism” for they deal with “themes of imperialism and colonialism” (60). Besides, Michael Bell infers, “ ‘Magical realism’ draws on pre-scientific folk belief to subvert the ‘western’ commitment to scientific reason, itself associated with both imperialism and a history of realist representation, so that the new genre is intrinsically oppositional” (126).

Though the myth of the devastating bird and the interaction of Antara bin Shaddad’s ghost sound irrational, they are made plausible in the context of the stories. Tiffany Magnolia remarks, “the magical elements of the [magic realist] text are to be taken as literary as the realist elements” (119). In the same vein, Joan Mellen observes that magic realist writers make the imaginative sound believable (4). Moreover, Gerry Turcotte proposes that the magic realist works fuse the familiar with the unfamiliar to look natural and involve gothic events creating postcolonial uncanny feelings or racial tension (124).

According to this logic, Al-Koni and Tamer succeed in naturalizing the existence of the magical bird and Antara’s ghost within the realistic events. As magical realist writers, both Al-Koni and Tamer imply that it is possible to combine spiritual and physical realities in a single piece of work. Joan Mellen notes that magic realist fiction often gives ghosts a leading role in the events of a plot, and “the whole work aims at ... challenging the scientific and materialistic method of thinking” (17).

On a point suggestively relevant, Al-Koni and Tamer present rural Arabic lives away from the modernity of industrial cities. In “The Ill-omened Golden Bird,” Al-Koni celebrates the victory of the Sufi Isawi dervishes over the foreign fortune-teller emphasizing that Islam rejects superstition. The events take place in the oases of the Western Desert. In “Death of a Dagger,” Tamer similarly delineates a countryside where Khudr lives with his mother. According to the Arabic tradition, Khudr -like most of the men- like to spend time at coffee houses smoking hookah. The foreign

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tourist represent Israel which has illegally bought the Palestinians’ right in their own land. However, Khudr’s tragic death can be viewed positively as a note of hope in future rebirth.

There is no need to recognize that the messages of both magic realist stories “The Ill-omened Golden Bird” and “Death of a Dagger” are implicit. Tiffany Magnolia states that any magic realist writer manages to change “the way the

readers think about... situations” (222). Indeed, Al-Koni shows that superstition has nothing to do with Islam, while Tamer indicates that the Palestinians should not lose hope in having a state of their own once again.

To sum up, the research investigates two mythic literary models: Ibrahim Al-Koni’s “The Ill-omened Golden Bird” and Zakaria Tamer’s “Death of a Dagger”. Mythic fiction is no doubt part of postmodern literature which highlights spirituality, transcendental thoughts, insight into life, revelation, moments of enlightenment and suchlike. Broadly speaking, the study analyzes these mythic short stories from a Jungian perspective to detect the meanings beyond the texts: For example, Al-Koni’s story exhibits the true meaning of Islam, the Islamic viewpoint of magic and the Islamic definition of superstition. Besides, Tamer’s story proposes a method to put an end to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and praises the Saudi Arabians for offering help to the Palestinian brothers. The research also treats some aspects of postmodernity in the stories like ambiguity, intertextuality and semiology since they are related to the themes of the stories.

To conclude, the stories pose questions without offering any direct answers. However, the research answers the following proposed questions: What is the difference between folktale and myth? What is the importance of myth in our life? How and why do the writers Ibrahim Al-Koni and Zakaria Tamer adapt Arabic myths into their short stories? How do they form the structure of their pieces of mythic fiction? Answering the last question, the research reaches the point that both Al-Koni and Tamer employ the genre of magic realism to convey indirectly their political points of view. All in all, the research highlights the conflict between

transcendental thinkers like Carl Jung, Tom Chetwynd and Ihab Hassan and secular realists like Naomi Goldenberg and asserts the integration of both the materialistic and spiritual realms, finding out a close connection among postmodernism, transcendentalism, semiotics and myth adaptation.

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