

of Lang and Hartland, still remains a most exhausting survey of the father-son combat theme in the written and oral literature of the world (POTTER 1902), or to an interesting brief study by the Parsi scholar Coyajee, who points out the corresponding features of the Sohrab story with a Chinese legend (COYAJEE 1936).

The Notes (180–184), and the small Glossary of Persian Words and Proper Names (185–188) and a brief Selected Bibliography (189–190) give much help to the general reader. In his translation Clinton shows a stronger than usual tendency toward embedding Persian words into his translation, like *shahryar* (king) *sepahdar*, *sepahbod* (“army chief,” “general”), *Piltan* (“elephant-bodied”; an epithet of Rustam), *Div Sepid* (the White Dev) and especially *pahjavan* (“knight,” “hero”; this latter is also thoroughly used in the English text for translating various Persian synonyms of “hero,” presumably for more local color). I find however the use of Persian words *Yazdan* and *Isad* (both meaning God in Persian, from the Old Iranian root *yaz-* “to worship”) in his English translation a little bit of “Orientalism.” His gloss of the above mentioned epic key term *pahjavan* as “‘hero’ transformed into ‘paladin’ in English” (187) is also misleading. It is, of course, quite appropriate to render the word *pahjavan* as the semantically corresponding archaic English term, “paladin,” as the Warners occasionally have done. However, the choice of the verb “transform” suggests etymological relation. My dictionaries unanimously give the origin of the word “paladin” as the Lat. *palatinus*, Italian *paladino*, French *paladin* i.e., “palace official” (from the Lat. *Palatium*), while the word *pahjavan* had originally meant “a Parthian,” then later “a cavalier.” Also, the translation of an epithet of Sohrab, *roushan-ravan*, as “of the eternal soul” (29, verse 147) is questionable; it would be more justified to translate it as “of bright soul,” perhaps “spirited.”

But these are details which should not overshadow appreciation for the new and lively *Shahname* translation. Let us hope that more similar efforts will be undertaken in future to introduce other, equally beautiful, but less familiar episodes of the great Persian epic to the contemporary readers.

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## ARAB WORLD

CONNELLY, BRIDGET: *Arab Folk Epic and Identity*. Berkeley, Los Angeles,

London: University of California Press, 1986. X+328 pages. Map, tables, photographs, notes, index. Hardcover. ISBN 0-520-05536-5.

*Sīrat Banī Hilāl* or simply *al-Hilāliyya* is a biography of legendary heroes which commemorates events of almost 1,000 years ago in the migration of famine-stricken nomadic from Arabia to Tunisia via the Levant and Egypt. The saga, both in verse and prose, spread orally and as a text all over the Arab world and even among the Shuwa Arabs of Nigeria. In Egypt alone, new materials and new versions are constantly being collected. Thus, the *sīra*'s "very multiplicity and fluidity make it difficult for the researcher to grasp and comprehend" (261). Despite all this, Connelly endeavours to enter inside and understand its rhetorical scene, though from a distance. In this respect she draws heavily on her experience in Egypt, for the most part, and to a lesser extent in Tunisia, and on her interviews with many individuals there. In addition to the analysis, Connelly presents a rhetorical theory of transmission for the *Hilāliyya* and hypothesised that it is applicable to the *Sīra* genre as a whole.

Connelly begins by taking up a polemic with literary historians and critics of Arabic literature, as well as Arab men of letters who disdain folk literature and hold that there is no Arab epic. Although the author gives various reasons, she does not provide a critical response to these apart from the argument that the oral and written elements are closely interrelated in Arab culture. She goes on to give a critical survey of the *Hilāliyya* studies.

Connelly raises the question how the *Hilāliyya* has survived to the present, while other *sīyar* have perished. In other words, how does the professional poet who creates in performance make the *Hilāliyya* relevant to his audience both morally and psychologically? Or what makes one performance good and another bad? To answer this question, Connelly carries out a close listening (in contrast to reading) analysis of three Egyptian *rabāb* (*rebec*) poets singing the opening episodes of the *Hilāliyya*. The analysis reveals that a good performance depends on the poet's musical talent, both vocal and instrumental, his style of narration, his poetic competence, and more importantly the meaning he gives to the *sīra*. Here she shows by examples how the poet exploits punning, one of the features of Arabic, to interpret meaning and to teach the audience, who consist primarily of peasants, the several levels of meaning in the *sīra*. The poet presents a critique of the status quo of the peasants' society, i.e. the social, economic and racial differences based on status (ownership of land and property) and hierarchy (with the descendants of the Prophet Muhammad at the top of the social ladder and gypsies and slaves at the bottom). He also criticises the strife which derives from these differences since they contradict the principles of Islamic brotherhood based on a common belief rather than race or color. By extension, the *sīra* is also a critique of the urban population, the literates and the central authority, national or foreign. Moreover, the *sīra* appeals to the audience because it tells the history of their ancestors—the Bedouin Arabs—who penetrated their society, taught them Arabic—the language of the Qur'an—converted them to Islam and inter-married with them. It is no wonder then that the peasants identify with the *sīra*. Paradoxically, the poets are gypsies, and they also identify with the *Hilāliyya* "the epic of the outcast, wandering outlaw tribe" (165).

The identity Connelly speaks about is forged out of "a history of racial and cultural contact and a political history of successive rule by outsiders" (225, 226). She argues that it fits the social concept of identity as presented by Barth and Spicer. When people are militarily defeated and they realise that open opposition is useless, they "intensely maintain their cultural identity through moral and language

participation rather than political action" (226). She points out that the Egyptian peasants, the majority of the population, have only occasionally revolted or rebelled against their foreign rulers, and their resistance has been passive.

It is clear that the identity Connelly speaks about depends on *versions of ONE multiple and fluid sira*. It is also evident that she generalises her conclusions to the *sira* genre as a whole, and to the broader identity of Arab Muslims of North Africa. She claims that the *sira* genre incorporates this identity and that North African Arab countries have witnessed different foreign rulers including the *Hilālis* with whom they have assimilated and identified. This implies that the generalisation can be extended to include almost all Arab Muslims, for all have passed through a similar experience of racial and cultural contacts and foreign rulers.

Folklorists have rarely dealt with the notion of identity in their studies. The conferences held in the past few years on traditions and identity are a step towards formulating a folkloric concept of identity. Results of future studies on Arab identity based on Arab folklore genres other than the *sira* might modify, compliment, or contradict Connelly's conclusions.

The above comments should not hide the fact that *Arab Folk Epic and Identity* is a delight to read. It is an important and useful contribution to the *sira* studies which I recommend to the initiated as well as the uninitiated in Arabic folk literature.

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