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ROOTLESSNESS AND REMEMBERING IN MARWAN HASSAN'S *MEMORY GARDEN*

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Marwan Hassan's *Memory Garden of Miguel Carranza*, published in 1991, is a novel of immigration. But unlike Hassan's earlier work, this narrative treats immigration only implicitly, transforming this theme into an attempt to describe, not only the immigrant experience, but also what it means to be human in a new country like Canada. Yoking together two apparently irreconcilable conceptions of humanity —the neo-Platonic, Druze belief in the transmigration of souls and a materialist, Marxian metaphor of the origins of consciousness— Hassan presents a new definition. We are both individual, discrete beings, and beings whose existences are inextricable from a common existence, both atemporally, in the present, and temporally, in history.

In a letter written earlier this year, the young Ottawa writer, Marwan Hassan, said of his *Memory Garden of Miguel Carranza* published in 1991: "I'm not certain this small work can sustain itself in the present crisis of the novel . . . I would not make too broad a claim for this short book, it is circumscribed by too many things, both personal and social". The author's own reservations notwithstanding, it is nonetheless possible to make some claims for his book. It is a masterfully executed narrative which with a few strokes presents at once a portrait of contemporary life in Canada; a troubling metaphor for immigration and its too-often overlooked corollary, emigration; and a meditation on the nature of humanity as profound as it is unorthodox. Though splendidly written, Hassan's *Memory Garden* is a dense and difficult novel; it may thus be best approached through his other, earlier and less complex narratives,

the novellas, *The Confusion of Stones* and *Intelligence*, published in 1989, and which, incidentally, were received somewhat more enthusiastically by the critics than was *The Memory Garden*. While both novellas are worthy of attention in their own right, they may also be considered as precursors to *The Memory Garden*. Both contain elements and themes which Hassan went on to develop more fully in the novel; both are also stories of immigration. *The Confusion of Stones* follows a young man, Falah Azlam, from his bombed-out village in Lebanon to Beirut and, eventually, to his joining an uncle, the only other surviving member of a once numerous family, in Canada. The other novella, *Intelligence*, is also the story of a young man's journey from Lebanon to Canada. It is a journey very different from Falah Azlam's, however, for it is a return. The protagonist, Salah Abourezk, is a third-generation Canadian who, after spending a year in the country of his grandparents, is going home.

Intelligence is perhaps the less successful of the two novellas, but not, as Amin Malak suggests in his review for *Canadian Literature*, because it presents a "more contrived than convincing . . . parallel between the aggressiveness of intelligence officers in Lebanon and the vulgarity of the Canadian drug officer" (1991, 157). Malak has missed the point of Hassan's story; it is not a more or less contrived parallel between vulgarity and aggressiveness that is most important, but the fact that in both instances the protagonist is assumed guilty. If the novella has a weakness, it is that it brushes over many questions rather too quickly; questions which, fortunately, Hassan returned to in his subsequent novel. Yet *Intelligence* is an interesting narrative, and one which, perhaps precisely because of its weaknesses, provides some useful insights into *The Memory Garden of Miguel Carranza*. Three elements in particular are worthy of note. First, the ending of *Intelligence* looks forward to the perplexing end of *The Memory Garden*: it breaks off *in medias res*; the reader is left hanging, wondering what in fact is true. The Canadian police officers accuse Abourezk with such conviction that, given the rather bewildering circumstances of his departure from Lebanon, it is difficult not to wonder if in fact he has not smuggled something

home. At the end of his interrogation in Lebanon, he was given three envelopes and told to take them back to Canada. There is no suggestion that he did so; but despite his having passed a thorough customs inspection at the airport in Montreal, and despite there being no motive and no evidence, his accusers' certainty of Abourezk's guilt carries the weight of damning evidence. And this is where Hassan ends, leaving the reader to sort things out alone. Second, Abourezk looks forward to Miguel Carranza and one of the controlling metaphors of Hassan's novel; he is a physiologist, specifically a neuro-physiologist seeking some- where in the physical constructs of the brain the secret of our humanity —or inhumanity as the case may be. Finally, in *Intelligence* Hassan presents a commonplace occurrence, especially in a country like Canada, but one that holds a special significance in his metaphors of immigration. When Abourezk telephones his girlfriend from the airport in Montreal he must pass through an operator:

> 'Hello . . . Yes, operator, I'd like to call collect to Vancouver. The number is six eight three four three four eight'.
> 'Your name?'
> 'Abourezk'.
> 'Could you spell that?'
> 'A-B-O-U-R-E-Z-K'
> He could hear a buzz and the telephone rang until a sleepy woman's voice . . . answered on the other end.
> 'Hello'.
> 'Yes, I have a collect call from Mr. Abarack in Montreal. . . . ' (1989, 119)

Taken alone, this incident seems hardly worth mentioning. Considered in the perspective of Hassan's other work, it takes on a greater importance. For Hassan sets the name at the heart of the person. We are not only our names, but our names are part of our intimate selves. To take the name away, perhaps even more than denying language or religion, is to deny a person's right to exist: it is conquest. And yet, a simple truth of life is that an immigrant into another social and linguistic context always, necessarily, loses his name.

Where the protagonist's relation to his name is marginal in

Intelligence, it is central to Hassan's other novella, *The Confusion of Stones*. Both the protagonist and his uncle, who has been many years in Canada, lose their names. The uncle, Yusuf, has become Joe, not in itself a great change since his new name is just an English diminutive of the Arabic original. Falah, on the other hand, is burdened with a completely different name simply because it is the one on the uniform he inherits when he begins working as a janitor in a shopping mall. A little confused by this change, he questions his uncle, who answers:

> 'By god, Falah! Your Arabic name is no use here. Who can say or remember Falah ibn Najeeb ibn Ali beni Azlam? Don't worry about the name. Everybody calls me Joe. I used to try to get them to say Yusuf. But they only laughed and called me useless in English. Do you know what it means? I don't want you to have the same problem. They can't or won't say Yusuf.'
> 'They're lazy or stupid'.
> 'And what's the matter? Between you and me, it'll always be Falah and Aumi Yusuf and that's all that matters. Let them call us Tom or Joe or Nick. Their names are all the same even to themselves'. (1989, 39)

After years in Canada, the uncle continues to see himself as a Lebanese living among foreigners. Of Canada he seems to have learned only one thing: "that's what this country runs on: money and money and money. Nothing else" (1991, 38). He has taken two jobs in order to build up his pitiable bank account, and keeps whatever human part of him that is left, the part that was called Aumi "uncle" Yusuf, secret and hidden, perhaps to be resurrected in another time, certainly in another place. He advises his nephew to do the same, to accept the uniform because it will save him money, and, because it is convenient, to accept his new name, Nick, even though it means "fuck" in Arabic. However much the uncle's understanding of Canada and Canadians is founded in reality it is also partial, perverted. Thus he dies meaninglessly, of overwork; and his death frees Falah to discover that Canada can have a human face. The novella concludes with the young immigrant coming out of seclusion and telling one of the few people he meets regularly his real name:

> When the uniformed guard appears and unlocks the glass and metal door, the janitor smiles.
> 'Hello'.
> 'Hi, stranger. What are you so happy about, sunshine'? laughs the guard, who is more accustomed to Azlam's stoic visage.
> 'Nothing'.
> 'It takes all kinds. I guess I'll see you tomorrow, Nick'. He shuts the door after the janitor steps outside and then turns the key in the lock.
> 'You know something'? 'I'd like you to know my real name. It's Falah'.
> 'Right, Fellah. Why don't you change that then'? He flicks with the bronze key at the gold and blue name tag. 'How's a body gonna know your right name if you've got the wrong name on your chest, friend'? (1989, 59)

Eventually, Falah, who had resisted and rebelled against his uncle's one-sided and bitter view of their new home, accepts the friendship of his Portuguese landlord and his family. They, the two girls Tima and Lucy and their parents, are working people much like Falah himself and given the opportunity, they show him that they are decent, honest folk: human beings. And, paradoxically, it is only when he learns this, only once his world ceases to be divided into *us* and *them* as his uncle had divided it, and he begins the slow and difficult process of assimilation into Canadian society, that Falah finds the will and the strength to recover his name. As his uncle had lost his past and himself because he denied his present, Falah reclaims his history and his person when he accepts his new world.

Like *The Confusion of Stones* and *Intelligence, The Memory Garden of Miguel Carranza* is on one level a story of immigration. But unlike the novellas, immigration is treated only implicitly, and it is transformed into a metaphor exploring and attempting to define what it means to be human today. To this end, Hassan develops chiefly four themes. First, as in *Confusion of Stones*, he shows his characters variously integrated into and alienated from their contexts. Second, as he does in *Intelligence*, he explores the possibility of a historical-cultural return to the root of the self. Third, and seemingly in contradiction with the other apparently materialist

lines of inquiry he uses, Hassan evokes the Druze[1] belief in the transmigration of souls as a metaphor for immigration. Finally, continuing and developing into a central metaphor what is only a marginal discussion in *Intelligence*, Hassan examines the ability, or inability, of positive science to uncover and alter the self. What and where, asks Hassan as did Descartes almost four centuries before him, is the occult connection between our material existence and that part of us earlier ages called the soul? or, in other words: What is the relation between our material, physical existences and that apparently ineffable part of ourselves that makes us human?

As in *Intelligence* and *The Confusion of Stones*, in *The Memory Garden*, Hassan uses his characters' names to describe their relations to their contexts and to each other; and, as in the novellas, the characters in *The Memory Garden* have intimate names and public names. The protagonist, the neurosurgeon Miguel Carranza, seems a reasonably well-adjusted and respected member of his community and his profession, though Hassan does present him in a particularly solitary moment of his life. His daughter is married, his son is dead, and his wife is off travelling in Europe, leaving him to ramble about his deserted suburban house alone. There is in Carranza's life, however, if not a contradiction, an opposition. He is "Miguel" for his wife, and "Mike" for everyone else, for his son-in-law as well as for his colleagues. In contrast, his daughter, Victoria, is "Vicky" for everyone, including for him. Significantly, Vicky is as well integrated into Canadian society as anyone can be, and she is comfortable with herself. She has married and had children who are, by all accounts, Canadian only: there is no suggestion that either they or their mother belong anywhere but where they are. By the simple fact of his double name, though, Carranza maintains an implicit link with another, Hispanophone, world in America or in

[1] Hassan may also be referring to the Alawis, a Shi'ite Muslim sect of Syria; some Sunni Muslims consider that the Alawis hold beliefs too far removed from orthodox doctrine to be considered Muslims. Like the Druze, the Alawis hold a neo-Platonic belief in the transmigration of souls (*tanasukh*) (Betts 1988, 17).

Europe;[2] another, intimate world he holds onto through a few, insignificant objects and memories: a trip he once took to Spain, the delicate box of Spanish marquetry where he keeps a note left by his son before his death. This son, Jaime, committed suicide some ten years earlier, a fairly strong indication that something was not right with him in his world. In the matter of names, he stands in direct opposition to his elder sister, Vicky: from an early age Jaime refused the name he had been given by his parents and by which he was generally known, claiming to be called in truth *tibb halim atrash.* It is through Jaime's very particular case that Hassan develops his discussion of the dual existence and double world of the immigrant, an existence and a world characterized by the seemingly contradictory motifs of rootlessness and remembering.

In an article published a few years ago Francesco Lorrigio remarks that Canada is a country without national ghosts, but one with a "superabundance of unmonumentalized, nondescript, small-time, small-space ghosts hidden in every household or under our skin" (1987, 65). Because of Canada's particular geographical position: next to the United States, and due to its historical situation: grown in the age of mass, leveling culture, its ghosts, especially the great ones, are permanently threatened with oblivion. In this context, the small ghosts take on an importance they cannot and need not have in countries and for peoples rooted to their history through geographical and cultural continuity.[3]

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[2] Hassan may have taken the name Carranza from the Mexican president, Venustiano Carranza (1859-1920), who after helping overthrow the dictatorship of Porfirio Diaz had the revolutionary Zapata assassinated, before being overthrown and assassinated himself. This possibility opens many avenues of inquiry, especially into the metaphorical value of Carranza's relation to his patient, Shaker, whose death by his hands haunts Carranza even before the fact.

[3] It does not matter that perceived cultural continuity may in fact have little basis in objective reality. In defining who we are through our past, the manner in which this past is perceived and reconstructed is as, and possibly more, important than any objective historical or cultural facts. This does not mean, however, that any interpretation of the past is acceptable; some are truer than others. Karl Mannheim presents a fine exposition of the problem in *Ideology and Utopia* (1936), but ultimately falls back on a belief in the superiority of an intellectual elite, an unfortunate maneouver reminiscent of Plato.

If the Canadian character has consequently been forged, at least on the part of the people, by an "unremitting effort to distinguish itself from the United States" (Galbraith 1991), like that of other new, immigrant nations, it has also been formed by a struggle to nurture the small ghosts they have, to keep them alive and thriving, often until they grow to proportions they could never have reached in their original homes. To nurture these ghosts they turn to real and imagined pasts, worlds through which they give meaning to present and future, and without which, therefore, we would cease to be human beings.[4]

In Canada, the search for these small ghosts has typically taken on the form of a return to one's historical and cultural origins, however distant or imaginary these might be. In *The Memory Garden*, Vicky lives in the present and in the future; she is not, like her father, preoccupied with the past. When Carranza calls her because the memory of his dead son will not leave him, she answers, simply: "Pappa, it's been years now" (1991, 12). And she has children, today an indication that she has faith in the future, that life will go on. The past is part of us, but for Vicky it is not a problematic part of the equation; life is the present and the future. Unlike her daughter, Carranza's wife, Marta, does turn to the past. She is absent until the final pages of the narrative, travelling about Europe. Spain is mentioned, which provides a link, though a vague one, with a past to which she and her husband hold without quite knowing why or even being conscious that they are doing so. From the scanty details Hassan provides, it seems that, like her daughter, Marta lives also in the present. She has certainly returned to something in Europe, but while this return may be important to her, it is by no means essential. She explores the past as she explores the world; but she has a home she will return to. She enjoys the past, as it is part of the present, but the past does not have a distinct, unmasterable and malefic,

[4] As Orwell very adroitly remarked, those who control the present control the past, and by controlling the past control the future. The great turning to the past, to "roots", by this generation is very much a reaction, perhaps the only possible one in the present context, against being reduced to mere consumers, especially of culture.

existence of its own as it did for her son and now does for her husband. Like her daughter, Marta chooses those ghosts she wishes or needs to keep and those she will abandon.

The situation is otherwise for Miguel Carranza and for his son, Jaime. Both are haunted by the past, and by a hidden, esoteric dimension of themselves and of humanity. Since earliest childhood, Jaime insisted that he was not Jaime Carranza, and when adults refused to acknowledge his, as he claimed, true identity, he withdrew, going into hiding with what he considered his true self so effectively that his parents thought he had abandoned what they saw as childish fantasies. He had tried occasionally to communicate his private world to others, but his efforts were invariably answered with incomprehension, when they did not meet with simple indifference (1991, 34 and 74). Ultimately, unable to accept that this life was his, all those around him refusing to admit the existence of his other lives, which he did not himself understand, in short, unable to reconcile who he believed he was with what he was living and who others thought he was, Jaime committed suicide. The only clue he left to his life is a notebook, which, unable to let the tragedy rest, Carranza finally locates in the family cottage somewhere north of Toronto. His efforts go unrewarded, though:

> At the bottom of a mildewed box, he found a small black notebook. Blueline book, cover made of pressed cardboard. There on the inside cover a small maple leaf above CANADA in capitals, across from the printed message: Montreal, Canada, 192 pages. The pages had been torn from the spine. On the left side on the flyleaf there was written in Jaime's up and down neat script:
>
> *The life of tibb halim atrash, m.i.m.*
> *(aka my true life. Jaime Carranza)*
> Toronto May (74)

The contents of the notebook, which contained the secret of the boy's life and his death, have disappeared. Only a shell remains. Perhaps Jaime destroyed it himself before committing suicide. Whatever the reasons for its disappearance, Carranza is left with

only his memory to rely on when he searches back into his past and his son's, trying to discover what happened and why.

Hassan gives some clues, though none are understood by Carranza as he sifts back through his memory. He had once had an argument with Jaime because the boy insisted on being called Halim and claimed to have been killed by French soldiers who had ambushed him. The birthmark he had on his stomach was, he said, in fact the scar from a bayonet wound. He was also, inexplicably, terrified of dogs. Though they are of no help to Carranza, these details can help us reconstruct, from the outside, both Jaime's life and his secret world.

In February 1021, the founder of the Druze religion, the Fatimid caliph al-Hakim of Cairo disappeared. A thirteenth-century chronicler (Abu Salih) reports that he "went alone into the desert and never returned"; a modern historian (Nejla M. Abu-Izzeddin) suggests that he went to Sijistan in eastern Iran. According to a commonly accepted tradition, however, al-Hakim was murdered at the instigation of his sister, whom he had accused of impropriety (Betts 1988, 11), and torn apart by wild dogs on the outskirts of Cairo. *Tibb halim atrash* can be translated as meaning "the essence, the soul, of Halim Atrash". The al-Atrash are a leading Druze family, of whom several members were prominent in rebellions and uprisings against the French. Among them was Halim Atrash, who in the 1920s led a rebellion against the French mandate in Syria and Lebanon until he was ambushed by French soldiers and killed, exactly as Jaime describes his own previous or imagined death. Though the Druze form a closed religious community and are forbidden to reveal the secrets of their faith to outsiders, some of their beliefs are common knowledge. A key tenet of the Druze religion is the transmigration of souls. When a Druze dies, his or her soul goes on to inhabit another body; each person hence carries many previous lives. A tradition in the Levant suggests that the waters of Lethe are not all-effacing: a soul may remember its earlier lives, and it may need to return to the place where it had lived. If it cannot, the person carrying this soul will die. Denied contact with his past, with a deeper history than that which his mother goes to

Europe to observe, denied the self he was and therefore must also be in this life in Canada, Jaime does just this. He kills himself. The empty notebook Carranza finds in the cottage is like the boy's life without his past: it has "Canada" written on the cover; this is to where and to what he belonged; but it is empty. Taken as a metaphor for people living today in Canada, almost all of us in some way immigrants, Jaime's short life and suicide suggest that we cannot, we must not, abandon our pasts. Extended to Canada, his story suggests that if we refuse to recognize the worth, the needs and the aspirations of those who, like Jaime, also belong elsewhere, our nation is as empty as the pressed cardboard notebook.

But with *The Memory Garden of Miguel Carranza* Hassan goes beyond the sort of discussion of the immigration condition in Canada that is central to his novellas. Searching for whatever it might be that makes us human, Hassan constructs his novel around a conceit, that is by violently yoking two ideas together, the device so skilfully employed by the Metaphysical poets of the final hours of the Renaissance. He takes two apparently irreconcilable approaches to the problem, the transmigration of souls and a materialist, Marxian metaphor of the origins and nature of human consciousness, and joins them to present an eloquent —if evasive— answer: we are individual, discrete beings, but ones whose existences (especially as individual and discrete beings) are inextricable from a common existence, both atemporally, in the present, and temporally, in history.

Like his son, Miguel Carranza is haunted, and he is searching. Alone at home, he sees shapes, strange creatures manifesting themselves in his swimming pool and his garden, shadows at the edge of his consciousness. Unlike his daughter, he cannot let the past rest; or, perhaps more accurately, it will not let him rest: he returns continuously to his son's suicide, searching vainly to understand what happened. But he is also haunted by the future. When he is alone at home, a voice returns continuously, accusingly: "You bastard, you fucked me. You fucked me Doctor Carranza carranza carranza carranza" (1991, 9). This voice comes from the man, Albert Shaker, whom he will inadvertently destroy on the operating table.

Opening Shaker's head and changing the structure of his brain in order to help him, Carranza will change more than he ever imagined possible; and doing this he will be drawn into another world, that same world that years ago swallowed his son, Jaime.

Any sort of work transforms not only the object but also the active subject, not only the object being acted upon, but the person acting upon it. Operating on a man's brain transforms also the one who performs the operation. Even during a routine and successful operation, Carranza the neurosurgeon is as vulnerable as his patient. His consciousness is necessarily affected by his physical intervention inside the patient's head. Entering a patient's brain, Carranza glimpses worlds hidden in another man, and a world hidden in himself:

> Next the assistant made a cross-shaped incision in the dura-matter, the leathery membrane covering the brain, and pulled all four corners back to expose the pinkish-grey tissue underneath. The hole opened up was not much wider than the fingertip of a child, the little Dutch boy could have snugly plugged his baby finger into it, but he could never have halted the ocean of time, memories and dreams flowing away. To Carranza and the others it was the awesome circumference and diameter of a black hole in space. And that black hole had been measured over to the nth degree.
>
> Surveying for this tumour was like sifting sand at an archeological site with spoons, tiny brushes and sieves, careful not to damage even the smallest potsherd, conscious of moving and shifting whole civilizations and memories.
>
> As he pressed in to look, Carranza recalled searching for a gold cross which he had lost on his high school playing field. . . . (1991, 54-5)

Peering into the patient's skull, Carranza descends also into his own mind, sifts through his own past and, perhaps forty years after the fact, recalls how he had remembered: "There had been an infinitesimal snap at that moment —a penny dropping across time— but he only heard it now over this memory. . . ." (1991, 56). For Hassan the self is not, or at least not limited to, the idealist, Platonic

soul of Druze transmigration. It is also, though this contradicts the entire concept of transmigration, it is in fact first of all, the physical constructs of the brain. Carranza knows that upon entering into this physical construct, he has before him "a naked and vulnerable universe" (1991, 56). But this naked and vulnerable universe is in himself as much as it is in his patient.

The brain is the place to which science has traced our minds and personalities, but it is not necessarily the most essentially human organ. Attempting to resolve the perennial question of the development of human consciousness, Marxians have answered with a metaphor. The hand is at the origin of the mind.[5] Evolution was not pre-determined, but contingent: primates or even hominids were never *destined* to evolve into human beings. Humanity is the result of accident, perhaps; and of its ancestors' actions upon their world, certainly. The brain and the mind developed in response to attempts to resolve specific problems at hand, through a sort of *bricolage*, work.[6] The motor of human evolution is not any sort of ineffable intelligence, but our physical interaction with the world, symbolized by the hand. If it is possible to speak of such things as human consciousness, it is also necessary to recognize that this consciousness depends as much on the hand as it does on the brain.

This materialist metaphor is central to Hassan's work to date. In *The Confusion of Stones*, Falah Azlam has his hand severed by a bomb fragment. He is lucky; modern medicine succeeds in grafting it back, first to his abdomen, then to its rightful place. It remains pale and fragile, though, and Falah hides it as much as he can from view. It becomes a symbol of his shattered life, of how he is torn from his ancestral home, of his powerlessness. Yet, it is also a

[5] For clear and accessible discussions of the basic tenets of Marxian ontology (there has been and continues to be much simplification and obfuscation) see Maurice Cornforth, *The Theory of Knowledge* (1971) and Lucien Sève, *Une introduction à la philosophie marxiste*, 2nd ed. (1980); Ernst Fischer's classic, *The Necessity of Art* (1978) discusses the question in relation to art.

[6] Lévi-Strauss is correct in describing primitive thinking as *bricolage*. He is wrong, however, to limit *bricolage* to so-called primitive thinking; *all* thinking is a form of work, and hence *bricolage*.

symbol of regeneration; for when he begins to reconcile himself to his new life in Canada, Falah gradually ceases to be ashamed of it. The loss or crippling of the right hand is a device as old as literature; it has been used, from *The Gilgamesh Epic* to Lägerkvist's *Sibyl*, for example, as an indication of lost power or of forthcoming disaster. In *The Confusion of Stones*, Hassan adds to this a political dimension: having lost full use of his right hand, Falah Azlam must use his left, which grows in strength. His shame concerning his right hand may represent the political right, which, rather than religious and ethnic rivalry, the author clearly blames for Lebanon's mutilation and martyrdom. In *The Memory Garden*, Hassan returns to the more traditional use of the device, but transforms it. The Marxian metaphor of the hand as the origin of consciousness is developed into a discussion of the relation each one of us maintains with a necessarily collective past; for it is this relation that brings together the physical world of the brain and the mind,[7] that ocean of occult memories and secret histories.

Carranza's most important patient throughout *The Memory Garden* is Albert Shaker, a tool and die maker who lost his right hand and arm in an industrial accident:

> The next patient was an auto worker from Oshawa whose right arm had been crushed in the factory. Carranza had seen this worker some months before. He had suggested surgery at that time, but only tentatively because he was still inclined to treat the patient's persistent pain with drugs. . . . There was nothing but the stump of a right arm. The amputation had been just above the right elbow and the limb jerked here and there like a snapping turtle's leathery flipper. Higher up in the shoulder, Carranza knew, the web of nerves –the brachial plexus– had suffered some damage which became increasingly apparent after the surgery. (1991, 14-17)

[7] While Hassan's conceit —transmigration and the hand as the origin of consciousness— may suggest the mind-body problem, or more accurately, non-problem, an attempt to read this old idealist bugbear into the text would rest on a crudely literal interpretation of Hassan's use of transmigration.

The crucial problem is not so much Shaker's pain, nor even the psychological trauma he is suffering after the loss of this hand that has served him so well, "working by the millimetre, millimicron" (1991, 50), but that in the two years since his crushed arm was amputated, a phantom limb has replaced it and transformed the man. The nerves that had once linked his hand to his mind were irreparably damaged; as the hand is at the origins of consciousness, a phantom hand is transforming Shaker's mind, driving a once normal man to madness, destroying him and his family. All other solutions having failed, Carranza and the psychiatrist treating Shaker have proposed a new surgical technique. They will place electrodes inside Shaker's skull which will allow them to stimulate or reduce activity in specific parts of his brain at will. Through this direct, physical intervention the physicians hope eventually, after six to eighteen months, to cure the man of his phantom arm and his pain.

The results of the first therapy session after the electrodes have been implanted are extremely promising:

> Carranza could see the phantom limb fading, evaporating into the electrical waves vibrating in the man's skull. Where could the limb float away to? Nowhere, anywhere . . . maybe drifting on the radio waves . . . floating in the ocean among seaweed, plankton, turtles and cetaceans.
>
> Shaker's eyes were open and glazed over when the last radio waves hummed through the electrodes.
>
> Carranza studied the transformed features, a mask had been removed revealing Shaker's new face: euphoric and naive and remote. (1991, 93)

But the sorcerer's apprentices get far more then they had bargained for; there is yet more in heaven and earth than they have dreamt of in their science. Carranza's colleague, Polgar, shows him the results of his experiments with flint scalpels. Under the microscope, they reveal smoother, sharper and hence less harmful blades than those of the finest modern, steel instruments, those precisely which Carranza uses on Shaker. The flint scalpels are a warning; however much we know, it is not enough, and the answers we seek may not always be

in the future, as positive science tends to assume, but somewhere in a past we have passed over without reflection. Further, the surgeon Carranza and his patient are in many ways similar. Both work with their hands. Like Shaker's hands, Carranza's have been trained through years of practice and are inseparable from his mind. Describing them, Hassan writes that Carranza's "hands ... exuded nothing more than the refined self-discipline that his mind had acquired through precision surgery" (1991, 43). Also like Shaker, Carranza is injured in an accident. His profession depends on the discipline, control and knowledge of both the hand and of the mind, yet he cuts himself while slicing a tomato. The knife with which he injures himself is serrated, like the scalpel he uses routinely in surgery, an apparently sharp blade which under the microscope reveals "a jagged toothed edge not unlike a hack-saw" (1991, 27). Carranza ultimately follows the same path as his patient; hand and mind fail him. But unlike Shaker, Carranza is the author of his end. Cutting into Shaker's brain, Carranza will open undreamt of worlds not only for his unhappy patient, but also for himself.

Before the surgery, Shaker had suggested that inanimate objects have some sort of soul, or at least a meaningful continuity. A mysterious voice had once saved him from stepping backwards into a furnace of molten steel, and he interprets his later misfortune to that moment when his life was inexplicably spared:

> Sometimes I think that steel I was stirring up there with my buddy back in the Rouge got shaped into the hammer and block that seized my arm away. Bounced back to life in another form to get its own. Goes on a pilgrimage, migrating from one thing to the next and keeps coming back to life someway else, somehow else. (1991, 47)

Now, subsequent to the surgery, Shaker discovers a similar continuity in himself. He does not become the man he was before the accident, but goes much further back, like Carranza's son, Jaime, to another life. After a few therapy sessions, Shaker no longer suffers from the phantom limb or the former pain; but he begins to be troubled, first by memory lapses, then by memories that he knows

are not his own. He remembers scenes from a childhood that could not possibly be his, in Lebanon, or some other part of the Levant.[8] He knows these memories do not belong to him, yet he knows also that they do, describing them as "far away. Far away like it wasn't my experience. Like I was watching myself as somebody else" (1991, 103). A short time later, after being discharged from hospital, Shaker kills himself. No more than Jaime was he able to live with memories of a life that is both his and not his.

The Memory Garden ends soon after Carranza gets news of the suicide. Hassan sends us with him "through the hiatus of a post coitus triste into a sleep which by increments had grown fitful until a nasty dream erupted" (1991, 115) and into a world constructed of layer upon layer of dream and memory, and leaves us there. After drawing together the idealist, religious metaphor of transmigration and the materialist metaphor of the hand and human consciousness into a taut conceit, Hassan draws his protagonist into the very ocean he had tinkered with all his life, and us with him. The various types of existence we traditionally separate and consider distinct, discrete and exclusive —the physical world, consciousness, individual and collective memory,[9]— fuse and become indistinguishable, as they were for Jaime, and as they became for Albert Shaker.

Taken literally, this conclusion is perplexing, if not outright confusing. It seems to stand in complete contradiction with the materialist perspective Hassan adopts in his earlier novellas and throughout most of *The Memory Garden*. Taken as metaphor, it is more accessible. Each element Hassan explores in his narrative is one of the many elements that make us what we are. We are material beings: toying with the brain means toying with the person. But a reductivist correspondence between neurons and thoughts, between the coils of grey matter and the mind is as incapable of explaining human consciousness as idealist and religious methods are of

[8] Shaker can also be read as an Arabic name: Shaaker. This may simply be coincidence, however.

[9] There is no indication that Hassan is postulating any sort of silliness like a Collective Unconscious or a Great Code.

explaining the relation between consciousness and the physical person. For Hassan, we are all of these together, individually; but we also exist collectively, with pasts, with histories without which we cannot continue to live, but with which we must come to terms if we are to live.

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INDICE