MASCULINITY'S SEVERED SELF: GENDER AND ORIENTALISM IN *OUT OF EGYPT* AND *RUNNING IN THE FAMILY* [1]

Daniel Coleman

My interest in the interrelations between gender, emigration, and postcoloniality has personal roots. Born and raised in Ethiopia the son of Canadian missionary parents, I have often been asked since moving to Canada in my late teens, "Do you ever want to go back there to live?" The question has always raised in me a profound unease, a deep-seated ambivalence about my relation to my own boyhood, to my parents' ideological commitments, to the anomaly of my privileged childhood in one of the world's economically most beleaguered countries. I trace this ambivalence to a general paradox that takes on particular intensity in emigrants' lives:[2] while you can never return to your past, you can also never escape it. So it is that I cannot help but read the tensions of this paradox in *Out of Egypt* and *Running in the Family*, autobiographical narratives written by two highly acclaimed practitioners of post-modern ambivalence: Ihab Hassan and Michael Ondaatje. Both writers are sons of the "Eastern" elite who emigrated to North America—Hassan to the United States, Ondaatje to Canada—where they have secured prestigious reputations in the university academy, and, especially in Ondaatje's case, in the literary world. Both texts are highly problematic representations of a male emigrant's dissociation from his own cultural, racial, and familial heritage. In this essay I want to examine, firstly, the way in which this sense of estrangement, common enough in emigrant experience, is intensified by socially constructed codes of masculinity and, secondly, how these codes tend to align the male subject with an Orientalist discourse that is complicit with the neo-colonial ideologies of the West. I want to demonstrate how certain discourses of masculinity and Orientalism cooperate with and mutually enforce one another.

A growing dialogue about gender and colonialism has emerged in the last decade between feminist and postcolonial theories largely because of the parallel political concerns of women and colonized peoples who have been positioned as "other" to the hetero-sexual white male of the dominant discourses of empire and capitalism.[3] However, a consideration of gender in the intercultural context of post-colonial studies immediately raises a difficulty: if gender is a social construction, as I have claimed, following the lead of feminist theorists from Simone de Beauvoir to Teresa de Lauretis,[4] then how does one account for gender in the experiences of those who have moved between social and cultural systems? And how does one do so without reconfirming the monolithic image of a universal masculinity? For, as Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson observe in their Introduction to *Decolonizing the Subject: The Politics of Gender in Women's Autobiography,*

> just as there are various colonialisms or systems of domination operative historically, there are various patriarchies operative historically, not one universal 'patriarchy.' There are various positions of men to patriarchy, not just an equivalence among them. (xv)[5]

On the one hand, we must be wary, as Gayatri Spivak has warned, of reconfirming a Western template for universal human experience by working only with "variations on, critiques of, and substitutions for, the narratives of Oedipus and Adam" ("The Political Economy" 227). We must keep in mind that the binary thinking inherent in essentialist discussions of "femininity" and "masculinity" participates in the "dualistic system of thought" that Trinh Minh-ha reminds us is "peculiar to the Occident" and to the "'onto-theology' which characterizes Western metaphysics" (90). The temptations are to reductionist homogeneity and to the tunnel vision of a Euro-American paradigm. On the other hand, there is a political efficacy to be gained from an attention to the specific, local enterprises and effects of wide-ranging systems of hegemony. Attempting to clear a path for their work in post-colonial women's autobiographies, Smith and Watson suggest a strategic tension between global and local focuses:

> While attention to specific colonial regimes helps us resist certain totalizing tendencies in our theories, thinking broadly of the constitutive nature of subjectivity and precisely of the differential deployments of gendered subjectivity helps us

> tease out complex and entangled strands of oppression and domination. (xvi)

In an attempt to maintain this tension, I examine the markers of masculine discourse in Hassan's and Ondaatje's texts with what Smith and Watson call a "standpoint reading practice" (xxviii), one that makes explicit its own specificities—both of the particular texts under consideration and of my own investments as reader. I have chosen to examine emigrant autobiographical narratives for several reasons. First, I believe that emigrant writings published in the West and for Western audiences, as these autobiographies are, refract the Western discourses they take up. The cultural hybridity of emigrant experience causes these writers to reflect a troubled, somewhat skewed version of the Western forms they employ. Thus, they offer perspectives on Western culture that often remain invisible to our own eyes. But this is not to say that emigrant literature is some kind of alternative vision, the voice of pure difference. The emigrant traffic between East and West, between South and North, between "Third" and "First" worlds makes physical and prominent the ideological traffic between these worlds that is an inescapable reality of modern postcoloniality. Hassan and Ondaatje are both sons of the privileged classes, both educated in colonial schools which inculcated at an early age the European values that eventually led to their respective emigrations. Furthermore, their working with—or against—the autobiographical genre, itself a specifically Western form of self-construction, indicates how strongly they are influenced by Western ideology.[6] But while this influence is indelible, it is not totalizing, for, as the writers of *The Empire Writes Back* have shown, when post-colonial writers do take up Western literary forms such as autobiography, the inflection of their marginal, ex-centric status suffuses their texts with nuanced levels of subversion and resistance.

Second, the emigrant's negotiations among the strikingly multiple ideologies of language, place, culture, race, class, and gender reveal how identity is very much a social construct; conceptions of self are determined by the plethora of discourses that circulate among social bodies. And because these negotiations are given such dramatic emphasis in the dislocations of the emigrant narrative, they enable the denizens of Euro-American culture to perceive its usually undetectable modes. Third, this exposure is important to my intention in this essay to intervene in structures

of masculinity because male hegemony in Western culture has long maintained its power by attempting to remain invisible, by positioning itself as the standard of civil normality against which the differences of "femininity" and "effeminacy"—not to mention "barbarity" and "savagery"—are thrown into sharp relief. However, as Anthony Easthope puts it, "If masculinity can be shown to have its own *particular* identity and structure then it can't any longer claim to be universal" (1). I propose here to trace the relations between one particular mode of masculinity, a tendency to construct identity by severing the individual from his originary relationships, and one particular mode of neo-colonial imperialism, Orientalist discourse,[7] in order to reveal how they inform and trouble one another.

My fourth and final reason for examining these two emigrant autobiographies is much less "critically correct," for it tends unrigorously to elide representation and reality, the literary and the literal, the semiotic and the substantial. What I mean is that the way these books address the issues of masculinity, emigration, and autobiographical continuity has directly altered my own negotiations of these very issues. Between the original writing of this essay over a year ago and the present re-writing, I made a journey back to Ethiopia for the first time since childhood. I have never wanted to go back; I've always believed that you can never return to your past. But the process of researching and writing this essay convinced me that there is much to be gained from revisiting the past in order to understand it critically, to reconsider the scenes of my early formation as a privileged, white, Protestant, English-speaking, male subject. In Ethiopia, most of these markers of my identity were definitely abnormal. They ensured that I grew up self-conscious, always the object of curiosity, suspicion, interest. While I might have assumed they were "natural," I could never assume they were universal. My readings of Hassan's and Ondaatje's texts motivated me to review these elements of my past not just to see how they shaped my early perceptions, but to attend to the ways in which they continue to form and inform my present concerns and endeavours. For you may convince yourself that you are finally forever out of Egypt, but you will find that Egypt is always running in your family, and there comes a time when it is important to acknowledge the power of its current.

"I was born on 17 October 1925, in Cairo, Egypt," Hassan writes at the outset of his narrative, "and though I carry papers that solemn-

ly record this date and place, I have never felt these facts decisive in my life. I do not recall the house I was born in" (2). The stark irony of this claim at the beginning of an autobiography set mostly in the Egypt of his childhood is a characteristic flourish in Hassan's performance of the "fierce intricacy of asseveration" which, in his 1980 article on "Parabiography," he claims is an inescapable element of human self-definition (595 & 612).[8] Hassan defines the self in terms of severance, through isolating the self from others, from the community, and from the past—a formulation of identity that is distinctly masculinist.[9] He leaves Egypt at nineteen years of age and never returns. His parents, he says dispassionately, were "dead to me perhaps before they entered their grave" (31). He makes no present identifications with Egyptian society, culture, or influence. Kaja Silverman explains how Oedipal severance separates the boy not only from his parents but also from his racial, cultural past. Once the boy leaves his parents and sets out to establish his own independent identity, she says, he finds

> himself 'at home' in those discourses and institutions which define the current symbolic order in the West, and will derive validation and support from them at a psychic if not an economic or social level. In other words, he will 'recognize' himself within the mirror of the reigning ideology, even if his race and economic status place him in contradiction to it. (141)

Jewish British philosopher Victor Seidler corroborates Silverman's statement without employing her psychoanalytic terminology. He claims that it is a common thing for ethnic men to deny their cultural background in order to fit in to the dominant society. "We learn to give up these aspects of our history and culture," he explains, in order

> to be treated as equals by others. It is as if we have to pay the price of the painful and difficult work of deconstructing our identities to be treated fairly and equally with others. . . . In this way we become *estranged* from important aspects of our history and culture. . . . [W]e are encouraged within a liberal moral culture to think of our class and ethnicity as 'emotional attachments' we will eventually outgrow. (124-25)

Hassan's journey "out of Egypt" to the United States exemplifies the way in which masculine severance readily cooperates with the politics of neocolonial imperialism.[10] By representing himself as the

self-made man who leaves the claustrophobic, constricted East to find success and prestige in the free, promised land of the West, he reaffirms the Orientalist pattern in which scholars from the East move to the academies of Europe and North America in order to achieve their career ambitions, thereby confirming the superiority of an "Occidental" education over an "Oriental" one. "[T]he accommodation between the intellectual class and the new imperialism," writes Edward Said, "might very well be accounted one of the special triumphs of Orientalism" (322). One implication, then, of what Hassan himself calls his "Great Escape from Egypt" (87) is a justification of the dominion of the West over the East.

However, Hassan is too self-aware, too self-doubting to be such a naïve proponent of Western power. The successfully Americanized professor does exclaim, "Roots, everyone speaks of roots. I have cared for none" (4), but his assertion begs the question posed by his son, Geoffrey: "you're writing an autobiography? But you never spoke of Egypt at home!" (11). If he cares not at all for roots, then why dig them up? With typical self-irony, Hassan poses the question himself:

> But why this autobiography now? . . . [I]s autobiography my own warrant for American self-exile?
>
> Men and women have flocked to America, fleeing or seeking, driven by the most diverse motives. But the psychological exile stands apart, his case shadier, thicker with complicity and intrigue . . . . What urgency speaks through [his] self-banishment? (106)

This urgency could be something like that of the seminal autobiographer (pun intended), Augustine, who recollected his youth so that he could delineate what it was that he had rejected. It could be like the ancient Israelites, who constantly retold the exodus from Egypt in order to reconfirm the spiritual and material benefits of their migration to the Promised Land. "Self-recreation," Hassan writes, "helped me slip through my birth-rights: language and the clutching blood. Slip? We tear ourselves free. We learn murder in the family, as the ancient Greeks knew, and rehearse the pride of Oedipus before the Sphinx" (6). The Oedipal violence evoked in this passage has its symbolic analogue in the veritable armory of guns, swords, and knives—usually his father's, sometimes his own—that supplies many of the incidents of Hassan's memory. From the moment he feels a curious mixture of fear and fascination when his father

skewers a viper on the point of his cane-rapier to his own days in Mâitre Prôst's fencing club in Cairo, Hassan evinces a "passion for the sword" (76), a passion rooted in the belief that violence is the crucible in which the masculine mettle is tested; bravery in the face of the sword will prove him to have vanquished his inner fears. He can cut himself off from the plenitude of family and home, and not cry. "A part of me," he declares, "has always longed for [the] parched state, and for the fierce solitude of the nomad" (41).

But the too-Freudian severance, as the project of the autobiography itself indicates, is not complete. "For a long time after leaving Egypt," Hassan admits,

> I had a bad, recurrent dream. I dreamt that I was compelled to go back, complete some trivial task—close a door left ajar, feed a canary, whisper a message. There was terror in the banal dream, terror and necessity, and also the sense, within the dream itself, that I had dreamt it before, and within that a feeling that each time I dreamt the dream, something would work out: I would no longer need to go back. (108-09).

His repeated compulsion to close the door whispers the message that his dissociation from the past is not absolute.[11] Even the writing of the autobiography—if we read it as an exorcism of the past—is one more closing of the door. How many more will it take before he no longer needs to go back?

Hassan's consciousness of his own discomfort, his own ambivalence, can be seen in the contradictions between his determination to write about his escape from his past and his contemplation of the possible effects of that writing: "Do my words re- colonize the fellah, who will never read them, as do all these learned [Egyptologist] books I read?" (48). The question is a discomforting one, for it is quite possible that they do. It is quite possible that Hassan's blunt articulation of his desire to be severed from his Egyptian past does recolonize the fellah, does reinscribe the Orientalist discourse that simultaneously desires and dismisses the non-West. The conflict between Hassan's rejection of Egypt and his momentary concern for the fellah exemplifies an extreme version of the masculine struggle, the continual and repeated self-wounding that is necessary to repress the disturbing awareness of interdependence with others.

Feminist poetics of autobiography assert that the drive to define the self by severance from the other is a particularly mas-

culine one. Mary G. Mason claims that "the disclosure of female self is linked to the identification of some 'other'" (210), while Susan Stanford Friedman shows that the female subject represents herself not just in relation to one other, but to a community of others. Friedman takes issue with the masculinist assumption in Georges Gusdorf's influential essay on the "Conditions and Limits of Autobiography" when she insists that the female autobiographical self, contrary to Gusdorf's (male) individual, "does not oppose herself to all others, does not feel herself to exist outside of others, and still less against others, but very much *with* others in an interdependent existence" (56). A cursory reading of recent autobiographies by women such as Sara Suleri, Lillian Hellman, Mary Meigs, Violette Leduc, Maxine Hong Kingston, and Margaret Laurence would corroborate Mason's and Friedman's interrelational poetics of women's autobiographies. As Sara Suleri puts it in *Meat-less Days*, "Living in language is tantamount to living with other people" (177).[12]

This relational understanding of subjectivity is proposed by feminist scholars not just as an aesthetic concept but as an ideal political practice. "The answer to the problem with the white race and the colored, between males and females," writes Gloria Anzaldúa,

> lies in healing the split that originates in the very foundation of our lives, our culture, our languages, our thoughts. A massive uprooting of dualistic thinking in the individual and collective consciousness is the beginning of a long struggle, but one that could, in our best hopes, bring us to the end of rape, of violence, of war. (80)

And this shifting of paradigms—as Anzaldúa, Trinh Minh-ha and Françoise Lionnet, among others, have suggested—can be effected by people who inhabit the margins of culture, people who move between monolithic systems of power: women, *mestizas*, *métis*, émigrés—people who have experienced what Lionnet has called *métissage*,[13] who have had to negotiate multiple relations of gender, race, language, class, nationality, and culture. For it is in the space between cultural and ideological systems that the subject encounters a disjunction of contradictory discourses, and thus, it is in this interstitial space that social change has the potential to emerge. "We have to articulate new visions of ourselves," writes Lionnet, "new concepts that allow us to think *otherwise*, to bypass the ancient symmetries and dichotomies that have governed the ground and very

possibility of thought, of 'clarity,' in all of Western philosophy" (*Autobiographical* 6).

The fact is that *both* men and women live in language, and the diametrically opposed modes of self-representation—individualistic and interrelational—are not essential to the two sexes; they are functions of what Teresa de Lauretis has called "technologies of gender." Adapting the term from Foucault, she uses it to make a strategic intervention in Louis Althusser's model of the ideological formation of the individual subject, asserting that the sex-gender system is one of the most fundamental ideological apparatuses of all. She takes Althusser's statement that "All ideology has the function (which defines it) of 'constituting' concrete individuals as subjects" and adapts it to her own argument by asserting that "Gender has the function (which defines it) of constituting concrete individuals as men and women" (6). De Lauretis points out that the shift from "subjects" to "men and women" marks the distinction between two orders of discourse: the discourse of philosophical theory employed by Althusser and the pragmatic discourse of everyday speech. The sex-gender system implicit in the latter, she explains, "is both a sociocultural construct and a semiotic apparatus, a system of representation which assigns meaning (identity, value, prestige, location in kinship, status in the social hierarchy, etc.) to individuals within the society" (5).[14] Hers is a political move because the assertion that gender is produced by social construct—influenced, but not determined by biology—opens up the possibility of change, of shifting the codes and limits that define gender behaviour. Thus she writes:

> To assert that the social representation of gender affects its subjective construction and that, vice versa, the subjective representation of gender—or self-representation—affects its social construction, leaves open a possibility of agency and self-determination at the subjective and even individual level of micropolitical and everyday practices which Althusser himself would clearly disclaim. I, nevertheless, will claim that possibility." (9)[15]

Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson take up that claim and show how autobiographies written by those who have been marginalized and "minoritized" by the Euro-American centres—they are speaking specifically about postcolonial women's writings—have the potential to assert that micropolitical agency. "[S]elf-repre-

sentation and self- presentation have the potential," they assert, "to intervene in the comfortable alignments of power relationships":

> even if the colonial subject does mime certain traditional patterns, she does so with a difference. She thus exposes their gaps and incongruities, wrenches their meanings, calls their authority into question, for 'illegitimate' speakers have a way of exposing the instability of forms. (xx)

Thus, autobiographical or self-representational writings by those from the margins become sites where definitions, technologies of the subject can be contested.

I read Michael Ondaatje's *Running in the Family* as one such set of self-representations that destabilizes a whole range of hegemonic technologies of the subject. For the purposes of this essay, however, I will focus on the ways in which it contests and problematizes one particular discourse: the technology of masculine gender.[16] Like *Out of Egypt*, this autobiographical narrative foregrounds the male emigrant's severance from his familial and cultural past, but where Hassan refuses to return to the past, Ondaatje is fascinated by it. *Running in the Family* narrates the author's attempt, after twenty-five years' absence, to reconnect with his Sri Lankan past. Where Hassan returns only to his memories, Ondaatje returns physically to the living rooms and gardens of his surviving aunts, cousins, and stepsisters in Sri Lanka. "I would be travelling back to the family I had grown from," he writes at the outset of his return journey, "I wanted to touch them into words" (22). In particular, Ondaatje wants to formulate for himself a new understanding of his deceased father, Mervyn. His project is to cross the Oedipal divide. Yet, as Smaro Kamboureli points out, this is not a straightforward attempt by the son to inscribe himself in the Law of the Father. Despite the writer's obvious "desire to assign a paternity to his act of writing" and despite the fact that "it is the father who emerges as the person who wills the writer to write" so that the "father, not the mother, is the matrix of *Running in the Family*," Kamboureli insists that "Mervyn Ondaatje is not the father figure as legislator; his is the law of scandal. . . . [H]e is a scattered center, a figure that deconstructs his own paternal (patriarchal) authority" (88).

Michael Ondaatje's memories of his alcoholic father prompt his two journeys back to Sri Lanka which provide the substance of *Running in the Family*. "What began it all," he says of his return,

"was the bright bone of a dream I could hardly hold onto. . . . I saw my father, chaotic, surrounded by dogs, and all of them were screaming into the tropical landscape" (21). The nightmare image refers to one of the many surreal stories of Mervyn's dipsomania; "a story about my father," Ondaatje admits, that "I cannot come to terms with" (181). According to this story, Mervyn's friend Arthur finds him walking naked in the jungle, holding with superhuman strength five ropes with a black dog dangling on the end of each one. "The dogs were too powerful to be in danger of being strangled," the son explains. "The danger was to the naked man who held them at arm's length, towards whom they swung like large dark magnets. . . . He had captured all the evil in the regions he had passed through and was holding it" (182). The superhuman strength, the deluded attempt to master the world's evil, the threat of self-destruction are all masculine modes in their most extreme form: isolation and violence; man stripped of his social garb and struggling to master a threatening world.[17] Mervyn's remoteness and insanity remind Ondaatje of Gloucester and Edgar on the edge of Shakespeare's imaginary cliff. "I long for the moment in the play where Edgar reveals himself to Gloucester," Ondaatje writes, "and it never happens. Look I am the son who has grown up. I am the son you have made hazardous, who still loves you" (180). But, unlike the moment in Shakespeare's play, the *éclaircisse-ment* never takes place. Despite Ondaatje's imaginative and sympathetic reconstruction of Mervyn's "thanikama," his bitter isolation after his divorce and the dispersal of his children, Michael is forced to admit that

> There is so much to know and we can only guess. Guess around him. To know him from these stray actions I am told about by those who loved him. And yet, he is still one of those books we long to read whose pages remain uncut. We are still unwise. (200)

What is significant here is not just that Michael Ondaatje expresses his frustration with the severance, both of his own and of circumstance's doing, that has disconnected him from his father, his family, his culture and heritage. Nor is it just that he rejects the exclusionary stance of masculinity, its self-containment, wanting instead to regain kinship, to bridge the harsh divisions between present and past, self and other, individuality and community. What is significant here is that in a text fueled by the desire for know-

ledge of the father—which is a bid for a kind of power—Ondaatje, the son, admits failure. Thus, the text closes in profound ambivalence, certain about the need to re-establish ties with the past, but uncertain about the possibility of meeting that need; certain about the inescapable influence of the father upon the life of the son, but uncertain about how to trace or interpret that influence.

Ondaatje's elusive engagement with Sri Lankan politics is one register of this uncertainty. Postcolonial critic Arun Mukherjee takes Ondaatje to task for his "unwillingness or inability to place his family in a network of social relationships" (57) and says that by not drawing explicit attention to his family's involvements in the colonial tea plantations of pre- and post- independence governments, he naturalizes, even glamorizes, the colonizers. He does not take up the challenge of the lines he quotes from the Sri Lankan poet Lakdasa Wikkramasinha:

> Don't talk to me about Matisse . . .
> the European style of 1900, the tradition of the studio
> where the nude woman reclines forever
> on a sheet of blood
> Talk to me instead of the culture generally—
> how the murderers were sustained
> by the beauty robbed of savages: to our remote
> villages the painters came, and our white-washed
> mud-huts were splattered with gunfire.
>
> (85-86)

Ondaatje does mention in passing the student insurgency of 1971, but he makes no attempt to address its significance in Sri Lanka's history. He does not explain that young Sri Lankans tried to force the postcolonial government to redistribute the land more equitably and to offer more opportunities to the poor; nor does he divulge his own plantation-owning family's compradore relation to political power during that turbulent time.[18] And it is not difficult to see how the portrait of his Gatsby-like family, with their champagne-soaked parties, careening roadsters, and moonlight tangos, exemplifies the exoticizing impulse of Orientalist discourse. Ondaatje's enigmatic Ceylon, where "a well-told lie is worth a thousand facts" (206) is precisely that seductive Orient, the object of imperialist desire described so carefully by Edward Said.

Nonetheless, I would not go as far as Mukherjee does in her categorical assertion that "Ondaatje takes sides with the colonizer"

(56).[19] I would not do so because I read the masculine and Orientalist discourses side by side, believing that Ondaatje's lack of direct engagement with Sri Lankan politics is related to his severance from *everything* Sri Lankan—including family, culture, history, and politics. Identifying himself with any particular position in Sri Lankan politics is impossible because of the ambivalence which rises from his awareness of, and struggle with, the masculine exclusionary position that has severed him from intimate contact with every aspect of his place of origin.

I return, in conclusion, to de Lauretis's as well as Smith and Watson's claims that in self-representation there exists the possibility of agency and self-determination at the level of micropolitical practice. In both cases, these theorists warn that such representations of gender can function "as a personal-political force [that is] both negative and positive" (de Lauretis 9). Insofar as the masculine modes represented in Hassan's and Ondaatje's texts perform the severance of the male subject from his past relationships to family, culture, heritage, and insofar as this severance cooperates with the Orientalist discourse that separates the "East" from the "West" by representing the Oriental as an inferior, exotic "other" to the Occidental self, it functions as a negative force. But, where both these texts reveal the instabilities of the gender system, where they evince the discomforts of the male autobiographical subject within the procrustean bed of the masculine code, they can be read in such a way as to disturb that easy partnership between discourses of masculinity and discourses of modern Orientalism.

Neither *Out of Egypt* nor *Running in the Family* alter in any earth-shaking way the gender codes with which they struggle. Still caught in a vast and intricate series of systems, they are, in fact, complicit in patriarchal-imperialist power structures. Nevertheless, their enormous value emerges in the way they articulate the contradictions and slippages that occur in the gender system when the autobiographical subject undergoes that dislocation of racial, national, and cultural identifications which is the narrative of emigration.

To me, at any rate, they offer the hope that my ambivalent feelings about my own gendered and geographical migrations are not merely signs of personal neurosis, but are part of a process of gradual redefinition and reintegration of my own male experience—past and present. For through the influence of these autobiographies, I did go back to Ethiopia. And I visited my parents who still live

there. We went back to the places where we'd lived when I was a child. And I learned what I had known before I went: while your past is always with you, you can never return to it, really. For there remained the dim outlines of familiarity—the shape of a window or doorway in an old house, the aging faces of family friends, the jostling streets of Addis Ababa—but the flesh on those bones had grown heavy with age. The grass and trees and shrubs have overgrown the neat playgrounds of my memory, a mechanic's grease pit gapes in the middle of what used to be the front porch of the house in which I was born. The paint is chipped and the eavestrough droops uselessly down from the roof. And I am surprised that even though the past has slipped irredeemably away, there is yet a kind of health, a kind of self re-creation, to be found in examining and acknowledging the traces of its passing.

NOTES

[1] This essay was delivered in shorter form at the Ninth Triennial Conference of the Association for Commonwealth Languages and Literatures Studies at the University of the West Indies, Kingston, Jamaica in August 1992. I am grateful for excellent critical advice on earlier drafts from Jane Watt, Linda Warley, Kwaku Larbi Korang, Romita Choudhury, Catherine Nelson-McDermmot, Gerald Hill, Don Randall, Shirley Neuman, Chris Bullock, and Paul Hjartarson.

[2] I use the term "emigrant" in this essay because Hassan's and Ondaatje's texts deal with the conditions and effects of *having left* the place of origin, rather than those of *arriving* in the new destination—which the term "immigrant" would suggest.

[3] For texts that participate in this dialogue, see Chandra Talpade Mohanty, K. Holst-Peterson and Anna Rutherford, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Trinh Minh-ha, Kumkum Sangari and Sudesh Vaid, and Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson in my list of Works Cited.

[4] Diana Fuss's *Essentially Speaking: Feminism, Nature & Difference* presents a very useful discussion of the positions and problems that "essentialist" and "constructionist" accounts of gender pose for feminist theoreticians. She points out that "while the essentialist holds that the natural is *repressed* by the social, the constructionist maintains that the natural is *produced* by the social" (3), but she goes

on to deconstruct the constructionist claim by pointing out that "constructionism . . . really operates as a more sophisticated form of essentialism" (xii).

[5] And, as Tom Hastings has shown, there are various positions of white men to Orientalism, too. Hastings' article provides an important corrective to the monologic impulse in Said that constructs a seamless, unified discourse of Orientalism by repressing the anti-dominant, anti-social potential resistance of many Orientalists' homosexuality. Hastings points to such prominent Orientalists as Richard Burton, T.E. Lawrence, E.M. Forster, and Oscar Wilde for examples of how the very producers of orientalist discourse are often embroiled in deep conflicts with the European colonial values which Said makes them represent.

[6] Georges Gusdorf claims that autobiography is a phenomenon peculiar to Western culture and that autobiographies written by non-Westerners are examples of intellectual colonialization (29).

[7] Orientalism, as Edward Said describes it, is an elaborate discourse manufactured in the West to describe the East. In this discourse, the Orient is not so much a geographical location as it is "an idea that has a history and a tradition of thought, imagery, and vocabulary that have given it reality and presence in and for the West" (5).

[8] Hassan's need to perform this "fierce asseveration" can be traced in the struggle between the theoretical determinisms of post-structuralist subject theory and a pragmatic conviction about the authenticity of personal experience that surfaces throughout his scholarly writings. His experimentations with multiple voices, including those of critic and autobiographer in *Paracriticisms* (1975) and *The Postmodern Turn* (1987), exemplify this struggle. "Though the self may find no basis in theoretical analysis," he writes in 1988, "it is very well able to dispense with such basis. The self, as I argue, finds justification in lived and effective reality" ("Quest for the Subject" 429). It lives, in short, through assertion.

[9] See Anthony Easthope and Victor Seidler for discussions of the masculine exclusionary code. Brigitte Scheer-Schäzler also observes that "[t]he pattern underlying [*Out of Egypt*'s] most important features is a form of duality, the break, the split, the division in two" (248), but she associates the pattern with emigrant autobiography in general without noting its particularly masculine markings in Hassan's text.

[10] See Catherine Belsey's discussion of the relationship between the emergence of the individual subject and the need of industrial capitalism for a manipulable labor force; pp. 67ff.

[11] The dream reveals the tenuous quality of the "fortunate forgetfulness" Hassan invokes in his preface to *Paracriticisms*: "Nietzche offers this provocation: 'As the man who acts must, according to Goethe, be without a conscience, he must also be without knowledge; he forgets everything in order to be able to *do* something . . . . ' We, of course, can never forget; for reality forgives nothing. But we may induce that fortunate forgetfulness that permits an action to complete itself in an act of creation" (xii).

[12] The interrelational mode of female self-representation is important for the way it points out the partiality and specificity of the individualistic-masculinist

mode. However, it is not necessarily a more or less successful way of constituting a self. Linda Warley points out that while Mason's and Friedman's "argument has been a persuasive one for Western feminist critics and has produced insightful readings of women's autobiographies, it is problematized by Suleri's *Meatless Days*. Although the narrator does investigate the nature of her relatedness to those who figure prominently in her life . . . the textual construction and positioning of the 'I' in relation to an 'other' does not necessarily produce a more coherent portrait of the self" (115). Warley's article examines how the multiplicity of relationships and identifications that compose Suleri's "I" blur and destabilize any totalized or complete delineation of the subject in Suleri's autobiography.

[13] See Lionnet's "*Métissage*, Emancipation, and Female Texutality in Two Francophone Writers."

[14] Sidonie Smith makes a similar assertion in her *A Poetics of Women's Autobiography*: "The meaning culture assigns to sexual difference, that is, the ideology of gender, has always constituted *a*, if not *the*, fundamental ideological system for interpreting and understanding individual identity and social dynamics. . . . In order to sustain the idea of man as that which is not woman, the mirror must remain intact. . . . Primary among the ideological intentions inherent in forms and language, then, is the desire of culture to name and to sustain the difference of man's and woman's subjectivity" (48-49).

[15] Judith Butler makes a similar point in *Gender Trouble* when she argues that if identity is a repeated performance of social codes, then agency arises in the displacements that occur between each repetition. As each individiual performs the role(s) society expects, he or she will always fall short of the ideal and be compelled to try again. In the disjunction between the subject's performance and the social ideal, a space opens for the kind of micropolitical agency de Lauretis claims. See especially Butler's concluding chapter, "From Parody to Politics."

[16] Others have commented on the ways Ondaatje's text destabilizes generic codifications as well. Linda Hutcheon gives *Running in the Family* the gordian label "historio-graphic metafiction," pointing out how its postmodernist self-reflexivity calls attention to the "constructedness" of the family history (*The Canadian Postmodern* 81-93). Smaro Kamboureli asserts that "*Running in the Family* is not, in fact cannot be, autobiography. . . . [T]he meaning of *Running in the Family* is inscribed in the registers of its many genres which deconstruct the autobiographical privileging of self-referentiality" (81).

[17] John Russell links Mervyn with that other psychologically unstable catcher in the rye, Holden Caulfield (38), but he does not comment on the destabilizations of genre or gender that occur in either text.

[18] Leslie Mundweiler poses the questions begged by this aporia: "Was the breakup of inherited wealth only something which affected the Ondaatjes and Gratiaens, or were there deeper social reasons for the generation of 'flaming youth' which Ondaatje describes? What was the relation of the social group he characterizes to the colonial administration and to other groups and classes in Ceylon? If this social group stood outside the many political currents in its time (as Ondaatje seems to suggest), why did it do so?" (139). But the truth of the matter is that the group

was not apolitical. The Burghers, despite Ondaatje's carefree portrait, were involved, for example, in a failed *coup d'etat* in 1961 against the government of Mrs. Bandaranaike.

[19] Kamboureli also objects to Mukherjee's accusations on the grounds that "Mukherjee fails to situate Ondaatje's work in a context larger than the one its ethnic signature marks" (91).

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