
**Metamorphosis in John Boyne's
The Heart's Invisible Furies
and Salem Hameed's *Banadiq Al Nabi*
(*Rifles of the Prophet*)**

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Abstract :

Religion and literature seem to be standing on two wholly different poles, perspective on the relationship between them has been diverse; however, it either follows: heteronomy, theonomy, or autonomy. The determination of the question "What is literature?" can be based on literary norms alone. But in the evaluation of the greatness of literature (its adequacy, the truth it embodies, etc.) faith must intervene. All notions of what is best and most true in the world depend upon what one deems real, so they are perspective bound, however, these notions should deal with the deepest concerns of human life in which surely the question of religion must come first.

This paper tackles two novels by two different novelists of different nationalities. The first is the novel of the Irish novelist John Boyne's *The Heart's Invisible Furies* (2017), where the church controls the social behaviour of people and enforces the laws that would confine their freedom. It follows the life of Cyril Avery who takes a long time in order to thwart decades of crippling guilt and shame that he was burdened with since his childhood. The second novel is the Iraqi's Salem Hameed's *Banadiq Al Nabi (Rifles of the Prophet)* (2017) which pictures the life of Asmer bin Shwali, who suffers from schizophrenia, since another voice speaks from within, the voice of the prophet Mani himself or one of his followers. He and the voice within share the same loss of identity and of terrorism stemming from a terrible misunderstanding of religion. Both novels tackle characters shaped by an environment based on religious inclinations and, henceforth, transformed into apostles of a new religion based on humanity alone.

Keywords: Religion, identity, enforcement, social behaviour, shame, freedom.

Metamorphosis in John Boyne's The Heart's Invisible Furies and Salem Hameed's Banadiq Al Nabi (Rifles of the Prophet)

John Boyne is an Irish writer who wrote many acclaimed novels, like *The Boy in the Striped Pajamas* (2008), *The Absolutist*, and *The Telegram Man* (2011), which tackle mainly the lives of adults or children, he is interested in showing the effects of war on childhood and how it destroys the experience of 'living' this period as carefree as possible, and how a child is thrust, due to circumstances, into a situation that requires him to act like an adult ahead of time (Boyne, Introduction to *The Boy in the Striped Pajamas*, iv).

John Boyne was born in Dublin, Ireland in 1971, studied English literature in Trinity College, Dublin, Ireland and acquired another BA in creative writing in the University of East Anglia, Norwich. He won so many awards like the Hennessy Literary 'Hall of Fame' Award for his body of work, three Irish Book Awards, for Children's Book of the Year, People's Choice Book of the Year, and Short Story of the Year. He won a number of international literary awards, including the Que Leer Award for Novel of the Year in Spain and the Gustav Heinemann Peace Prize in Germany. In 2015, he was awarded an Honorary Doctorate of Letters from the University of East Anglia (<http://johnboyne.com/about/>).

John Boyne, like many other Irish people, seem to be suffering from the shadow of church and its authority that darken the lives of many Irish youths who find no other means of thwarting the authority of the church but through rejecting it and exposing the lies and hypocrisy of the religious men, because they seem to lead a double life, one of freedom for themselves and another of confining the freedoms of others. John Boyne states that "The Catholic priesthood blighted my youth and the youth of people like me". (<https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2014/oct/03/john-boyne-novelist-catholic-church-abuse-priesthood-boy-in-striped-pyjamas>).

Boyne states that he has lived the situation of being a Catholic in a country he couldn't write about because he didn't have a worthwhile story to tell, but retrieving memories of the Ireland of his childhood, he found himself writing about his childhood experiences that did him great damage. He couldn't evaluate how harmful they were but via means of writing these moments and experiences down via 'fiction'. Fiction becomes a means of healing, of trying to grasp the truth via reconstructing the past by bringing it into one present picture, even though this picture retrieves painful memories, it heals. Boyne describes how Catholic Ireland would revere religious men to the degree that they would feel like they are receiving the queen if they are to receive a priest, preparations precede and it feels like a dream if he actually comes to have a mere cup of tea. Moreover, a family which would not attend a mass would be literally excluded from the social circles. Hence, people are forced to be hypocrites who would

make stuff up and commit ordinary decent sins as confessions required them to be attendants of the masses and confessors of sins, but never required them to be true believers, since priests and people alike searched for the shortest masses and the briefest sermons.

Boyne throughout his puberty and adolescence felt hostility towards the church, because it gave him hard time in his childhood, he carried these feelings to his teenage years, because he constantly found himself in severe depression and the cause was because he found himself always punished and abused by priests at school where he was an altar boy breaking down before the cross just because he showed up in the wrong mass, whereas, elsewhere he lived a perfectly happy childhood which might provide a contrast to his experience at school to condemn it as a frightful experience with people preaching love but practising hatred. He lost his faith in priests, and regained it only when he started considering the other kind of priests who lived only to relieve the pain of those who suffer, for this he wrote his novel *A History of Loneliness* (2014). Boyne tries to get mature and to thwart his prejudices and to write about an Ireland as divided as his own affiliations.

John Boyne's *The Heart's Invisible Furies* opens in the small west Cork village of Goleen, in 1945, where a mass is held in the parish of the village. Instead of giving a sermon, Father James Monroe rises to condemn 16-year-old Catherine Goggin, who has been discovered to be pregnant recently. The priest calls her up to the altar to denounce her before family and congregation, before dismissing her out of the church and banishing her from the parish. Boyne introduces this scene with the irony that this priest has himself fathered two children in the area, and his cruelty is inflamed rather than tempered by his hypocrisy. Catherine's journey to Dublin is the beginning of a picaresque, a turbulent odyssey for the individuals and for the nation that confiscates their freedom. The novel is a panorama of Ireland since the beginning of change, it opens with Ireland as a young republic and effectively a theocracy. The church applies the laws controlling physicality and social behavior by force. It begins very untraditionally, since the opening episode is narrated by the child in Catherine's womb. He grows up as Cyril Avery, who gets adopted by a famous Irish female novelist, and tells the story of his life up to 2015, marking the time when the permanent, unquestionable structure of Catholic Ireland would but vanish, as the power of the church dissolves in scandal and shame.

The past is never neutral, but must not be trusted, on the contrary, it must be fought over and claimed. Cyril, a boy who knows he is gay in a society that hates his sexual tendencies, will take decades to disclaim a long history of suffocating guilt and shame,

while at the same time, truly realizing his own weaknesses. The book is loaded with anger as it commemorates lives wrecked by social contempt and self-loathing. This idea of a country suppressed by its priests is well expressed in Mrs Hennessy's statement "I've never known cruelty like the cruelty of the priests. This Country ..." (*THIF*, np)*, Mrs Hennessy looked as she wanted to scream while closing her eyes and shaking her head.

Such is the life of the protagonist, Cyril Avery, who, from the beginning of his life, actually, from the beginning of his existence, is banished and considered illegitimate, and has no place among people. Hence, the story is tracing the life of an ordinary Irish man from 1945 to 2015 as he grapples with his relationships, his sexual affiliations, and his search for a place and people that truly make him feel at home, because he never belonged. Cyril grows up adrift in a luxurious Dublin society, being adopted by a well-off married, but cold Dublin couple, he lives in an imposing house in Dartmouth Square: Charles, a banker, and Maude, a brilliant novelist who abhors attention and search for privacy in a society that pries on almost everything that would provide a fresh gossip. Cyril isn't a real Avery, as his adoptive parents constantly remind him of that. But if he isn't an Avery, then who is he? Reared in an environment that would provide him supposedly with the freedom he needs, he finds himself questioning his identity and the feelings he's beginning to develop for other boys—especially his best friend and boarding school roommate, Julian Woodbead—within the confines of strict Irish social mores. At the mercy of fortune and coincidence, he travels from Dublin to Amsterdam to New York, only to return home again. Despite finding love along the way, he will spend a lifetime struggling to understand where he came from, as well as how to accept himself for who he really is (<http://crownpublishing.com/archives/news/hearts-invisible-furies-john-boyne#.WtDJri7wZdh>). One watches Ireland evolve alongside Cyril as he bears witness to watershed moments in history, from IRA activities in Dublin in the

*The novel will be abbreviated into *THIF* and the quotes will be all taken from London: Penguin, Random House edition, 2017, p. 51.

1960s, to the global AIDS crisis, to the aftermath of the referendum legalizing same-sex marriage in Ireland in 2015. Thus, Cyril is not an individual, he is a representative of Ireland and the change Ireland has been through during its besetting history:

-'And I am not ashamed to admit it. That's not going to be a problem, is it? You're not going to get all judgmental on me, are you?'

-'No, of course not,' I said. 'It makes no difference to me how carelessly some people want to cast themselves into the fires of hell for all eternity.'(THIF, 285-286)

As much as he sounds an anti-Christ figure, Cyril seems to be the gospel of a new religion and his mother is the first rebel who brought a fatherless child into the world. To have Cyril become the narrator while he is in his mother's womb, the similarity of the Christ figure would be none other than shocking and surprising. Catherine Goggin is the initiator of this new religion of rebellion and breakaway from the authority of the Church. Cyril can't help observing unknowingly about his mother her fearless nature with admiration:

I nodded and followed her inside as I remembered the afternoon that Julian and I had walked through these same doors seven years earlier during our school trip, drinking pints of Guinness while he passed himself off as a TD for whichever Dublin constituency he was pretending to represent at the time. And I was certain that this was the same woman who had come over to chastise us for underage drinking but ended up attacking Father Squires for leaving us with the run of the place instead. Fearless in the face of authority, she had proved her worth to me twice now. (THIF, 233)

Dr. Dourish thinks that Cyril's homosexuality is a kind of peril, an affliction that has fallen onto him for some reason, but Dr Dourish cannot offer any other means of help but denying what he heard from Cyril, who finally found his voice in order to express himself and receive the consequences, asserting at the same time that Cyril is a good Catholic boy:

'First' said Dr Dourish, 'you mustn't think yourself alone in your affliction. There have been plenty of boys who have had similar feelings over the years, from the Ancient Greeks to the present day. Perverts, degenerates and sickos have existed since the dawn of time. so don't for a minute think that you are anything special. There are even places where you can get away with it and no one bats an eyelid. But the important thing for you to remember, Tristan, is that you must never act on these disgusting urges. You're a good decent Irish Catholic boy and... You are a Catholic, aren't you?' (THIF, 218)

In a religiously coloured society, these things must be practised secretly or else they are condemned as illnesses or inflictions. Catherine Goggin is condemned before as a whore, excommunicated, and banished because of her pregnancy and now her son is turning to be gay who cannot declare his physical inclinations for fear of condemnation or being considered psychologically disturbed.

The novel seems to offer a very dialectic argument about the privacy of its characters and how confessions or seeing therapists

would be an act of violation of privacy. The priests and therapists offer no other than what others offered previously, keeping matters under a deep cover and avoid the condemnation of society and God by betraying oneself and repressing one's true identity. Mrs. Maud Avery serves as a contrast to what the Irish society demands from its citizens all the time, confessions and decency, Mrs. Maud Avery thinks that the public should have no access to her life; it is none of their business. Unlike Cyril Avery, who is a reflection of the writer John Boyne himself, who thinks that he should write his own life in order to be healed of this entrapment in his rage over his country which prevented him from forming a 'being' in the past and should not let it prevent him in the future. Maud Avery seems to be one type of novelists who prefer to write literature for its sake, not to reform people nor to reflect her life experience to assert a moral value, while Cyril Avery, John Boyne, represents the other of novelists who argue that literary texts should be effective and acute form of moral reasoning that heighten ethical awareness, they should be analogous to reality, and can change its course by interference (Adriana Caverero in Yebra, 176); that is, they should share an actual experience in order to be effective. John Boyne admits that many details that he put into the novel are autobiographical.

Boyne is communicating his own trauma, the word is Greek and it means wound, originally referring to an injury inflicted on the body, recently it refers to a wound in the mind. The trauma of John Boyne and many youths like him is in his gayness and in the trauma of AIDS to which the writer dedicated a considerable part of the novel. Hence, gayness cannot only traumatic to the mind only, but to the body as well. The novel becomes a panorama of the lives of people in Ireland in general, and of a particular case that tries to 'become' in or outside Ireland. Such panorama is found in the novel of Salem Hameed's novel *Banadiq al Nabi (Rifles of the Prophet)*.

The novel opens with two voices that seem to have lost their identities because of social terroristic unjust acts, the voice of Asmar Shwali and of the voice within, the Prophet Mani, they mingle to create a bridge between the past and the present which did not differ that much, since the same patterns of history are repeated and the world seems to be no place for the good. The novel is a dizzy and feverish search for identity that is lost in quests that are imposed on Asmar and on Mani because of political and social oppression.

Mani is another prophet who created a problem in the early church was Mani—the 3rd-century founder of a dualistic religion that was to bear his name (Manichaeism)—who considered himself to be the final messenger of God, after whom there was to be no other. Mani combined the ethics and ideals of purity and devotion of existing great

religions with the popular if not grotesque myths of the masses, could create a universal faith and unite the nations in one single body of aspiration and righteousness (Greenlees, xx). Of Persian descendants, the Prophet Mani's parents lived in Mesopotamia for no traceable reason where his father joined the Mandeian cult and followed their teachings. However, Mani hailed a new religion of his own based on spirituality and rejoice in death as a final release from the miseries of embodiment (Greenlees, ix).

The novel *The Rifles of the Prophet* opens with the story of the prophet Mani who is killed and whose spirit still wanders in a quest to find a human body to dwell in and direct to fulfill his prophecy. The omniscient narrator tells the reader that Mani chose a person whose name is Asmar bin Shwali, an Iraqi who is born in Maysan in 1976 to Kurdish parents who are brought to Maysan to be killed by the authorities then. He is taken as a baby by a childless couple who have recently lost their newly born baby. Time then is forwarded to 2003 days before the collapse of the political regime in Iraq. It is then that readers are introduced to Asmar and the other main character inside his head. With those two characters and all the other minor ones connected to Asmar's past and present, the writer surveys the tremulous changes that has shaken the Iraqi person and society.

The narration style shifts then to the first person narrator as Asmar introduces himself to the reader:

My name is Asmar bin Shawli... according to psychiatrics, I suffer from schisophrinia, to psychics, an unknown spirit haunts me which belongs to one of the followers of the prophet Mani or perhaps the prophet Mani himself. (RP, p13)*

**Rifles of the Prophet* will be abbreviated as RP. The edition cited is Sutoor Publishing House, 2017.

Asmar is quite uncertain about his birth, he knows that he was born in "very mysterious and vague conditions"(RP, 13.) in fact, he doesn't seem to be sure of anything and his entire life is pictured more like a roller coaster ride in which everything seems to move fast with drastic changes of direction. He finds himself, while still in his teens, chased by the authorities for breaking the president's picture in his school, and though he didn't do it, he is dismissed for this reason, and prevented from getting any further education. In 1991, he joins the rebellion in the south against the political regime then, and after it fails, he elopes to Iran and lives there until the 2003, the year the novel starts. The writer gives many records of the events in Asmar's life in which time is a very secondary issue; his life does not follow a chronological order since most of his youth is wasted in wars and conflicts. Even his sense of identity is shattered: "I'm nameless now like Al Thawraa city

and a lot of other Iraqi cities... I can call myself "Balasm" (nameless)... call me whatever you like. (RP, p.125) Asmar's loss of identity is imposed on him by his society, which obliged Asmar to adopt one identity after another in order to 'belong'. The problem with Asmar is that he is banished always and wherever he goes, he seems to be entrapped in moulds that he lived all his life in order to break:

Right, Asmar was a good medium to communicate my thoughts, since he is free and flexible, he is not a fanatical Muslim, not very committed to the teachings of Islam, which made me choose him for this mission, but he is entrapped now, he can be killed or imprisoned at any moment, he has no one to stand by him, no clan to defend him, no family to return to, no party or sect or religion, society has taken away his identities one after another till he became a mere human, with no name or surname. He is like Prophet Mani in his last days, he can't continue living like that on the margins of life, even though cruelty he got accustomed to since he was a child. If he dies, I should find another medium, I might find him in a year or maybe a century, because mediums are a rarity among people sometimes, I will always be wavering between earth and heaven till I found Asmar's succor to deliver my thoughts. (RP, 194)

Everything in Asmar's life is temporary, his name, the odd jobs he takes, his prophet, and even family. Asmar for a very short time experiences what it feels like to have a family as he marries and has a son and he seems to settle down and have a constant job for a while. The prophet inside him seems to fall silent during this period in which things start to feel normal for Asmar. Yet, this settlement is blown by an explosion in which his house, his family all turn into ashes; he can't even find their remains.

The writer then explores the religious ideas of Mani and Asmar through the many arguments they have, these arguments seem to be more recurrent when Asmar is left all alone, after his departure to Egypt and Jordan and meeting a lot of extremists, those people who turn his life into a living hell after he finds himself a member in Al Qaaida in order to seek revenge for the murder of the son of his friend, which can quench his own thirst for avenging himself upon the unknown terrorists who killed his family, the enemy that seems to be everywhere but never in one particular place to be fought.

Asmar: why hasn't your religion spread like Islam?

Mani: we haven't used the sword... we didn't raise armies to invade others... our prophet did not have a throne, and never married, he was a mystic...a doctor who cured the sick... look at the results of your religion, the armies raised before are fighting

now, the verses (ayat) are now twisted to become rifles, rifles that kill... (RP, 192)

Asmar finds Mani's book while he is only 12, the same age Mani himself started hearing the angel Paraclete that communicated to him the message of God, and the Mani inside him tells him to write down the teachings of this new religion, this becomes his mission in life; to spread the new religion through the social media and the internet. The last sentence written by Asmar is this:

Oh God I confess to you that I failed like all the other prophets in leading people to love and mercy, as you haven't sent prophets to preach rituals as priests claim, but u sent them so that people would live together in peace.... I beseech you to send your angels to change people's convictions and concepts (RP, 219)

Asmar dies while fighting ISIS, though he is wanted as a terrorist. Everything is mixed up, and one traces this Iraqi's life till his death to find him fighting in wars he didn't wage and is not convinced with, living lives that are not his, and becoming a prophet in a place that does not tolerate prophets. Like Mani, Asmar travels and returns to his country only to be killed. Asmar is turned into a legend, a myth, or a representative of his own country or prophet, in both cases, Asmar is a clear statement that hope must not cease to be, Asmar never gave up even though he has witnessed many turbulent events in his life that he himself could not find a logical reason or ground for but that he is a human being done injustice to by all the institutions that are found basically to serve his needs, he finds himself serving others' needs except his own. But, eventually, Asmar finds his purpose in life, embracing martyrdom that would give a definite shape to his past and history; to his life so to speak, which he has been denied all the time. A heroic closure of steadfastness and endurance, and a spark of hope that 'home' whatever that might be, a religion, a family, a country, a God, it should be attained no matter how long this quest takes.

Asmar, Mani, and Salem Hameed found home in words, in changing the meanings of words to serve humanity and to bring a universality of diversity that is embraced and appreciated because it is stemming from one source 'from God to man', the same words that were turned into rifles to kill people and to annihilate life.

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ملخص باللغة العربية

"التحوّل في رواية جون بوين *عواصف القلب الخفية* و رواية سالم حميد *بنادق النبي*"
 لطالما بدا بأن الأدب والدين على طرفي نقيض لذلك كان من الصعب الاتفاق على وجهة نظر واحدة تحدد ماهية العلاقة بينهما. لكنها يجب أن تخضع لاحدى هؤلاء المذاهب: خضوع اجتماعي، خضوع ديني، أو خضوع ذاتي مما حدا بالسؤال "ما هو الأدب؟" أن يخضع بدوره للسلوك الاجتماعي فقط. ولكن تحديد قيمة الأدب أي صدقه في تصوير الحقائق وكفائته في نقلها يتركز الى حد كبير الى الايمان. فنرى أن كل المفاهيم التي تعنى بما هو حقيقي وفضيل في العالم تعتمد على رؤية الشخص ذاته لما هو حقيقي ولذلك فإن هذه المفاهيم رهن وجهات النظر، ولكنها يجب أن تعنى في الوقت ذاته بأهم قضايا و مخاوف الإنسان وأهمها مسألة الدين.

ويعنى هذا البحث بتتبع مسألة الدين و تأثيرها على مجتمعات مختلفة كالمجتمعين الايرلندي والعراقي من خلال روايتين لكاتبين من هذه القوميات تباعا. الرواية الاولى ستكون ل جون بوين وتدعى *عواصف القلب الخفية* (٢٠١٧) و التي تصور إحكام الكنيسة قبضتها على السلوك الاجتماعي لرعاياها و فرض أحكام بالقوة للحدّ من حرياتهم الشخصية. وتتبع هذه الرواية سيرة الفتى سيرل أيفري والذي يرفض ما أثقل كاهله مذ طفولته من شعور بالذنب والعار الملازمين له ولمن سبقه منذ عقود خلت. وأمّا الرواية الثانية فهي للروائي العراقي سالم حميد ذات العنوان *بنادق النبي* الصادرة في العام ٢٠١٧ والتي تصور حياة أسمر بن شوالي وما يعانيه ظاهرياً وكما يطلق عليه علم النفس "انفصام الشخصية" ويعزى ذلك الى أن صوتاً آخر يعلو من داخل أسمر وهو صوت النبي ماني أو أحد أتباعه فكلاهما على ما يبدو يعانيان من ضياع الهوية ومن القمع والارهاب النابع من سوء فهم فطيع للدين. ويتضح للقارئ حتماً بأن الروائيتين تجسّدان شخصيتين صقلهما محيطهما المشحون دينياً و حولهما الى مبشرين بأديان تخضع للإنسانية وحدها.