



## *Fort Lotfi* of Salim Bachi Seen Through the Theory of Intertextuality by Riffaterre\*

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THE exceptional scope of the myth of the Sahara belongs to literature of all periods. French literature, however, in this case is not an exception.

In this respect, the short story of *Fort Lotfi*, by Algerian contemporary writer Bachi, is particularly interesting. *Fort Lotfi* is a part of 12 short-story collection *Les douzecontes de Minuit* (2007). By exploiting the rich symbolism of this myth, he relates to the particular experience of a soldier in the desert. By adopting a descriptive-analytic research methodology and by taking advantages of intertextual approach of Michael Riffaterre, this research aims at responding to the following questions: what is the function of this myth in the narrative? Why does the author portray the image of Sahara, and what is the function of this myth in intertextual reading of this short story? The way in which the reader goes through in order to arrive at the inter-text and significance of Bachi's text provides the answers to these questions.

According to Riffaterre, when encountering a text, a reader cannot associate with the process that regulates the so-called "normal" communication. This unique experience, the literary communication, is mediated by the presence of "agrammaticalities".

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Grammar is a semantic system established by mimesis and generally constructed by a set of descriptive systems and clichés. It is the rule, expected by the reader, that a text is comprehensible and coherent; it is the grammaticality that breaks this rule and thus deforms the mimesis. A grammaticality is an element which modifies the grammar of the text, and makes the latter no longer faithfully represent the real; it is a grammaticality that makes it possible to pass from mimesis to semiosis, and thus to reach the significance of the text.

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In order to reach significance, the reader should take into account the various agrammaticalities encountered in the text and attempt to identify a common structure for them which is accomplished in a dynamic movement of reading.

Riffaterre distinguishes two levels (two phases) of reading since, before reaching significance, the reader must pass through mimesis. The decoding of the text starts with the first phase which consists of reading the text from the beginning to the end, from top to bottom, following the syntagmatic deployment. It is during this first phase of reading that mimesis is grasped as a whole, or, more exactly, the outdated concept that there is no reason to believe that the perception of the text in the second phase necessarily implies the realization that mimesis is based on a referential illusion. The second phase belongs to retroactive reading through which the second interpretation is formed, being defined as hermeneutic reading.

Therefore, by shedding light on the theoretical concept of intertextuality developed by Riffaterre, we have paved the way to analyze our corpus in order to achieve an intertextual reading of *Fort Lotfi* by Salim Bachi

In this text, the axis of the mimesis is broken by the agrammaticality generated by the lexeme "sun". This word no longer assimilates itself to this star which appears in the morning and then disappears in the evening and gives light. The writer, using personification, creates a disturbing element of the tranquility of human beings. The sun breaks the grammar of the text since it generates a deformation of the mimesis, an agrammaticality which obliges the reader to go beyond the linearity of this mimesis. The sun in this context loses its original meaning and the reader is forced to superimpose to the text a new interpretation that breaks the universe of mimesis.

Does the double sign represented by the lexeme sun allude to the civil war of Algeria in 1990, the mother country of the writer? War is a living

reality, therefore, the sun as an incongruous element bursts the significance. No longer does assimilating to a planet break the grammar of the text since it engenders a deformation of the mimesis, an agrammaticality that obliges the reader to extricate himself or herself from the linearity of this mimesis. The sun alludes to the national cohesion and social peace that once gave the joy of living in the country.

As for *Fort Lotfi*, this agrammaticality requires a second reading. The reader of the short story encounters, retroactively, a series of words that are connected by an element of meaning that brings them together, Bachi accumulates certain words that represent the natural elements: "sun", "sand", "desert", "plateau", "rocky", "tamarisk", "dune", "wind", "simoom", "heat", "fennec", "storm", "gust", and "vulture".

The text abounds in these words which describe the nature as a scene where life is in flux. All these accumulated words, instead of being developed for themselves, appear in the text only as codes, as a hyperbolic language describing the "Sahara". All the words evoke the myth of the Sahara. There is therefore a return to the Sahara myth in this narrative of fiction.

What is the intertextual function of the text representing the myth of the Sahara?

Bachi has selected the semantic field of Sahara for short story. The myth of the Sahara shows a quest for renewal and discovery, an identity quest. It is the symbol of return to the source, the nostalgia of a better past. The desert is the symbol of origin and beginning. In *Fort Lotfi*, the use of the myth of the Sahara is a way of going back to the origins in search of the "first knot" in order to re-actualize the past and to tie it to the present and future. It also makes it possible to interpret and explain events, and, more importantly, to give meaning to past and present violence.

The evocation of the Sahara thus imposes a truth: to be immortal like the Sahara, one must become eternal; one must have an eternal return to oneself, one's origin, and one's personal and national identity. It is in the Sahara that Réda can find his identity.

The third part of analysis allowed us to establish the relationship between the writing of history and identity through the use of the inter-text of the Sahara. The use of the myth of the Sahara allows the author to question the Algerian identity during a period of crisis. This identity is very complex, loaded with the weight of the past of Algeria, with all the invasions that have crossed the country. It is a writing of oneself, a sign of a quest for oneself in a universe that is constantly tormented by war.