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Abstract

This essay compares the draft and published versions of three central chapters in Rajia Hassib's 2015 novel *In the Language of Miracles*, as a smaller instance of what John Bryant terms a revision narrative. The key differences in characterization across the evolution of the narrative, along with the elements of a related character that remain largely unchanged, indicate the ways in which Hassib negotiates public and private versions of a gendered Arab American identity. By revising one chapter to remove a scene depicting a public assault in a pharmacy, the essay concludes, Hassib resists familiar narratives constraining Arab American subjects within a post-9/11 Orientalism.

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In a key early scene in Rajia Hassib's 2015 novel *In the Language of Miracles*, Nagla Al-Menshawy, an Egyptian American mother haunted by the memory of her teenage son killing his white girlfriend and then himself, is accosted while working at a pharmacy in her New Jersey hometown. An older white woman, who has come to this store looking specifically for Nagla, pulls something out of her purse, with a disturbing "glint of metal." The woman is retrieving a camera, not a gun, but she captures a picture of Nagla and yells, "'No more hiding for you, you filthy Arab,'"[1] before being pulled away by two other clerks. Deeply shaken, Nagla returns home to an argument with her mother that has been building for some time, finally smashing her living room window with an ashtray when her rage, anxiety, and guilt become uncontainable.

Readers familiar with what Monica Ali called Hassib's "assured and beautifully crafted debut"[2] will not recognize this scene, or indeed anything related to Nagla's employment at a pharmacy at all, as they do not exist in the novel. Or, at least, not in the published novel. This early version of the book's ninth chapter is contained in one of Hassib's multiple drafts, which she eventually revised to discard all references to this aspect of Nagla's character.[3] This section of the published narrative builds to the same concluding act, though the description of Nagla hurling the ashtray through her window is developed in a bit more detail by that point. The key difference between the draft and published versions, though, derives from Hassib removing her protagonist from the public space of the pharmacy. While she is vulnerable in the draft chapter to verbal and physical assaults based on her physical presence as a "'filthy Arab,'" in the published version readers follow Nagla's movements through entirely private, domestic spaces, first in a close friend's home and then back at her own house. Hassib has explained that she conceived of the novel's backstory as a "microcosm" for the events of Sept. 11, 2001, involving not a massive attack but "one Muslim family and one American family."[4] The impact of Nagla's son's actions is never contained within these two families, however, as the narrative depicts multiple moments of harassment from the Al-Menshawys' community leading up to a memorial service at which Nagla's husband Samir insists on speaking. In the published novel, this closing scene is also Nagla's first public exposure to a broad anti-Arab American sentiment, while in the draft version that interaction has already been presaged by the episode at the pharmacy.

In this essay I read Hassib's revisions as an instance of cultural negotiation, as part of the author's attempt to represent and resist processes of Arab American racialization. The "racialized body," Alia Al-Saji writes of aesthetic representations, "is cast as perpetually past, coming 'too late' to intervene in the

[1] Rajia Hassib, "In the Language of Miracles" (unpublished manuscript, December 2012), 132.
[2] Monica Ali, "Was He a Terrorist?," *New York Times Book Review*, Aug. 16, 2015, 13.
[3] I am deeply grateful to my colleague Rajia Hassib for sharing these materials with me.
[4] Ishak Berrebbah, "Reading Arab American Literary Variations: An Interview with Rajia Hassib," *MELUS* Vol 47 No 2 (2022), 195.

meaning of its own representation."[5] By removing the pharmacy scene as a public space in which Nagla literally struggles to deny the customer's photograph and its violent capture of Nagla's racialized body, I will conclude, Hassib shifts the terms of the novel's narrative and political dynamics to a safer but still fraught private sphere. On the way to that conclusion, I review the ways in which Arab American identity has been racialized within a U.S. context, and then outline the ways in which we might understand the draft chapters in relation to the published novel through the lens of genetic criticism. While a full study of the *Miracles* drafts, not to mention those for Hassib's second novel, *A Pure Heart* (2019) are well beyond the purview of this article, I present a micro-revision narrative of three draft chapters as a proxy for that more comprehensive reading.

"Revision narrative," a term coined by the editorial theorist and Melville scholar John Bryant, provides an explanatory rationale for an author's (and often an editor's or other agents') patterns of textual change, so that readers can think through the counterfactual versions of a published text. Rather than imagining multiple possible directions in which a draft might have developed, however, revision narratives are tied to the material record of versions actually produced, or at least conceptualized. By understanding more fully the forms in which a literary work could have come into public existence, we can develop a more nuanced interpretive sense of the text's relationship to its material, social, and cultural circumstances of production. Thus to read, in this case, Hassib's first novel as it was published by Viking in 2015 through a revision narrative would entail a secondary perception of the novel that could have been, and of the factors that propelled the text along the path of its eventual published form.

In an interview with Ishak Berrebbah, Hassib, who left Egypt for the U.S. at the age of twenty-three, remarks on her sense that "it is okay, as an immigrant, to claim part of American identity and to accept that you do change when you immigrate and you absorb some of the traditions and ways of thinking of your adoptive land, so you become that hybrid, you develop that hybrid identity."[6] As various scholars have noted, the particular kinds of "hybrid identity" available to Arab Americans have historically overlapped with and diverged from those imposed upon other groups defined as outside of a white cultural hegemony, with many Arab citizens officially counted as "white" and others sometimes passing for white. The category designated as "Arab American" is itself comprised, of course, of a collection of peoples of multiple nationalities, cultures, and faiths, which have often been misunderstood and misclassified by U.S. customs officials. Immigrants from what is now Syria, for instance, were designated as "Turks" in the 1880s, as the territory they were leaving was then part of the Ottoman Empire; by 1914, a court ruling would designate "Syrians" as "Caucasian" but without the full privileges of "white" citizenship. This history, along with later waves of

[5] Alia Al-Saji, "Glued to the Image: A Critical Phenomenology of Racialization through Works of Art," *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* Vol 77 No 4 (2019), 475.

[6] Berrebbah, "Reading," 208.

immigration following the 1948 Palestine War, Arab-Israeli War of 1967, and other disruptive events, leads Nadine Naber to reflect in a 2000 essay, "While Arab Americans (like other racial/ethnic communities) have been forced into the binary classification 'either entirely white or entirely non-white,' differences within the population indicate that Arab Americans do not quite fit into the US's either/or racial labeling system."[7] That uneasy relationship to a U.S. racial binary was rendered even more problematically complex by the events of September 11 and the decades of U.S. policy toward the "Middle East," so that, as Salah Hassan concludes, "Unlike other racial constructs, such as blackness or Asian-ness, which are defined officially in opposition to whiteness, the contemporary racialization of Arabs appears to be linked to US foreign policy in the Middle East and its translation into the domestic context."[8]

Writing in 2008, Amaney Jamal notes that "even though the U.S. census continues to classify Arab Americans as 'white,' a solely 'white' designation may not capture the diverse and complex ways that Arab American individuals experience 'race.'"[9] Since Sept. 11, 2001, to be perceived as "Arab" in the U.S. has increasingly derived, as Carol Fadda-Conrey explains, from "exclusionary conceptualizations of US citizenship" and an "us-versus-them binary" that generates a "divisive rhetoric identifying the good Arab from the bad Arab."[10] While most forms of anti-Black and other U.S. racisms have at least nominally been rooted in (mis)perceived physiognomic differences, Arab American otherness is not necessarily premised on the (mis)perception of physical characteristics, but rather on the kinds of cultural stereotypes and misprisions that become a kind of floating signifier attached to more materialist racisms. As Jamal notes, "Arab American racialization stems not only or even primarily from physical appearance but also from a deep and prolonged history of reduction to 'Suspicious Arab.'"[11]

Arab American fiction published in the long wake of 9/11, then, has looked for ways to complicate and contest these dominant cultural narratives. Writing in 2011, Steven Salaita saw a new wave of novels as constituting a "formidable art form in the Arab American community," and the decade-plus since has only witnessed an acceleration of that trend.[12] This broad group of novelists—such as Diana Abu-Jaber, Laila Halaby, Mohja

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[7] Nadine Naber, "Ambiguous Insiders: An Investigation of Arab American Invisibility," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* Vol 23 No 1 (2000), 51.

[8] Salah Hassan, "Arabs, Race, and the Post-September 11 National Security State," *Middle East Report* No 224 (2002), 18. For additional discussions of these issues, see Hosam Aboul-Ela, "Edward Said's *Out of Place*: Criticism, Polemic, and Arab American Identity," *MELUS* Vol 31 No 4 (2006): 15-32; and Keith Feldman, "The (Il)legible Arab Body and the Fantasy of National Democracy," *MELUS* Vol 31 No 4 (2006): 33-53, both part of that journal's special issue on Arab American literature.

[9] Amaney Jamal, "Conclusion: Arab American Racialization," in *Race and Arab Americans Before and After 9/11: From Invisible Citizens to Visible Subjects*, edited by Jamal and Nadine Naber (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2008), 319.

[10] Carol Fadda-Conrey, *Contemporary Arab-American Literature: Transnational Reconfigurations of Citizenship and Belonging* (New York: New York University Press, 2014), 141.

[11] Jamal, "Conclusion," 321.

[12] Steven Salaita, *Modern Arab American Fiction: A Reader's Guide* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2011), 2.

Kahf, and many others—strive to "articulate transnational Arab-American assemblages,"[13] Fadda-Conrey maintains:

> They capture and challenge homogenized depictions of Arab-Americans, forging in the process what can be identified as revisionary or counterhegemonic spaces that redefine exclusionary conceptualizations of US citizenship and belonging. In addition to problematizing simplistic types of post-9/11 patriotism that demand a unilateral type of US national identity, the creation of these revisionary spaces responds to racial stereotyping, blanket labeling, and discriminatory profiling by insisting on complex representations of Arab-Americans.[14]

In the case of *In the Language of Miracles*, the "microcosm" of 9/11 results in a similarly bounded local process of stereotyping, labeling, and profiling. Strikingly, Hassib withholds from both her readers and, largely, her characters, any developed sense of why Hosaam has fallen into extreme violence. While the narrative shifts among various characters' consciousnesses and back and forth between the story's present and the remembered past, readers never gain access to Hosaam's perspective, or arrive at anything more than Nagla's and others' speculations. As Hassib explains to Berrebbah, "I didn't want to justify what he did in any way, so I didn't want to give him that space, and I thought that, in my mind, he is a symbol of 9/11 or the terrorists of 9/11, and I didn't want them to have that room to try to explain and perhaps garner some sympathy."[15] Indeed, given the epidemic of gun violence that has taken hold in the U.S. over the last two decades, one might well say that Hosaam's murder-suicide is a more "American" act than a "terrorist" one, despite the inescapable presence of his Arab-American identity for many of the town's citizens. Hassib's work so far—her second novel revolves around an actual terrorist incident in Egypt—thus contributes to 21st-century Arab-American fiction's continued coming to terms with both the events of 9/11 and their persistent distortion of a U.S. racial imaginary.

Hassib's novel, while not focused directly on Sept. 11, nevertheless participates in the broader genre of "post-9/11 fiction," which Tim Gautier demarcates as consisting of "novels which identify the events of September 11, 2001, as their focal point, or at least whose plot construction is linked strongly to the notion of living 'in the shadow of no towers.'"[16] In its extensive engagement with Islam across multiple generations, *Miracles* contributes to a broader turn away from a post-secular society in post-9/11 postcolonial fiction, as outlined by Abdelaziz El Amrani. In its consistent narrative refusal to explain Hosaam's actions, *Miracles* seems also to work in a post-9/11 aesthetics of choly (vs.a Freudian sense of mourning), a distinction that Beverly Haviland identifies within this genre.[17] More broadly, Hassib's fiction—very

[13] Fadda-Conrey, *Contemporary*, 141.
[14] Fadda-Conrey, *Contemporary*, 139-40.
[15] Berrebbah, "Reading," 203.
[16] Tim Gauthier, *9/11 Fiction, Empathy, and Otherness* (Lanham, Lexington Books, 2015), 44.
[17] See Abdelaziz El Amrani, "The Postsecular Turn: Interrogating Postcolonialism after 9/11," *Interventions* Vol 24 No 4 (2022), 533-66; and Beverly Haviland, "After the Fact: Mourning, Melancholy, and 'Nachträglichkeit' in Novels of 9/11,"

much including her second novel as well—works within the vein of a "second wave" of 9/11 fiction, in which an emphasis on cultural alterity becomes even more foregrounded than in earlier novels, such as Don Delillo's *Falling Man* (2007). Georgiana Banita, indeed, sees the move to feature "Otherness" in these works as not only a narrative pattern but as a "fundamental structural principle" that "exceeds the thematic."[18] In contrast to some of the now canonical entries in the field, such as *Falling Man*, Jonathan Safran Foer's *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* (2005), or Claire Messud's *The Emperor's Children* (2006), *Miracles* portrays a post-9/11 world through a distinctly Arab American perspective, with occasional references to Hosaam's girlfriend's parents the only time in which white characters emerge from the narrative periphery.

Hassib's decision to remove Nagla's encounter in the pharmacy, and her role as a pharmacy employee altogether, reinforces this sense of narrative insularity. While many white readers would surely reject any potential identification with the woman accosting Nagla at work, the scene foregrounds Nagla's perceived status as "other" within this professional sphere and within the community more generally. One effect of Hassib's revision, then, is to maintain the novel's use of a self/other dynamic on terms where the cultural "other" is the subject rather than the object of narration, as the story is focalized entirely through members of the Al-Menshawy family. This narrative technique is in operation for the deleted pharmacy scene as well, but one effect of its removal is to reinforce Nagla's presence within the sphere of her family life, and thus to emphasize that element of post-9/11 Arab American identity, for readers both within and external to those communities. If, as David Palumbo-Liu proposes, much 21st-century fiction in an age of globalization develops a "critical reappraisal of systems and discourses of 'sameness' that deliver others to us" through a "more radical type of otherness," we might well see novels like Hassib's as working within this mode as well, through the multiple portraits of its central families representatives of three generations, each with their own distinct experience of Arab Americanness.[19] While Hassib's second novel is outside the scope of this essay, its "system" of sameness and otherness arguably goes even farther in this direction than *Miracles*, with its shifts in geography (New York, Cairo, rural Egypt, West Virginia) paralleling its shifts in perspective among three Egyptian (American) characters and the protagonist's white American husband. As Banita notes, "many post-9/11 fictions engage nonwhite characters in a vibrantly transnational context," an effect heightened by Hassib's eventual decision, while revising *A Pure Heart*, to orient the narrative around a character who shuttles back and forth from Egypt to the U.S., trying to understand the circumstances of her sister's death and, by extension, her

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Amerikastudien/American Studies Vol 55 No 3 (2010), 429-49.

[18] Georgiana Banita, *Plotting Justice: Narrative Empathy and Literary Culture After 9/11* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2012), 22.

[19] David Palumbo-Liu, *The Deliverance of Others: Reading Literature in a Global Age* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2012), 1.

own identity within this transnational context.[20]

In addition, *Miracles* consistently resists post-9/11 discrimination through the kinds of "complex representations" that Fadda-Conrey cites. Nagla's teenage son, Khaled, for instance, maintains a Facebook page where he is identified only by his initials, KA, which he sees as contributing to a kind of unraced online identity: "His face, a dark tan that could easily have passed for any ethnicity, from mixed to Hispanic, was not antagonistic. People did not object to his face, he learned, as much as they objected to his name. Karlos Aguilar, with roots both in Puerto Rico and the Dominican Republic. Khristos Agathangelos, standing in the front yard of his Mediterranean villa in the Greek isles. Or his favorite, Kevin Anderson."[21] As Khaled's white friend Garret points out, "Ka" also refers to the ancient Egyptian concept for the essence of the human soul, exclaiming at Khaled's ignorance of this history, "'Man. Your culture is wasted on you.'"[22] Indeed, as "KA" Khaled primarily uses his online presence to post links to videos and blogs about the migration habits of monarch butterflies, and eventually to connect with Brittany, a white college student in New York City. More generally, Hassib peppers the narrative with Arabic phrases and sentences, often left untranslated, while beginning each chapter with English and Arabic sayings that convey similar (though usually not quite identical) ideas. She explains the latter device as a signal to readers that "stylistically and as commentary on the chapters and also as little subtle hints, maybe to pay attention to how differently we react to similar situations but also to pay attention to how similar we are."[23]

Throughout the novel, readers are intensely aware that the suddenness and extremity of Hosaam's violent act will inevitably lead some of the Al-Menshawys' fellow citizens to view them in reductive, stereotypical terms, despite the many years the family has spent in the community. Khaled recalls the immediate assumption from the police that Hosaam's crime was motivated by extremist religious tendencies, as he tries "to refrain from asking why on earth they thought it made sense that Hosaam did what he did out of religiousness."[24] Similarly, when Nagla's husband Samir, a doctor, sees a local Facebook page at his secretary's insistence that contains potential threats to his family, he reflects, "He had seen it all before, of course: the ethnic slurs, the insistence that *those people* were all inherently violent, the self-satisfied assurance that Islam was the real threat, the suggestion that, for their own sake, they should pack up and move somewhere else where they could *blend in* more easily."[25] Finally, as Samir attempts to address an angry congregation, Khaled recognizes the finality of the Al-Menshawys' place in the community: "Khaled had hoped that, given time, Hosaam's crime would have been accepted as the isolated act of violence that it was, a reflection of nothing other than

[20] Banita, *Plotting*, 302n14.
[21] Rajia Hassib, *In the Language of Miracles*, (New York: Viking, 2015), 64.
[22] Hassib, *Miracles*, 65.
[23] Berrebbah, "Reading," 198.
[24] Hassib, *Miracles*, 118.
[25] Hassib, *Miracles*, 165, original emphasis.

his own madness. Now his entire family would be labeled deranged."[26]

The Al-Menshawys' local experience thus conveys this broader aspect of post-9/11 Arab American identity. As Andrew Shryock observes, "The sense of marginality, the ambivalence about inclusion in (or exclusion from) the cultural mainstream, desires for greater political influence in the United States, the fear of being scrutinized, spied on, and judged a threat to security—this 'structure of feeling' has never been so firmly in place."[27] In the published novel, the memorial service is virtually the only public space in which Nagla confronts these aspects of what Theri Pickens thinks of as the "everyday embodiment of Arab and Black people within the United States."[28] Indeed, Samir at one point reassures Nagla, who objects to his plan to speak at the memorial service, that his public presence as a physician has generated a deeper level of social understanding: "'But you're home alone all the time. I'm interacting with them every day. I know what I'm talking about.'"[29] In the draft version, by contrast, Nagla experiences the daily erasure of her public identity as she is perceived only as the mother of a "terrorist": "Walking behind the pharmacy counter, Nagla felt a familiar thought approach her, engulf her, and sink in, like an inevitable truth: her identity, again, was becoming distilled. She was no longer a pharmacist, an Egyptian-American, Samir's wife, mother of three children, a good cook, a formerly enthusiastic amateur interior decorator—she was simply Hosaam's mother."[30] Strikingly, this list begins with Nagla's professional identity and then proceeds through more family-oriented roles, while Hassib's revisions shift the spaces through which Nagla moves away from any professional context. Before going into further detail on the interpretive implications of such textual changes, though, I will orient that discussion within the broader context of editorial theory and genetic criticism.

Broadly speaking, editorial theory and genetic criticism (two distinct but related fields) seek to trace histories of textual production, to chart authors' processes of composition and revision. (In almost every case, those processes also involve editors, publishers, authors' associates, and other figures.) Scholars working in both areas attempt to map out the routes a published work has taken on its way to publication, i.e. the alternate versions generated by drafts and manuscripts and their revisions, as well as (in most cases) the additional versions generated by post-publication revision (including both multiple published editions and changes between types of publication, e.g. from magazine to book). Whereas many readers tend to see, consciously or unconsciously, a published text as representative of an author's "final" intentions, contemporary editorial theorists and genetic critics

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[26] Hassib, *Miracles*, 253.

[27] Andrew Shryock, "The Moral Analogies of Race: Arab American Identity, Color Politics, and the Limits of Racialized Citizenship," in *Race and Arab Americans Before and After 9/11: From Invisible Citizens to Visible Subjects*, edited by Amaney Jamal and Nadine Naber (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2008), 81.

[28] Theri A. Pickens, *New Body Politics: Narrating Arab and Black Identity in the Contemporary United States* (New York: Routledge, 2014), 1.

[29] Hassib, *Miracles*, 147.

[30] Hassib, "Miracles," 127.

perceive a much more fluid dynamic between stages of textual production. The published form of a text thus represents not a teleological endpoint but one of multiple possible versions that might have made their way into print, given different decisions by authors, editors, publishers, and others at various steps along the way. As Robin G. Schulze suggests, a Darwinian metaphor of authorial selection more accurately represents the creative and publication processes than more idealized conceptions of authorial intention, so that we might "think of texts less like immutable, divinely engineered artifacts and more like variable, responsive, historically embedded organisms."[31] Reading published works from this vantage point tends also to dislodge perceptions of the text as "fixed" or "finished"; as Brenda R. Silver has observed of the effects of reading Virginia Woolf's drafts and manuscripts, for example, "Once we are aware of the manuscript versions and their alternate readings, it becomes impossible, except by a willed act of commitment to a particular interpretative stance, not to be conscious of their presence within the 'final' text."[32]

Based on the surviving documents (and sometimes on documents that can be inferred to have existed), genetic critics seek to recover what Dirk Van Hulle terms the "dynamics of the creative process," an account that emerges from the "tension between the concrete objects of manuscripts that have been left behind and the abstract retrospection to reverse-engineer the process that produced them."[33] This approach yields a conception of the "text," as part of what Van Hulle proposes as a genetic narratology, as a "dynamic succession of versions," and a view of the author as a "succession of selves," as, from a genetic standpoint, "The writer who cancels a word is already different from the one who wrote it."[34] Genetic critics operate at the level of the individual (revised) word, but also at much larger scales of textual organization and structure. I consider both levels of genetic analysis below, in working through both the ripple effects of the large sections of Hassib's draft chapters that are "canceled" from the published novel, as well as the smaller scale of change between an early draft version and the published text of one chapter's closing paragraph.

In doing so, I will be presenting a micro-instance of what John Bryant thinks of as a "revision narrative," a means by which editors (and, in principle, genetic critics) can explain the story of a text's development and change. Such accounts respond to readers' natural interest in textual change, Bryant maintains. Readers, he argues, "gravitate toward revision in ways different from our gravitation toward genesis. This is true because revision always reveals *an intention to change meaning*, and we sense that a text with a history of revision

[31] Robin G. Schulze, "Textual Darwinism, Marianne Moore, the Text of Evolution, and the Evolving Text," *Text* Vol 11 (1998), 301.
[32] Brenda R. Silver, "Textual Criticism as Feminist Practice: Or, Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf Part II," in *Representing Modernist Texts: Editing as Interpretation*, edited by George Bornstein (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1991), 194.
[33] Dirk Van Hulle, *Genetic Criticism: Tracing Creativity in Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022), 138.
[34] Van Hulle, *Genetic*, 163, 11.

is always more deeply interpretable than if that same text were known to us only as an act of genesis."[35] A revision narrative, for Bryant, "leads readers into, and familiarizes them with, the spaces between variant texts," so that they will see how and why a text has changed along its arc toward (and beyond) publication, as a "comparison of sequential versions will always reveal a *strategic* pattern of revision evincing some *reconception of the work itself*."[36] As I will hope to demonstrate in this essay's final section, the "space between" the draft and published chapters in Hassib's novel demonstrates her reconception of that narrative and its representations of racialized and gendered Arab American identities. While a complete revision narrative would consider a much larger array of revisions and rearrangements in Hassib's narrative—and so would require a much longer study, especially one that might eventually locate the textual history of her first novel within a more thorough sense of what will be her eventual oeuvre—I will focus here on this smaller instance of textual change as a window into the kinds of Arab American selves that appear in the novel, and those that might have.

The two most substantial narrative changes from the early draft to the published stage revolve around, again, Nagla's confrontation while working at the pharmacy, as well as a conversation with her mother that delves into the apparent suicide of Nagla's father, an event that has been mysterious for much of her adult life. In the second case, Nagla's mother Ehsan finally reveals the full extent of her husband's erratic behavior, in terms that suggest a likely case of bipolar disorder, which fill in the gaps in Nagla's understanding of his death. This family history leads her to speculate about her own son's seemingly sudden change in demeanor, with immediate if initially unspoken recriminations toward Ehsan: "What if she had confessed to Nagla only two years earlier, when Nagla was calling her every second day complaining about how Hosaam was changing, asking her for advice?"[37] In the draft version of this chapter, this revelation is the one that finally sends Nagla over the edge, leading her to hurl an ashtray through the window (especially as Ehsan seems more concerned in the moment about Samir discovering that Nagla has been smoking inside the house). Over the course of multiple revisions, this section of the chapter becomes refocused, with the history of Nagla's father now entirely excised and replaced with a tense exchange about gender dynamics in Arab and Arab American families, especially in women's tendency not to openly criticize their husbands. From there, Nagla's thoughts shift inexorably from her spouse to her son, as she reevaluates his final weeks of life. Listing mentally the various warning signs that she feels she did not respond to adequately, Nagla concludes, "Such as when he had stopped answering her when she spoke to him. She had told herself that she was giving him the distance he needed, when, she now saw, she had been too cowardly to do otherwise. // It was, of course, all her fault. She had known that for a long time."[38]

[35] John Bryant, *The Fluid Text: A Theory of Revision and Editing for Book and Screen* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2002), 96.

[36] Bryant, *Fluid*, 160, 90, original emphasis.
[37] Hassib, "Miracles," 156.
[38] Hassib, *Miracles*, 161.

This level of revision effectively redirects the etiology of Hosaam's actions away from a family history of mental illness and toward a cultural history of patriarchy, especially in the reinforcement of patriarchal structures by women themselves. In her interview with Berrabbah, Hassib points to the "role women play in making sure that patriarchy persists in the Arab culture. It is not just that men are forcing things and women have no way to say no to this. It is that women themselves have internalized the assumptions behind patriarchy so much that they are policing others and themselves in a way to make sure that patriarchy persists."[39] In the draft chapter, Nagla's burst of anger is largely directed toward her mother, and toward the regret she now feels for not having challenged Ehsan's perpetual reshaping of a true family history. While an earlier conversation with Nagla's closest friend takes place in the draft, about the "need" for Egyptian American women to "support" their husbands, there it leads into a much more damning revelation, from Nagla's perspective, about her mother's decades-long silence regarding her own husband, rather than the more self-directed critique that arrives in the published version. In that iteration of the narrative, Nagla's anger is prompted much more strongly by her recognition of her role, and her mother's, in maintaining traditional patriarchal family structures.

A comparison of each chapter's closing paragraph is instructive along these lines.

Draft version	Published version
Nagla felt herself lift the ashtray up in the air, caught a glimpse of her mother's face as her eyes widened, her hands lifted up in the air as if preparing to make a catch. Then, turning on her heels, Nagla screamed as she flung the ashtray at the windowpane with so much force that the crystal went right through it, shattering it on impact, the shards falling to the floor in a cascade that chimed and twinkled, like rain droplets made of glass.[40]	She groaned. With the most force she could muster she lifted the ashtray up and flung it at those trees, at the window she had often spent hours so futilely scrubbing, at her own reflection as well as at her mother's. The ashtray hit the windowpane with such force that the crystal went right through it, shattering it on impact, the shards falling onto the deck in a cascade that chimed and twinkled, a downpour of glass.[41]

[39] Berrabbah, "Reading," 201.
[40] Hassib, "Miracles," 159.
[41] Hassib, *Miracles*, 162.

While important elements of these paragraphs remain relatively stable across versions, an element of revision studies that I have argued elsewhere should garner more editorial and interpretive attention relative to revision,[42] one of the more striking points of comparison in this case derives from the description of the window before it shatters. The juxtaposition of Nagla's memory of mundane and largely thankless housework with the doubled reflection gestures toward her realization and rejection of the extent to which she has followed in her mother's ultimately patriarchal path, and thus the extent to which she, in the moment at least, seeks to disrupt that pattern. At the same time, Nagla's physical expression of anguish shifts from a scream in the draft version to a groan in the revised version, generating a sharper contrast with the ensuing act of throwing the ashtray that, perhaps, emphasizes further the extreme degree of this reaction, especially for a character who has so rarely reacted to her circumstances with this much force.

These more local revisions clearly stem as well from the ripple effects of changes elsewhere, especially in Hassib's decision to rewrite Nagla's character out of any public, professional space. While drafting the version of the novel that would eventually become her M.A. thesis at Marshall University with novelist Marie Manilla, for instance, Hassib revised these chapters with an eye toward modulating the extremity of the pharmacy incident and Eshan's ensuing revelations. Hassib's notes on a chapter outline of the manuscript at that stage, when Nagla was called "Rania," read:

> [for Chapter 9] Revise the attack at the pharmacy; needs to be more menacing and less violent. [for Chapter 10] Needs to be revised for melodrama/heavy handedness. Revise Ehsan's confession to make it seem more natural. [for Chapter 11] Edit to make sure references to pharmacy attack are consistent with the latest version.

While the later draft version of Nagla's encounter with the racist woman in the pharmacy does not end with her physically assaulting Nagla, she returns home bearing the marks of both psychological trauma and a symbolic red stain on her clerk's shirt, after spilling a prescription bottle while recoiling from the verbal attack. In the revised draft chapter, Ehsan's reaction to Nagla's recounting of the pharmacy episode eventually leads to the revelations about her husband, in response to Nagla's screaming, "'You know nothing of bad luck!'"[43] This outburst follows in turn from a culmination of events, past and future, that finally overwhelm Nagla: "The humiliation at the pharmacy, the upcoming memorial, and her letdown at how her husband and her mother both failed to appreciate her pain all came crashing down on her, a throng of thugs united against her, cornering her, determined to destroy her."[44] The narrative's turn to focalization through Eshan as she reacts to the sobs and demands that follow from Nagla's sense of "pain … crashing down on her" strikingly position Nagla's verbal transgressions as symbolically violent, as

[42] See John K. Young, "Textual Continuity," *Textual Cultures* Vol 14 No 2 (2021): 30-59.

[43] Hassib, "Miracles," 147.
[44] Hassib, "Miracles," 147.

Ehsan "stared at her daughter as if she were holding a disarmed grenade in her hand."[45]

These revisions, and many more besides, are integral to Hassib's compositional process. "I learned that it is perfectly fine to write things and just throw them away," she tells Berrabbah. "I throw away so much. I learned from writing my first novel that revisions are very important."[46] Similarly, Hassib reports completing a full draft of her second novel, about Rose, an Egyptologist who has immigrated to New York and returns to Egypt after her sister Gameela has been killed in a terrorist bombing, in which Gameela is revealed to have survived in the end, before concluding, "it didn't work."[47] As of the date of that interview (2022), Hassib was at work on the first draft for her third novel, but noted that "usually the first draft ends up in the trash."[48]

From a genetic standpoint, how might we retrieve subsequent yet still not final drafts and read through that manuscript palimpsest to approach the versions of Nagla, and thus the versions of a particular Arab American subjectivity, that Hassib worked through on the way to the publication of her first novel? While it may not be possible to rescue the novel's earliest versions from Hassib's trash, there is still a substantial textual record from which to trace this history. Overall, I read Hassib's revision patterns as part of a larger trend in recent Arab American fiction, what Fadda-Conrey understands as a series of "new engagements with US citizenship and belonging that are repositioned outside the frameworks of Orientalism and neoimperialism," as part of an ongoing effort to "reimagine the exclusionary and isolationist elements informing dominant enactments of US citizenship and belonging."[49] Interestingly, the middle of these three draft chapters, focusing primarily on Khaled's meeting with Brittany in New York, is essentially unrevised in contrast to the ones surrounding it, narrating Nagla's attack at the pharmacy and her exchange with Ehsan. Based on a preliminary reading of these manuscript materials, I would see this early version of Khaled as already participating in the kind of non-binary framework that Fadda-Conrey outlines. This difference is likely generational; it is not until the novel's epilogue, taking place several years after the narrative proper, that Khaled makes an adult trip back to Egypt, following Ehsan's death. While the adult character is well aware of himself as a "quasi-Egyptian who spoke Arabic with an American accent,"[50] he ends the novel by imaginatively connecting with the memory of his grandmother and thus negotiates on his own terms his relationship to his family and cultural history, and his post-9/11 Arab American identity. In the draft and published chapters I have examined here, Khaled is anxiously aware of the possibility that Brittany will discover his connection to Hosaam and thus perceive him in the same kinds of reductive ways that his trips to New York, and to see her in particular, would otherwise yield as an escape from the smothering atmosphere of his New Jersey hometown. In both versions of this chapter, he is on the verge of revealing

[45] Hassib, "Miracles," 147.
[46] Berrabbah, "Reading," 203.
[47] Berrebbah, "Reading," 209.
[48] Berrebbah, "Reading," 210.
[49] Fadda-Conrey, *Contemporary*, 3.
[50] Hassib, *Miracles*, 271.

this part of his life to Brittany, but both end with the two of them sitting silently together on a park bench, as Khaled "prayed that she would remain like this for as long as possible."[51]

The changes to Nagla's character, in contrast, reposition her away from a potentially more straightforward narrative of victimhood even while, somewhat ironically, maintaining the gendered dynamic around public, professional vs. private, domestic spaces. The encounter with the white woman in the pharmacy clearly proceeds from an Orientalist standpoint, as she seeks to deny Nagla's potential for belonging and citizenship through the aggressive act of the photograph. Even if the woman's eventual plans for the picture are unclear, they will presumably involve circulating the image through social media, to encourage similar kinds of provocations against Nagla, either in-person or online. Hassib seems to have felt that this kind of narrative might have pushed readers' impressions of Hosaam's violent acts too far in the direction of a "terrorist" script, despite the novel's larger insistence that his motives be understood within different, if largely inscrutable, terms. Eshan's revelations about Nagla's father provide a different kind of explanatory account, locating Hosaam's swerve within the arc of a larger family history, so that their excision similarly renders Hosaam's actions as unexplainable. While Hassib acknowledges that this narrative refusal "drove people crazy,"[52] I would suggest that at least part of that readerly reaction derives from the frustration at not being able to contain Hosaam's narrative within a preestablished cultural framework. Hassib's revisions respond both to Orientalist narratives of terrorism and other narratives surrounding suicide; as she explains to Berrabbah, "I wanted the readers to identify themselves with Hosaam's family and to know that Hosaam is a victim of suicide and that there is no way for them [Hosaam's family] to go back and know how he got to that point."[53] But by removing Nagla from the kind of public space in which she could be forced to confront an intruder seeking to superimpose one kind of story onto Nagla as Hosaam's mother, and simultaneously removing Nagla's family history as another kind of origin story, Hassib locates Nagla and her readers within private spaces that, ultimately, resist the kinds of more public narratives seeking to contain this version of a contemporary Arab American identity. Only by reading the published novel against its draft versions, though, would this effect be fully visible.

Attending to the processes of revision in Arab American literature, and more generally in works seeking to resist hegemonic representations of racialized identities, can offer a significant and particular kind of insight into these efforts at cultural resistance. One of the important directions pursued by recent Arab American writers, Sarah Christine Giese maintains, derives from their attempts "to revamp the resurfacing essentialist understanding of (Arab) identity as something fixed by emphasizing the multilayered fabric of Arab

[51] Hassib, *Miracles*, 146.
[52] Berrebbah, "Reading," 203.
[53] Berrabbah, "Reading," 203.

life."[54] By reading Arab American texts with and against their draft and revised versions, we can trace more fully their formal and narratives routes toward such anti-essentialist depictions, as the possible versions of Arab American identity developed, redesigned, and sometimes discarded along the way to publication demonstrate the full range of aesthetic representations for a multifarious sense of community and individual identity.

[54] Sarah Christine Giese, "'This is My Country Too, You Know!': Intercultural Encounters in Post-9/11 Arab American Drama," in *Radical Planes? 9/11 and Patterns of Continuity*, edited by Dunja M. Mohr and Birgit Däwes (Leiden: Brill Rodopi, 2016), 185.

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