

ARAFAT: A Gas of a Political Spoof

Douglas Hackleman

pluming as

Michael McRoary

Last night as I lounged before the tube and the eleven o'clock news, his picture flashed on the screen, and my latent xenophobia rose across the decades since that historic malprecedent (neologism alert) at the United Nations. With so little else to do, I took pen and spleen-vented until my cellmate began to snore, deposited my emotions in an envelope, addressed and stamped it, and taped it to the bar next to my pillow where the guards picks up my mail.

As you read these lines from the slam, yours truly will have served half his sentence for conspiracy to break and enter and larcenize. But don't look for any Bonhoeffer-like letters from prison.

You see this young graduate student friend and I both got curious about the notes my psychiatrist was taking during our sessions. And all it took was a boy scout knife and a screwdriver to open his old office on the dingy 4th floor of an unrenovated building in Mayor Michael Bloomberg's cultural cornucopia and pry into the filing cabinet where he stores away notes on his patients.

Why did I want to see my records so badly? Hard to tell. Curiosity is not limited to cats is about the best I can do; except to add that when I asked Doc if I could see my records he said, "No." And then when I pressed a little he became quite indignant in his refusals, and wouldn't that

prick your curiosity? (Doc would read too much into my choice of verbs.)

I won't pretend that there was some quasi-moral-ethical-political idealism to my actions, like the Plumbers (national security), or claim any citizen's "right to know" crap. It was just plain mischief guided by what the lawyers call "need to know," and illegal as crack.

But since we got caught with our paws in the jar, I don't mind sharing with you, and [insert magazine or website] for a fee (that will be transferred directly to counsel), what it was we discovered.

My shrink, Dr. Ruben Davidson (you're right, he's not Scandinavian), and I have debated in past sessions, at length, the efficacy of psychoanalysis; and counterclaims and claims fly, but I always win, hands down, by presenting myself as exhibit "A," verifying the contention that it does no damn good.

Dr. Davidson then sits quietly pulling on his Havana brand (he closets cigars like some people cellar wine—the result of his prescient political prognostication in 1960 of the deconsumation of United States-Cuban relations and the resulting cigar embargo), unlit, as he watches my peripatetic delivery of injunctions against psychoanalysis: "the disease it purports to cure."

As I collapse onto his old leather couch he mutters

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something about “resistance,” disengaging the cigar into his ashtray which is in the form of a small glass Hydra (don’t worry I’ve asked him about the Freudian loadings that may attach to both his cigars and the seven-snaked ashtray), exhales slowly (patiently?) and allows that there are always “anomalous” cases of which I may be one; “but vee vill not become discourteched.”

During our three years of patient-doctor relationship I was honest in almost every regard . . . and quite open. He only has my name and profession wrong. He believes that I sell computers; I am a psychologist. And he doesn’t know that I know, that the collective body of literature has given us to know, that depth psychology (couch analysis) has a “cure rate” (whatever that may mean) equal to chance. Translating for carbon offset purchasers: the same percentage of people get well spontaneously as under psychoanalysis.

But New York is a place chilly to visitors (unless they are Third World thugs and they are visiting the United Nations), even frequent visitors, even psychologists; and even psychologists get bored and lonely, which is why I was paying Dr. Davidson \$180 for an hour of his perspicacity every time I visited New York—which place Emerson labeled a “. . . sucked orange.”

You may wonder why, if I’m lonely and have money, I don’t look up short-term Mayor Spitzer’s friend, Ashley Dupré. Well, I would have to remind you that girls like Ashley don’t specialize in conversation (neither does Dr.

Davidson come to think of it, but he listens well). More importantly, my wife would know. She’s clairvoyant, and a dirty look gets me *our* couch. Besides, any money saved would buy nearly a tank of gas for my rental job, which train of thought leads naturally and directly to that last, pretrial, visit with Dr. Davidson.

It stumbled on the heels of Yassir Arafat’s November 2004 funeral—a celebration that dragged out for me a repressed memory of his visit to address the United Nations thirty years earlier. Somehow the Arab blackmail of the West a year earlier (1973) through the hoarding of black gold, and its direct ramifications for me personally, was causing a flare-up of the old “id” (for post moderns, that is not short for identification; although some make it their sole [Soul?] reference point); and in my regressed state (late 1974), I proceeded to cathart effusively, Agnewianly (a period-piece modifier) in Dr. Davidson’s office.

“That camel driver came to New York last week. His camel flies. It was a wide-bodied camel—a triple bumper. The driver wore shades and his turban billowed and he had three days growth, and I knew in a minute it must be Arafart. How else could a camel and driver fly? Aafart and Clyde, the oily-snouted camel, landed on the United Nations heliport.

“On approach they reverse-thrusted ponderously, Clyde snorting, his driver peering down from side to side through the emissions, reconnoitering, now satisfied,

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checking the reins as they settled, centering on the big ‘X’ obscured lingeringly as ground effect and retro-sphincters (sphinxters?) merged.

“The resemblance between driver and mount was really very uncanny.

“Rather than hunching in low, toupees held, to avoid slowly decelerating chopper blades, the corps of U.N. officialdom ran in high, handkerchiefs over noses (in respect for Muslim modesty no doubt). Gas masks should have been disbursed. How do you run ahead of a diplomatic guest with an aerosol can, wide open, surreptitiously? He needed a visit from the neighborhood Welcome Wagon.

“‘Hey, Mon,’ the correspondent next to me started out mumbling in Beaner and ended in Hebe, ‘we have a pollution problem without any SST camels, already.’”

Doc was scribbling down my very free associations in Hebrew. I had to have my friend the TM (that’s theology major to all you philistines out there) from the seminary translate it for me after we broke into Dr. Davidson’s office and kiked, I mean kyped (that would give Dr. Davidson a start, hardened old analyst though he be), my records. You see how impartial are my Archie Bunkerisms?

Davidson couldn’t ask for a better patient (they call us clients, or subjects, in this mannerly millennium); I was disgorging a torrent of uninhibited consciousness.

And now I was John Scali (former U.S. Ambassador

to the U.N.), and I was speaking, after invoking a point of order, to the real issue at hand, namely: the fact that it was unfair for that camel driver to confiscate oil from a society whose steel and plastic camels can only run on petroleum products, while Yasser’s camel, although it smelled like burning wrestler’s shorts, nevertheless, had the advantage of running on weeds; and a second superiority: its emissions being not only biodegradable but useful as fertilizer for the greening of guerrilla land (the Sinai Peninsula). Woops, got to watch those terms loaded with symbolism or Dr. Davidson might read something into it that would clash with my Protestant upbringing. What propelled all this cerebral wandering in the desert was economics—personal economics.

“You see, Doc, because a bunch of camel drivers decided not to sell crude, except maybe at exorbitant prices, I’m not sure I’ll be able to buy the stereo I saw in the window the other day, or records to play on it; because they are plastic (a petroleum derivative), and my child’s dolls and trucks are plastic, and my wife’s falsies. We’ll lose falsies! And, oh, Doc, what if the social scientists (I usually scoff at them) are right, and we have a ‘plastic’ society? Then the tent dwellers are in a position to cut off my society. Quick! Get Senator (Scoop) Jackson on the phone, and the Secretary of Defense, too; find out if we have anything like a SAM that will bring down a tri-humped camel.”

I guess I quit being Ambassador Scali when I

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emerged from the episode sweating. The Doc was shaking me, “Hey, hey, you’re going nutso, relax.”

“Whew,” I exhaled looking around. “That was a bad trip, Doc. But you are supposed to let me regress and get out those fantasies, those aggressions, and hostilities. Catharsis is good for the spleen.”

“How do you know all that?” He eyed me suspiciously.

“Because I’m really a desert rat posing as a southern cracker in a business suit,” I jabbed my finger at him, “and I’ve spotted you as a Zionist.”

“Alright, alright,” he thumb-nailed the wrapper from another Havana. “See if you can relax again and start from where you left off.”

So I disassociated back to the three faces of McRoary (not to be confused as the husband of—and here, Bill Buckley, the oxymoron again clearly prevails—that lady columnist, Mary McGrory), and I became Tekoah (Israeli ambassador to the UN) rising from my place in the General Assembly:

“Okay, Arafart, quit yourself like a man.” I approached the lectern. He had a dagger in one hand and his scabri in the other. I drew my scimitar and it glittered under the kleg lights as a network cameraman fainted, and I fainted at Arafart. “Better take that shawl off your head, you woman, and cover your Ishmael’s face with it,” I goaded.

“It is a proud turban worn proudly, and will still be worn when I see you into your sepulcher,” he riposted.

The United Nations General Assembly has never been so attentive. In plenary session it has never considered a matter with such *gravitas*. The Arabs were quiet. Even Jamil Baroody seemed to have tetanus. The Latinos were hushed. Saliva ran down the chin of the transfixed representative from Poland. The CBS man still lay where he’d fallen at his post, unattended. A phalanx of security officers stood riveted.

Arafart slashed. I parried. The unmuted clang of raw steel evoked pilomotor responses from all; no hair remained unraised. The East German representative’s cigar had burned down between his fingers as he stared, oblivious to the hiss of fluid from his blistered skin quenching the stogie. Our blades crossed. I slashed a remnant from his turban as he twirled away grim, sandy, sun-weathered.

“We shall decide the Middle East here and now!” he screeched, twirling his blade as he leaped down from the dais. He flew at me, and I almost tripped on a microphone cable as he drew a red line down the back of my unfoiled sword hand.

“And here and now it shall be, forever,” I retorted, raining a series of thrusts worthy of Zorro, which he parried and dodged.

“We shall settle apartheid, Sinai, the Golan Heights, Cyprus, Jerusalem, Cuba, the Berlin Wall.” He was

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getting a bit carried away, I thought, as he punctuated each area of contention with a slash or thrust.

Scali sat behind his stein-bottomed lenses, unblinking as any owl. The Cuban representative, forgetting that he was a Marxist now, sat gesturing slowly, somnambulistically, tracing the sign of the Cross. Malik, who had half-risen, hand up, to request the right to speak, was frozen there, statue-like, a pillar of Russian *SALT*, *sans* talks.

And then he had me walled up against the polished mahogany retaining rail just in front of Turkey; and that was what I was beginning to fear I might become: a butchered and carved gobbler—and headless.

We were foil to foil, nose to nose (a couple of Durante models), the base of our blades trying to penetrate the sharpened steel of the other. And as we each pushed with every cultural and nationalistic fiber (strength against strength, just two men, no technology involved), it seemed that the older of us must inevitably lose. But then the trademark of my sword, so close now to my face, focused clearly, meaningfully, accompanied by a new rush of adrenalin. It read: “Bethlehem Steel.”

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When Dr. Davidson first saw me as a client one of his several initial directives about session procedure was that I could say anything I wanted to him, around him, or about him. He would take no offense. I couldn’t leave that alone. So one day I told him the one about the German,

the Scotchman, and the Jew who were all sitting together at a cafe counter nursing their respective glasses of milk. Obviously, my name being McRoary, my ancestors used to hoof it across green moors under a light fog wearing plaid skirts yodeling and blowing on those instruments that this descendant will pay money not to have to hear. But now I was in New York telling my Jewish psychiatrist this German-Scotch-Jew joke.

“So the three of them each gets a fly in his milk. The German says, ‘Scheist!’ and snaps for another glass. The Scot takes his spoon and flicks the fly out and downs the milk. But the Jew picks his milk-treading fly up by the wings, holding him over the glass, demanding, ‘Spit it out! Spit it out!’”

When I finished Doc asked me, expressionless, if my father had mistreated me as a child. I cracked up and said, “No, he mistreated me as a Mina [sic pun] bird.”¹ He proceeded to tell me, devoid of mirth, that it was my money and that I could spend it childishly or we could try to make some progress.

You be the judge of how well we progressed, with me regressed into fantasies about palliumated Arabs on SST camels, and now cooling my heels in the slammer, convicted, basically, of curiosity.

But my blitherings about the Tekoah-Arafart bout in front of the General Assembly with Bethlehem Steel and a fight to the end for Canaan had plucked a repressed

¹ *A Mina is an ancient Semitic measure of weight, 1/60th of a Talent.

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string of “never again” in my old, affectless, Hebe psychoanalyst; and, by Freud, he’d begun to cry.

My hour was over anyway. We got up and moved over to his desk. I had my checkbook in hand. He was a tissue. Just as I was about to pen McRoary in on the bottom line, Doc restrained my arm. “No, Michael, not today,” he sniffled. “I cannot take your money. It would be a sacrilege. I think next time you come back I be gone to Tel Aviv. Goodbye, Michael.”

What could I say? I gave the old man a clumsy hug, told him to say, “Hi,” to Ehud and Shimon for me, if he really went, and ducked out the door knowing he really wasn’t going anywhere, probably.

And then out on the street a smirk began to play fatuously across my mug as it occurred to me that a Scotchman psychologist named McRoary had just out-psyched and out-Jewed a psychoanalyst named Davidson. But it doesn’t exactly keep me in stitches here behind these vertical bars.

A few days pre-indictment, my friend (the theology major and Hebrew consultant) and I had gone over some of my pilfered session notes, and always the space in Dr. Davidson’s writing for “diagnosis” was left blank. This time, as we translated the end of my last hour, I noted with much anticipation that there were Hebrew scratchings in the space provided for clinical labeling. My friend, and future clergyman (his role in the cloth is not so certain at this writing), came to it, looked up, began

to grin, and translated: “Diagnosis,” he looked up again, laughed, “Diagnoses, ha, ha: acute schizophrenia,” we both roared, “paranoid type.” Another round of mirth, and then, “Client shows extreme flights of fancy with grandiose and persecutory themes.”

But the laughter died and our smiles faded as we realized, simultaneously, that, unwittingly, my shrink had caricaturized metaphorically, through diagnosis, the Arab-Israeli insanity; and we fell somber, because, even the rise of the hope-hyping Obama from Chicago—who will talk to terrorists without preconditions—notwithstanding, the prognosis is poor.