



B L O O M S B U R Y

Cultural and Social History – International Academic Journal, Vol.15, Issue 1, 2018



Remembering the Fall of Baghdad: 100 year Later

Figern Atabeg

Syracuse University of USA

kevin@cc.syracuse.edu

DOI: 10: 8388/cshj/734

Abstract

Iraq's rich history is as diverse as the country's many names – Babylon, Shinar, Chaldea, Al-Jazireh, Mesopotamia, Iraq. It's also a history of many people, including the Jews who lived there for 2,600 years, until only a generation ago. Iraqi Jews constitute one of the world's oldest and most historically-significant Jewish communities.



Keywords: Iraq, remembering, history, social culture

Introduction: This Jewish community first settled around 586 BCE when Judah was defeated by King Nebuchadnezzar. Nebuchadnezzar captured the Jews and took them to Babylon as slaves. In turn, less than half a century later, the kingdom was conquered by the Persians – the Jews were allowed to return to Judea, but most preferred to remain. From the Babylonian period until the twentieth century, Iraq thrived as a centre of Jewish learning. After the fall of Jerusalem in 70AD, the kingdom took in many refugees from current day Israel and became the centre of decision making in Jewish affairs. Christianity reached Mesopotamia in the first century AD and the religions lived side by side. The Babylonian academies were at their height in the third century AD, which marked the beginning of a new era for the Jews. This was when they established the style of learning found in the Talmud, a book of legal scholarship with folk stories, jokes, debates and disagreements in which every imaginable topic is covered, from legal debate, theology and music to trapping mice.

Around this time, Upper Mesopotamia came to be known as Al-Jazirah in Arabic (which means “The Island”, in reference to the land between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers), while Lower Mesopotamia came to be known as Iraq-i (meaning “the land of the Arabs”). Islam arrived in the 630s and the Jewish community became part of the Muslim caliphate. The city of Baghdad was built in the 8th century and soon became the primary centre of the Muslim world during the centuries of the Islamic Golden Age. All minorities had to pay a poll tax and experienced some discrimination, but as “people of the book”, the Jews had a large and well-regulated place in society. The Jewish community survived the Mongol invasions of the Middle Ages and fared well under the Ottoman Empire (1533–1918). The community established modern schools in the second half of the 19th century with funding from French philanthropists.



After the First World War, the Ottoman Empire was divided up and the British Mandate of Mesopotamia was established by the League of Nations, later to be called Iraq. A war of rebellion consumed vast resources and set the people of Iraq against one another. But Winston Churchill was determined to hang onto the territory, keenly aware of how much oil was needed to power a fleet and that Britain would benefit from controlling an open trade route to India.

In 1921, Britain imposed a Hashemite monarchy on Iraq and defined the country's territorial limits. After hundreds of years as institutionalised second-class subjects, the Jews started to play an important role in running the country. The first minister of finance was a Jew, Sassoon Eskell. However, this drove a wedge between Muslims and non-Muslims. The minorities were regarded as instruments of European policy.

After 1932, the British mandate officially ended, making Iraq the only independent Middle Eastern country. It became a magnet for Arab intellectual dissidents and especially a large contingent of Palestinian teachers, who took refuge in Baghdad. They moved the climate of opinion and attitudes hardened towards the British, with their hold on Iraqi oil and their backing for the creation of a Jewish state in Palestine. Iraq's own monarchy was generally seen as a puppet regime serving the British.

In this atmosphere, the German Nazi party courted the opposition. Mein Kampf was translated into Arabic, radio propaganda from Berlin blared in market places comparing Jews with worms, and the slogan "Allah in Heaven and Hitler on the ground" became familiar. Most significantly of all, the Grand Mufti of Jerusalem – whose campaigns of violent popular resistance against the proposed Jewish State in Palestine were funded by the Nazis – came to Baghdad to inspire politicians and train young men.



Following a coup in 1941, driven by Nazi sympathisers, a skeleton British operation was mounted and succeeded in taking back the country. The king was reinstated, much to the fury of those who thought they had got rid of the imperialists. The Jews were seen as British sympathisers and a vicious riot against the community followed – the Farhud (which roughly translates to mean “the violent dispossession”); 180 were killed and 2,000 were injured in this two-day massacre, known as Baghdad’s Kristallnacht.

The Jews of Baghdad never entirely regained their confidence although peace and prosperity returned to Iraq while the war raged elsewhere. And Jewish fears were realized when in 1948, Iraq joined the Arab League states that went to war to stop the creation of Israel. When they lost, both ordinary

It is not that the ancient ritual process, the Comus honoring the god of the name, was the source of this great art form- for comedy has arisen in many parts of the world where the Greek god with his particular form of worship was unknown- but that Comus was a fertility rite and the god it celebrated a fertility god, a symbol of perpetual rebirth, eternal life. **[1]**

Northrop Frye also associates comedy, particularly romance, with the abundance and plenty of the Golden age. The romance quest, according to Frye, leads towards "the victory of fertility over the waste land." Here, by fertility Frye means "food and drink, bread and wine, body and blood and the union of male and female." Romance, according to Frye, is "the nearest of all literary forms to the wish-fulfilment dream." **[2]** It is a nostalgic form which seems to be searching for some "imaginative golden age in time or space." However, as Frye argues, the idealising romance narrative is not as an escape from reality, but as a "transformation of ordinary reality."

While in the mythical Golden age, "The fertile earth as yet was free, untouched of spade or plow, And yet it yielded of itself of every things enow," (115/116) the fate of those living in 'ordinary reality' is to have to



work in order to achieve victory over the wasteland. In the postlapsarian age we are reminded of God's injunction that

Cursed is the ground for thy sake; in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life; Thorns and thistles shall it bring forth to thee; and thou shalt eat the herb of the field; In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it was thy taken: for dust thou art and unto dust shalt thou return. (Genesis 3 17-19)

Once nature provided humanity's every material need at no physical cost to man. Now he must enter into a relationship with the land in order to feed his requirements. In order to consume he must also produce. As part of the progression from dust to dust mankind makes his impression in the life cycle by producing children and by wresting the fruits of nature by the sweat of his brow. Instead of being a passive recipient he is an active agent of transformation and part of the transformation process itself. He is matter and he transforms matter. For Mikhail Bakhtin the participation of man in this cosmic cycle of continuing change is part of carnivalesque vitality:

Abundance derives from transformations of matter carried out in work to renew the body. These processes include the agricultural cycle... butchering cooking and consuming of meat; eating digesting and defecation...Carnival represents a dialectical exchange between life and death, achieved through positive and negative transformations of matter. [3]

John Locke also regards this agrarian relationship with nature as a form of economic paradise.

This is certain, that in the beginning, before the desire of having more than men needed had altered the intrinsic value of things, which depends only on their usefulness to the life of man, or had agreed that a little piece of yellow metal, which would keep without wasting or decay, should be worth a great piece of flesh, or a whole heap of corn, though men had a right to appropriate by their labour, each one to himself, as much of the



things of Nature as he could use, yet this could not be much, nor to the prejudice of others, where the same plenty was still left, to those who would use the same industry. [4]

Bakhtin's folk culture and Locke's almost mythical economic paradise replace Ovid's Golden Age with a new form of Golden age in which labour is a necessary part of human relations with nature. The enjoyment of the material world is directly related to the effort which has gone into producing it. As Marx puts it:

Labour is, in the first place, a process in which both man and Nature participate, and in which man of his own accord starts, regulates, and controls the material re-actions between himself and Nature. [5]

For both Bakhtin and Locke, the Fall is brought about by replacement of an agrarian economy with a money based one, the projection of this desire for material objects onto the "little piece of yellow metal," and the desire that the excesses of labour should be stored in the coin in the form of profit. In Ovid's mythical first age the fall from the Golden age of plenty was driven by "craft, treason, envy, pride and wicked lust." Man began to trade with ships and to divide up the common land and mine, not only for food, but

For riches couched and hidden deep in places near to Hell,
The spurs and stirrers unto vice and foes to doing well. Then hurtful iron
came abroad, then came forth yellow gold, more hurtful than the iron far
(157/160).

*I blow no subtle glass; expose no ships
To threat'nings of the furrow-faced sea;
I turn no moneys in the public bank;
Nor usure private. (I i 30-36)*

Gold in Ovid's age is not money but food. In Bakhtin's folk culture too, it is "gay matter," the fruits of natural production which provide positive human experience. In *Volpone*, as we know, sustenance is not provide by food but by literal gold. Removing themselves from the festive cycle of



production and consumption, the pair have replaced material objects of nourishment with that "little piece of yellow metal" which now stands in for the "great piece of flesh or the whole heap of corn." Gold and money now stands in or substitutes for food. [6]

In Bakhtin's theory of carnival, he argues that eating and drinking symbolise the struggle and victory of man over the world, a collective social triumph in wresting the fruits of the earth for consumption. "Everyday life and consumption are not isolated from the labour and production process." [7] However, as he points out:

If food is separated from work and seen as a private way of life, then nothing remains of the old images ...Nothing is left but a series of artificial meaningless metaphors. [8]

That food in *Volpone* is not only separated from work, but is a metaphor for money, affirms this. The Golden Age that Volpone and Mosca create is one of artificial metaphor. Bakhtin's statement seems to suggest that the metaphor has lost its connection with the material and physical world and become an arbitrary and abstract token- a free floating signifier. However I would argue that the metaphors are not meaningless. They work because the tricksters are able to find common ground between the Golden age of natural plenty and the Golden age of a money economy. The golden hopes of the citizens of city comedy are that they, like those lucky mythical citizens, can escape the Curse of Adam.

Quicksilver in *Eastward Ho!*, like Volpone, wishes to evade the labour process. As the son of a gentleman his enforced apprenticeship offends his sense of status. He tries to persuade his industrious co-worker Golding to adopt his attitude to work:

Why, do nothing, be like a gentleman, be idle; the curse of man is labour.

Wipe thy bum with testons and make ducks and drakes with shillings. (I i 114-116)



=====

Golding however has been well schooled in the Protestant work ethic and answers

Whate'er some vainer youth may term disgrace, The gain of honest pains is never base; From trades, from arts, from valour, honour springs. These three are founts of gentry, yea of kings. (I i 143-146)

Honest labour for Golding is the cornerstone of advancement and moral virtue. Quicksilver, on the other hand, shows his scatological contempt for the fruits of his master's labour by debasing them to the lower body. Bakhtin states that in folk culture

Dung and urine lend a bodily character to matter, to the world, to the cosmic elements, which become closer, more intimate, more easily grasped, for this is matter the elemental force, born from the body itself. [9]

However, Quicksilver's unwillingness to work has removed him from this cycle. In Protestant polemic idleness is constantly associated with base matter. In the Puritan John Northbrooke's case, as he explains in his 1577 *Treatise wherein Dicing, Dauncing, Vaine Plays or Enterludes...are Re-proved*, labour is a duty and idleness is described in the language of the lower body, in the language of excrement and waste: "A slothful man is to be compared to the dung of Oxen," they are "the dung and the filthe of idleness" (Howard 27).

In a similar way in *Every Man In His Humour* Brayneworme, in his disguise as an out of work soldier, is accused of idleness by Knowell in similar terms to those employed by Northbrook:

*Men of thy condition feed on sloth
As doth the beetle on the dung she breeds in
Not caring how the mettle of your minds
Is eaten with the rust of idleness. (II v 110-113)*

The metaphor of consumption dominates this speech and connects each image. The idle man feeds on sloth, the dung beetle feeds on dung



and idleness feeds on man's "mettle." Immediately there is a suggestion that the idle man consumes but he does not produce. In other words he gets something from nothing. Labour is required to reinstate the idle man back into the cycle of consumption and production.

The word mettle has a double meaning in this context; it means both the essence or quality of a person and a metallic substance. This is reinforced by the reference to rust which consumes the mind of the idle man. The reference to the dung beetle introduces a further level of meaning into the speech. It is suggested in this simile that the idle man, like the dung beetle, consumes without producing. The dung beetle feeds on filth and produces the same filth from which she then breeds. Like the idle man the dungbeetle bypasses the labour process. The traditional association "of shiny metal with faeces, or of lucre with filth links the dung beetle with the circulation of money. It may be seen as the *Dukatensheisser* or shitter of ducats" (Shell 12). While in Bakhtin's agrarian society dung symbolised the transformative relationship between man and matter, in an emergent capitalist economy, matter and money become equated. Money is food and drink and sex. Marx notes the productive power of money:

That which I am unable to do as a man and of which therefore all my individual essential powers are incapable, I am able to do by means of money. money... converts my wishes from something in the realm of my imagination, translates them from my mediated, imagined or desired existence into their sensual actual insistence- from imagination to life, from imagined being into real being In effecting this mediation money is the truly creative power. **[10]**

This paper will now examine the mediating and creative power of money in two city comedies: Thomas Middleton's *A Chaste Maid in Cheapside* and Ben Jonson's *The Devil is an Ass*. Both comedies present characters who are eager to remove themselves from the cycle of consumption and production and avoid physical labour.



=====

In Gilbert Walker's "A Manifest detection of the most vile and detestable use of Dice -play, and other practices like the same," Walker outlines a kind of catechism wherein R and M discourse. M explains to R the cheater's ability to counterfeit:

For the first and original ground of cheating is a counterfeit countenance in all things, a study to seem to be and not to be indeed; and because no great deceit can be wrought but where special trust goeth before, therefore the cheater, when he pitcheth his hay to purchase his profit, enforceth all his wits to win credit and opinion of honesty and uprightnes.....the foundation of all those sorts of people is nothing else but mere simulation and bearing in hand. And like as they spring all from one root, so tend they all to one end : idly to live by rape and ravin, devouring the fruit of other men's labours. **[11]**

In Middleton's *A Chaste Maid in Cheapside* the character Allwit, as his name suggests, is one such cheater. To the community, he appears to be an honest and upright citizen. Blessed with bounty, he seems to epitomise a man reaping the reward of honest toil. In Psalm 128 the curse of labour given to Adam is transformed to a blessing to all those who are reconciled to their fallen state:

Blessed is every one that feareth the Lord; that walketh in his ways. For thou shalt eat the labour of thine hands; happy shalt thou be, and it shall be well with thee. Thy wife shall be as a fruitful vine by the side of thine house; thy children like olive plants round about thy table. (Psalm 128 1-3)

For Allwit, this is the "happiest state that ever man was born to" (l.ii.21). His material needs are more than met and his wife is about to produce her seventh child. Allwit's prolific excess might be read as a sign of his carnivalesque phallic power. He has entered the cosmic cycle of production and consumption on a grand scale. As Kurt Heinzelman argues:

Labor is both economically and sexually potent. In economic discourse, labour always means masculine or male labor (to distinguish it



from childbearing or female labor) Labor in the end is the economic expression of manhood. **[12]**

However, Allwit's labour is neither economically or sexually potent. His wife may be a fertile vine, and he might rejoice in his groaning store cupboards, but the labour is out of his hands. Labour in Allwit's Golden age is not redundant but invisible. His hoarded stores of coal and faggots are the result of someone else's sweat. He enjoys the signs of work without expending any himself. The fall from Locke's golden age economy where a man worked to have sufficient unto his needs to one in which value lies in the objects of commodity rather than in the labour required to produce them is demonstrated in Allwit's gloating speech. His celebration of plenty moves from the festive symbols of abundance and winter cheer to the signs of conspicuous consumption. Even his wife's grunting labour, the curse of woman, is effaced by displaced from carnivalesque generative body to a shop window display. The movement from material excess to private consumption is signalled by Allwit's phrase "I say nothing, but smile and pin the door." Allwit is able to evade the comic cycle of life by employing a middleman or substitute to do his work for him. Allwit's seemingly sexually potent economic labour is provided by another man: Sir Walter Whorehound.

We are told in the first act of the play that Mrs Allwit exhibits a carnal longing for pickled cucumbers and the coming of her lover Sir Walter. Her husband's servant Davy assures Allwit that the sight of the cucumbers will keep his wife happy until she can have the real thing. The phallically symbolic cucumber represents the displacement of labour onto a substitute or 'stand in.' First the cucumber represents the absent Sir Walter who in turn 'stands in' for the anti-libidinal Allwit. Allwit is now removed from the cycle of production and consumption and his material needs are supplied by an intermediary or 'middleman' without the need for sweat or toil. Allwit rejoices that the knight "hath took that labour all out of my hands" (I.ii.51). He has all the pleasures of the world without getting his hands dirty: "like a



happy man/ I pay for none at all, yet fools think's mine;/ I have the name, and in his gold I shine" (I.ii.38-40). Allwit basks in the reflected glory of Sir Walter's status as a knight, as a rich man and as a figure of carnival festivity. He has replaced the appetites of the body and its material needs and desires with a materiality that requires no physical expenditure and the final refrain of this speech where he sings "*La dildo, dildo la dildo, la dildo dildo de dildo*" (I.ii.56) reinforces the separation between creative festivity and displaced desire. The use of the sexual stand in breaks the reciprocal link between man and matter and replaces it with a form of agent, representative or intermediary. In the same way the material nature of the carnivalesque is fractured and replaced with a material sign or symbol, material goods.

However, while labour might be economically and sexually potent (more than enough is needed to sustain a family), in some cases sexual potency exceeds economic sufficiency. According to Arthur Marotti, Touchwood Senior, "the comic avatar of Eros...most vividly symbolises the power of fertility present in Middleton's dramatic world." [13] This invocation of festive procreation is undermined though when we meet Touchwood who is bemoaning his excessive fertility which threatens to prove both his economic and physical ruin:

*Life every year a child and sometimes two,
Besides drinkings abroad, that's never reckoned
This gear will not hold out. (II.i.15-17)*

Not only does his fertility cause the downfall of his family unit and the "wenches" he has impregnated but it also becomes an anti-comic threat in that it threatens to damage his "gear" and to delay the harvest, the symbol of rural festivity.

*I have such a fatal finger in such business
I must forth with't, chiefly for country wenches
For every harvest I shall hinder haymaking
enter a wench with child*



I had no less than seven lay in last Progress

Within three weeks of one another's time. (II.i.59-63)

In this play the sexual excesses of carnival activity and the resulting progeny are not sources of festive celebration but of economic transaction. Touchwood sees the illegitimate child he has fathered as "a half a yard of flesh" and, relieved to be rid of it with just a small financial outlay, he remarks "and would I were rid of all the wares in the shop so" (II.i.99). The bawdy double meaning of wares and female genitalia links the child to a chain, not of consumption and production, cause and effect, but of commodity exchange.

However his fertility does have a marketable value and he offers to sell his "magic water" to the barren but wealthy Kixes. The economic transfer of the symbol of fertility is made possible by the dilemma of the heirless gentry whose sterility is not felt simply as lack of children but will result in their loss of property and goods to their surviving next of kin Sir Walter Whorehound. Lady Kix castigates her impotent husband (who is not given to standing):

*'tis our dry barrenness puffs up Sir Walter;
None gets by your not getting but that knight;
He's made by th'means, and fats his fortunes shortly
In a great dowry with a goldsmith's daughter. (II.i.51-154)*

Here it is fortunes that get fat not the body of Lady Kix. Money becomes both a procreative force in itself and the means to buy fertility, as Oliver Kix says -"I'd give a thousand pounds to purchase fruitfulness" (II.i.139) - although he makes an astute bargain that costs him only half this. The comic cycle of regeneration and renewal is removed to the level of the abstract cycle of monetary exchange when a symbolic token of potency, a vial of almond milk, is exchanged for five instalments of a hundred pounds. Oliver Kix does not begrudge the outlay because, as he argues, "Put case his water stands me in some five hundred a pint,/ Twill fetch a thousand and a kersten soul" (II.ii.185-187). Touchwood exchanges his



=====

"magic water" for money. In an act of substitution he replaces barren dryness with his fertile fluidity.

Jean-Christophe Agnew suggests that in the Jacobean and Elizabethan attitude to commodity exchange there was a distinction between the exchange of solid and tangible commodity which, he remarks, was termed "dry exchange," and the abstract fluidity of financial transactions based on the disembodied form of money which was seen in terms of liquidity. [14] Kix hopes that his speculation will "bring him one hundred pounds profit." The procreative power of semen becomes dis-embodied in the cycle of exchange where it is transformed into an abstract and liquid form which like the fluid nature of money will keep on growing (Oliver envisions his wife in a few years "Cirled by children," II.iii.90). Agnew points out that it was only

within the expanded commerce of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries that ecclesiastical authors began to embrace a definition of interest as the opportunity or displacement cost of sums available not just for settlement but for investment...Money now appeared to be a source of productive possibilities...the desire for liquidity thereby came to mean something more than the thirst for solvency; it suggested a simultaneous readiness to transact.. a moment frozen in the money form itself...liquidity thus translated and condensed ...the market process into a permanent speculative posture or attitude that subjected the world to a reflexive calculus of returns on capital. [15]

The selling of carnival removes it from the lower body onto a more abstract level of exchange. Exchange of goods or dry exchange requires the material presence of both objects whereas money exchange allows for the absence of commodity- money stands in for the goods just as Touchwood's magic water stands in for Touchwood, who in turn stands in for Kix.

In *The Devil is an Ass* Fitzdottrel, a would- be gentleman, wishes, like Allwit, to remove himself from the cycle of work and leave himself free to



enjoy his materialistic lifestyle. The projector Meercraft is keen to show the creative potential of financial investment in his schemes:

Meercraft is keen to assure Fitzdotterel, however, that this isn't magic but investment in work. His project to transform dog skins into vendable commodities notes the effort involved: the dressing and medicining of the leather leads to "a height of improved ware" (II.i.71-2). In the "bottle ale scheme" Meercraft describes the seven years of hard labour put in along with "my water, my malt and my furnaces...the earth of my bottles which I dig, / Turn up and steep, and work, and neal myself, / to a degree of porcelain" (II.ii.85-90).

While Meercraft is keen to persuade Fitzdottrel that his labour will save the lazy citizen from working himself, he also convinces him that his schemes will be profitable because they are labour *saving*. Fitzdottrel is easily gulled and tells his wife:

Here Meercraft has drawn on the belief that man could find ingenious ways to work on nature and to yield the most profit from the least output. According to Kurtz Heinzelmann, the seventeenth century political economist Sir William Petty used the term "art" to describe such labour:

If by simple labour I could dig and prepare for seed a hundred acres in a thousand days; suppose I spend a hundred days in studying a more compendious way, and in contriving tools for the same purpose; but in all that hundred days dig nothing, but in the remaining nine hundred days I dig two hundred acres of ground; then I say that the said art which cost but an hundred days' invention is worth one man's labour for ever; because the new art and the one man performed as much as two men could have done without it. **[16]**

However whether Meercraft describes a scheme to make money out of his own labour or whether he suggests a project for the saving of labour is truly im-material as neither object or labour really exist in the corporeal world. It is not matter which Meercraft promises to transform into com-



modity, nor even a viable scheme of ingenious industry for someone else to profit from: it is instead the money of investors that Meercraft really turns into profit.

Marx's equation which differentiates between commodity exchange and capitalist production is useful here. In commodity exchange, he writes, commodity -C is exchanged for money -M which is then used to buy Commodity again, written C-M-C. However in a capitalist society, Marx argues, it is not commodity that circulates but money. Money is used to buy commodity C which is then sold on to make M thus M-C- M-. According to Shell:

The circulatory system of capitalist production bestows a new significance on money replacing the direct exchange of commodities- money is no longer an exchange equivalent but possesses the power of transformation in itself. In this progression from M-M matter is created 'money which begets money'- we are no longer in the self enclosed world of Newtonian physics but further back in the magical transformation of alchemical elements. **[17]**

In Meercraft's cycle of exchange the commodity is absent from the equation: the drown'd lands, the raisins, the dogskins are never physically present, they exist only in the projection of Meercraft's imagination into language. Money is invested by the citizen on the basis of belief in Meercraft's word, invested in the hope of a significant return or profit. It is Meercraft's wit and his command of the imagination of the aspirations of citizens for endless transformation that enables him to profit from the credulous Fitzdottrel.

Pierre Bourdieu argues for a particular kind of social context which he calls field, game or market:

A field or market may be seen a structured space of positions in which the positions and their inter-relations are determined by the distribution of different kinds of resources or capital. **[18]**



This may not only be economic capital, he argues, but cultural capital, the possession of skills and knowledge and symbolic capital, the possession of honour, reputation and prestige. One type of capital can be converted to another for example skills into paid work and thus economic capital. The field or market is therefore a "site of struggle in which individuals seek to maintain or alter the distribution of the forms of capital specific to it." [19] The tricksters of Jacobean comedy achieve symbolic capital by a number of ritual transformations. By working on the desire for symbolic capital of others they are able to raise their own status.

Symbolic power is an invisible power. The exercise of power through symbolic exchange always rests on the foundation of shared belief, in such a way that even those who benefit least from it participate to some extent in their own subjection. [20]

Here in Meercraft's "toothpick scheme" the selling of the commodity is to be achieved by the printing of a book authorising the use of the product and educating the reader; an early form of advertising. Here Meercraft is enforcing the primacy of the word in the process of transaction. This is doubly emphasised when the reader/audience realises that there is no scheme. Meercraft's language does not have a material referent, it is an abstract symbolic system of signification which relies on the faith or credulity of the audience and the gullible citizen. It is not Meercraft's manipulation of the material world that makes him such an efficient trickster but his control of symbolic capital, his mastery of language which embodies other forms of symbolic capital such as religious discourse alchemical jargon and economic enterprise . As Robert Pelton points out, "The trickster's ability is verbal, words are what he juggles best." [21]

Meercraft exercises his power through symbolic exchange drawing on the shared foundation of belief to those willing to participate in their own subjection. It is this faith or credulity that allows him to be successful in his coining of money. By manipulating the language of signs he is able



to conjure up an absent material world which is represented by maps and charts and diagrams of the schemes. He is able to work on the imagination of characters like Fitzdottrel because he taps into the wish fulfilment desires of the citizens. The citizens imagine an ideal golden age without the need for labour. The creative potential promised by tricksters such as Meercraft is the alchemical transformation of base matter to gold. By offering to insert their labour, either physical, or ingenious they appeal to the citizens' Golden age desire of getting something for nothing. However many of the victims of such tricksters get nothing for something. Meercraft's transformation is not material. As Charles Nicholl says of Jonson's tricksters in *The Alchemist*, it is

David Dangoor still keeps what he calls a “mental suitcase”, packed full of memory and longing for a homeland he left more than half a century ago.

The 68-year-old father of four who lives in London's St John's Wood is one of Iraq's exiled Jewish population. He fled the country with his family aged 10 in 1959 and has never been able to return.

Occasionally, such as when his father Sir Naim Dangoor died two years ago and the Iraqi ambassador visited to pay his respects, Dangoor will ask among his fellow countrymen whether or not it is yet safe to go back? The answer remains always the same: “not yet”.

The story of the Jews in Iraq is one that dates back 2,500 years, but such was the speed that they were forced to abandon their homeland following the end of the Second World War and creation of Israel that it remains little known today.

David Dangoor's parents dancing at a function in Baghdad

David Dangoor's parents dancing at a function in Baghdad CREDIT: FAMILY ARCHIVE



A century ago when the British invaded the country then known as Mesopotamia, one third of Baghdad's 200,000 strong population was Jewish. Today in the city just five Jewish people remain.

The story of what happened to the last Jews of Iraq is the subject of a new documentary, *Remember Baghdad*, released this month. The film follows the stories of several prominent Jewish families, including the Dangoors, who were forced to flee Iraq and ended up in Britain where they attempted to re-establish their tight-knit community as best they could.

Next door to David Dangoor in north London lives David Shamash, whose family were among the very last to leave in 1970, fleeing over the mountains to Iran. We meet in the nearby flat of another émigré, 91-year-old David Khalastchi, overlooking Regent's Park.

"I miss those great old times," Khalastchi says. "It was once a paradise. It is too late for me now but I hope my daughters can one day go back there."

The film comes at a prescient time. Not only does 2017 mark the centenary of the British occupation of Iraq, but 100 years ago this month the Foreign Secretary Arthur Balfour announced the British government's support for the "establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people".

The so-called Balfour Declaration paved the way for the modern-day state of Israel and laid the foundations for decades of conflict which persists today.

Prior to the British arrival in Iraq, it had been ruled by the Ottoman Empire since 1517 and Jews and Arabs had peacefully co-existed for centuries. Within the country's borders lies the city of Babylon, where the Jews came after their first exile from Jerusalem in 587BC. Iraq is also the birthplace of Abraham. Islam arrived only when the Arabs invaded in 641AD - more than 1,000 years after the Jews had first settled.

=====

The life once lived by Baghdad's prominent Jewish families is a world away from the violence and carnage associated with the modern day city.

The Khalastchi family entertaining friends in 1955 CREDIT: FAMILY ARCHIVE

In the middle of the 20th century Baghdad was booming and its residents pleasure-seeking. Dangoor recalls picnics on the banks of the River Tigris and falling asleep to the sound of summer cocktail parties on neighbouring rooftops. His parents, meanwhile, were regulars on the city social scene rubbing shoulders with royalty and government ministers. In 1947 his mother, Renée, was crowned the first Miss Baghdad.

David Dangoor traces his family roots in Iraq back to the 1700s at least, and in all likelihood much earlier. His great grandfather was the Chief Rabbi of Baghdad from 1923-1926.

He says when the British arrived they quickly recognised an ally in Iraq's Jewish population and divested a lot of wealth and power through them to gain a foothold over the country.

As a result, discord began to spread among the largely Shia Muslim masses. "They started to see all these Jewish people who because they were educated with connections had houses and big cars and so on," Dangoor says. "That led to envy and eventually jealousy."

In June 1941, came the Nazi-inspired Farhud - or pogrom - during which an angry mob burned property and looted houses and hundred lost their lives.

Following the creation of Israel in 1948 and the Arab-Israeli War the public mood further darkened. In 1951 around 95 per cent of the Iraqi Jewish population (120,000 to 130,000) was airlifted to Israel in an operation financed largely by American Zionists.



Both David Dangoor and David Khalastchi remained behind. The former's father ran a string of successful businesses, including the Iraqi franchise for Coca Cola, while the latter's family had interests in farming and the booming automobile industry.

Despite still being a child, Dangoor recalls several moments from his youth where he noticed alchemy of swindle transmuting the stuff of gullibility into the gold of profit, turning not lead but fools to gold. Face is the prospector, the miner unearthing rich ores of credulity, the prima material of their transformation. [22]

Earlier I said that art was seen as a form of ingenious labour. Art or artifice is also used to describe cunning and trickery. The craftsman transforms matter into valuable commodity, to be sold for gold. The crafty man in these plays uses the language of the imagination to create a golden world; he is, like Sidney's poet, a creator. However unlike the poet the trickster has no positive transformative function; his art is Meer Craft.

Notes

1. Suzanne Langer, *Feeling and Form* (New York: Charles Scribner and sons, 1953), 331.

2. Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1957), 186.

3. Michael D. Bristol, *Carnival and Theatre: Plebeian Culture and the Structure of Authority* (New York: Methuen, 1985), 68.

4. John Locke 134-5, cited in Kurt Heinzelmann, *The Economics of the Imagination* (Amherst: U of Massachusetts P, 1980), 168.

5. Karl Marx, *Capital*, 3 vols (New York: International, 1967), I, 177.

6. Edward. B. Partridge discusses many of Jonson's food/gold images in *The Broken Compass* (New York: Columbia UP, 1958).

7. Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and his World*, trans. Hélène Iswolsky (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT P, 1968), 206.



8. Bakhtin, *Rabelais*, 281-2.
9. Bakhtin, *Rabelais*, 335.
10. Marx, *Works*, 3:325, cited in Heinzelmann, 179.
11. A. V. Judges, *The Elizabethan Underworld* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1965), 36.
12. Heinzelman, 145.
13. Arthur Marotti, "Fertility and Comic Form in *A Chaste Maid in Cheapside*," *Comparative Drama* 3 (1969): 65-74, 67.
14. Jean-Christophe Agnew, *Worlds Apart: The Market and the Theater in Anglo American Thought* (New York: Cambridge UP, 1986), 69.
15. Agnew, 46.
16. Petty in Heinzelmann, 148.
17. Marc Shell, *Money Language and Thought: Literary and Philosophical Economies from the Medieval to the Modern Era* (Berkeley: U of California P, 177).
18. Pierre Bourdieu, *Language and Symbolic Power*, ed John B. Thompson, trans. Gino Raymond and Matthew Adamson. Oxford : Polity, 1992, 15.
19. Bourdieu , 15-18.
20. Bourdieu ,21.
21. Robert D. Pelton, *The Trickster in West Africa: A Study of Mythic Irony and Scared Delight* (Berkeley: U of California P, 1980), 225.
22. Charles Nicholl, *The Chemical Theatre* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1980), 112.

Works Cited

- Abrams, M. H. *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*. 7th ed New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 2000.



- Agnew, Jean-Christophe. *Worlds Apart: The Market and the Theater in Anglo American Thought*. New York: Cambridge UP, 1986.
- Bakhtin, Mikhail. *Rabelais and his World*. Trans. Hélène Iswolsky. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT P, 1968.
- Bourdieu, Pierre. *Language and Symbolic Power*. Ed John B. Thompson. Trans. Gino Raymond and Matthew Adamson. Oxford: Polity, 1992.
- Bristol, Michael D. *Carnival and Theatre: Plebeian Culture and the Structure of Authority*. New York: Methuen, 1985.
- Frye, Northrop. *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1957.
- Heinzemann, Kurt. *The Economics of the Imagination*. Amherst: U of Massachusetts P, 1980.
- Howard, Jean E. *The Stage and Social Struggle in Early Modern Europe*. London: Routledge, 1994.
- Jonson, Ben. *The Alchemist*. Ed. Douglas Brown. London: Ernest Benn, 1988.
- ----. *Every Man Out of His Humour*. Ed. Martin Seymour Smith. London: Ernest Benn, 1988.
- ----. *Volpone*. Ed Philip Brockbank. London: Ernest Benn, 1988.
- Jonson, Ben, George Chapman, John Marston. *Eastward Ho!* In *Elizabethan and Jacobean Comedies: A New Mermaid Anthology*. Ed Brian Gibbons. London: Ernest Benn, 1984.
- Judges, A. V. *The Elizabethan Underworld*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1965.
- Langer, Suzanne. *Feeling and Form*. New York: Charles Scribner and sons, 1953.



B L O O M S B U R Y

Cultural and Social History – International Academic Journal, Print ISSN - 1341-0791

=====

- Marotti, Arthur. "Fertility and Comic Form in *A Chaste Maid in Cheapside*." *Comparative Drama* 3 (1969): 65-74.
- Marx, Karl. *Capital*. New York: International, 1967.
- Middleton, Thomas. *A Chaste Maid in Cheapside*. Ed. R.B. Parker. London: Methuen, 1969.
- Nicholl, Charles. *The Chemical Theatre*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1980.