

## **Orientalism as Banality: Interpreting the 1930 Shriner Convention in Toronto**

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In early June 1930 the city of Toronto was in the temporary throes of a Middle-Eastern craze. Minarets had sprouted in the Exhibition Grounds. Men in fezzes and baggy pants paraded through its streets. The lobby of the Royal York Hotel had become a sultan's court. The streets seemed filled with "symbols of the mystical East",<sup>1</sup> giving the city "the atmosphere of old Arabia".<sup>2</sup> Bay Street teemed with "Gaily dressed Arab patrols marching with amazing precision and accompanied everywhere by bands and chanters".<sup>3</sup> At the Exhibition, noted the *Toronto Telegram* "everything is camels and caravans, moguls and mosques".<sup>4</sup> "The mystic atmosphere of the ancient East permeates everywhere. The Pyramids, the Sphinx, the lazy Nile, the wandering Arab and lolloping dromedary are everywhere."<sup>5</sup> The Exhibition became "old Stamboul or Bagdad where thousands are mustering to the great caravansarie".<sup>6</sup> There was a simple explanation for these shameless displays of Middle Eastern fantasy: the city was hosting the 1930 Shriners convention.

The Shriners, as North American readers will know, are a branch of freemasonry, a fraternal order of businessmen and community leaders with a philanthropic reputation. The organization has adopted rituals and costuming inspired by North American fantasies of the Middle East. It is well known for its participation in parades, for operating circuses and for maintaining a network of specialised children's hospitals. Periodically, as in this case, the fraternity gathers in national or regional conventions.

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<sup>1</sup> *Toronto Telegram* 9 June 1930 p. 2.

<sup>2</sup> *Toronto Telegram* 9 June 1930 p. 2.

<sup>3</sup> *Toronto Telegram* 9 June 1930 p. 1.

<sup>4</sup> *Toronto Telegram* 9 June 1930 p. 2.

Ever since the publication of Edward Said's *Orientalism* in 1978 it has seemed impossible to look at western attitudes towards the Middle East without sensing power relations. As Said himself wrote "never has there been a nonmaterial form of Orientalism, much less something so innocent as an "idea" of the Orient".<sup>7</sup> What once seemed to be "innocent" western fantasies about the Middle East are now revealed as manifestations of domination. "Innocent" fantasies turn out to have teeth. By representing the Middle East as an alluring, exotic Other, the western self is expressing a dominant Gaze. There is a linkage between this "Orientalist" Gaze and western efforts at military and colonial interference. Said would see a connection between the absurdities of Shriner orientalism and the spectacle of Shock and Awe in the Red Zone.

In cultural studies generally, and in cultural geography in particular, Said has been very influential for the past 20 years. A user of Foucault's concept of the Gaze, Said's work has led to enormous progress in the field of post-colonial literature. His interpretation has been the backbone of the so-called "new cultural geography" which is rapidly establishing itself as the dominant paradigm. If faced by the task of analysing the Shriners, most cultural geographers would currently reach for Said and Foucault. The orientalism of the Shriners would be mapped onto the Orientalism of Said.

This paper will focus on two important cultural fantasies of the 1930 Shrine convention. The first, most obviously, was the charade of playful orientalism which the Shriners brought to Toronto. The second, less obviously, was the official purpose of that

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<sup>5</sup> *Toronto Telegram* 7 June 1930 p. 2.

<sup>6</sup> *Toronto Telegram* 9 June 1930 p. 2.

convention, which was supposed to be a celebration of peace and international fraternity. This was often tinged with patriotism and a sense of Great War remembrance.

Our account also needs to examine the performance of these fantasies in the presence of an audience. The Shriner festivities were deliberately designed to become a public spectacle, as the Toronto media and civic leadership explained prior to the convention. Although the audience enjoyed the performance of Shriner orientalist fantasy, it didn't take it very seriously. No one really believed the mythology of the Shriners as devotees of a Mystic Shrine. As the newspapers pointed out, it was something of a comic illusion. Although red-tasseled fezzes and baggy pants were much in evidence,<sup>8</sup> there was a general absence of beards.<sup>9</sup> It was decorative but ephemeral, spectacular but obviously artificial. It was much more difficult though to recognize the synthetic qualities of the fantasies concerning peace, patriotism and fraternity. These seemed much more tangible realities to the Shriners and their Toronto audience.

The strength of the Saidian framework, its ability to connect fantasies to discourses of power, is also its main weakness. In its more vulgar forms, especially those common in the New Cultural Geography, we tend only to be interested in the political connotations of culture and cultural fantasy. The political becomes the only important realm in which fantasies have meaning.

This does not seem to be a fully satisfactory way to deal with fantasy, and it probably isn't a realistic way to deal with politics. For Jacques Lacan, for example, it was impossible to reduce fantasy to the political. For the situated human subject, cultural

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<sup>7</sup> Edward Said 1978 *Orientalism* p. 23.

<sup>8</sup> *Toronto Telegram* 9 June 1930 p. 2.

fantasy was simply a manifestation of unconscious Desire. The richness of fantasy could not be reduced to politics, any more than the richness of human psychology could be reduced to power. The potency of cultural fantasy and the economy of signs as Lacan and Baudrillard point out, lies not so much in the realm of politics, as in the realm of psychology.

### *Orientalist Fantasies*

In the later nineteenth and early twentieth centuries North American popular notions of the Middle East were rather farcical. It was a region elastic in its boundaries, fuzzy in both time and space, and jumbled in contents. The symbolism of the Arabian Nights, classical Egypt and Mesopotamia mingled with that of the Ottoman Empire. Under its gaze Islam was reduced to a meaningless jumble of empty decorative symbols. For the Shriners the play-value of the Middle East lay in a combination of its exoticism and remoteness. It was a conveniently remote fantasyland, a plaything of what appeared to be harmless fun.<sup>10</sup>

The Shriners trace their history through two official but broadly incompatible traditions. In one version, steeped in Masonic mythology, they claim to be heirs to an Arabian secret society. It is something which few take seriously. In another, perhaps equally mythological account of their history, they trace their origin to the 1870s.

This version of history states that the fraternity began as an idea among a small number of freemasons who met regularly at New York's Knickerbocker restaurant. Circa 1870 this small band decided to create a new Masonic fraternity which would emphasise

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<sup>9</sup> *Toronto Telegram* 9 June 1930 p. 2.

fun rather than sober ritual. The movement's orientalist tendencies were inspired by some of the parties attended by one of the conspirators; an actor called Billy Florence. Florence had been in Marseilles, on a European tour, when he was invited to a social event hosted by an Arabian diplomat. Something of a musical comedy, the event concluded with an induction into a secret society. It fascinated Florence and he suggested that the new fraternity have a Middle-Eastern theme.<sup>11</sup> The Knickerbockers quickly constructed the mythology and lore of the new organization and developed its costumes and rituals. The movement's designers were not scholars and, apart from Florence, were not world travellers. The result was a rather simple-minded and theatrical form of orientalism, with Masonic tendencies. Styling themselves as the "Ancient Arabian Order of the Nobles of the Mystic Shrine" (AAONMS), they held their first meeting in September 1872.

In Shriner terminology a local branch of the fraternity is known as a Temple, the city in which it is found is known as an "oasis",<sup>12</sup> and the surrounding region is described as a "desert". Becoming a Shriner involved, among other things, a ceremony known as "walking the hot sands". Individual Shriners were known as Nobles, and their leadership, with various orientally-named ranks, was known as a Divan. Shriners greet each other in pidgin Arabic, and wear red fezzes with Shrine emblems. The different kinds of fez tassels denoting rank and function. From 1906 Shriners began to run circuses for fundraising, and continued their earlier traditions of bands, choirs and costumed parades.

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<sup>10</sup> Holly Edwards ed. (2001) *Noble Dreams and Wicked Pleasures: Orientalism in America, 1870-1930* Princeton University Press.

<sup>11</sup> A Short History of the Shrine, Shrine of North America Website <http://www.shrinershq.org/shrine/shorthistory.html> accessed 27 April 2003 at 2:25 p.m. EDT

<sup>12</sup> *Toronto Telegram* 9 June 1930 p. 2.

The idea of a national convention was added in the later 1870s, an innovation made possible by the North American railway system.

A tradition developed of associating the annual conventions with various hokey orientalist symbols. "Park your camel with Uncle Samuel" was the slogan of the 1923 Washington DC convention, while its main parade route was "the Garden of Allah". Toronto's theme in 1930 was "the road to Mecca".<sup>13</sup>

### *Shriners in Toronto*

In the 1930 convention the Shriners made use of Toronto's Exhibition Grounds and its ornamental waterfront. It was their key parade area, and the focus for all the large outdoor events and most of the indoor activities. It was the scene also of the convention's most symbolic ceremonial: the dedication of the Shrine peace monument. The city, conscious that it was in the international spotlight had allowed the Shriners to use the Canadian National Exhibition (CNE) on generous terms.

Lakeshore Boulevard, running along the Lake Ontario shore, was decorated throughout with streamers and signs on light poles.<sup>14</sup> This road was the terminal point for many of the big parades, and the Shriners equipped it with bleacher seating on both sides, to which they charged admission. The city provided ceremonial arches at both the western and eastern entrances to the Exhibition, with simulated domes and minarets.<sup>15</sup>

The Exhibition was renamed the "Rameses Oriental Gardens" for the duration of the convention.<sup>16</sup> Some of its buildings were taken over for administrative purposes;<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> *Toronto Star* 2 June 1930 p. 14

<sup>14</sup> *Toronto Telegram* 3 June 1930 p. 25.

<sup>15</sup> *Toronto Telegram* 3 June 1930 p. 25; 6 June 1930 p. 2.

<sup>16</sup> *Toronto Star* 4 June 1930 p. 30

others were used to accommodate displays of oriental objects. Persian rugs and cooking pots, cashmere shawls, paper maché boxes were displayed alongside silks, daggers and saddle pistols. There was an Arabian Temple of Art, and a Toronto stockbroker exhibited a painting of the Fall of Nineveh which once belonged to Emperor Franz Josef. All of this was quite in keeping with the tradition of the CNE as a place of specular consumption. The 1930 CNE, for example, would feature Madame Bari's travelling collection of Chinese objects, which included displays of silk gowns and a torture chamber.<sup>18</sup>

The Shriners' decorative makeover of several building interiors was assigned to a team of fifteen "imagineers" under the leadership of Franz Johnston.

Johnston, a former member of the Group of Seven, was a prolific artist, who specialised in decorative, commercially marketable middlebrow art. Several of his team had similar profiles, and many were his former students at the Ontario College of Art (OCA). Among Johnston's recent students were Leslie Collins and Franklin "Archie" Arbuckle. Both would become prominent commercial illustrators. Collins was already working for A. McKim Ltd., a national advertising agency. Arbuckle would become a painter of historical scenes for the Hudson Bay Co., a painter of dining-car art for the CPR and eventually would produce more than 100 covers for MacLean's Magazine. The team included a fair number of women, notably Beatrice Maltby, another young Toronto artist and OCA alumna, and Johnston's two daughters, Frances-Anne and Wenawae. Operating as Johnston's assistant was Trevor Tremaine-Garstang, a much-travelled Toronto-based stage manager and character actor. It was a group of commercially oriented practical

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<sup>17</sup> The Ontario Government Building was used for convention registration (*Toronto Telegram* 4 June 1930 p. 1) and the Press Building was used for administration of the Shriner music (*Toronto Telegram* 13 June 1930 p. 3.).

<sup>18</sup> Canadian National Exhibition (1930) *Official Programme* p. 116.

people with good connections to the city's intellectual community. Garstang had been stage manager at both the Uptown and Hart House theatres, for example and his wife had been painted by Johnston's erstwhile colleague, Fred Varley.

Johnston's team had the responsibility of transforming several rather modernist exhibition buildings into suitably orientalized spaces. Their work focussed on the Horticulture Building (built 1907) and the much newer Coliseum (1922) and Automotive Building (1929).

Horticulture was slated to become a pavilion for the Shriner "ladies", for whom it was thought an elegant space would be required. Johnston claimed that careful research had preceded the design of the decoration, no doubt assisted by the OCA library. The team proceeded to install a series of green interior friezes<sup>19</sup> with themes drawn from the Egyptian Book of the Dead. Karnak-like lotus flowers were applied to supporting pillars. A series of parchment lampshades were added to the interior lights, while a giant example, sporting scarab beetle decorations, covered the chandelier above the building's central fountain.

The Coliseum was made over in Shriner colours, using fireproof crepe bunting and various other Shriner symbols. The Coliseum was to serve as a space for concerts, a luncheon, a featherweight title-match ("Frenchy" Belanger versus Frankie Genaro),<sup>20</sup> a dog show<sup>21</sup> and an induction ceremony in which more than 200 Toronto men "walked the hot sands".<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> *Toronto Star* 7 June 1930 p. 1.

<sup>20</sup> *Toronto Telegram* 5 June 1930 p. 11.

<sup>21</sup> *Toronto Telegram* 10 June 1930 p. 24.

<sup>22</sup> *Toronto Telegram* 9 June 1930 p. 26.

A key interior transformation took place in the Automotive Building. Lifesize fake camels were provided to guard the entrances,<sup>23</sup> while 12,000 square feet of beaverboard transformed the interior. The result, claimed the designers without a hint of blasphemy, was an "authentic" replica of the Courtyard of the Black Stone. Moorish arches were added to the interior windows, there was a stage for a 150-piece orchestra, a dance floor and a café.<sup>24</sup> To add authenticity to this bizarre representation of the holy city of Mecca, painted pyramids, palm trees, sand dunes, camels and the odd Arab had been added. This egregious and perhaps somewhat vulgar parody of Islam's most sacred site was to serve as a cabaret and Shriner nightspot during the convention. It is not clear whether it was licenced to serve liquor but it did feature a resident ventriloquist and a troupe of 24 scantily clad dancing girls.

Transformed into an "Arabian Oasis", claimed the *Toronto Star*, the public "would scarcely recognize the old Exhibition grounds. Mecca, Cairo, Damascus, Crete, Arabia, Jerusalem, Samarcand, Mesopotamia, the Gardens of Allah, and the Sahara, (are) all flung into a coloured cyclorama of a super-magnified motion picture".<sup>25</sup>

The place-making was certainly not confined to the Exhibition Grounds. The private sector played a significant role with the greatest efforts being made by the city's major railway companies. The Canadian National Railways (CNR) reconfigured its Spadina coach yards to serve as a sleeping-car dormitory during the convention.<sup>26</sup> The facility, renamed "Temple Park" had showers, washrooms, barbershops, laundries and ceremonial arches. Its arch-rival, the Canadian Pacific (CPR) went one better and built its

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<sup>23</sup> *Toronto Telegram* 6 June 1930 p. 2; *Toronto Star* 7 June 1930 p. 1.

<sup>24</sup> *Toronto Star* 7 June 1930 p. 1.

<sup>25</sup> *Toronto Star* 7 June 1930 p. 3.

<sup>26</sup> *Toronto Telegram* 3 June 1930 p. 25.

own railyard of 21 acres, laying 12 miles of track. The place had its own temporary rail station as well as the usual complement of ceremonial arches,<sup>27</sup> and ancillary facilities. The CPR's "Fez City" even had its own "mayor", a company official.

The Province of Ontario, perhaps at the instigation of its Shriner Minister of Highways, constructed a ceremonial arch on University Avenue at College, and decorated a section of the street. The City of Toronto constructed a large, expensive, illuminated tableau on the front of City Hall,<sup>28</sup> facing the cenotaph, a focal point in Shriner parade geography. There was also a temporary bandstand where more than 40 Shriner bands would play. The city organized a competition to "Shine up for Shriners", providing it with office space and aldermen to act as judges. A few days before the convention Mayor Wemp, a Shriner himself, issued a proclamation to decorate the city.<sup>29</sup>

Some of the private sector decorations and displays were rather elaborate. Ryrie & Birks, the Yonge Street jewellers covered the front of their store in a giant illuminated Shriner jewel. On Danforth Avenue the Businessmen's Association draped bunting from the streetcar wires<sup>30</sup> while Eaton's department store promoted its "Oriental" restaurant and Shriner writing room. Fresh paint and bunting were much in evidence everywhere.

The city's merchants were keen to cash in on the orientalist craze, selling flags, bunting,<sup>31</sup> berets,<sup>32</sup> cameras,<sup>33</sup> pens and novelty table lamps with Shriner themes. The Adams Furniture Company advertised a special offer to put a new radio in the home in

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<sup>27</sup> *Toronto Telegram* 3 June 1930 p. 25.

<sup>28</sup> *Toronto Telegram* 7 June 1930 p. 1.

<sup>29</sup> *Toronto Telegram* 5 June 1930 p. 17.

<sup>30</sup> *Toronto Telegram* 7 June 1930 p. 1.

<sup>31</sup> *Toronto Telegram* 5 June 1930 p. 25.

<sup>32</sup> *Toronto Telegram* 5 June 1930 p. 22.

<sup>33</sup> *Toronto Telegram* 3 June 1930 p. 21, Eaton's ad.

time for the "Big Shrine Broadcast".<sup>34</sup> Dr Scholl told the public that his sandals were just the thing for walking on hot sand. The A&P company which won the contract to supply coffee to the convention, trumpeted its "Bokar" blend as a Shrine-endorsed beverage.<sup>35</sup> Unwilling to be outshone, Loblaw's Groceterias used the convention to launch their new "Pride of Arabia" brand of coffee,<sup>36</sup> and offered free tours of their grocery warehouse.<sup>37</sup> The British-American Oil Co., printed and distributed special Shriner-themed road maps of the province, while their corporate rival the McColl-Frontenac Red Indian raised his hand in greeting to camel-herding Shriners in newspaper print-ads.<sup>38</sup>

### *Fantasies of Peace and Fraternity*

While a simple-minded orientalism provided a theme for placemaking and decoration, the organizers of the convention saw their official purpose in connection with the celebration of peace and fraternity. They arranged for the unveiling of a Peace Monument as the convention's centrepiece.<sup>39</sup> It was the ceremonial focus for the Shriners in 1930 and remains the central theme of much of the historical memory of the convention.<sup>40</sup>

The monument was apparently the brainchild of Imperial Potentate Youngworth. It was supposed to commemorate the peacefulness and brotherhood implied by undefended Canada-US border, as well as the international fraternity of the Shrine. With the rose-coloured glasses of well-meaning amnesia the convention overlooked the Aroostook War of the 1840s, the cross-border tensions of the 1830s and 1860s, and

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<sup>34</sup> *Toronto Telegram* 5 June 1930 p. 5.

<sup>35</sup> *Toronto Telegram* 9 June 1930 p. 7.

<sup>36</sup> *Toronto Telegram* 6 June 1930 p. 15.

<sup>37</sup> *Toronto Telegram* 5 June 1930 p. 31.

<sup>38</sup> *Toronto Telegram* 11 June 1930 p. 15.

<sup>39</sup> Canadian National Exhibition (1930) *Annual Report* p. 80.

instead celebrated more than 100 years of supposed peace and goodwill between the 49<sup>th</sup> Parallel neighbours.<sup>41</sup>

A committee of the Shriner leadership selected Charles Keck to be the sculptor.<sup>42</sup> He was a New Yorker and a fairly-well-known monumental artist. A Shriner of Brooklyn's Kismet Temple, he designed a number of public sculptures, coins, medals, and plaques in the 1920s and 1930s, including the friezes on the Bronx NY county building, and the Liberty Statue in Rio de Janeiro. His design for the peace monument took the form of an angel, positioned to face the Niagara River, with arms raised bearing olive branches. The monument was to be installed in the Exhibition Grounds on the north side of Lakeshore Boulevard, between the Manufacturing Building and the phallic Fort Rouillé monument.<sup>43</sup>

The unveiling ceremony involved the last of the great Shriner parades of the 1930 convention, on the afternoon of 12<sup>th</sup> June. Described rather hyperbolically as "pageantry unrivalled in the modern world"<sup>44</sup> Some 25,000 Shriner nobles converged on the monument in marching columns,<sup>45</sup> with Goodyear's newest blimp, the *Defender*, hovering overhead. At 3.30 p.m. the marchers had reached the monument and the bands played "God save the King".<sup>46</sup>

Music for the ceremony was provided by the Shriners massed bands, some 3,000 strong, supported by a massed Shriner choir of 800.<sup>47</sup> It was hoped that the harmony of

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<sup>40</sup> *Toronto Star* 10 August 1985 Donald Jones column; Canadian National Exhibition (1958) *Annual Report* p. 68.

<sup>41</sup> *Toronto Telegram* 12 June 1930 p. 1; 13 June 1930 p. 3.

<sup>42</sup> *Toronto Telegram* 10 January 1930 p. 11.

<sup>43</sup> *Toronto City Council Minutes* 1930 Appendix A: Board of Control Report #14 p. 918.

<sup>44</sup> *Toronto Telegram* 12 June 1930 p. 1.

<sup>45</sup> *Toronto Telegram* 12 June 1930 p. 1.

<sup>46</sup> *Toronto Telegram* 12 June 1930 p. 1.

<sup>47</sup> *Toronto Telegram* 12 June 1930 p. 1.

the musicians would demonstrate the "unity of sympathies in a great continent".<sup>48</sup> Prayers by Shriner clergymen and speeches from Shriner dignitaries would be interspersed with solemn silences and the "national airs of four countries" as a powerful demonstration of fraternity and peace.<sup>49</sup> Allegiance to a common faith was to be symbolised by the massed bands playing the Protestant hymn "Onward Christian Soldiers".<sup>50</sup> The bands also played the locally-composed Shriner peace march<sup>51</sup> and the massed choir sang "Abide with me".<sup>52</sup> Through the magic of radio, the parliamentary carillon in Ottawa joined the gathering with a rendering of "O Canada", followed by a few words from Prime Minister Mackenzie King. The massed bands played the "Star Spangled Banner" and Secretary of State Stimson addressed the gathering by radio from Washington DC.<sup>53</sup> The anthems of Cuba and Mexico followed with speeches from their national representatives.<sup>54</sup>

The climax of the event was the unveiling of the monument itself. It had been draped by representatives of Canada's blind war veterans, and by the Toronto police. They had used two significant flags for the purpose, a white ensign previously used at the British national cenotaph in London, and a Stars & Stripes previously used to cover the tomb of the unknown soldier at Arlington National Cemetery.<sup>55</sup> The unveiling ceremony featured the Canadian Legion and the Shriners' Legion of Honor, representing of

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<sup>48</sup> *Toronto Telegram* 12 June 1930 p. 1.

<sup>49</sup> *Toronto Telegram* 12 June 1930 p. 1.

<sup>50</sup> *Toronto Telegram* 12 June 1930 p. 1.

<sup>51</sup> *Toronto Star* 5 June 1930 p. 1.

<sup>52</sup> *Toronto Star* 4 June 1930 p. 21.

<sup>53</sup> *Toronto Telegram* 12 June 1930 p. 5.

<sup>54</sup> *Toronto Telegram* 12 June 1930 p. 5.

<sup>55</sup> *Toronto Telegram* 13 June 1930 p. 3.

Canadian and US war veterans. "We could not do anything better to promote world peace" said a US representative.<sup>56</sup>

At a simple level, the Shrine gathered in 1930, if not in the Name of the Father, then in the name of peace and fraternity. The Shrine leadership termed it "the peace session",<sup>57</sup> and the unveiling of the peace monument was certainly its highlight. Imperial Potentate Youngworth, explained the *Telegram*, entered the city on not in conquest but in goodwill, friendship and peace.<sup>58</sup> It was a theme he repeated in his speeches, notably at the Shrine Dedication service on 8<sup>th</sup> June. On this occasion, in front of 20,000 Toronto people, he spoke of peace and brotherhood.<sup>59</sup> "There is nothing really secret about Masonry," he said. "It is a philosophy. Its fundamental principle is the brotherhood of all men of all the world".<sup>60</sup> "We are all children of the same Father, all with the same ideals" he continued.<sup>61</sup>

The simplicity of the official purpose belies a more complex and confusing reality. The emphasis on "peace", for example, was expressed through martial metaphors, of flags and marching feet. It was also clear that the Shriners saw comradeship in war as a manifestation of fraternity. The mythical "goodfellowship" of an undefended Canada-US border was somehow connected to a mythology of international loyalty in the Great War. Peace was somehow associated with military solidarity and 49<sup>th</sup>-parallel fraternity.

### *Combined Fantasies*

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<sup>56</sup> *Toronto Telegram* 13 June 1930 p. 3.

<sup>57</sup> *Toronto Telegram* 9 June 1930 p. 26.

<sup>58</sup> *Toronto Telegram* 9 June 1930 p. 2.

<sup>59</sup> *Toronto Telegram* 9 June 1930 p. 2.

The 1930 Shrine convention included, as has been pointed out, a combination of fantasy themes, both orientalist and patriotic. It involved performance of both: the mask of orientalism on the face of civic religion. One of the most emblematic performances of these two themes was to be found in the convention's primary fireworks display.

The fireworks were held at the Exhibition grandstand. Tuesday 10<sup>th</sup> June was probably the grandest of the various nightly displays, with a large variety of pyrotechnics. The clear intention was to reconcile the themes of orientalism with those of peace and fraternity. The display began with a "welcome" tableaux of patriotic pictures (firey portraits of King George V, President Hoover, the Prince of Wales and George Washington) interspersed with Middle-Eastern fantasies: "the pearl of peace", "the queen of the night" and "the garden of Omar Khyaam". The display continued with a climacteric "*ne plus ultra*" of 12,000 square feet of fireworks. These traced out the pyramids of Giza, illuminated mechanical camels and a representation of a volcanic Mount Ararat erupting. The display concluded with more patriotic symbolism, with the national flags of Britain, the USA, the maple leaf and the eagle.

Although the other events of the convention were characterised by similar combinations of these fantasy themes, it would be wrong to suppose that there were no others. The grand illuminated Shriner parade of 11<sup>th</sup> June, for example, is a reminder that the fantasy world of Shriner performance was freighted with many contrasting meanings.

You certainly saw the familiar combinations of orientalism and patriotism in the Grand Parade. The Union Jack and the Stars & Stripes accompanied the men in baggy pants, but there was much more in this economy of signs. The Shriners of Kansas City,

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<sup>60</sup> *Toronto Telegram* 9 June 1930 p. 26.

<sup>61</sup> *Toronto Star* 9 June 1930 p. 30.

for instance, paraded in blackface dressed as "Zulus", while the Shriners of Calgary wore cowboy hats and chaps. Even in the rather disjointed and jumbled geography of orientalist fantasy these seem rather strange expressions. We can explain the presence of the pipe band of the 48<sup>th</sup> Highlanders of Canada, because, after all it was musical parade, but there were other kilted Shriner bands of rather dubious orientalism. The orientalism of the San Francisco Shriners, who brought a Chinese dragon with them, was somewhat modified by the fact that each wore a Mexican hat and carried an illuminated cactus. The giant illuminated mosquito float which accompanied the Newark NJ delegation was spectacular without being either obviously patriotic or obviously orientalist. More topical was the Eaton's department store company who contributed a float in the form of a sphynx, but as they did so the Los Angeles Shriners, dressed as Mexicans, danced in front of the reviewing stand. It was an event of jarringly contrasting symbols, with popcorn cannons, circus elephants, and the Goodyear blimp overhead. We certainly can't reduce all of these symbols to patriotism and orientalism. It is evident that there was much more going on. It is a reminder that cultural fantasies are complex and problematic to read.

*Watching the Parade: the discourse of the Audience*

On the morning of Sunday 8<sup>th</sup> June 1930, parts of downtown Toronto were packed with expectant crowds. Surrounding the north and west sides of Union Station the great throng "made Front Street look like some giant mass meeting",<sup>62</sup> and almost blocked the station's Bay Street entrance. It lined both sides of Bay all the way to City Hall. The crowd was good-natured, but it was also a "shoving, pushing swarm".<sup>63</sup> Four kilometres

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<sup>62</sup> *Toronto Telegram* 9 June 1930 p. 2.

<sup>63</sup> *Toronto Telegram* 9 June 1930 p. 2.

to the north another substantial crowd lined the streets around the North Toronto CPR station. By 9:15 a.m. it had surrounded the building and stretched 500 metres southwards to Ramsden Park along both sides of Yonge Street.<sup>64</sup> As it turned out, one of these crowds was waiting in the wrong place.<sup>65</sup>

The crowds were waiting for the first spectacular parade of the 1930 Shrine convention: the official arrival of the Shrine leadership. Coming in on the 10:00 a.m. train from Los Angeles, the dignitaries would process from the station to the Royal York Hotel. The crowd in North Toronto would be disappointed to find that the train actually pulled into the CPR's new depot at Fez City, some four kilometres to the southwest. On arrival the Imperial Potentate posed for the usual press photographs, and greeted Mayor Wemp, before proceeding in a white convertible. A substantial honour guard of Toronto's Rameses Shriners accompanied the parade, with bands, chanters and drill routines in the June sunshine. Substantial crowds lined the route along Fleet Street and became so thick near Union Station that the street was almost blocked. Although it was a small parade, it was well attended for a quiet Toronto Sunday morning. It was evidently enjoyed by the crowd and the city's journalists spilled considerable ink in describing it with superlative clichés.

This opening performance proved quite representative of the reaction of Toronto people. They turned out in considerable numbers to watch Shriner events. During the afternoon of 8<sup>th</sup> June, some 20,000 people attended the Shrine dedication service at the exhibition grandstand.<sup>66</sup> After a substantial crowd for the mid-day "educational" parade on 11<sup>th</sup> June, an estimated 160,000 people watched the grand illuminated parade late that

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<sup>64</sup> *Toronto Star* 9 June 1930 p. 4.

<sup>65</sup> *Toronto Star* 9 June 1930 p. 4.

evening.<sup>67</sup> Many of them remained until the parade finished at 3.00 a.m. There were some lulls in attendance, notably at the Shrine circus on 7<sup>th</sup> June, and at the boxing match on 10<sup>th</sup> June, but on the whole the events were well-attended. The Shriners were banking on this, and indeed hoped to finance their convention by selling tickets to the grandstand and boulevard seats. The events of the convention were deliberately designed to draw a crowd, and form a spectacle. The convention was supposed to be a public performance.

The sense of performing to a crowd was very obvious in the downtown parades of Empire Day, 9<sup>th</sup> June 1930. At around 10.00 am the Shriners of Murat Temple, Indianapolis, paraded up Toronto's Bay Street from the area of Union Station to the Cenotaph at City Hall. Murat's drum and bugle corps and oriental band led the way, followed by a rifle squad in Zouave uniforms, a choir and a drill team of 55. In all some "210 men in gaudy uniforms"<sup>68</sup> marched, drilled and sang their way up Bay, dragging a trench mortar and a gatling gun with them. In front of the Toronto Stock Exchange, amid showers of ticker tape, the drill team built themselves into a human pyramid, narrowly missing the trolley wires, while the gatling and mortar were fired for the amusement of the crowd.

While Murat's parade embodied spectacular militarism the city's newspapers readily used the same metaphors in their coverage of the event. The *Telegram* described it as "a chaos of colour",<sup>69</sup> in which the "Marching Hosts"<sup>70</sup> of "gorgeously garbed visitors"<sup>71</sup> "literally took possession of down-town Toronto this morning".<sup>72</sup> The parade

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<sup>66</sup> *Toronto Telegram* 9 June 1930 p. 2.

<sup>67</sup> *Toronto Telegram* 12 June 1930 p. 2.

<sup>68</sup> *Toronto Telegram* 9 June 1930 p. 21.

<sup>69</sup> *Toronto Telegram* 9 June 1930 p. 2.

<sup>70</sup> *Toronto Telegram* 9 June 1930 p. 1.

<sup>71</sup> *Toronto Telegram* 9 June 1930 p. 2.

<sup>72</sup> *Toronto Telegram* 9 June 1930 p. 1.

was a scene of "vivid, shifting, shimmering colour, the flutter of pennons, the gleam of lances in the sun, the cadent swinging of ... uniformed legs".<sup>73</sup> "Invading Shriners Take Toronto by Storm"<sup>74</sup> said one headline. It was as if "a potentate of an Asiatic power with pomp and circumstance entered the forgotten city of the old east, when the walls fell in and the gates were thrown open to the gorgeously garbed invader sweeping down in triumph".<sup>75</sup> The Shriners lacked only "chariots and spearmen"<sup>76</sup> to seem like "an avenging host of old Assyria"<sup>77</sup>. It was with distinctly military metaphors that Toronto's scribes greeted "the invasion of the Men of the Fez".<sup>78</sup>

The Shriners also seemed to represent cacophony and disturbance. Murat paraded with the "throb of drums" and "crashings of swelling, stunning martial music".<sup>79</sup> The Temple was "a jovial gang of din-producers".<sup>80</sup> They serenaded the *Telegram* offices "while their body of gunners were exploding things in the street"<sup>81</sup> the chanters sang 'Bells of St Mary's', 'Happy Days' and several other numbers, "then sallied forth to further adventure".<sup>82</sup> The streets throbbed with "the clatter and clanging, the ceaseless blowing of whistles, spinning of klick-klacks, blaring of bugles and thumping drums".<sup>83</sup> It was a time of "Continuous Pageants on Front Street".<sup>84</sup>

Hyperbolic metaphors of disturbance abounded in the press coverage. Hotel lobbies become "bedlam, an hilarious hubbub with the laughter and shout of

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<sup>73</sup> *Toronto Telegram* 9 June 1930 p. 2.

<sup>74</sup> *Toronto Telegram* 9 June 1930 p. 1.

<sup>75</sup> *Toronto Telegram* 9 June 1930 p. 2.

<sup>76</sup> *Toronto Telegram* 9 June 1930 p. 2.

<sup>77</sup> *Toronto Telegram* 9 June 1930 p. 2.

<sup>78</sup> *Toronto Telegram* 9 June 1930 p. 2.

<sup>79</sup> *Toronto Telegram* 9 June 1930 p. 2.

<sup>80</sup> *Toronto Telegram* 9 June 1930 p. 2.

<sup>81</sup> *Toronto Telegram* 9 June 1930 p. 2.

<sup>82</sup> *Toronto Telegram* 9 June 1930 p. 2.

<sup>83</sup> *Toronto Telegram* 9 June 1930 p. 2.

<sup>84</sup> *Toronto Telegram* 9 June 1930 p. 1.

goodfellowship coming over the transoms and roaring down the corridors and into the street while the dining rooms clashed and clattered and thronged with the hungry faithful".<sup>85</sup> Not content with taking over 12 floors of the Royal York Hotel, the Shriners appropriated laundry tubs from the basement and staged impromptu chariot races in the corridors.<sup>86</sup> The city, claimed the Telegram, had become a "Mecca for School Boy Pranks".

Watching parades was something of an established Toronto practice, as Peter Goheen has pointed out. Ranging from religious processions, to union marches and the July 12<sup>th</sup> Orangemen's parade, there was a long parading tradition on the city's streets. It extended to the tradition of certain routes being used, certain destinations being reached and monuments being passed. The front of city hall frequently served as a rallying point, a place for speeches, ceremonial or other official acknowledgement of a parade's purpose. Indeed, it was no co-incidence that the front of city hall, which had been used for so many civic farewells to military parades in 1914-18, would, in 1925, become the site of the city's main cenotaph.

The organizers of the 1930 Shrine convention drew expertly on these traditions, and their parades took advantage of the symbolic order of the city's landscape. Bay Street, the city's main business artery, was used for several parades. The front of city hall, with its cenotaph and steps, became a destination for several marches and episodes of wreath laying. It was one of the spots where Toronto's Shriner mayor would shake hands with the Imperial Potentate, and where Murat's rifle squad would fire a salute. The city had adorned the spot with an illuminated tableau and bandstand. The use of the

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<sup>85</sup> *Toronto Telegram* 9 June 1930 p. 2.

<sup>86</sup> *Toronto Star* 9 June 1930 p. 30.

Exhibition and Fleet Street as Shrine parade routes recalled the established Toronto practices of parades on Labour Day and Warriors Day. The aesthetic traditions of Toronto parades were continued with prominent use of Canadian flags and other familiar symbols.

It is therefore easy to understand why the convention attracted large crowds. Both the Shriners and the citizens could recognize their roles. The Shriners were performing and the city was willing to watch. Journalists who viewed the "sidewalks jammed with vast masses of humanity"<sup>87</sup> on 9<sup>th</sup> June, recalled the Armistice festivities of 1918. Whether they saw the parade, or sometimes waited in vain, Toronto people seemed willing to watch the spectacle that the Shriners provided. The people of Toronto, a city of parades, were keen to be an audience.

Yet in the months preceding the sense of symbolic performance had worked the other way round. In the long months of preparation civic leaders seem to have been conscious of the city being placed in the spotlight by the convention. As they pondered the projected arrival of 200,000 Shriners (the estimates kept changing) Toronto's civic leaders sensed an excellent opportunity for boosterism. Toronto, they thought, would be performing for a symbolic Shriner audience.

Shriner requests for the use of the city's Exhibition Park were granted without fuss. A subsidy of \$25,000 was approved and arrangements were made to decorate Lake Shore Road, Fleet Street and University Avenue. The city not only paid for expensive illuminations on the front of City Hall, but also secured the necessary permits for this extraordinary expenditure from Queen's Park. Hearing that the convention programme

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<sup>87</sup> *Toronto Telegram* 9 June 1930 p. 1.

would have a circulation of 50,000 across the continent, the city readily agreed to purchase a full-page advertisement.

Driving this enthusiasm was the not-unfounded belief that the Shriners were leaders in their own communities. They were businessmen and politicians, the sort of people who might invest in the city. Toronto itself had Shriners on city council, there were Shriners in Queen's Park and there would shortly be one in the premier's office. The convention seemed like an excellent opportunity to advertise the Queen City, and promote it in front of a continental audience.

The civic promotional programme was matched by appeals to the citizenry and businesses. The city's newspapers (especially the Telegram) endorsed these schemes. The Telegram created a special *Shriner Accommodation Wanted* section in its classified pages, and ran ads soliciting potential landlords.

Enthusiasm for the convention was fairly widespread among the city's prominent business houses. Several put up decorations, some of which were extensive and elaborate. Several of the bigger businesses agreed to supply floats for the parades. As the convention approached, merchants began to publish Shrine-themed advertisements, and to offer souvenir merchandise.

The city's sense of being on display was evident in the arrangements for radio broadcast of the convention proceedings. Coverage was not only extensive on the local airwaves,<sup>88</sup> but was to be relayed to distant audiences. The Toronto media, for example, seemed proud that Ted Husing, a prominent radio personality, would host the broadcast of the Shriner's peace ceremony across the Columbia system.<sup>89</sup> Through the magic of

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<sup>88</sup> *Toronto Telegram* 7 June 1930 p. 27.

<sup>89</sup> *Toronto Telegram* 9 June 1930 p. 26.

radio, dignitaries in Ottawa, London and Washington DC would participate in the Toronto ceremony. It would, claimed the *Toronto Telegram*, be broadcast throughout the world.

Consciousness of a symbolic audience continued through the convention. The size of this audience was unclear, but the enthusiasts hoped it would at least be continental in size and possibly global. The city's newspapers, prominent voices in civic boosterism, continued to stress the importance of the visitors. Lu Lu Temple of Philadelphia would bring 1,000 of the city's prominent businessmen, promised the *Telegram*. Medinah Temple in Chicago would draw its delegation from its membership of 30,000. A prominent Shriner musician, John Philip Sousa, would conduct the massed bands at the unveiling of the peace monument.<sup>90</sup> There would be 13 state governors and their representatives at the convention, and ambassadors from Mexico, Panama and Cuba. One report claimed that the President of Cuba would attend in person.<sup>91</sup> Among such luminaries, the attendance of James T M Anderson, Premier of Saskatchewan, paled into insignificance. It was shortly revealed that the embassies were informal ones, involving retired colonels in comic-opera uniforms. Sousa like President Machado, was a no-show, but it did not prevent the Toronto papers from basking in these feats of diplomatic grandeur.

Toronto's relationship with the Shriners, therefore, was discursive. In this discourse of the audience the Shriners could be performers or symbolic spectators. The city (at least in the minds of its leadership) was on a mirrored stage before the Gaze of the world. Once the convention started, and there were things for the public to see, the

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<sup>90</sup> *Toronto Star* 4 June 1930 p. 21

<sup>91</sup> *Toronto Star* 4 June 1930 p. 21

discourse of the audience shifted. It had become possible for ordinary Toronto people to see the Shriners for themselves. The fantasy of Shriner orientalism whetted the public Desire to watch. While the city remained on display, the citizens became an audience in the tens of thousands.

To these conscious audiences of the living, we should add the symbolic audience of the dead. The public ceremonies of the 1930 convention were tinged with Great War remembrance, as Shriner ceremonial opened with wreaths at the cenotaph and closed with war veterans unveiling the angel of peace.

The Shrine dedication service of 8<sup>th</sup> June 1930 in fact used the same hymns which were sung to dedicate Toronto's cenotaph in 1925: "Abide with me" and "O God our help in ages past".<sup>92</sup> Both were crowded events, with speeches from dignitaries and similar accompaniment by military-style bands and massed choirs. These were also the conventional trappings of Protestant remembrance and contemporary civic religion.

The dedication of the cenotaph in 1925 had expressed a master signifier of the interwar years: the troubling shadow of the Glorious Dead. Sanitised through patriotism and militarised religiosity the sacrifice had been appalling. Some 60,000 Canadians had perished in the conflict, including 5,000 Toronto men. Fresh in memory in 1925, and still in 1930, these men who hungered and thirsted no more lurked in the mind as a symbolic audience.

Toronto's Canon H. J. Cody expressed the sentiment eloquently at the 1925 dedication. Well-known in the city as a trenchant supporter of militarised evangelical Christianity, his parish, St Paul's Bloor Street, was the only Anglican church in the Toronto diocese to have a rifle range in the basement. His wartime exhortations from the

pulpit had, no doubt, sent many lambs to the great slaughter. For the city's Glorious Dead, he said, "this cenotaph will be a mystic shrine".<sup>93</sup>

The Gaze of the ghosts was much in evidence five years later when the Shriners paid their respects to Toronto's war dead. Murat's parade on 9<sup>th</sup> June 1930 had the symbolic task of laying a wreath at the Toronto cenotaph. "I can conceive of nothing more fitting for any United States Shrine unit to perform on its visit to Canadian soil than this", said Murat Potentate Laird as he laid the wreath. Mayor Sullivan of Indianapolis noted that the American Shriners were "moved with the same emotion in commemorating ... your departed as they would be in decorating the graves of the dead in their own land". Sullivan's speech continued with references to "Canada's heroic dead" and to the peace-making possibilities of international brotherhood and Masonic fraternity. Toronto's Mayor Wemp replied by saying that the peace of the world was "now in the hands of the English-speaking peoples of Great Britain and the United States. Toronto clergyman F C Ward-Whate declared that as long as the British Empire and the US stood together there would be hope for the peace of the world"<sup>94</sup>

### *Analysis*

At first glance, it is not difficult to subject this material to a Saidian explanation. The references to 49<sup>th</sup>-Parallel fraternity, for example, are not altogether disconnected from the themes of military alliance in times of war. The spectre of the Glorious Dead, which might be read in many ways, has powerful connections to nationalism and the ideologies of the powerful. The reduction of the Middle East to a simple-minded fantasy has

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<sup>92</sup> *Toronto Telegram* 11 November 1925 pp. 19, 26.

<sup>93</sup> *Toronto Telegram* 11 November 1925 p. 26.

ominous connotations to a number of Saidian scholars.<sup>95</sup> If you want to, you can read the Shrine convention as an example of fantasies being connected to politics in the now-conventional way. Said has been determined to point out that the fantasies of Orientalism only come into their true meaning the realm of politics. For Said, the political is a privileged discourse. The fantastic is to be understood in terms of the political.

Orientalism and analogous cultural fantasies may, of course, be analysed in other ways, the ideas of Jacques Lacan and Jean being simply the most obvious. Like Foucault, Jacques Lacan came to prominence in French cultural theory in the 1960s and 1970s. As the field of Orientalism emerged the ideas of both thinkers were applied to the topic of Middle Eastern fantasies in the western mind. In 1977, a year before Said published his *Orientalism*, Alain Grosrichard published his *Sultan's Court* using a Lacanian framework. He argued that western fantasies about the despotism of the sultan's court had played a significant role in the formulation of Enlightenment politics. Crucial aspects of the modern West were therefore based on fantasies about an oriental Other. Said, using some of Foucault's writings, dealt with the succeeding period in which Western dominance over the Middle East was accompanied by Orientalist fantasies. In the end it was Said's writing which got most of the attention and, although cultural studies embraces a wide variety of theory, cultural geographers tended to ride on the Said-Foucault bandwagon. Lacan and a number of other theoretical approaches were eclipsed.

This paper has attempted to redress the balance by posing a number of Lacanian questions. We have asked about the form and content of Shriner fantasies, and about

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<sup>94</sup> *Toronto Telegram* 9 June 1930 p. 21.

<sup>95</sup> Oleg Grabar "Roots and Others" in Edwards ed. (2001), p. 8.

their real and symbolic audiences. As situated human subjects, they were enmeshed in the performance of cultural fantasy. These were cultural fantasies which, simultaneously, connected to the kinds of political dimensions which Said talks about, but also to many other things. They were outcomes of Desire in the conscious mind, their richness and complexity structured by the complex language of the unconscious. Shriner orientalism, however colourful and farcical never quite captured the minds of the participants, it never succeeded in alienating them (in Lacanian terms). They were enthralled by its pageantry, and they might stay up until 3:00 a.m. to watch the parades, but they were never quite captured by its images. They could see through this orientalism, although they had only hazy notions of the "genuine" Middle East. They were not so perceptive towards the mythologies of patriotism, fraternity and coffee-table pacifism. These they found much more captivating fantasies.

It is an approach friendly to the insights of Jean Baudrillard. In Toronto 1930 we evidently have a society of mass-consumers of cultural fantasies, of visual images and many consumer goods, of signs and symbols. Some parts of this economy of signs seem ordered, others are jumbled and inconsistent.

The answer is not, to paraphrase Baudrillard, to "forget Said", but to explore other ways of examining cultural meaning. Sometimes it may be productive to treat Orientalism as Dominance, but in other situations we may be better to treat Orientalism as banality.