The Paranoid Metanarrative and The Postcolonial Response in Post-9/11 Fiction

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Masters of Arts in English Literature

Massey University, Palmerston North, New Zealand.

Abdulaziz Nasser Dous

2014

The Pit and the Ladder

In HBO sensation *Game of Thrones*, the Machiavellian spymaster Varys walks into the royal hall and finds the equally cunning council member Lord Petyr Baelish staring intently at the Iron Throne. Initiating the conversation, Varys revels in awe of the throne and the thousand swords taken from King Aegon's enemies and melded together to fashion a throne worthy of the first king of Westeros. "There aren't a thousand blades. There aren't even two hundred. I've counted," replies Baelish, the more incredulous of the two. Varys slyly concurs with his fellow council member's observation. It is a scene that presents characters driven by entirely different motives - positioned in a binary opposition of sorts - but simultaneously demonstrates the affinity of their respective natures, foregrounding the political complexity of the series.

Varys comments on the aesthetically grotesque nature of the throne before Baelish states, "it still has a certain appeal." After a brief digression, Baelish redefines the narrative or - shall we say - the metanarrative behind the Iron Throne as a self-perpetuating fallacy. It is a mode of narrativisation that consolidates the social structure of the kingdom. Varys, far from denying the fictitious nature of the metanarrative, advocates its necessity as the lesser of two evils. He forewarns Baelish that in its absence, the population would fall into a pit of chaos; the kingdom devolving into a ruinous power vacuum. In response, Baelish likens that absence to a ladder instead of a pit, hinting at his true intentions and suggesting that this potential vacuum is not necessarily a calamity. He doesn't seek to dismantle the current metanarrative but replace it with a metanarrative that is more advantageous to his personal plans.

Much like the metanarrative of the Iron Throne, the dominant 9/11 metanarrative was similarly perpetuated to bring order alongside polarity to an event that was akin to Varys' gaping pit of chaos. It is employed by those who created it to generate global paranoia and xenophobia. It continues to operate to unite and mobilise nations of different creeds and cultural backgrounds against members of a particular ethnicity and ideology - whom they accuse of fostering global terrorism. The dominant 9/11 metanarrative is utilised as a ladder so those who perpetuate it can climb closer towards their own political goals. Simply put, the intent behind this project is to deconstruct this ladder, and demolish it through a series of interpretive acts. It may appear like a harmless nudge, rather than a brute kick to the ladder's base, but it is a start.

In the critical component of this project: "Fiction Under the Clout of the Dominant 9/11 Metanarrative", I will examine the extent of the influence of the dominant 9/11 metanarrative on post-9/11 fiction. This section is conducted in terms of literary analysis and gauges whether the selected novels succeed at producing counternarratives that incite literary and public incredulity in the dominant 9/11 metanarrative or, conversely, if they aid in perpetuating that same metanarrative.

Through the creative component entitled *The Righteous Man*, I will recreate the post-9/11 world, but from a perspective that is loosely based on my personal experience after 9/11 in both the US and Saudi Arabia. I would contend that this perspective deterritorialises and forces the reader to look through the vantage point of someone who is neither a direct victim nor a culprit of the terrorist attacks of 9/11. Through the construction of a protagonist who suffers unjustly from racial profiling - under the guise of the implementation of stricter security measures - I hope to showcase how the perpetuation of the 9/11 metanarrative creates a vicious cycle of paranoid and

xenophobic tendencies. These, in turn, feed into the metanarrative's pool of doctrines and exacerbate the endless cycle of victims-turned-offenders.

The need to construct this project as a creative-critical thesis stems from its dual objectives. Through the critical component, I aim to examine the nature of the relationship between three works of post-9/11 fiction and the dominant 9/11 metanarrative and evaluate the scope of their dependence on this metanarrative. Through an exploration of the literary techniques employed, and a comparative assessment I determine which text most successfully challenges said metanarrative. I endeavour to ascertain which novel provides the reader with a deterritorialising, thought-provoking experience, and reconfigures the porousness of the borders defined by post-9/11 terrorist discourse. I also attempt to identify the literary devices at work in this particular counternarrative, that enable it to pose such a challenge to the dominant 9/11 metanarrative.

In my creative component, I intend to develop some of these literary devices to compose a narrative that further deterritorialises readers and incites them to question the widespread 9/11 metanarrative. Both a critical examination of the relationship between post-9/11 fiction and the dominant 9/11 metanarrative, and a creative implementation are essential to this project. It is only through literary analysis, coupled with the reconstruction of self-perpetuating paranoia and xenophobia in the form of a novella, featuring a protagonist that falls neatly under the categorisation of the "other" in terrorist discourse, that a deconstruction of the "ladder" can take place.

This approach has led to the discovery that there are numerous modes of adhering to the multi-pronged, negative depiction of the "other" and conciliating oneself

with the dominance of the 9/11 metanarrative. But, moreover, there is also more than one way of challenging that metanarrative. The development of an ominous uncertainty in a counternarrative that employs an unreliable narrator, examined in my critical component, is one means of achieving this. Through my creative component, I have realised that the creation of an atmosphere of instability, that emphasises the vicious, cyclical nature of the dominant 9/11 metanarrative, is yet another way of subverting this superstructure of narrativisation. I hope that this project sheds some light on the fallacies and ramifications of the dominant 9/11 metanarrative and arouses suspicion of this metanarrative in the minds of readers, expanding the spectrum of debate in post-9/11 fiction.

Acknowledgements

In life, all that counts is one's belief in oneself. It is of tremendous value, however, to have other people believing in one's potential too. I would like to thank those people without whom none of my past and future academic achievements would have been possible.

First and foremost, I would like to thank my supervisor Dr. Thom Conroy for his unwavering support and inexhaustible patience throughout the process of writing this thesis. His interest in me began even before I embarked on my postgraduate studies and I do not know if it will one day be proven warranted or misplaced, but I know that it exists. For that, I am deeply grateful.

I would also like to thank Dr. Kim Worthington, Postgraduate Programme Coordinator, for being so understanding and supportive prior to and during the writing stage of this thesis.

Last but not least, I wish to express my deep gratitude to my parents who have been by my side longer than I can remember, and my close friends Samer Zakri, Turki Al-Zahrani, and Mohammed Al-Sobaie who have unconditionally given me so much and asked for so little in return.

Table of Contents