

Exitus and *Reditus*: Towards a New Islamic Neoplatonic Paradigm*

By Ian Richard Netton

Procession and Return, Exile and Return

Down the ages diverse thinkers and scholars, from the Neoplatonist Plotinus (AD 204/5-70) to the Victorian Jesuit poet Gerard Manley Hopkins (1844-89), have identified a flow of procession and return, working, as it were, like a kind of natural law within the universe (McGinn 2007: 46-7ff.). Bernard McGinn, in a succinct recapitulation, put it like this:

The master paradigm of *exitus* and *reditus*, the procession out and return to God, is perhaps natural to the religious mind as it reflects upon the nature of the universe. In Western thought the evolution of this dynamic paradigm was shaped by the way in which Neoplatonic thinkers, both pagan and Christian, sought to express how the First Principle overflows into the universe while at the same time drawing all things back to Itself (ibid.: 46).

In a masterly exposition McGinn shows how ‘pagan Neoplatonic thinkers brought the paradigm of emanation and reversion to a new level of sophistication by their analysis of the three stages of reality’ (ibid.: 47) and how the fundamental ‘triadic paradigm’ at the heart of Neoplatonism could have become ‘Christianized’ in terms of Christian Trinitarian theology (ibid.: 47). The articulation, however, was within a framework which acknowledged the inadequacy of human words confronted by an ineffable mystery (McGinn 2007: 49).

* This article is a revised version of “Exile and Return: Diasporas of the Secular and Sacred Mind” (which first appeared in Yasir Suleiman (ed), *Living Islamic History*, Edinburgh University Press, 2010), and is published in *Sacred Web* with the kind permission of Edinburgh University Press and the author.

The basic Plotinian triad of The One, Intellect and Soul (Plotinus 1966–88: *passim*), and the various triads which developed from it, thus ‘spoke’ to a nascent mediaeval Christian theology and could be used to intellectual effect. But what did this paradigm of procession and return have to say to broader intellectual arenas such as those of the intellectual development of Islam, the proliferation of various world diasporas or the efflorescence of certain leitmotifs in world literatures? To paraphrase A. N. Whitehead’s (1861–1947) famous dictum (to the effect that the whole history of philosophy was just a series of footnotes to Plato; Lacey 1982: 10), could it be that the motifs of *exile and return*, *procession and return*, and the intellectual developments thereof with which we shall concern ourselves in this essay, were also footnotes to the complex corpus of Plotinus?

How is Plotinus’ intriguing paradigm reflected in, or paralleled by, such areas as the politics of the diaspora, diverse world literatures and various Islamic theologies? All this will be surveyed in the remarks which follow. It is recognised, of course, that the twin motifs of *procession and return* and *exile and return* reflect a slightly different dynamic: the first is a fundamentally Neoplatonic theological motif; the second may be both theological and terrestrial in its essence and impact. Furthermore, in Neoplatonism, emanation from The One is involuntary (Plotinus 1966–88: V.1.6, V.2.1); in diaspora politics, exile *may* be voluntary but it is often forced.

Into the Diaspora

The diaspora model for Judaism is basically tripartite in that it reflects three major events: the Babylonian exile, the fall of Jerusalem in AD 70 and the Holocaust. In 587/6 BC the Babylonian king Nebuchadrezzar II (605–562 BC) besieged and destroyed Jerusalem. J. R. Porter questions the reliability of 2 Kings 24: 14 and 2 Kings 25: 12 which give the impression of a mass deportation of the population and prefers to trust Jeremiah 52: 28–30 which indicates ‘that three thousand twenty three Judeans were deported in BC 597, but only eight hundred thirty two after Jerusalem’s final fall and destruction’ (Porter 1995: 110–11).

Regardless of the figures, however, and discounting the Exodus under Moses, this constitutes the first major diaspora in Jewish history. Exaggerated or not, rhetorically inflated or not, the account in 2 Kings

24: 14 is powerful and heart- rending in its creation of a diasporic atmosphere:

And he carried away all Jerusalem, and all the princes, and all the mighty men of valour, even ten thousand captives, and all the craftsmen and smiths; none remained, save the poorest sort of people of the land (King James Edn: 323).

And, from the depths of their yearning, the exiled Jewish people in Babylon sat down and wept by its rivers and hung their harps on the willow trees which they found there (Porter 1995: 112; Psalm 137: 1-2).

Yet, if this may be designated ‘an age of sorrow’, the Return to Jerusalem in c. 539-38 BC, after the defeat of the Babylonians by the Persian King Cyrus 11 (550-29 BC; Porter 1995: 114), inaugurated ‘an age of joy’ as well as reconstruction. All is recorded in *The Book of Ezra* (ibid: 114-17, esp. Ezra 3: 11-13). And an arch- paradigm of *exile and return* is established which runs Jerusalem- Babylon- Jerusalem. That said, it is worth noting with Lavinia and Dan Cohn-Sherbok that ‘after the return to the land, many Jews, who had prospered, remained behind and by the 1st century BCE, there were Jewish communities in most urban areas around the Mediterranean coast’ (1995a: 37-8, 1995b: 49-50; Cohn-Sherbok 1992: 115). Robert North observes, furthermore, that ‘the Jews in Babylon had already prospered because of their facility in the Aram chancery language. Their usefulness as undercover agents in the chanceries was doubled when Persia conquered Babylon’ (1990: 386).

The second major event in the diasporic tripartite model for Judaism is the siege and capture of Jerusalem by Titus in AD 70 (Porter 1995: 145). The horrors of that siege and the resulting diaspora of many of the Jews are vividly recorded by Joseph ben Matthias who came to be known as Flavius Josephus (AD 37-100; Josephus 1971). A second revolt under Rabbi Aqiba, Eleazar the priest and Simon ben Kosibah (Bar Cochba) in AD 132-5 culminated in Jerusalem being razed by the Emperor Hadrian (AD 117-38; Fitzmyer *et al.* 1990: 1251-2). Between the two revolts, ‘both in Palestine and in the Diaspora a yearning for “the restoration of Israel” was fed by the recollection of how restoration followed the destruction of Jerusalem in 587 BC’ (ibid: 1252). Rabbinic eschatology, then as now, fostered the idea of an ‘ingathering of exiles’ (Cohn-Sherbok 1992: 147; Cohn-Sherbok and Cohn-Sherbok 1995: 50) in a Messianic age, however far they may be perceived to have spread (Josephus 1971: 233).

The third leg in our tripartite Judaic model is the Holocaust, known also in world history as the Shoah or Calamity (Cohn-Sherbok 1992: 229; Cohn-Sherbok and Cohn-Sherbok 1995: 78). Six million Jews were slaughtered during the Holocaust and the antique foundations of Eastern European Judaism were irretrievably wrecked. Yet some did manage to escape in time from this and other pogroms, thereby creating the basis of the Jewish diaspora with which we are familiar today (Davies 1997: 842–3, 845–8; Taylor 2000: 364). And ‘since the founding of the State of Israel in 1948, the in-gathering of the exiles (Hebrew ‘kibbutz galuyyot’) has come to mean the immigration of diaspora Jews to Israel’ (Cohn-Sherbok 1992: 147; Cohn-Sherbok and Cohn-Sherbok 1995: 50).

The diasporic model for twentieth century Islam and the Arabs, by contrast, is univocal in emphasis and focuses upon Palestine. Babylon, for the displaced Palestinians of 1948 and their exiled descendants, is all the land outside the land of Palestine, for many truly a *dar al-harb* (land of war) or, at the very least, ‘a land of exile’. Return to the land of their forefathers is a complex, half-fulfilled and, at the time of writing, fear-fraught dream.

There had, of course, been previous exiles for Arabs in history, whether they were Muslim or Christian. There was that which became characterised in Arabic literature as the *Mahjar* (Emigration; Nijland 1998c: vol. 2, 492–3), embracing such literary luminaries as Mikha’il Nu’ayma (1889–1989; Nijland 1998d: vol. 2, 588–9; Nu’ayma 1962: vol. 1, esp. 273–83), Jubran Khalil Jubran (1883–1931; Nijland 1998b: vol. 1, 415–16) and Iliya Abu Madi (1889–1957; Nijland 1998a: vol. 1, 38–9). All these migrated from the Lebanon to the USA and some, at least, returned at various times; but their experiences of ‘procession’, migration and occasional return can hardly be compared to those of contemporary Palestinians, whatever the hardships suffered by the former.¹ For the exilic experiences of Nu’ayma, Jubran and Abu Madi may be characterised ultimately as ‘exiles of the soul’; within their individual financial constraints they were free to return and ‘possess’ their land according to inclination and choice.

¹ ‘The romantic stream was generously fed from afar by Lebanese émigrés to the United States, now known as the Syro-American school. These were mostly Christians, and *as such they fitted easily into a Western environment* and readily absorbed its dominant tastes and perceptions. Their high priest was Jibran [*sic*] (1882–1931), who in the last ten years of his life wrote only in English . . .’ (Cachia 2002: 157; my italics).

Palestine (Arabic *Filastin*, Greek *Palaistine*, Latin *Palaestina*) has been inhabited and ruled inter alia by Philistines, Jews, Romans, Arabs, Ottomans and the British (Sourdel and Minganti 1965: 910). It is a truism to say that the land has been much fought over. After the First World War 'the policy of the British Mandatory government in Palestine was from the beginning influenced by the promises made by Britain to the Jews to establish a Jewish National Home in Palestine' (ibid: 913).

Britain relinquished her mandate on 15 May 1948 but 'the day before, David Ben Gurion had proclaimed the birth of the State of Israel' (ibid: 914). The aftermath in the decades which have followed is too well-known to require repetition here. However, 'the flight of the native population was a cataclysm so deeply distressing to the Arabs that to this day they call it, quite simply, *al-Nakba*, the Catastrophe' (Hirst 1977: 136). This *nakba* was—and is—the Palestinians' Babylon Event. The events of Deir Yassin provided further fuel for the catastrophe (ibid: 138, for Deir Yassin 124ff.). By early 1949, David Hirst estimates that of 1,300,000 Arab inhabitants of Palestine, nearly 900,000 had been displaced (ibid: 142). Yet, if Deir Yassin and other episodes provided the angry fuel and motor for the *nakba*, 'the Vision of the Return' as David Hirst calls it, a vision powerfully and evocatively articulated in poetry and prose, was its immediate and dynamic offspring (ibid: 265–9; Fisk 2005: 491).

After the first exile of the Jews from Jerusalem to Babylon under King Nebuchadrezzar, the exiled people are portrayed by the Psalmist, as we have seen in Psalm 137, to devastatingly emotional effect, hanging up their harps and weeping by the waters of Babylon. David Hirst cites the Palestinian scholar, Dr A. L. Tibawi in 1963 who, after 'examining the growing literature of The Return... concluded that such feelings were no less intense than those of the Psalmist: "Should I forget thee, O Jerusalem"' (1963, 508, cited in Hirst 1977: 269, 287, n. 22), in Psalm 137. Here we have a notable confluence of exilic feelings felt by both Jews and Arabs and it is these feelings which we shall now explore in a little more depth in the section which follows. They are framed by the *possibility* of Return. In David Hirst's prescient words once again, 'it was after all from such powerful emotions, seemingly visionary at first, that great upheavals spring' (1977: 269). The passages which follow present not just the Vision and the emotion but also the possibility—sometimes the reality—of The Return as well.

A World of Feelings: the Terrestrial Paradigm

To enter the world of *exile and return* is to enter a world of feelings. Zahia Salhi powerfully articulates this sensitive world:

However, regardless of the reasons that make exiles live far from their homelands and regardless of whether they escaped prosecution or chose to live far from home, they all keep an *idealised image of home as a paradise they were forced to flee*, and never manage to entirely adopt their new dwellings. As such they share feelings of solitude, estrangement, loss and longing (Salhi and Netton 2006: 3; my italics).

The selection of texts which follows is not intended to be comprehensive but merely illustrative; it is, however, designed to highlight those exilic feelings of ‘solitude, estrangement, loss and longing’. Such feelings may be said to be paralleled by that great Neoplatonic ‘yearning’ for Return (Plotinus 1966-88: vi.9.9) to which we alluded earlier. Later, we will examine, in a specifically Islamic context, Salhi’s reference above to the ‘idealised image of home as a paradise they were forced to flee’. For here, in this phrase, merge a diversity of Biblical and Qur’anic motifs of innocence, expulsion, procession, exile and longed-for return, underpinned by a weighty theological orchestra to be led by the trumpet of Israfil on the Last Day, but, potentially, paralleled earlier on earth in real time by every return to a yearned-for homeland. Every r/Return is thus a minor resurrection for the spiritually inclined, Muslim and Jew alike. And every yearned-for land provides a terrestrial foretaste of the Paradise Garden itself, *al-Janna*.

In Homer’s *Odyssey*, Odysseus yearns to return to his native island of Ithaca in the Ionian Islands after the lengthy and wearisome Siege of Troy. The war at Troy is traditionally reckoned to have lasted ten years; having left behind both Penelope, his wife, and Telemachos, his young son, in his island kingdom of Ithaca in order to fight in the Trojan War, Odysseus, not always of his own volition, spends another ten years trying to return home, according to the tradition (Severin 1987: 54-5; Homer 2007: 1-2). The theme of Return is thus a very powerful one; indeed the whole of the *Odyssey* may be characterised as ‘an epic of return’ and one which is sieved through a very lengthy journey. As Michael Silk puts it: ‘in the most literal sense, the *Odyssey* is the story of a wanderer, even an explorer. “Many men’s cities he saw, many men’s minds he discovered” (1.3)’ (2006: 39). And the motif of yearning is present from the start:

Now all the rest, as many as had escaped sheer destruction, were at home, safe from both war and sea; but that man alone, *filled with longing for his return and for his wife*, did the queenly nymph Calypso, that beautiful goddess, keep prisoner... (Homer 1995: book 1, 12-13, lines 11-14, my italics; Silk 2006: 35).

The Return is fulfilled, the yearning is quenched, by Odysseus' ingenuity. Indeed, Nancy Felson and Laura Slatkin observe: 'A poem that celebrates ingenuity, the *Odyssey* might be read as a series of ingenious plans, their collisions and their unfolding'. Thus they draw attention to the way in which Odysseus fools the Cyclops, his dealings with the witch Circe and the test set by his wife Penelope (Severin 1987: 26; Felson and Slatkin 2006: 103). Eventually, as Book XIII shows, Odysseus is returned to Ithaca and wakes, in solitude, estranged, unrecognised and unrecognising, in his own native land from which he has been absent for so long (Homer 1995: book 13, 14-17, lines 185-99). The land which he lost for so many years as a result of participating in a foreign war is now lost to him—at least temporarily—again, through lack of recognition and the machinations of the goddess Pallas Athene. Finally, after a series of trials and tests, Odysseus is recognised and accepted by his faithful wife Penelope, and the longing and yearning are fulfilled and quenched, both physically and emotionally (ibid.: book 13, 398ff., lines 205ff.).

In Plato's *Symposium*, as in some of his longer Dialogues like 'the Protagoras, Meno, Gorgias, Phaedo... and Phaedrus... the Socratic puzzles about the virtues are discussed more deeply and connectedly . . .' (Hare 1982: 21). Here, as Bryan Magee stresses, we find Plato writing 'at the height of his powers' (1987: 23). In response to Magee's question as to why such Dialogues are also regarded as 'supreme works of literary art', Myles Burnyeat replies succinctly: 'They are so alive . . . Where Plato is concerned, we have to add his great mastery and range of language, from high-flown, imaginative descriptions to austere analysis or jokes and witty repartee. Add that he is terribly good at making crystal clear the most difficult thoughts' (ibid: 23-4).²

Such observations may be borne in mind as we survey how Plato, and the Arab historian al-Mas'udi (c. 896-956 AD) after him, handle our key exilic themes of solitude, estrangement, loss and longing in relation to the concept of love.

² We note, also, Stone's comment: 'Plato is the only philosopher who turned metaphysics into drama' (1988: 4).

Bernard Williams provides us with a useful thumbnail sketch of what the *Symposium* is all about:

The participants in the dinner party which the *Symposium* describes, talk about what *eros* is, what it is to be a lover. The lover and his desires have some relation to beauty, or beautiful things: in particular, beautiful young men. We learn more precisely what these desires are. His desire is not a desire for the beautiful, at least in an obvious sense . . . This desire itself turns out to be an expression, or form, of a desire to be immortal (Williams 2000: 69-70).

During the meal the doctor Eryximachus proposes that the guests entertain each other with speeches which will sing the praises of love, rather than just listening to the usual flute players. Socrates seconds this proposal and all the others agree (Plato 1972: 40-1).³

It is the contribution by the great Greek comedy writer and poet, Aristophanes (c. 448-380 BC), author of *The Birds* (c. 414 BC), which concerns us here. Walter Hamilton tells us that Aristophanes begins by reminding his audience that they should not take him too seriously

but, as he continues, a vein of seriousness and almost of pathos begins to mingle with the humour... Aristophanes recognizes that love is a need ...*love is also a longing to regain a lost happiness*... The ultimate object of love is the vision of absolute beauty which man's soul once enjoyed before it was incarnate... (Plato 1925: 132ff., 189Bff., 1972: 16-17, my italics, 58ff.).

Aristophanes puts it thus to his assembled audience at the meal: mankind originally comprised three sexes, male, female and hermaphrodite. Their strength, vigour and massive pride made them appear a threat to the gods:

Each human being was a rounded whole, with double back and flanks forming a complete circle; it had four hands and an equal number of legs, and two identically similar faces upon a circular neck, with one head common to both the faces, which were turned in opposite directions. It had four ears and two organs of generation... (Plato 1925: 134-7, 189D-190B, 1972: 59).

Zeus solves the problem by deciding to weaken the human race and bisects each of its three forms with the aid of Apollo (Plato 1925: 136-9, 190C-E, 1972: 60). 'Man's original body having been thus cut in two, each half yearned for the half from which it had been severed' (Plato 1925: 138-9, 191A-B, 1972: 61). Later, the plan is refined by Zeus

³ For the original Greek text, see Plato 1925: 95-101, 176E-178B.

whereby the reproductive organs in each bisection are moved from the side to the front of the body to enable male-female sexual intercourse (Plato 1925: 138–41, 191B–C, 1972: 61–2). Aristophanes' conclusion is that from this distant era dates 'the innate love which human beings feel for one another, the love which restores us to our ancient state by attempting to weld two beings into one and to heal the wounds which humanity suffered' (Plato 1925: 140–1, 191D, 1972: 62).

Two *topoi* coalesce in Aristophanes' vivid tale: a yearning, consequent upon loss, solitude and estrangement, to be reunited with one's 'other half'—'Each of us is perpetually in search of his corresponding tally' (Plato 1925: 140–1, 191D, 1972: 62). Men who are halves of the original hermaphrodites seek out women with whom to mate, while women who are bisected from the original female sex are lesbians, seeking other women, and the male halves similarly seek out other males (Plato 1925: 140–3, 191D–192A, 1972: 62). Love then, reflected in what I will term here a 'lesser yearning' is the result of the meeting of two bisected halves.

However, all this mirrors a 'greater yearning'—a key theme in the Platonic corpus. We note, once again, Walter Hamilton's words in his Introduction to his translation of *The Symposium*:

'Love is also a longing to regain a lost happiness, and this too is characteristic of Platonic love at its highest. The ultimate object of love is the vision of absolute beauty which man's soul once enjoyed before it was incarnate ...' (Plato 1972: 17).

In the medieval Arab historian al-Mas'udi's *Muru' al-Dhabab* (Fields of Gold), a species of *adab* (belles lettres) more than pure *ta'rikh* (formal history), we encounter a similar symposium or *majlis*, convened by a member of the powerful Barmakid family, Yahya b. Khalid b. Barmak (AD 735–805; Barthold and Sourdel 1960: 1033–6), and a similar discussion of love. The Arabic word used in the *majlis* is '*ishq*, passionate love, a direct equivalent of the Greek *éros* (al-Mas'udi 1966: vol. 3, 371ff.). And it is clear from the context that the original source is Plato.

Here we find the same initial characterisation of the soul as being round when it is created. God then divides each soul and each half is put into a completely separate body. Love necessarily results when one half of a soul, enclosed within a human body, meets its original other half enclosed in another. It is noted in the debate that this doctrine has even been accepted by some Muslims, and they try to justify this Platonic,

but certainly un-Islamic, belief by reference to such Qur'anic verses as 89: 27-30, suggesting as exegesis that *return* to an initial state logically implies that there must have been prior existence *in that state before*:

O (thou) soul,
In (complete) rest
And satisfaction!
Come back thou [*irji'i*]
To thy Lord -
Well pleased (thyself)
And well-pleasing
Unto Him!
Enter thou, then,
Among my Devotees!
Yea, enter thou
My Heaven!
(al-Mas'udi 1966: vol. 3, 373-4)⁴

The logic of this interpretation of the Qur'an may seem to be semantically irrefutable, depending on the emphasis or twist one gives to the Arabic imperative *irji'i* (come back! return!); the theology of such a *tafsir* however, is clearly Platonic. In a passage which parallels numerically, even though it does not reflect, Plato's famous tripartite division of the soul (Hare 1982: 53-4), Yusuf Ali comments on Q. 89: 27 as follows:

In Muslim theology, this stage of the soul is the final stage of bliss. The unregenerate human soul that seeks its satisfaction in the lower earthly desires is the *Ammara* (xii.53). The self-reproaching soul that feels conscious of sin and resists it is the *Lawwama* (lxxv.2) (*The Holy Qur'an* 1984: 1735, n. 6127).

However, to judge from the evidence of this *majlis*, it is clear that not only had such Platonic ideas of the pre-existence of the soul endeared themselves to some in Abbasid Islam, but these ideas had a certain antique currency among the Arabs. The famous seventh-century AD Arab protagonist of the 'Udhrite School of Poetry, Jamil b. 'Abdallah b. Ma'mar al-'Udhri, is quoted with reference to the great love of his life, Buthayna: the latter's parents would not allow her to marry Jamil and instead married her off to another. Gabrieli tells us that Jamil 'was the first to speak of love as an ever-present cosmic force which attracts a person from the moment he is born, and lives on after his death' (1965: 427-8).

⁴ The Holy Qur'an 89: 27-30 is translated here by Abdullah Yusuf Ali (1984:1735).

In the simple and very poignant lines quoted by al-Mas'udi in the *majlis* there is reference both to existence of the soul before this earthly life and existence after death: the poet glories in the idea that his soul and that of his lover cleaved to each other before any earthly creation, that their loves have grown as they grew and that even death cannot destroy this love. Love is anthropomorphised and, contrasting vividly with the horrendous visitation of the soul in the grave by the Angels of the Grave, Munkar and Nakir, will visit the terrestrial lovers in the darkness of the tomb itself (al-Mas'udi 1966: vol. 3, 374).

Here, for the poet then, love is eternal, having not only a reach beyond this earthly life but, bound up with the pre-existent soul, a pre-existence for itself as well. The loving soul, exiled temporarily on this earth from the sublime object of that love, Jamil from Buthayna, will return to the object of that affection in the grave and, I am sure we are intended to understand, in Paradise itself. Exile, solitude, loss, estrangement and yearning will be wiped out for the Arab poet in the bliss of an afterlife with the earthly beloved and the eternal Divine Beloved. Again, we may insert our own *tafsir* here: there is the 'lesser yearning' of Jamil for Buthayna which mirrors the eternal 'greater yearning' of the Islamic soul for Allah.⁵

It is intriguing that the modern Shakespeare scholar, Dr Wendy Macphee, founder of an itinerant Shakespeare company called Theatre Set-Up in 1976 and administrator of that company since that date, has used stories such as we have surveyed from Plato's *Symposium* to interpret the works of the Bard himself. Thus, Macphee writes, interpreting *The Comedy of Errors*:

This story presents a classic blueprint of the Platonic scenario: in which Love is described as originating from Chaos, represented by the storm and ship-wreck; in which the twin-born Love is characterised into two kinds, the heavenly (the Antipholus twins) and the earthly (the Dromio twins); in which the divided soul, when it reaches early maturity, (Antipholus at the age of eighteen), seeks its other half; and in which, through Love (implied by the meaning of Antipholus' name), the soul seeks to be reunited with the divinity from which it fell into a human body. Just as the divine soul is imprisoned in the human body, so Egeon is imprisoned for the course of the play (2007: *sv* 'Different levels of meaning of the story: Renaissance Platonism', col. 4).

⁵ Gabrieli notes that only fragments of Jamil's *Diwan* have survived (1965:427-8) but several are to be found, *inter alia*, in al-Isfahani (1926/7: vol. 8, 90-154); see Gabrieli 1965: 428 Bibliography.

While 'it has long been agreed that Shakespeare's principal source for *The Comedy of Errors* was the comedy called *Menaechmi* by Plautus, the third-century BC Roman dramatist' (Shakespeare 2003: Introduction, 17), it is fascinating to note how Macphee's interpretation perpetuates and re-energises Plato's original story of the bisection of the soul in the *Symposium* of Plato, a story found no less entrancing by the medieval Arabs like Jamil and al-Mas'udi. And, citing Murray J. Levith's *What's in Shakespeare's Names*, Macphee notes that the name of two of the main protagonists, Antipholus of Ephesus and his twin brother Antipholus of Syracuse, means 'one who returns another's love' (2007: n.p.). Once again appears our cardinal leitmotif of 'return'!

The twins motif is, of course, a particularly powerful vehicle with which to portray the Platonic myth of the bisected soul. And even the briefest of glances at the text of *The Comedy of Errors* unveils all our principal themes in this essay of exile, loss, estrangement, yearning and—finally—*Return*. It is a multifaceted return, ranging from the return of the twin sons to their father, the return of one under sentence of death to life through pardon, the return of a diamond ring and the return of a husband to his rightful wife (Shakespeare 2003: Act 5, Scene 1, lines 331ff to the end of the play).

In the *Two Islands Story*, narrated by the tenth/eleventh-century AD Arab philosophers of Basra, known to us as the Ikhwan al-Safa', in their *Rasa'il*, the shipwrecked mariner recalls, and yearns for, his former home. Indeed, it is interesting how often in world literature a shipwreck, or near-shipwreck, serves as a vehicle, prelude or catalyst to a story of exile and estrangement. It was clearly a favourite narrative engine of William Shakespeare, for example, as we see from both *The Comedy of Errors* (2003: Act 1, Scene 1, lines 60–119) and *The Tempest* (1961: Act 1).

In the Ikhwan's tale (1957: vol. 4, 37–40) some inhabitants from an idealised mountain city set sail, only to be shipwrecked on an inhospitable island whose native inhabitants are monkeys. The latter are subject to frequent attack by a monstrous bird of prey. The shipwrecked mariners are forced by physical circumstance to remain in exile on the island where they mate with the monkeys, forget their noble homeland and indulge in much warfare and quarrelling. After some years clouded by feelings of loss and estrangement, which gradually fade, one of the shipwrecked men returns *in a dream* to his native land which makes

him most welcome. Awakening from the dream, he is filled with yearning and sadness: the exile is still a reality and his old feelings are revived. At the dreamer's instigation a valiant attempt at boatbuilding is attempted in an effort to return. But while all this is going on, the monster bird seizes one of the men and drops him in flight over his native city. Return has become a reality.

As part of their homespun *tafsir* for this tale, the Ikhwan explain that our own terrestrial world (*al-dunya*) is like the island of the shipwreck, while the great mountain dwelling, whence the shipwrecked people originally came, is an image of Paradise (*Dar al-akhira*) itself (Ikhwan 1957: vol. 4, 40). 'Here', it is clear, 'knowledge of reality is indeed recollection... Behind all this lies the common Platonic theme of the soul having had a previous existence to which it eventually returns' (Netton 2005: 84).⁶ And the Ikhwan's tale encapsulates, once again, all our major themes of procession, exile, solitude, loss, estrangement, yearning - and final return.

A plethora of other literary and fictional narratives of exile and return spring readily to mind, all imbued with the leitmotifs to which we have constantly referred. In Arabic literature we recall, for example, the profound sadness and loneliness of the North African traveller Ibn Battuta (AD 1304-1368/9 or 1377) as he begins his famous *Rihla*, and the joy he exhibits when his lengthy—admittedly self-inflicted—exile is over and he returns home to Morocco (Ibn Battuta 1964: 14, 17, 657).

One thinks of the best-selling novel *The Alchemist* (1999) by the Brazilian Paulo Coelho, whose protagonist Santiago embarks on a long journey seeking a treasure but in whose exile is always the promise of return. This is a story of transformation achieved through exile and return.⁷

One thinks of the equally popular *Captain Corelli's Mandolin* (1994) by Louis de Bernières in which the young Italian officer and mandolin player, Captain Antonio Corelli, finding himself stationed on the Greek island of Cephallonia during the Second World War, falls in love with a local girl, Pelagia. In a chapter poignantly entitled 'Every Parting is a Foretaste of Death' (pp. 428-37), he is forced by circumstance to exile himself from the island; it is noteworthy how frequently in our examples 'the island' serves as the *locus* of exile or return. And in his old age and

⁶ See also *passim* for this narrative survey.

⁷ Compare *The Pilgrimage* (Coelho 2003).

that of Pelagia, Captain Corelli *does* return to Cephallonia and his former love. The bitter exile is over (pp. 518–33).

Our final literary illustration of that Terrestrial Paradigm which is ‘A World of Feelings’ will be taken from the Norwegian playwright Henrik Ibsen’s (1828–1906) *Peer Gynt*. Intertextually, we may relate it to the stories of the *Sleeping Beauty*, *Rip Van Winkle* and even the Qur’anic *Sura of the Cave (Surat al-Kahf)*; Netton 2000: 67–87). In terms of style and content it is every bit as picaresque as Cervantes’ *Don Quixote*, with locations moving from Norway’s mountains to Morocco, the Sahara desert and Cairo (Ibsen 1970: 22). As John Northam comments, ‘*Peer Gynt* explodes, from small farm to wide world, from fact to fantasy, in a prodigal variety’ (2004: 37).

Yet, after all his adventures, ‘Peer comes home’ (Northam 2004: 44), having travelled all over the world in search of himself and home. Like Santiago in *The Alchemist* he has gained in self-knowledge – and perhaps more (ibid: 45). But the Return is painful at first. More than forty years separate Acts One and Five in Ibsen’s dramatic poem (1970: 186, n. 1). Peer Gynt suffers shipwreck and is later encountered as a stranger (ibid: 174–5, 184); he is told by ‘an Elderly Man’ that Peer Gynt ‘went overseas to foreign parts, and came to grief, as you might have expected. It’s years now since he hanged himself’ (ibid: 188).

He returns finally to the now nearly blind Solveig who tells him he has not sinned, characterises him as ‘my only love’ and cradles him to sleep (ibid: 221(n. 1)–3). His exile, wanderings and yearning are finally assuaged in the arms of Solveig. *Sbe* is his final home.

The Islamic Model of Return: the Eschatological Celestial Paradigm

This essay has sought to identify some of the key aspects of our principal theme of *exile and return*. We may now link these, intertextually, to Islamic eschatology itself: to the exile on earth after the fall of Adam (Q. 2: 35–9, 7: 19–25) and the Return to the Paradise Garden (*al-Janna*) of the believers. The microcosm of each individual ‘return’ mirrors the greater eschatological Return. The Arabic word *al-ma’ad* means both ‘the return’ and ‘the Hereafter’. The whole theology of the Islamic *topos* of ‘Return’ is encapsulated in the Qur’anic verses 6: 60, 10: 46 and 96: 8 and, in particular, in the traditional words of condolence: *Inna li-llabi wa-inna ilayhi raji’un* (We belong to God and to Him we return). There

are 'lesser' flights into exile and returns implicit here as well, ranging from the flight of the Prophet Muhammad from Mecca to Medina in AD 622 and his later Return in triumph to Mecca, and the return of the Twelfth Imam for the Shi'a to the reappearance of 'Isa at the end of time (Q. 43: 61; al-Bukhari 1994: 1022–3 *Kitab al-Fitan*, 84:10 #2198). And the Return of the Hero, after exile and much questing and testing, is a common motif in world literature, mirroring in a terrestrial fashion the cosmic Return of the Soul to God, the entry into the bliss of the Paradise Garden for the believer, as well as the Neoplatonic Return to The One.

The Eschatological Celestial Paradigm in Islam reflects a universal paradigm of exile and return whose literary parallels are to be found in Homer, Plato and Plotinus as well as Shakespeare, Ibsen and Coelho. The terrestrial mirrors the celestial; and, as literature and politics show, every longed-for 'return' starts in the Paradise garden of the human imagination.

Bibliographical Notes

- Barthold, W. & Soudel, D. 1960, 'Al-Barāmika' in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd edn, vol.1, eds. H.A.R. Gibb, B. Lewis, *et al.*, E.J. Brill, Leiden; Luzac, London.
- Brown, Raymond E., *et al.* (eds) 1990, *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary*, Geoffrey Chapman, London.
- Al-Bukhārī 1994, *Mukhtasar al-Bukhārī*, ed. Z.A.A. al-Zubaydī & M.M. Khān, Maktaba Dār al-Salām, Riyāḍ.
- Cachia, Pierre 2002, *Arabic Literature: An Overview*, Culture and Civilization in the Middle East Series, Routledge Curzon, London.
- Coelho, Paul 1999, repr. of 1988, *The Alchemist*, trans. Alan R. Clarke, Harper Collins Publishers, London.
- 2003, *The Pilgrimage*, trans. Alan R. Clarke, Harper Collins Publishers, London.
- Cohn-Sherbok, Dan 1992, 'Diaspora' in *The Blackwell Dictionary of Judaism*, Dan Cohn-Sherbok, Blackwell, Oxford.
- Cohn-Sherbok, Lavinia & Cohn-Sherbok, Dan 1995a, 'Diaspora' in *A Popular Dictionary of Judaism*, Lavinia Cohn-Sherbok & Dan Cohn-Sherbok, Curzon Press, Richmond.
- Cohn-Sherbok, Lavinia & Cohn-Sherbok, Dan 1995b, 'Exile, Babylonian' in *A Popular Dictionary of Judaism*, Lavinia Cohn-Sherbok & Dan Cohn-Sherbok, Curzon Press, Richmond.

- Davies, Norman 1997, *Europe: A History*, Pimlico, London.
- De Bernières, Louis 1994, repr. 1998, *Captain Corelli's Mandolin*, Vintage, London.
- Felson, Nancy & Slatkin, Laura 2004, repr. 2006, 'Gender and Homeric Epic', in *The Cambridge Companion to Homer*, ed. R. Fowler, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
- Fisk, Robert 2005, *The Great War for Civilisation: The Conquest of the Middle East*, Fourth Estate, London.
- Fitzmyer, J. A., et al. 1990, 'A History of Israel', in *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary*, eds, Raymond E. Brown, et al., Geoffrey Chapman, London.
- Fowler, Robert (ed) 2004, repr. 2006, *The Cambridge Companion to Homer*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
- Gabrieli, F. 1965, 'Djamīl b. 'Abdallāh b. Ma'mar al-'Udhri', in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd edn, vol. 2, eds, H.A.R. Gibb, B. Lewis, et al., E.J. Brill, Leiden; Luzac, London.
- Gibb, H.A.R., Lewis, B., et al. 1960, 1965, *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd edn, vols. 1, 2, E.J. Brill, Leiden; Luzac, London.
- Hare, R.M. 1982, *Plato, Past Masters*, Oxford University Press, Oxford; New York.
- Hirst, David 1977, *The Gun and the Olive Branch: The Roots of Violence in the Middle East*, Faber & Faber, London.
- Holy Bible, The*, n.d., King James edn, Oxford University Press, Oxford.
- Holy Qur'an, The*, trans. Abdullah Yusuf Ali, *The Holy Qur'an: Text, Translation and Commentary*, 1984, Dhāt al-Salāsīl, Kuwait [Dual Arabic-English edn].
- Homer 1995, *The Odyssey*, Books 1-12, 13-24, trans. A.T. Murray, rev. George E. Dimock, The Loeb Classical Library, 2 vols, Harvard University Press, Cambridge Mass.; London [Dual Greek-English edn].
- Homer 2007, *The Odyssey of Homer*, trans. Richard Lattimore, Harper Perennial Modern Classics, New York; London.
- Ibn Battūta 1964, *Rihlat Ibn Battūta*, Dār Ṣādir; Dār Bayrūt, Beirut.
- Ibsen, Henrik 1970, *Peer Gynt*, trans. Peter Watts, Penguin Books, London.
- Ikhwān al-Ṣafā' 1957, *Rasā'il Ikhwān al-Ṣafā'*, 4 vols, Dār Ṣādir; Dār Bayrūt, Beirut.
- Al-Iṣfahānī, Abū 'l-Faraj, 1926/7, *Al-Aghānī*, vol. 8, Cairo.
- Josephus, Flavius 1971, *The Destruction of the Jews*, trans. G.A. Williamson, The Folio Society, London.

- Lacey, A.R. 1982, *Modern Philosophy: An Introduction*, Routledge & Kegan Paul, Boston; London; Henley.
- Macphee, Wendy 2007, *Programme Notes, Theatre Set-Up in William Shakespeare's The Comedy of Errors, Set in a Lively Platonic Banquet*, Theatre Set-Up, London.
- Magee, Bryan 1987, *The Great Philosophers: An Introduction to Western Philosophy*, BBC Books, London.
- Al-Mas'ūdī 1966, *Murāj al-Dhabab*, vol. 3, Dār al-Andalus, Beirut.
- McFarlane, James (ed) 2004, *The Cambridge Companion to Ibsen*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
- McGinn, Bernard 2007, 'The Dynamism of the Trinity in Bonaventure and Eckhart', *Eckhart Review*, no. 16.
- Monk, Ray & Raphael, Frederick (eds) 2000, *The Great Philosophers: From Socrates to Turing*, Weidenfeld & Nicolson, London.
- Meisami, Julie Scott & Starkey, Paul (eds) 1998, *Encyclopedia of Arabic Literature*, 2 vols, Routledge, London; New York.
- Netton, Ian Richard 2000, 'Towards a Modern *Tafsir* of *Sūrat al-Kahf*: Structure and Semiotics', *Journal of Qur'anic Studies*, vol. 2.
- 2005, 'Private Caves and Public Islands: Islam, Plato and the Ikhwān al-Ṣafā', *Sacred Web*, vol. 15, June.
- Nijland, C. 1998a, 'Abū Mādī, Īlīyā (1889-1957)' in *Encyclopedia of Arabic Literature*, eds, J.S. Meisami & P. Starkey, vol. 2, Routledge, London; New York.
- 1998b, 'Jubrān, Jubrān Khalīl (1883-1957)' in *Encyclopedia of Arabic Literature*, eds, J.S. Meisami & P. Starkey, vol. 2, Routledge, London; New York.
- 1998c, 'Mahjar Literature' in *Encyclopedia of Arabic Literature*, eds, J.S. Meisami & P. Starkey, vol. 2, Routledge, London; New York.
- 1998d, 'Nu'ayma, Mikhā'il (1889-1989)' in *Encyclopedia of Arabic Literature*, eds, J.S. Meisami & P. Starkey, vol. 2, Routledge, London; New York.
- North, Robert 1990, 'The Chronicler: 1-2 Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah' in *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary*, eds. Raymond E. Brown, et al., Geoffrey Chapman, London.
- Northam, John 2004, 'Dramatic and Non-Dramatic Poetry' in *The Cambridge Companion to Ibsen*, ed. J. McFarlane, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

- Nu‘ayma, Mikhā‘īl 1962, *Sab‘ūm*, vol. 1, Dār Ṣādir; Dār Bayrūt, Beirut.
- Plato 1925, *Plato Volume V: Lysis, Symposium, Gorgias*, trans. W.R.M. Lamb, The Loeb Classical Library, William Heinemann, London; G.P. Putnam’s Sons, New York [Dual Greek-English edn].
- 1972, *The Symposium*, trans. Walter Hamilton, Penguin Books, Harmondsworth.
- Plotinus 1966-88, *Enneads*, trans. A.H. Armstrong, The Loeb Classical Library, 7 vols, Heinemann, London; Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Mass [Dual Greek-English edn].
- Porter, J.R. 1995, *The Illustrated Guide to the Bible*, Oxford University Press, New York.
- Salhi, Zahia Smail & Netton, Ian Richard (eds) 2006, *The Arab Diaspora: Voices of an Anguished Scream*, Routledge, London; New York.
- Severin, Tim 1987, *The Ulysses Voyage: Sea Search for the Odyssey*, Hutchinson, London; Melbourne.
- Shakespeare, William 1961, *The Tempest*, in *The Complete Works of William Shakespeare*, ed. Peter Alexander, The Players’ Edition, Collins, London; Glasgow.
- 2003, *The Comedy of Errors*, ed. Charles Whitworth, Oxford World’s Classics, Oxford University Press, Oxford.
- Silk, Michael 2004, repr. 2006, ‘The *Odyssey* and its Explorations’ in *The Cambridge Companion to Homer*, ed. R. Fowler, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
- Sourdel, D. & Minganti, P. 1965, ‘Filastīn’ in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd edn, vol. 2, eds, H.A.R. Gibb, B. Lewis, et al., E.J. Brill, Leiden; Luzac, London.
- Stone, I.F. 1988, *The Trial of Socrates*, Jonathan Cape, London.
- Taylor, A.J.P. 2000, *England 1914-1945*, The Folio Society, London, repr. of Oxford University Press edn of 1965.
- Tibawi, A.L. 1963, ‘Visions of the Return: The Palestine Arab Refugees in Arabic Poetry and Art’, *Mideast Journal*, vol. 17.
- Williams, Bernard 2000, ‘Plato: The Invention of Philosophy’ in *The Great Philosophers: From Socrates to Turing*, eds. Ray Monk & Frederic Raphael, Weidenfeld & Nicolson, London.