Breaking the Thread: Structure and Exile in Wajdi Mouawad's *Incendies*

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Abstract

Published in 2003, the Lebanese-Québécois playwright Wajdi Mouawad's *Incendies* is a work which explores issues of exile and displacement. Guided by theorist Mieke Bal's contention that an analysis of how the linguistic structure of a narrative text and its thematic concerns correlate with one another may lead to an enriched understanding of both dimensions, and thus the text overall (181-2), I will illustrate how this play structurally reflects Edward Said's concept of exilic subjectivity by featuring binary oppositions that constantly interact with one another while never completely losing their separateness. In addition to relying on both *Incendies* and F. Elizabeth Dahab's *Voices of Exile in Contemporary Canadian Francophone Literature*, my investigation will also utilize Edward Said's essay "Reflections on Exile," Mieke Bal's *Narratology,* and other literary analyses of *Incendies*, as well as referencing the theories of de Saussure and Derrida. Furthermore, an analysis of the manner in which Mouawad blends historical facts with fiction will demonstrate how the renegotiation of oppositional elements is a phenomenon which applies to the very nature of *Incendies* as a collective whole, and thus how this is a work that both stylistically and essentially reflects an exilic consciousness that transcends stasis and victimization.

Introduction

In her book-length study, *Voices of Exile in Contemporary Canadian Francophone Literature,* F. Elizabeth Dahab analyzes the lives and oeuvres of five Canadian writers of Arab origin. Dahab devotes a chapter to the Lebanese-Québécois playwright, Wajdi Mouawad, in which she analyzes several of his plays, including *Incendies*. In the introduction to her monograph, Dahab mentions that a structural[1] reflection of the state of exile is prevalent in some of the works of the authors in question, manifested primarily by way of a prevalence of binary oppositions[2] (28), which she then relates to Edward Said's delineation of exile as a state informed by a "contrapuntal" awareness (185). Although an exploration of the dialectic between silence and speech is a crucial component to her analysis of *Incendies*, Dahab does not apply this analysis within the context of the discernment of a structural reflection of the exilic condition. I maintain that such a reading of *Incendies* is possible, provided it also entails Said's interrelated notion of exilic subjectivity. Thus, in what may be at least partially taken as a stylistic emulation of exilic itinerancy, this paper will follow its own circuitous path, beginning with an analysis of the relationship between the historical events explored within Mouawad's play and the play's status as a work of fiction, followed by a brief recounting of the plot, and returning, finally, to the theme of exile through a demonstration of how, in addition to that of the state of exile itself, a reflection of exilic subjectivity is discernible on a structural level within the work.

Lebanon: Historical Fabula(s)

"On oublie l'histoire du Liban, peut-être parce-que cette guerre civile fut si compliquée à comprendre qu'elle a assourdi la mémoire." [The history of Lebanon is forgotten, perhaps because the civil war was so difficult to understand that it stifled all memory.[3]]

—Wajdi Mouawad (*Architecture d'un Marcheur* 57)

In *Narratology,* Mieke Bal puts forth the notion that a narrative work is comprised of three distinct yet interrelated elements: text, story, and fabula. Bal defines a narrative text as "a text in which an agent or subject conveys to an addressee ('tells' the reader) a story in a particular

medium, such as language, imagery, sound, buildings, or a combination thereof" (5). The story is the "content of that text, and produces a particular manifestation, inflection, and 'colouring' of a fabula" (5). Finally, the fabula is "a series of logically and chronologically related events that are caused and experienced by actors" (5). In other words, the text is the finished product—the film, the novel, or, for the purposes of this investigation, the play, while its story is the result of how an initial series of actions, a fabula, is *focalized*, or subjectively processed and represented by the agents of the text in question (145). *Subjectively* is a key word. For while Bal concedes that the fabula may be constituted by historical circumstances, "[a] point of view is chosen, a certain way of seeing things, a certain angle, whether 'real' historical facts are concerned or fictitious events" (145).

If, according to this conception, the delivery of "objective" facts via narrative texts is effectively impossible, is the attempt to familiarize oneself with the fabula in its original context thus a senseless endeavor? Rainier Grutman and Héba Alah Ghadie specifically relate the notion of the relationship between historical events and subjective processing to *Incendies* in the article *"Les Méandres de la Mémoire"* [The Meanderings of Memory]: *"En termes clairs,* Incendies *aurait été impensable sans la guerre du Liban"* [In clear terms, *Incendies* would have been unthinkable without the [Civil] war in Lebanon] (101). Drawing on the ideas of historian Pierre Nora and writer Régine Robin, Grutman and Ghadie go on to propose that the execution of *Incendies* (which combines a recounting of key events within the Lebanese Civil War with a retelling of the myth of Oedipus Rex) is both founded upon and vindicates the notion that a constant dialogue must be maintained between the subjective inclination and the potential accuracy of external truths, rather than one being irreversibly chosen over the other (97).

In fact, it is clear that Mouawad's work, described by the Québécois sociologist Jean-François Côté as *"théâatre engagé"* [engaged theater] (9), is intended to serve as a response to the issues it treats. When questioned by Côté as to how Mouawad felt about his piece *Littoral* being performed in Lebanon, Mouawad replied that he saw it as *"Une victoire contre la guerre, contre l'exil"* [A victory against war, against exile] (75). Thus, the "colour[ing]" (Bal 5) of the fabula(s) informing

Mouawad's plays does not (and should not) preclude direct familiarization.[4]

The incidents which afflicted Lebanon from 1975 to 1990 are almost as difficult to comprehend fully as they must have been to endure. Although already grave in nature, they were intensified even further by the unique set of complications which had characterized Lebanon from the Ottoman occupation, to the period during which it was a French "protectorate," and onward: a population that is both ethnically and religiously diverse, tensions produced by the translation of sectarian favoritism by occupying powers into governmental organization (Traboulsi 109), an uneven distribution of wealth whereby status and sect often colluded (Traboulsi 162-3), and internecine competition for equal autonomy.

Thus, the formation of the state of Israel in 1948, which resulted in "the expulsion or flight of between a quarter of a million and 350,000 Palestinians" (Khalidi 132), introduced yet another complication to an essentially already over-burdened national situation (Traboulsi 114). Lebanon soon became home to a percentage of a newly displaced Palestinian population that abided largely in "camps along the coastal plain and Beirut's industrial zone" (Traboulsi 113-4). Additionally, pockets of the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO), formed just over a decade later, began to involve themselves directly in Lebanese political affairs (Khalidi 176). The Palestinian presence, as well as subsequent Israeli aggression, further exacerbated the divide between groups. There were those who were more sympathetic toward the Palestinian cause and demanded retaliation for Israeli aggression (Traboulsi174), while others aligned themselves with Israeli forces and against the Palestinians (187).

Finally, this new phase resulted in two of the bleakest incidents in Lebanese history: the 'Ayn al-Rummaneh bus incident of 1975, in which a Phalangist militia opened fire on a bus full of Palestinians, thus initiating the fifteen year long Lebanese Civil War (Traboulsi 183), and the Sabra and Shatila massacre, in which, during a ten-week Israeli siege and bombardment of Beirut (Khalidi XXI), members of the Lebanese Front, in retaliation for the assassination of the Maronite leader, Bashir Jumayil, raided two Palestinian refugee camps with the aid of Israeli

forces (Traboulsi 218). Of this last incident, which resulted in "the massacre of more than a thousand Palestinians, and no less than a hundred Lebanese" (218), Evelyne Accad paints a particularly gruesome picture: "The bodies of women, children, old people, young people, their throats slit, their stomachs open, blood flowing in the earth . . ." (294).[5] Such are the events which (in)form the foundation upon which *Incendies* is based[6].

Incendies

Incendies is Wajdi Mouawad's thirteenth play, and the second part of his critically acclaimed tetralogy, collectively entitled *Le Sang Des Promesses* [The Blood of Promises]. At the time of its publication (2003), Mouawad considered *Incendies* to be his best work to date (Dahab 143). The success of this play has further contributed to Mouawad's rising fame. Critic Fabienne Darge has noted that Mouawad's works are presently highly sought after in France, and Martin Morrow has observed that, although Mouawad is still less known in the Anglophone world, this ignorance is rapidly fading, as evidenced by the recent success of an English-language production of *Incendies,* translated to *Scorched*. Mouawad's fame, however, is not restricted to the success of his theatrical works. He is perhaps as notorious for his striking persona as he is for the literary quality of his productions, and famously recognized for his unapologetic anger (Grutman and Ghadie 92). In his article, "Everyday Arabness: The Poethics of Arab Canadian Literature and Film," Nouri Gana implies that this anger may be tied at least partially to the marginalization of the works of Arab-Canadian writers and filmmakers, which both reflects and feeds into another, interrelated marginalization—that experienced by Arab-Canadians themselves (27).

Incendies begins in Montréal, in the office of the notary Hermile Lebel, a charming character whose malapropisms, mondegreens and general mangling of phrases function as primary devices for comic relief; for example, there is a practically untranslatable pun within the first few seconds of the opening scene alone, in which Lebel remarks, *"Je préfère regarder le vol des oiseaux . . . Avant, je disais un* zoiseau. *C'est votre mère qui m'a appris qu'il fallait dire un oiseau"* (13). Here, Lebel

admits that he enjoys watching the flight of birds (*"le vol des oiseaux"*), but also confesses that he used to think the French word for bird was *zoiseau*, a result of having mistaken the "z" sound produced by the French *liaison,* in which the consonant is always stressed before a vowel (for example, *"des oiseaux"*), for an actual character (z). Initially, it is unclear to whom Lebel is speaking; we know only that it concerns someone's mother (*C'est votre mère qui m'a appris qu'il fallait dire un oiseau")* [It was your mother who taught me that the word is *oiseau*[7]] (13).

Eventually, it becomes clear that Lebel is speaking to twins Simon and Jeanne, whose mother—the mother in question, Nawal Marwan—has recently passed away. Curiously, Nawal has stopped speaking altogether during the last five years of her life. The twins have come to hear their mother's will and last wishes read. Naturally enough, they are expecting a standard ceremony: the reading of their mother's final words, and a divvying up of her remaining property. However, what ensues is anything but ordinary, as Nawal's burial requests are far beyond what either of them could have possibly expected:

> Burry me naked
> Bury me without a coffin
> No clothing, no covering
> Face to the ground. (Gaboriau 7)

Nawal's burial instructions go on to dictate that no stone may be placed on Nawal's grave, that her name must not be engraved anywhere, for as Nawal has written:

> No epitaph for those who don't keep their
> promises.
> And one promise was not kept.
> No epitaph for those who keep the silence.
> And silence was kept. (8)

The notary is instructed to give each of the twins a letter; it is only after these letters have been delivered that a stone may be placed on Nawal's grave. Simon is told his letter is intended for their brother, while Jeanne is told that her letter is intended for their father. These instructions are not only conditions for burial, they are revelations: up

until now, both twins had believed that their father had died years ago, and were unaware that they had another sibling.

In order to deliver their letters, the twins are obliged to return to the country from which their mother was forced to emigrate some time ago. Though the name of this country is never pronounced, it has been well-established that Mouawad is invoking Lebanon (Dahab 143; Grutman and Ghadie 101). Initially, Simon refuses to acquiesce to his mother's final wishes; he believes them to be a cruel joke, and proof of Nawal's emotional distance. As he laments, "When she talks about us in her goddamn will, why doesn't she use the word *my children?* The word *son,* the word *daughter*!" (11).

However, Simon's animosity eventually cools, and both he and Jeanne resolve to deliver their letters. A combination of time-shifts and interviews with various citizens, which take place as the letters are delivered, slowly piece together the story of Nawal.

It is eventually revealed that Nawal had a child with a lover named Wahab during the period of the Civil War. As a result of the shame that this brings upon her family, Nawal's mother forces her to give the child up:

"[Y]ou will have to choose. Keep this child and this instant, this very instant, you will take off those clothes that don't belong to you and leave this house, leave your family, your village, your mountains, your sky and your stars and leave me . . ." (27).

Nawal relents to her mother's demands, but not before promising the boy, "No matter what happens, I will always love you!" (40).

A year later, Nazira, Nawal's dying grandmother, calls Nawal over to her bedside and makes Nawal promise " [to] learn to read, learn to write, learn to count, learn to speak . . . " (32).

Nazira goes on to explain to Nawal that the women in her family have been weighed down by anger for generations, and thus she says, "We have to break the thread" (33). This marks the first occurrence of the phrase "we have to break the thread" within the play. Learning to read and write thus becomes the way for Nawal to surmount this rage, to "break the thread" of hatred and anger which has bound the women in her family, and which presently binds the people of her country during this tumultuous period in history.[8]

Nawal promises her grandmother that she will follow her wishes, and leaves her village to learn to read and write. After having accomplished this goal, Nawal returns to the village only once: to engrave her grandmother's name on her tombstone (something which Nazira had also asked of Nawal).

It is during this visit that Nawal befriends a young woman named Sawda, a character modeled after a Palestinian refugee[9] whose family was killed in the fighting. Sawda is in many ways Nawal's opposite: she is illiterate, and wants to take revenge on every individual she sees committing an act of violence. Nawal, however, is ever ready to diffuse Sawda's thirst for vengeance. As Nawal remarks at one point, "Think about it, Sawda. You are a victim and you're going to go kill everyone who crosses your path, and then you'll be the murderer. Then in turn, you'll be the victim again!" (84).

Nawal believes that the urge for retribution must be avoided at all costs, as ceding to it will only work to perpetuate the endless cycle of slaughter. However, there is one act of violence in which Nawal does engage: she kills Chad, a militia leader who had overseen the execution of a brutal military campaign that was based on the real-life Sabra and Shatila massacre. While the temptation might be to read this incident as evidence of Nawal succumbing to sectarian rivalries, it is important to note that Nawal separates her motivation for this assassination from mere revenge. As Nawal tells Sawda, "We won't touch a single man, woman or child, except for one man" (88). Thus, as far as Nawal is concerned, she is acting outside of revenge by only killing the "one man" who had issued the orders, rather than a civilian or even a soldier who had carried these orders out. For this act, Nawal is imprisoned for five years in Kfar Ryat prison, where she is repeatedly raped and tortured by a sadistic guard named Abou Tarek.

Abou Tarek is eventually revealed to be the child that Nawal had given up so long ago. And, in a final, climactic twist adopted from Sopphocles, Abou Tarek is also both the brother and the father that the twins have been asked to find. The discovery of this fact, which Nawal makes much later on in her life when she goes to testify at a war crimes tribunal, is what leads Nawal to silence. For she realizes if she were to speak the truth and indict Abou Tarek, she would be breaking the

promise she made so long ago—the promise to love her child, *no matter what happens.* And so, in order to maintain her promise, Nawal resolves to maintain her silence, and carry the secret to her grave.

Exilic Subjectivity

In the introduction to her monograph, Dahab cites the literary critic and theorist Edward Said's famous essay, "Reflections on Exile" in an analysis of the structural nature of some of the Arab-Canadian works being studied. Said, himself an exile in the most literal sense (originally born in Palestine in 1935, both he and his family were forced to flee to Cairo after the formation of the state of Israel in 1948), defines exile as "the unhealable rift forced between a human being and a native place, between the self and its true home" (173), and explains that, as the exilic condition is characterized by a simultaneous affiliation with several places and cultures, it comprises a slew of often contradictory circumstances, and is thus informed by a "contrapuntal" awareness (189). Said goes on to write that, provided the exile does not succumb irretrievably to the tragedy of his/her state, there is the possibility of the cultivation of a "scrupulous subjectivity" (184). This is a subjectivity founded within the awareness that complete attachment to any one place and its constituent components (affiliations, languages, etc.) may eventually denigrate to blind dogmatism, and thus "seeing the 'entire world as a foreign land' makes possible originality of vision" (185-6). The "scrupulousness" of this subjectivity refers to the maintenance of some type of distinction in the face of the otherwise considerable merging entailed by the perpetual (re)navigation of place, for in fact "seeing the entire world as a foreign land" does not imply resignation or the achievement of a "happy ending," but the constant reinforcement of an inescapable difference. According to Dahab, the abundance of binary oppositions within some Arab-Canadian texts is a structural reflection of exile, evocative (whether intentionally or otherwise) of the "contrapuntal" awareness described by Said (28). Dahab does not apply this interpretation to *Incendies*, but such a reading of the work is possible, provided it also incorporates Said's notion of exilic subjectivity.

First, on a thematic level, it is evident from the manner in which Nawal consistently refuses complete allegiance to any nation, sect, or institution, striving to "reach for the stars, always" (89) that she has achieved such a state and come to accept the potential benefits of the de-centralization of her identity and situation (first being cast out of her home within her country, and then being exiled to another nation entirely after having fled to Montréal with her children). Furthermore, if it is possible to reflect the exilic condition structurally, it is likewise possible to reflect an *autonomous* exilic condition structurally. Because it relies on a transcendence of the stasis of conventionally oppositional schemas, the detection of a structural reflection of exilic subjectivity owes a great debt to Derrida's pioneering demonstration of how the lack of a center within a structure, resulting from the very presupposition of the existence of a center within a structure, makes possible only the validation of the groundlessness of traditional value schemes ("Structure, Sign, and Play . . ." 13). In other words, the debunking of these value schemes becomes both the only "meaningful" and the only *possible* method of structural analysis. Binary oppositions thus become truly significant in how they *deviate* from their ostensibly rigid, yet ultimately baseless value system. This deviation, vital to deconstruction, is also integral to the detection of exilic subjectivity, as the destabilization of a structural hierarchy is a direct reflection of an existential individuation from total allegiance. Thus, while the binary oppositions in theme, character and plot within *Incendies* structurally reflect an exilic condition, the way they interact with one another and evolve throughout the course of the work while never completely losing their separateness is a structural reflection of the transcendence of the "binary trap" of exile—an assumption of exilic subjectivity.

The binary oppositions within *Incendies* are numerous, but this investigation will focus on four, specifically: the intellectual/physical, Arabic/French, native/refugee, and silence/speech.

At the beginning of the play, Jeanne is earning her PhD in mathematics, while Simon is trying to make a career as a boxer. This contrast is clearly intentional. Early on, the play switches back and forth between a lecture being given by Jeanne on abstract mathematics, and a session between Simon and his trainer:

“People will often criticize you for squandering your intelligence on absurd theoretical exercises, rather than devoting it to research for a cure for aids or a new cancer treatment . . . welcome to pure mathematics, in other words, to the world of solitude” (17).

In this passage, Jeanne is giving her students an overview of the difficulties they should expect in dedicating their career to pure mathematics—a pursuit of a purely intellectual nature with very little relevance to the world around them.

Immediately after this quote, the play shifts to a boxing studio, where Simon’s trainer tells him exactly what he needs to do to get in shape: “The best way to get over your mother’s death is to win your next fight. So go in there and fight!” (17).

Thus, Jeanne is shown bracing her students for the world of theories and abstraction, while Simon is being groomed for physical combat. Here, a binary opposition is established between the physical and the intellectual. In shifting back and forth between these two opposing scenarios, Mouawad is clearly highlighting their “contrapuntal” nature.

However, the binary doesn’t remain static throughout the course of the play. As she becomes more involved with learning about her mother’s past, Jeanne becomes increasingly less rational, and more impulsive. She eventually abandons her studies entirely, even telling Simon at one point, “I don’t give a damn about my PhD!” (49), while Simon goes on to reference mathematics to make his point—that is, the two begin to take on the qualities of one another.

While the entire play is written in French, many of the names of characters and places are in Arabic, and Nawal and Sawda repeat the Arabic alphabet and recite the Arabic poem *Al Atlal* [The Ruins] (Dahab 143). Furthermore, it is to be assumed that much of the dialogue which takes place in the country of origin, though written in French, is actually being spoken in Arabic. All of this reinforces another binary between French and Arabic, Western and Eastern languages respectively. However, the relationship between them remains active, defined by mutual exchange as Mouawad “allows his characters to travel between linguistic oppositions,” thereby “render[ing] his texts dialectical” (Yeerzon 32).

When Nawal tells Sawda that she will kill Chad, she insists on using two bullets: ". . .one for you, one for me. One for the refugees, one for the people of my country" (89). Here, a binary is established between the (Palestinian) refugees and the (Lebanese) natives, and the presence of each group symbolically charges a single bullet. However, though they will interact in servicing the same goal—the execution of a militia leader—both bullets nevertheless retain a respective individuality that cannot be fully transcended.

Sherrill Grace has written that *Incendies* is "remarkable for its mobilization of silence, surely the least theatrical of human expressions" (vi). "Mobilization" is a choice term, for it admirably captures the manner in which the relationship between silence and speech evolves throughout the course of the work. As previously mentioned, a considerable portion of Dahab's analysis of *Incendies* revolves around the exploration of the dialectic between silence and speech; Dahab identifies the struggle between the necessity to end the silence and the necessity to maintain it as one of the "contradictory leitmotifs" which fuels the story (145), and contends that the final revelation of the truth validates and confirms the nature of the silence featured within the play as "the total absence of speech, as opposed to the omission of certain topics of conversation from one's utterances" (150). Similarly, my own investigation relies upon the evolution of the nature of the relationship of the binary of silence and speech, but I differ in my delineation of precisely how this evolution occurs. Within my reading, silence is initially a stylistic embodiment of the ellipses (to borrow another of Bal's terms) constituted by the unrevealed circumstances of Simon and Jeanne's origins, but by the end of the work, after all of the necessary information has been revealed, Simon asks to listen to Nawal's silence (Nawal was hospitalized during the last few days of her life, and a nurse had started to record her to see if she broke her silence when no one else was in the room; Simon is asking for one of these tapes) (135), a request implying that silence has gone from being the active opponent to the divulgement of the truth inherent in the act of speaking to assuming a more neutral role: merely that of the inevitable fate of all speech and communication.

In the same way that the exile weaves endlessly from one space to another, never being fully able to call any one of them home, but taking whatever can be taken from them and continuing forward, so too do the oppositions in Mouawad's play continue to engage one another, sometimes even adopting some of the aspects of each other which traditional structural schemas had claimed were inflexibly cast, though never completely becoming one and the same.

The End/The Beginning

After the twins have delivered their letters successfully, they are given a final letter from their mother in which the question of how they should process the circumstances surrounding their birth is addressed:

> Janine, Simon,
> Where does your story begin?
> At your birth?
> Then it begins in horror.
> At your father's birth?
> Then it is a beautiful love story. (134)

Nawal's instructions are for her children to see their origins in neither of these scenarios. Instead, she writes:

> When they ask you to tell your story,
> Tell them that your story
> Goes back to the day a young girl went
> back to her village to engrave her grand-
> mother's name
> Nazira on her gravestone. (135)

The play thus concludes with a reference to a beginning—Simon and Jeanne's beginning, which their mother asks them to situate in the fulfillment of her promise to her grandmother. In acquiescing to this wish, Simon and Jeanne must maintain a continuous awareness of a divide between their mother's request and their current knowledge of the events which inform their past. However, such is always the case when a beginning is conceptualized; as Edward Said writes:

> Constructing the tautology that says one begins at the beginning depends on the ability of both mind and language to reverse themselves, and thus to move from

> present to past and back again, from a complex situation to anterior simplicity and back again, or from one point to another as though in a circle. (*Beginnings* 29-30)

Past and present will always coexist side by side, each continuously informing the other in a relationship subject to perpetual evolution. There is even deeper significance in the fact that Nawal asks for her children to situate the commencement of their story in a moment of writing, the application of language, an act which marks the *beginning* of all expression and allows for the construction of narratives of inception, as well as the rationales by which they are informed, decoded and measured (Said 29). Nawal's final wish thus totals a perpetually reflexive irony in that it is a request for Simon and Jeanne to situate the start of their personal saga in a deed which represents the act of starting *every bit as much as it facilitates it,* a circumstance whose paradoxical configuration precludes static resolution and necessitates continuous, diametrical interplay. In fact, this phenomenon characterizes *Incendies* as a whole. This play is not intended to be read as a purely historical record. Rather, it is a work which *uses* a period in time to effect a collective function *through an individualized perception* of the period in time on which it was modeled, and thus only "works" when processed as an interpellation of history and fiction. Thus, as the play contains numerous instances of the renegotiation of binary schemes, so too does it reflect such renegotiations in itself, merging the fictional with the factual, the past with the present, and, ultimately, the spectator with the spectacle in awakening us to the necessity of forcing a resounding cry of triumph in resistance to the silence begotten by hatred and oppression.

Endnotes

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[1] An adjective corresponding to the theoretical conception of language as an intricate, measurable system comprised of individual "signs," or the combination of a spoken word and the concept the word invokes (de Saussure 102).

[2] Opposed pairs of signs which form the most basic unit of value construction in structural linguistics (de Saussure 24).

[3] Unless otherwise indicated, all translations will be my own.

[4] The notion of Mouawad's work countering the considerable tragedy and iniquity to be found within the Lebanese national narrative is in keeping with Mushim Jassim Al-Musawi's observation that, "[C]ivil war, prison, and exile narratives . . . engage the reader in a new contract of intimacy that may recompense authors of these narratives for their losses not only due to oppression or colonial power, but *also because of their own awareness of social and political evils* (emphasis mine)*"* (2).

[5] In terms of gravity, there is very little distinction between this description, drawn from personal observation, and Sawda's lamentation of how "They slit the boys' throats and burned the girls alive. . . Blood was flowing through the streets" (83).

[6] Furthermore, Kfar Ryat was modeled after Khiam, an actual camp that existed on the southern border between Lebanon and Israel. There, individuals were detained and tortured by the Israeli army and cooperative Lebanese military forces in an attempt to dissuade collaboration between Lebanese citizens and the Palestinian resistance (Farcet 138). The character of Nawal Marwan was based around one of its many victims, who reportedly told her torturer, *"Comment peux-tu faire cela? Je pourrais être ta mère"* [How can you do this? I could be your mother] (143). All of this is only further evidence of how, as Charlotte Farcet observes, *"Il est en effet impossible de ne pas entendre dans les histoires de Mouawad l'écho de l'Histoire"* [It is impossible not to hear the echo of history in Mouawad's stories] (136).

[7]For most quotes, I will refer to Linda Gaboriau's wonderful English translation of Mouawad's play. In this instance, I have opted for my own translation because the humor, relying as it does on linguistic nuance, is in effect virtually untranslatable. I feel it is significant to draw attention to this scene, as it is an example of what is perhaps the most difficult scenario a translator will ever encounter: the translation of humor which plays upon the very framework of an individual language. The difficulty of this task thus renders the manner in which it is approached one of the most significant factors that adumbrate the nature of

the translator's individual "style." In this case, it is interesting to note that Gaboriau, rather than omitting this particular line outright, has chosen to substitute a new pun concerning English idioms, replacing Lebel's miscomprehension of French phonetics with an ignorance of the phrase "gaggle of geese" (Gaboriau 3).

[8] "Breaking the thread" is also an apt metaphor for the assumption of exilic subjectivity. The act of severance, naturally, forever precludes complete restitution of the original structure, and the analogous origins of the two newly formed, opposing ends, simultaneously irreconcilable and juxtaposed, as well as their current proximity, perpetually ensure a co-affiliation which will never be more than partial in nature.

[9] At one point, Sawda laments that her parents had refused to answer her when she asked, "Why did we leave our country?" (46). In their words: "There is no country. It's not important. We're alive and we eat every day. That's what matters" (46).

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