6. The Challenge of Anglophone Arab Studies: For a Post-Integrationist Critical Practice

I have always distrusted the Orientalist obsession with origins and roots in which seeing the Orientals' true roots is hardly anything more than a function of where the Occidental stands. This is the first reason I would have liked to skip the question of beginnings entirely. I wanted no essentialist excuses for my approach to reading Anglophone Arab works. I would have preferred being liberated from the arguable obligation to begin my study by naming selected pre- and interstices among all other possible beginnings. I wanted to approach Anglophone Arab works as self-conscious works of art and literature without any Orientalist pre-qualification and without using any culturally specific interpretive code. There would have been no beginnings and no endings, no pre-texts and no intertexts of importance, and no interpretive prefiguration. Instead, Anglophone Arab articulations would have been approached as autonomous aesthetic works with their own sense of achievement beyond their existence as Anglophone carriers of Arab culture. They would be explained right from their respective inside, and they would be approached at the moment of their individual emergence. Their unique truth would firmly stand within the self-proceeding text or image, and that truth would emerge immediately from these representations' close reading.

Yet, the noble but equally naïve wish of recognizing Anglophone Arab works by universal standards in their pure aesthetic existence and not by using any particular (Anglo-)Arab predicament as the interpretive matrix would have run the risk of ignoring these aesthetics' specific correlations, both regarding their discursive formation as well as with a view to their potential and de-facto discursive effectivity. The archival arrangement of possible Anglophone Arab statements and the terms by which we recognize the appearance of these statements—the order of Anglophone Arab discourse,[1] so to speak—is much too striking regarding its non-intentional

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1   I am, of course, referring here to Michel Foucault's 1970 inaugural lecture of the same title, *L'ordre du discours* (Paris: Gallimard, 1971); "The Discourse on Language," Appendix of *The Archaeology of Knowledge and The Discourse on Language*, by Michel Foucault, trans. A. M. Sheridan Smith (New York, Pantheon, 1972) 215-37.

entanglements and far too complex concerning its worldly power effects to allow the critic to place herself or himself comfortably within the posed authenticities and inner certainties of any individual work.

In order to begin my undertaking seriously, I took the risk of breaking up, exploring, and, if necessary, multiplying the uncertainties of these assumingly transculturally located and closed-up works. I wanted to show that, if the doubt of clear-cut beginnings and distinctive intertexts is pursued as far as possible, it can be productively turned against itself. As a consequence, I was happily forced to accept the notion that dissonances are unavoidable in transgressive readings of Anglophone Arab representations. Now, I was no longer primarily concerned with the individual Anglophone Arab writer's or artist's heritage or her or his work's self-proclaimed identity but with the interventionist originality and symbolic quality of the respective work. I have treated the entity of the singular literary text or audio-visual representation, just like the individual author or artist, as a symbolic marker and communicative function for the general writing and re-writing (and in some cases even for the disavowed writing) of Anglophone Arab culture.

Although or maybe precisely because Khalid and other Anglophone Arab voices to which I have responded in the course of this study do not offer themselves as serious intercultural dragomans guiding the Western reader through the real Arab mind, the Arab world, or the authentic experiences of Arab immigrants to the West, they express key issues that have confounded the relations between Arabs and non-Arabs, between the so-called West and the Arab Middle East, throughout the 19th, 20th, and 21th centuries. By doing so, they critically reciprocate those experiences of physical transmigrations and correlative discursive formations that form the topical core of contemporary Anglophone Arab works: narratives of emigration, immigration, and forced assimilation; dreams of tolerance, conviviality, and cultural fusion as well as of ignorance, discrimination, failed integration, and remigration; stories of coerced identification and resistive selving caught between the claim of individual freedom and the struggle for collective liberation; movements of emancipation and unfinished revolutions, narratives of split belongings and multiplied affiliations, as well as strategic assertions of Oriental originality; issues of race and racialization and Orientalized relations of gender and sexual desire; nocturnal voyages into the powers of narrative counter-truth and illuminated experiments in revealing reality's uncanny magic; representations that manipulate and subvert normative conceptions of time, space, location, and belonging; works that elude the essentialist conceptualization of subjectivity and reality according to fixed cultural locations; and others that try to re-invent lost spaces and mobilities.

The narratives and audiovisual works I have explored are almost inescapably loaded with the challenge of competing truth claims, the denial of Arab representational authority, and the ambivalence of deploying a language, the narrative repertory of which has already defined Arab alterity. The long history of Western-Arab

encounters was, and continues to be, largely characterized by power imbalances and violent acts (representational and physical alike). These conflictual encounters decisively participated in the adjustment of competing symbolic orders and referential archives that, to this day, frame Anglophone Arab narrative acts. One cannot be surprised that the producers of Anglophone Arab representations show a heightened awareness of the presence of an external receiver who does not believe them. Always anticipating the Western audience's skeptical curiosity that can easily degenerate into "vulgar inquisitiveness,"[2] they know well that they are not perceived as fully reliable representations. The Anglophone Arab narrator's story and the Anglophone Arab audiovisual artist's work always risk being assimilated into a hegemonic Western discourse that suspects Arabs of speaking the non-truth. At the same time, these representations potentially expose themselves to Arab allegations of betraying internal claims of factuality. These narratives, in other words, are not concerned, as the multiculturalists want to have it, with challenging the Arab world's intrinsic traditions within the exceptional modernity of the Western (host) culture. They rather explore the spectrum of possible strategic uses and ab-uses of what Spivak calls the "trans-contextual gifts" of our globalized modernity.[3] As they shift from forced self-exhibition to resistive opacity, or the use of half-truths, they cultivate representational strategies of disruptive translations, reversed plagiarisms, and strategic lies.

The confusion that such re-presentations can ideally produce is not the result of their intrinsically different rationalities. Their insistence on dissonances rather directly follows from these representations' narrative and performative differentiation between what is postulated as universally rational and what is reasonable according to a particular worldly situation. If the re-coding of identities triggered by such differentiations seems at times to culminate in quixotic constructions of uncanny or improper non-belongings, this possibly mirrors "the uneven diachrony of global contemporaneity."[4] It is from this contradictory present that claims of memory and future visions are articulated. And it is from here that Anglophone Arab representations are working within and against often competing cultural archives to search for untold stories, lost struggles, and unrecorded histories. In order to respond creatively to one-sided claims of exact transcription or to the epistemo-ideological critique of flawed translations, they have to question both the residual Western narrative and dominant Arab modes of representation. Anglophone Arab representations struggle with the reliability of given narratives over here *and* over

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2   Rihani, "The Lying Oriental," 182.
3   Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Introduction, *An Aesthetic Education in the Era of Globalization*, by G. Chakravorty Spivak (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2013) 4.
4   Spivak, Introduction, 11.

there, and they willingly risk being seen as unreliable in their own search for truth or even lying on both sides of the pre-packed divide.

While it is true that these both unstable and destabilizing articulations usually wind up in the seemingly competing and mutually excluding master narratives of Orientalism and Occidentalism—how could they not?—they rarely affirm either one of the binary worldviews. The decentered representations with which I have been concerned over the course of this study instead have the capacity to disclose the secret alliance between Orientalists and Occidentalists across learned ethnic and geographical divides and thus to displace the Orient/Occident economy of reason. Anglophone Arab representations have a particular fictocritical capacity to mark out and question the established forms of systematic ordering and to blur ritualized divisions between true and false readings or between recognition and negation. These representations *in deed* (that is, *in actu*) identify themselves as intentional disruptions of dominant sureties. As discursive discontinuities in their own right, they explicitly address their own and their audience's materiality. As metafictional works, they broach questions related to the material conditionality of the cultural enunciation and reception of Anglophone Arab meaning.

Although the choice of primary works for my endeavor to trace discourses, counter-discourses, and what is in between has been selective, the genealogical treatment of the chosen works necessarily also attempts to critically question my own selection's discursive prefiguration. The study of Anglophone Arab representations does not reveal any original core or the universality of Anglophone Arab meaning. It rather brings to light distinct cultural acts as discursive events of imposing, alternating, and re-imposing meaning on Anglophone Arab encounters. Dissonances of cross-cultural encounters and inconsistencies of transmigratory identification were not only unavoidable but turned out to be of direct interpretive evidence for my undertaking. As I have shown, such dissonances and inconsistencies are explicitly addressed in the Anglophone Arab works I discuss. Their merging, equally disruptive and selective, and the constant blurring of disparate narrative and visual sequences lead to a high degree of internal distances, discordances, concurrences, and external interferences. The generic self-location of Anglophone Arab representations is often willingly unstable, as is their placement regarding the narrated time-space. Mobilizing familiar and less familiar codes, they usually escape any genuinely comparative morphology. Instead, they constantly remind us that the works and their critics (i.e., us) exist within a larger cross-cultural and trans-temporal meta-text of symbolic mediations and deviations, directly related to the long history of Western-Arab encounters. As a consequence, the scholarly obsession with stylistic purity and clear generic filiations regularly remains unsatisfied. Anglophone Arab works sometimes show resonances to medieval Arabic narratives, popular epic cycles, and folk tales—and this side by side with traces of early modern European classics, South American magical realist writings, mod-

ern North American poetry and fiction, and newer transnational genres of literature and film. They draw on the image repertoire of globalized popular culture and mass media and participate in the latest archival turn within international concept and performance arts. The theoretical frames and ideological schemes through and against which they operate are equally diverse and change significantly between the individual artists and writers.

Instead of lamenting a crisis of the cosmopolitan Arab subject in (trans-)migration or affirming the notion of worlds torn apart by clashing (post-)modernities, Anglophone Arab representations explore the correlational tensions of these binary imaginations and thus confront partial truths with other partial truths. They *push together*, but when they merge, they do not aim to resolve anything. In these works, hybridity is not a de-politicized ideology of instant postcolonial theory but a complex sociohistorical dynamic and theoretical concept. Anglophone Arab representations invite us to challenge, and maybe to unlearn, the consensual conceptions of moral and aesthetic boundaries which usually determine the limits of corporate identification. Whether we see ourselves as Arabs (by choice) or Westerners (by choice), these works urge us to question both our own subject position and that of our respective cultural other, whom we have imagined as a silent object for far too long: "No; travel not on a Cook's ticket; avoid the guides."[5]

Although many Anglophone Arab representations deploy the very narrative repertory which they challenge they creatively search for alternative documents and figments. Their performative evidence often results from the strategic invention of narrative and audiovisual modes of telling meaningful stories which anticipate, and yet manage to escape, the Western reader's overhasty answering word or penetrating gaze. While Anglophone Arab trustworthiness regularly surpasses or subverts the doubtful veracity of hegemonic Western representations and erodes the main referential systems of these representations' narratives, it can have truth effects in the world. Inventing modalities of the narrative production of a meaning that intentionally refuses to be fully translated and grasped as an intercultural translation of Arab truth, their modes of speaking for themselves are often fraught with willful untranslatability. I have interpreted this strategy as resistance to being assimilated within normative Western notions of intersubjectivity or intercultural accuracy. Refusing to be harmonized with the moral authority of exceptional Western reliability, Anglophone Arab articulations turn their discursively inscribed and, therefore, inescapable cross-cultural unreliability into a self-confident narrative act of critical validity across formerly separated representational spheres.

The metafictional contiguities of these representational acts are manifold and far-reaching: They subvert the learned culturalist assumption of originality, au-

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5   Rihani, *The Book of Khalid* 5.

thentic belonging, and teleological itinerary still at work not only in the ideological polemics of Arab and Western nationalists but also among scholars of Middle Eastern studies and immigrant culture or minority literatures. Circumnavigating the terrain of linguistic diversity and avoiding crude intercultural recodings, Anglophone Arab representations cannot be—and indeed, often explicitly, do not want to be—considered accountable for writing/translating any presupposed original meaning. Nevertheless, they can serve as a means for the realization of individual liberation or collective emancipation. As, for instance, my readings of contemporary Palestinian practices of cultural resistance have demonstrated, the questioning of the normative adjustment of truth does not collide with the goal of bearing witness to injustice, forming collective agency, or even mobilizing transnational forms of political action. However, a relational approach to Anglophone Arab discourse can also open up perspectives on hitherto excluded individual voices like that of Ihab Hassan, whose self-identification and intellectual agency is grounded in the decisive negation of any (af-)filiation to such collectivity.

In order to explore the cross-cultural communicational structures at work in Anglophone Arab representations, one needs to combine the analysis of the individual text's narrative organization or the individual representation's visual or performative order with the study of this internal organization's external discursive prefiguration. For this, any scholar working in the field must consider the presence of dominant Western representational modes which have fixated and still fixate Arabs within a differential network of unequal relations and, therefore, form an important matrix for Anglophone Arab correlational representations. Yet, s/he needs to be equally sensitive to the fact that these representations rarely care for the notions of culturally specific literary syntax or narrative genealogies. Whoever sees herself or himself as the intended receiver of these works should be aware of the ambivalent translocations of assumingly firmly located modes of emplotment or visual frames of references at work in Anglophone Arab discourse. If it is true that these works sometimes smuggle meaning from one place to another by displacing self-totalizing truths claims and related representational modes, and if they do so by telling lies, it is important to see that they do so intentionally. The strategic decision to counter hegemonic lies by *lying back* not only destabilizes the principal Eurocentric hierarchy of cross-cultural inquiry confined by the constitutive strategies of othering and selving but ultimately gains an epistemological and moral component. The reader, listener, or viewer is rarely in the position of fully grasping the socio-historic evidence and moral consistency of the world represented. There is no easy affective attachment to the represented cultural space. Moreover, it becomes increasingly difficult to differentiate between what is authentic and what is foreign or between what has been imported from the dominant Western discourse and what is exported from the assumed internal Arab discourse. Interpretive modes related to certain linguistic signifiers associated with socio-spatial

or ethno-cultural identities give way to conflictual gestures of horizontal exchange beyond intercultural translation.

The forgery of Anglophone Arab representations is by no means unidirectional. It is regularly committed against normative moralities and standardized aesthetics on both sides of the historically generated divide. Their cross-cultural contaminations, selective translational distortions, and strategic inauthenticities have unpredictable effects that exceed the institutionalized control of intercultural judgment. These works' structural and semantic correlationality disrupts both our aesthetic conventions of cultural specificity and ethical norms of universal accountability. Therefore, the (co-)relational reading of Anglophone Arab representations demands that we rethink our theories and procedures of cross-cultural comparativism. Such rethinking might lead to a meta-ethics of comparative literary and cultural criticism that, instead of morally condemning or habitually excluding acts of lying, rehabilitates the strategic use of partial truths, of lies, and of counter-lies as justifiable forms of cultural and, perhaps, political agency. In such praxeology of narrative truth, the act of interpretation goes beyond revealing what has been variously described as the counter-discursive or dialogical imagination. To interpretively grasp a poetics that incorporates the ideological and moral ambiguity of working across archives demands the imagining of the conflictual correlation of mutually excluding archives instead of the yearning for harmonizing meta-archives that are not yet in sight. In other words, such a project requires rethinking art and morality in the age of competing archives.

Although postcolonial theory has been decisively inspired by the critique of pure reason, our critical practice seems to be first and foremost concerned with the contrapuntal or counter-discursive project of speaking non-Western truths to Western powers, of narrating subaltern facts, or of writing back what has scarcely been written hitherto. While it has been sufficiently demonstrated that the civilizational promises of colonial and semi-colonial projects, the claim of Western exceptionality and superiority, or the legitimizing discourses of developmentalism and humanitarian interventionism were and still are very powerful lies, when it comes to creative works and emancipatory movements from the postcolonies of the global south or from immigrants of color within the Western metropolis, one finds an almost ethnographic inquiry aiming at the total disenchantment of other worlds and the world's Other(s). At least, in this regard, an almost idealist enlightenment paradigm and objectifying gaze seem to operate continuously in mainstream criticism. My readings of Anglophone Arab representations have shown to me and hopefully to others that such an approach is either astonishingly anachronistic in its lack of epistemological self-reflexivity or simply dishonest regarding its methodological Eurocentrism. In both cases, it contradicts the very (theoretical and political) foundations of postcolonialism. The field's preoccupation with making the invisible visible seems to aim first and foremost at recovering interpre-

tively authentic historical agencies and at uncovering who or what is really there beyond colonial and neo-colonial ideologies of representational othering. Whereas I do agree that there are many good reasons for opening up the Western canon so that its injustices can be redressed and its inherent lies exposed, the interpretive paradigm of locating the unseen, silenced, or the unspoken in the name of emancipation can easily lead to a practice which, in its scholarly institutionalized form, replicates the binary hierarchy between those who belong to the dominant group and those to be integrated. Such a practice can—intentionally or not—establish a structural alliance with the interrogative pattern of instrumental socio-political integration and hierarchical assimilation.

Considering the ambivalent setback and hype of cross-cultural communication since 9/11, it seems important, now maybe more than ever, to look at those representational acts that go beyond the questioning of established Western truths by giving voice to alternative truths—and at this point, I no longer think exclusively of Anglophone Arab representations. If we respect the many locations and complex meanings of contemporary cultural articulations, and if we seek to respond critically to these articulations, we cannot deny the writer's, artist's, and critic's capacity to lie strategically. Paradigmatically anticipating or even morally insisting on the postcolonial subject's obligation to speak and exhibit his or her truth in literature and the arts as well as in other forms of cultural mediation and political representation, in my view, risks affirming the oppressive (neo-)colonial practice of integration under the restrictive condition of total decommissioning. The conceptual incarceration of postcolonial representations within the field's institutionalized prison of counter-truth neglects the postcolonial writer's, artist's, or activist's right to utilize sub-harmonic and post-moralistic strategies of (narcissistic) self-affirmation or individual liberation or even to contradict herself or himself, intentionally or reluctantly. A self-critical literay and cultural critique cannot afford to exclude resistive strategies and emancipatory imaginaries of the counterfactual, thus reducing its scholarly commitment to the institutionalized incorporation of the self-confessing, self-exhibiting, or self-marketing global subalterns' narratives on the postcolonial bookshelf.

The unfinished project of emancipating postcolonial dissonances and the badly needed set-up of competing and yet equitable, and hopefully mutually correcting, cultural archives is bound to go beyond the still dominant objectifying paradigms of intersubjectivity, reciprocity, and harmony. As recent archival research conducted by the Dutch musicologist Wouter Capitain in the Edward W. Said Papers at Columbia University shows, Said, while drafting his seminal *Culture and Imperialism*, in fact, seriously considered using the concept of heterophony instead of drawing on the more harmonic notion of counterpoint, but was reluctant to actu-

ally incorporate the concept into the final manuscript.[6] I propose to draw on these draft fragments preserved in the archives of unpublished postcolonial criticism to interpretively grasp the voices played off in Anglophone Arab representations heterophonically rather than contrapuntally.

The Foucauldian insight that modern arts and literatures are characterized by both a particular decision for the non-truth and a commitment to its truth-effects in evidence[7] seems to be crucial for such undertaking. From here, the assumingly contradictory impression that Anglophone Arab or other postcolonial interventions against the discriminatory foundations of colonial-racist modernity can sometimes be true—in the sense of having truth-effects in the world—if, and only if, they are false looses its oxymoronic fright. If a central precondition of the criticized academic integration procedure is honest self-exhibition of those (willing) to be integrated, how can we grasp narratives which do not offer themselves to be included into the scopic matrix of the postcolonial integration regime? How can we interpretively respond to representations that are not secured by their truth-value or moral consistency? Can we imagine an aesthetics of negative exposure or an ethics of non-knowing that includes lies which disclose mutual unknowns and competing ignorance(s)?

I believe the fictional and non-fictional works I have discussed in this study do provide multiple points of departure for such a post-moralistic re-conceptualization of postcolonial lies and for a post-integrationist approach of correlational reading. And I hope my operations of selective correlational Anglophone Arab readings can also function as an exemplary point of departure. Yet, to avoid useless recapitulations at this point, I want to transgress the theoretical and conceptual boundaries delineated throughout these pages. I believe that alternative approaches to bridging the gap between theoretical reason and practical reason in relational Anglophone Arab studies or postcolonial criticism, for that matter, can be found outside the learned system of intellectual veracity as institutionalized in literary and cultural studies. To re-think truths and lies in cultural representations as intersections which can only be grasped on a transnational and relational axis, our critical practice needs to regain a utopian dimension, if not intention. During the last decade, scholars of critical social theory and political philosophy have been increasingly concerned with the theoretical implications of new transnational social movements which articulate global objectives and thus function as careers of a utopian

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6   I am referring here to an unpublished manuscript by Wouter Capitain, "From Counterpoint to Heterophony and Back Again: Reading Edward Said's Drafts for Culture and Imperialism," (2019). The manuscript derives from a chapter of his unfinished dissertation project "Postcolonial Polyphony: Edward Said's Work on Music" (working title) to be filed in 2020 at University of Amsterdam. I thank Wouter for kindly providing his manuscript.

7   Michel Foucault, "La vie des hommes infâmes," *Les Cahiers du Chemin* 29 (15 Jan. 1977): 12-29.

promise without speaking in the name of any social totality or universal truth.[8] These ecocritical, anticapitalist, or human rights movements, unlike the bourgeois worker movements of the past, are self-limited in so far as they know that there is no unified subject in history. Although they know that many unknowns, disagreements, and contradictory particularities remain, their political action to invent agency signals a sincere desire for global change. This tension between a desire for a global sense and the reasonable doubt of such a sense cannot be easily resolved. It is important to recognize that most global protests today "aren't pursuing any identifiable 'real' goal"[9] because they realize that failure may be inherent in any principle truth for which they are fighting. This insight might offer a hint into the direction of Slavoj Žižek's dialectics between the event of a truth and the truth of an event. His eventualizaton of the notion of social truth[10] assumes a certain compatriotism of mutual not-yet-knowing. Such compatriotism might not only form a new basis for a future ethics of global justice and peaceful coexistence; at the same time, it can function as a provisional horizon for a relational study of Anglophone Arab cultures in a critically revised global comparativist perspective.[11] In order to engage critically with cross-cultural transgressions related to past and present dynamics of globalization, one has to explore divided archival systems and discrepant dispositives formed out of these dynamics without dragging on within the old paradigm of mutually exclusive universal exceptionalisms. My study is an essayistic attempt to outline the contours of such literary and cultural criticism as a political event.

I have opened, I think, possibilities for myself (and hopefully for others) of an immense spectrum of future research directions in relational Anglophone Arab studies. Some of the topics to be explored include the role of Anglophone Arab and Muslim discourses within the American genesis and transnational transformation of hip-hop culture, the function of Anglophone Arab debates and agents within the so-called Arab Spring of 2011, the political ethics of (Anglophone Arab) refugee imaginaries, strategic lies in post-secular ideologies and militant movements, and postcolonial political authorities without truth-claim. These are projects to which the unpredictable sociopolitical circling of the world and our academic institutions shall hopefully offer some space.

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8   See, for instance, Seyla Benhabib, *Another Cosmopolitanism: Hospitality, Sovereignty and Democratic Iterations* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2006) and Seyla Benhabib, *Dignity in Adversity. Human Rights in Troubled Times* (Cambridge: Polity P, 2011).

9   Slavoj Žižek, "Trouble in Paradise," *London Review of Books* 35.14 (2013): 11.

10   Slavoj Žižek, *Event: Philosophy in Transit* (London: Penguin, 2014).

11   On postcolonial comparativism, see Rita Felski and Susan Stanford Friedman, eds., *Comparison: Theories, Approaches, Uses* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 2013) and Aamir R. Mufti, "Global Comparativism," *Edward Said: Continuing the Conversation*, eds. Homi Bhabha and W. J. T. Mitchell (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 2005) 109-26.

One insight I certainly gained from my readings in Anglophone Arab literary and artistic representations is that Arabs (by choice or by birth) and non-Arabs (by choice or by birth) are allies, if sometimes secret, in being seekers of common truths or lies to come. Let me thus end on a positive note and recite once more—this time not as a pun on the inescapable moral predicaments of (bodily) love between woman and man but as an allegorical vision of cross-cultural coexistence between different equals—the beautiful rhyming couplet of sonnet 138 by the famous English bard whose real name, as some of us know, was Shaikh al-Pīr, an Indian mystic and saint, or Shaikh Zubair, because he was Arab or because he converted to Islam, maybe during his lost years, maybe in Al-Andalus—and that is *a* truth:

Therefore I lie with her, and she with me,
And in our faults by lies we flattered be.
(Shakespeare, Sonnet 138)