

A LACANIAN ANALYSIS OF LAYLA AL-OTHMAN'S SHORT STORY 'MEN FADLAK, TALLEKNI' (I BEG YOU TO DIVORCE ME): A LITERARY STYLE THAT OSCILLATES BETWEEN SEMIOTIC AND SYMBOLIC ORDERS

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Abstract: *The objective of this article is to conduct a psychoanalytical literary criticism of Layla Al-Othman's feminist short story titled 'Men Fadlak Tallekni'. The author is commonly regarded as a stout advocate of Women's rights in the Arab World. Her body of work speaks about the persistent struggle of women against men's dominant culture of patriarchy. Therefore, we conduct a critical Lacanian examination of this literary text. Such examination requires a thorough understanding of Lacan's principal theories that appeared in his various seminars, from Name-of-the-father to object petit a, and from desire to jouissance, with emphasis on the protagonist's pre-linguistic narrative. Her plight is that of being castrated. Her voice emerges from her regressed refuge. Thus, there is a confrontation with two sets of languages: one imposed by Lacan's symbolic order and the other surging from the feminist literature defined by Kristeva's maternal semiotic order. The outcome of our analysis reveals that Al-Othman's protagonist has not resolved the Oedipus complex. She doesn't possess the discourse of paternal language. Rather, she is swaying back and forth between the imaginary and the symbolic.*

Keywords: *Feminist Literature, Symbolic Order, The Semiotic, Lacan, Kristeva*

Introduction

Layla Al-Othman is one of the leading figures of feminist literature in Kuwait and the Arab world. Her published works of fiction, novels and short stories are currently translated into foreign languages. Her voice is singular among the region's feminist writers who challenge the rule of patriarchy. Among her other peers coming from the Arab world, we can cite the names of: Oumayma Al-Khamis, Ihsan Kamal, Fadila Al-Faruq, Daisy Al-Amir, Samira Azzam and Nawal El-Saadawi. The latter is considered as the Arab world's equivalent of Simone de Beauvoir. In the west feminist literature has witnessed an expanded cultural evolution since the early decades of the 20th century. De Beauvoir was the first feminist writer/philosopher/intellectual to achieve international breakthrough with her activism tackling women's rights and role in society; others, like Julia Kristeva, Hélène Cixous and Luce Irigaray, have pursued her pioneering path and came up with their own theories. Irigaray, (1982), for example is not just a cultural theorist, but also a linguist and psycholinguist who wrote about the uses as well as misuses of language in connection with women. According to Jones, (1981), Cixous, on the other hand, is the proponent of 'L'Écriture féminine', a dual theory about psycho-cultural inscriptions of the feminine body and women-focused particularities emanating from texts and languages (Jones, 1981).

A near-contemporary figure of the above-cited feminists, Leila Al-Othman defied in her own writings the masculine presence that overwhelmed her. Thus, in this article we will analyze the nature of her writing, by singling out a short story titled 'Men Fadlak, Tallekni' (I Request Your Divorce). This analysis is conducted through the prism of Lacan who spoke about language and literature. As Hendrix (2105) states, Lacan regards language as the Unconscious or the Other; therefore, the unconscious thought has similar linguistic structure found in the conscious thought which makes the former 'present' and the latter 'absent'.

The language that Al-Othman's protagonist uses in 'Men Fadlak, Tallekni' combines both the semiotic and symbolic orders. This linguistic/textual process allows the reader to sense the paternal metaphors that are infused throughout the story. In fact, Sullivan (1991), notes that Lacan had proposed a theory of the paternal metaphor coupled with the Oedipal structure; a theory that employs his main concepts on the Phallus, the Castration, the Desire and Jouissance. Furthermore, Leland (1989), while reflecting on Lacan's theoretical hold over the works of Irigaray and Kristeva cites Rubin (*The Traffic in Women*, 1975) who claims that 'phallic culture' has gone beyond dominating women: it became a culture that domesticates them. Finally, Grimshaw (1992), in her review of Irigaray's feminist philosophy reveals where the feminine identity is: a pre-given libido just before the creation of language. In this sphere the woman is busy assembling her personal romantic pictures, which are developed in the pre-Oedipal imaginary.

Eventually, all these aspects and theoretical notions will be addressed in our reading and analysis of Al-Othman's 'Men Fadlak, Tallekni'.

Problem Statement

How the protagonist of Layla Al-Othman's short story, 'Men Fadlak, Tallekni', oscillates between the semiotic (the maternal language of the body as conceptualized by Kristeva) and the language of Lacan's symbolic order (that embodies the paternal law).

Hypothesis

A Lacanian psychoanalytical review of Layla Al-Othman's short story 'Men Fadlak Tallekni' prompts us to formulate the following hypothesis:

When the Oedipus complex is not resolved, a person (Al-Othman's female protagonist) does not fully enter into the paternal language which is the male symbolic order. He/she fluctuates between the imaginary and the symbolic orders.

Purpose of the article:

The main purpose of this article is to emphasize the difference between two linguistic orders that are confronting each other, and struggling with each other, amid the setting of 'Men Fadlak, Tallekni'. The influence of both orders, the semiotic and the symbolic, are seeping through the reaction of the protagonist who chronicles the unfolding of the events through her violent emotional ordeal, as if her secure world had suddenly collapsed and an invasive fatherly order – the reality – has set in.

Methodology

The methodology that we adopted for this article is that of qualitative research. Strauss and Corbin (1994) as cited in Babbie, (2016) declare that qualitative research is often undertaken for both descriptive and investigative objectives (Babbie, 2016, p.391). This kind of research refers to plausible links that are found among theories and sets of theories. Strauss and Corbin (1994) insist on the terms of 'plausible', or 'plausibility', because this notion highlights the observers', as well as readers' best comprehension concerning how life matters operate. Thus, when a qualitative researcher validates a specific set of links that are found among specific theories, then his analysis becomes more relevant to the study he/she is conducting and the interpretations he/she is emphasizing on.

Moreover, for better insight and adequate perspective-taking it was essential to pore into the key figures, concepts and ideas that are affiliated with feminist literature and its canon. Since Layla Al-Othman's is an Arab feminist writer we deemed it necessary to find out the Kristevian verbal techniques that she applied in her text to let her protagonist face the "unexpected" "infidelity" that she has witnessed with the father substitute.

Evidently, our methodology would have been insufficient and unbalanced without the adoption of literature criticism in reviewing of Lacan's theories, especially the one pertaining to the symbolic order.

It is important as well to clearly define the two main concepts that are mentioned in the following chapter: for Sadehl, (2012), The semiotic order is the maternal aspect of language that reveals the person's inner 'drives' and 'impulses'. On the other side, the symbolic order is the paternal aspect of language governed by rule and emphasized by grammatical syntactic structures (Sadehl, 2012).

Literature Review

The literature on the semiotic and symbolic orders covers a wide array of theories and concepts. They were elaborated at length since the second half of the 20th century by feminist authors and Lacanian ones. However, it is unconceivable to dissociate the first order from Kristeva's body of work: she is the one who discovered the semiotic potential of language, and declared that it

can be subversive; a declaration that invested this order with poetic-maternal linguistic traits aimed to shatter the symbolic speech (Butler, 1989).

In this context, it is equally unconceivable to dissociate the concept of the symbolic order from Lacan's object-cause of desire (objet petit a), in fact desire and its contrasting element jouissance, and Name of the Father. Eventually, on each theory numerous detailed interpretations are provided by analysts. Thus, on the Name of the Father one academic source Wilden ed. (2002) notes that it is tightened closely with the Superego, the Phallus, and the Oedipus complex. Another source, Hook, (2016) rather claims that it relates to the influence of sociocultural family rule, particularly among patriarchal societies where the image of the father-figure looms large. Nevertheless, both sources speak about its major significance as it holds the roots from which the symbolic order does emerge.

Still, it is crucial the put in emphasis how Kristeva conceives the biologic origins of the maternal instinct where language is not yet spoken. Such conception not only separates the semiotic and symbolic orders, but attempts to circumscribe the hegemony of patriarchal law. On this last issue Leader and Groves (2014) write that Lacan views the father not in his real physical presence but rather in his powerful and sometimes intimidating symbolic appearance. Moreover, he seems to incarnate a place, a zone, that conducts the separation from the mother. Meanwhile, the infant strives to be the object –the subliminal image the phallus - that it thinks the mother does not possess. But, the feminist thinker and theorist Butler (1989) does not hesitate to offer her own perspective on both orders saying that semiotic language is repressed in the masculine symbolic speech.

To better grasp these contradictory views/theoretical debates it is imperative to read and review the content of the original texts. Kristeva's pioneering work on semiotics was published in Paris by the French publishing house Seuil (1969). As explained by Perumalil (2009) Kristeva's semiotic language is closely related to the infantile pre-Oedipal stage as discussed in the works of Freud, Otto Rank, Melanie Klein, the British Object Relation psychoanalysis, and Lacan's pre-mirror stage.

In casting language in its non-discursive stage Kristeva ventures to demolish social order so that she can renew it. On the opposite side, the symbolic order is characterized by its discursive consciousness: it embodies a different set of logic validated long ago by the social milieu. Fonda (2000), citing Kristeva, alludes to the fact that “in social practice language cannot supplant either of these orders because they are intertwined. Together they constitute two types of discourse whether in text or speech” (Kristeva 1980: p.134).

A thorough reading of Kristeva's work lets the reader discover that she uses the semiotic approach to rearrange the analytical text in its historical and social setting. This sort of rearrangement has meanings that hover inside and outside the text (Allen, 2000, p. 37). At the same time, it dissects the subject between: “what is conscious and unconscious; reason and desire; the rational and the irrational; spoken and unspoken/discursive and pre-discursive” (Allen, 2000, p. 37).

This form of dissection leads us to the ‘moment of theory’ that Kristeva elaborated in her essay on Barthes. As noted by Allen (2000, p. 47), in that essay Kristeva (1980, p.p 92–123), welcomed Barthes' insertion of desire at the very heart of critical language: a circuit where

desire pulses with the subject's connection to 'body' and 'history'; and symbolic throbs with 'order', 'reason', and 'intelligibility' (Kristeva, 1980, p. 116).

According to Allen (2000) the 'Symbolic' differs from the 'Imaginary': the latter refers to the child's dispersed senses of the body; though there is something about the body that the child is still unaware about but its symbolization is latent.

In fact, toddlers in their early stages of growth cannot distinguish themselves and people in their immediate environment, particularly the mother who is the main caregiver. Thus, the 'Symbolic' state becomes inherent right after the plain acquisition of language: a state that Lacan identifies as the 'Symbolic order'. Henceforward, the child does gradually establish connections that characterize society's structures: positions, hierarchies, rules and various relations. Therefore, Lacan equates language acquisition with the triumvirate of the Father, the Rule and Ideas of Unity. At this stage the role of language is to convey socio-linguistic positions to the growing child. Thus, language starts to retain its role as the discourse navigates between 'I', 'You, and 'We' (Allen, 2000).

Although Kristeva adhered to Lacanian psychoanalytical theory in her earlier studies, but later she made an incursion into Freud's theory concerning the 'primary process' as well as the child's pre-symbolic stage. Thus, influenced by these Freudian concepts, Kristeva, developed her own notion of the semiotic. According to Allen, (2000), cited Kristeva, semiotic is a state defined by: pre-symbolic urges and impulses; pulsion of the body – known to be rhythms and movements; a complete identification with the mother's body, though later this process is fractured but not entirely erased by the 'the thetic phase'.

As pointed up by Allen (2000, p. 48) Kristeva's 'thetic phase' indicates the moment enters the social world ruled by monological notions of language. Clearly, this is like a transition into a new state run by social norms, and where language can presumably channel a thesis or a unitary meaning.

In citing Roudiez, Allen (2000, p. 49) further elaborates Kristeva's semiotic approach, which is a key feature of the signifying process (the second main feature is the 'symbolic'. Therefore, according to Kristeva, the subject is divided in/by two signifying zones, she defines them in this way:

- The symbolic order includes a socially signifying language that runs through the guidance of these elements: reason, communication, the ideal of singularity and unity.
- The semiotic order is about the language of urges and erotic impulses, together with the rhythms and movements of the body, when the subject had not yet reached the division of the thetic phase.

On this matter, Allen (2000, p. 50) declares that the text goes along the dividing tempo of symbolic and semiotic forces. It alternates between both orders, while the semiotic pattern is usually apparent within the symbolic.

An in-depth analysis of the Semiotic order is provided by Anne-Marie Smith (1998) in the first chapter of her book titled 'Julia Kristeva: Speaking the Unspeakable'. Thus, we are informed that Kristeva's semiotic, pre-discursive sign announces "'prosody, poetry's departure from prose, musicality and the unspeakable energy, which poets and artists attempts to express in their attacks against/and modifications of traditional forms'" (the last expression refers to

patriarchal law); it also covers the child's initial stages, particularly the relationship that is established with the mother before the process of language acquisition and the onset of symbolic separation.

Moreover, Smith (1998,) underlines that the semiotic evokes 'corporeal memory' (known in psychoanalysis as 'mnemonic trace'). It is about the destructive and pleasurable energy that emanates from the body prior to the phase of symbolic separation from the mother. Thus, the semiotic is both the non-discursive pain/pleasure – life and death drives inscribed in memory. Through this transgression it allows 'the impossible forces of the Real' to penetrate the Symbolic order while the pain registers a regulatory movement when the oedipal structure is excluded (Smith, 1998, p. 16). In truth, both life and death drives are clearly illustrated in Layla Al-Othman's short story.

In his analysis of Kristeva's theories Smith (1998) perceives that the semiotic enables a person to connect the linguistic system to a bodily subject that can structure and de-structure identity. The energy of that connectivity is pre-discursive. In articulating this theory Kristeva declared that she is indebted to Melanie Klein's work regarding:

- The instinctual economy of infancy
- The expression of the drives that a child carries off non-verbally in echolalia and vocalic and intonational differences.

Kristeva is mainly focused on the semiotic inscriptions of the child's phantasmatic configuration in symbolic language. This keen interest allows her to bring together the linguistic and the psychoanalytic, while creating a relationship with the sexual aspect of language. In this context, "the semiotic brings us to the child's pre-Oedipal/pre-linguistic relationship with the mother and her body, while the symbolic draws us nearer to the child's socialization, and the relationship with language and separation" (Smith, 1998, p. 20)

The literary text is a perfect example of a symbolic product and this is an aspect of the text Kristeva refers to as the phenotext, which is to be distinguished from the genotext- the textual inscription of semiotic modalities. What interests Kristeva, is to trace the dialectical processes whereby the individual subject moves from one modality to another in poetic language through breaks in syntax and semantic structure. so, in the text the semiotic is defined as musical, anterior enigmatic, mysterious and rhythmic (Smith, 1998, p. 21) a literary method which is applied in the first paragraph of the short story.

In reference to text, and more precisely poetic text, or poetic language, motherhood and maternal instinct prevail from words to phrases and paragraphs. Thus, in the text, "rhythm, rhyme, alliteration, onomatopoeia, tone, modulation and word-plays are all manifestations of Kristeva semiotic order." (Smith, 1998, p. 22). The identity is struggling in the middle of an arena where semiotic and symbolic are fiercely clashing against each other. Desire takes form in the language to alter its masculine or paternal origins. In a certain way, Kristeva's objective is to build a semiotic habitat to feminism/motherhood by putting into words what is unspoken/unspeakable. At some point, Smith (1988, p. 79-80) notices the difficulty for a woman to let her voice be heard in the Symbolic order of things where language, society and culture appear as challenging forces. Thus, she has to accommodate herself with the law of the father while keeping an eye on the biological demands of her body.

Lacan has a different theoretical approach to language; indeed, he claims that it is there from before the actual moment of the infant's birth; as it is there in the social structures which are at play within the family circle. If we took a look at the dynamics before the birth of a child, we realize how parents discuss with each other to decide about the name and even the future of the not-yet-born child. According to Leader and Groves (2013) this whole linguistic exchange is not grasped by the newborn, but still, it will act on the whole of his existence. During the various stages of growth, the child's identity will depend on the way how he assumes the parents' spoken words. This process will stretch both 'beyond' and in a sense 'prior' to the identification with the image: this is known as a symbolic identification with a signifying element. Lacan notes that this is an identification with the Ideal, but this ideal is not conscious (Leader and Groves, 2013, p.44). At this stage - when the ego is imagery - the symbolic order is operating beyond the conscious control or understanding of the involved players.

Furthermore, Lacan considers that the unconscious is structured like a language: constituted by a series of chains that include signifying elements; the unconscious changes words into symptoms, it engraves into the human flesh, or turns them into tormenting thoughts or compulsions. However, with the father's intervention the child enters the phase of gradual distancing from the mother and her universe; it also situates the phallus as something lost, forever out of reach. Therefore, the very act of this crucial intervention is like saying 'No' to both the child and the mother (Leader and Groves, 2013, p.51).

In 'Lacan and the Subject of Language' (The title as well as the first chapter of a book edited by Ragland-Sullivan and Bracher, 1991) the reader is provided with additional insight on how Lacan evolved a specific theory of representation where 'words' get combined with 'images' to negotiate with 'desire' and project identification. This act is driven with energy that seeks jouissance. The objective of language is not just to conduct a performance, but rather a multi-level performance within a sociocultural area separated by gender politics. Here, the paternal figure wields excessive rule/power while the maternal figure tries to figure out and live with the missing parts of her feminine identity. According to Sullivan (1991, p.7) the woman endures the projection of man's unconscious fantasy projected all over the house and all over her body. She also questions herself incessantly about the loss that affects her deeply. She discovers that patriarchy – together with its law and rule – is a symptom. Thus, she returns to a place, in her womb, where language is demolished.

Another key term heralded by Lacan in his studies is 'jouissance' overruns the principal pleasure (particularly Seminars I, II, III, VII, IX, XI, XII, XIV and XVII). It is defined as an 'enjoyment beyond of the pleasure principle'; another definition indicates that is an 'excess of life'. In fact, from one seminar to another, Lacan alters the nuance and meaning of 'jouissance'. Thus, in Seminar XIV (1967) he claims that the body is the scene of jouissance, but it is also the location where Eros and Thanatos (Freud's theory about life and death drives, both of which are clearly manifested in Layla Al-Othman's short story) are interconnected.

In *Écrits*, 1966, Lacan theorizes that "Desire is a defense against going beyond a limit in jouissance" (*Écrits*, p.825). Later, he notes that desire does not provide sufficient satisfaction. Thus, at a certain time, the subject will discover that his desire is simply a useless detour whose objective is to catch other's jouissance (Seminar XI, 1973, p. 183-184). In Seminar VII (1980, p.209) Lacan reexamines this notion saying that it is not quite the satisfaction of a need, rather the satisfaction of a drive that surges from a necessity to be satisfied, and directed towards the

Other. Then, he goes straightforward in Seminar IX (1962) by affirming that the Other is the Law whose prohibition renders impossible and inaccessible the jouissance of the Thing.

In Psychoanalytic Feminism, Zakin, (2011) tackles these Lacanian theories from the girl's perspective while mentioning Freud, Oedipus and Phallic castration. The author writes that the girl does somehow know that the mother is castrated. She looks at the father like someone who embodies the 'virile capacity of desire'; the very capacity that does not exist in herself but that she seeks by falling pregnant from another man. Thus, according to Zakin (2011) in the itinerary of the girl's Oedipal Complex, femininity is concretized when she becomes the object of masculine desire.

Irigaray, L., (1974), dismissed the male symbolic order, one of her key theories is that in the patriarchal speech of western civilization the image of woman has been created as male's specular Other. Mambrol (2016) explains that 'speculum' (curved mirror) refers to the inward-looking character of the woman, in contrast to the man being described as 'flat mirror' due to his tendency to establish relation with his male counterparts. Thus, Irigaray strives to reveal a parallel feminine order that sets the balance right upon woman's construction of her sexual identity. She states that "female sexuality has always been conceptualized on the basis of masculine parameters."

By rejecting male parameters Irigaray (1974), does also reject the logic of male organ that designates the justness of patriarchal truth.

Irigaray, (1977) claims as well that Lacanian psychoanalysis has overlooked the importance of feminine sexuality preferring instead the primacy of the phallus. In this respect she highlights that the mother-daughter bond is intruded by the symbolic order; therefore, the woman is unable to duly represent herself. Only by ridding herself from patriarchal system can the daughter separate from her mother and inhabit her identity; or else, she will be estranged from her identity and history; the experience of which is witnessed by the protagonist of Layla Al-Othman and whose psychanalytical account is provided in the next chapter.

Psychoanalytical analysis of Layla Al-Othman's feminist short story: 'Men Fadlak, Tallekni'

This short story is an archetype of feminist literature whose verbal patterns reveal the emotional disarray in which the protagonist is thrown. It plunges the reader into the tormented rage and grief of a woman who has just witnessed the direct betrayal of her husband. Thus, the marital bond and trust that she had shared with her life partner is shattered, and consequently her very existence.

In weaving this story, Al-Othman gives an account about the disintegration of this character who was orbiting like an unconscious female Icarus around the bright sun that her husband physicality radiated. She was blinded by this sun and let her wings burn. Therefore, this is an account of her descent into hell, after a conjugal interlude that seemed to her the ideal paradise. But before going further in our analysis we have to bear in mind the Arab patriarchal culture in which this story is unfolding: an environment in which the female voice seeks autonomy and independence. Through her protagonist, Layla Al-Othman crafts a literary device that leads to self-recognition and self-awareness so that a pre-established order could find its right course. In fact, that mechanism initiates a semiotic stance. Thus, it allows the protagonist to reclaim her visibility as a participant in all aspects of society.

The following paragraphs, taken from the short story provide a critical analysis with highlights on passages that refer to Lacanian concepts or theories while stressing on the symbolic and semiotic orders:

أتكور على نفسي، شيء ما بداخلي يتمزق. أحس حرقه القهر تأكل أحشائي حتى تصل أنيابها إلى قلبي، تنتهش فيه. وكلما توغلت اهتزرت وانتابني الشعور بأنني لا بد هالكة بعد ساعة أو ساعتين

“I curl up on myself as I feel something inside me tearing apart. I feel the burning of oppression eating away my bowels till its fangs reach my heart, devouring it out. The more I threw myself in, the further I shook, feeling like I was bound to perish within an hour or two.”

This paragraph refers to the concept of ‘jouissance’ as the protagonist subjects herself to regression and enters in the maternal womb. She is navigating in the semiotic order; her speech is that of the pre-verbal language, the imaginary language, and more precisely the language of the mother. As indicated earlier, in Seminar XIV (1967) Lacan indicated that the body is the very zone of jouissance; but also, the scene where Eros and Thanatos – the Freudian concept of life and death pulsion.

وتأتي لحظة أستسلم فيها، أغمض عيني ولون المأساة يفترشهما. لا مناص. ولا هروب

“There comes a moment when I give up, close my eyes adorned with the color of tragedy. This is inevitable, and there is no escape.”

There is ambiguity and ambivalence in this statement as it emphasizes the protagonist’s relation with her mother. Thus, the first love object becomes inevitable and there is no escape from it as we pursue it all lifelong. Once again, this is about the state of regression, a scene where the heroine cannot distinguish the self from the breast; as a child she is choosing her mother as the first external love object (Benvenuto, 1989)

لقد كانت واقعة شهدتها بالعينين، والموت أرحم لي. وعندما اصل إلى هذا القرار يقفز شيء آخر بداخلي يصفعني، يرجني فأستيقظ على ألا أضيق الدائرة من حولي، فالحياة أجمل، ويجب أن أعيشها، أن أخطو على شوكة حتى أصل، ثم بعد ذلك أستل كل الأشواك، أعيش حياتي، وأخلق أملاً جديداً يربطني بها، نعم لا يجب أن أموت

“That was an incident I witnessed with my own eye; and death is more merciful to me. And when I reach this decision, something does suddenly jump inside me and slaps violently, begging me to wake up and not tighten he circle around me. For life is more beautiful, and I must live it; step on its thorns till I reach my destination and I take off all the thorns, live my life, and create a new hope that binds me to it. Yes, I should not die.”

As the protagonist is hurled further in regression, we notice the confrontation that emerges between the pulsion of life and death. This condition is coupled with the loss of the ‘objet petit a’, which shakes her off really hard. By feeling the jouissance, she has returned to the imaginary language of the mother – as if she is a baby – the semiotic order. She is living in her ‘corporeal memory’ (Smith, 1998, p. 16), which is a life and death and energy that the body emits before the symbolic separation from the mother.

وأشعر أنها تأكل أحشائي

‘And I feel that it is eating away my entrails’

With this sentence we move from regression into orality. The entrails, together with the umbilical cord, redefine the intimate relationship developed between mother and child as the loss of the ‘objet petit a’ becomes more and more obvious. This is evoked in Klein's (1921) theory of the unconscious which centers on the mother-child bond. Through this special bond she becomes the prime seducer of the child. At the same time, we notice the signs of castration.

مات الحب. هكذا في لحظة حاسمة ما بين الحلم الذي دام عشر سنوات والأمل الذي فرشت به دروب المستقبل. مات ذلك الاشتعال وشعرت بأن الحياة التي كانت ترقص بثوب أبيض قد "داخت" وشاخت وسقطت مدرجة باللون الأسود.

‘Love died away; just like that, at one fatal moment, between the dream that lasted ten years and the hope with which the paths of my future were paved. That flamboyant passion disappeared and I felt that the life that was dancing in a white dress has “faded” and aged, falling down in utter darkness.’

There is much jouissance in this passage that combines the white dress and the dance with the couple relationship of love. But love veers toward hatred and its black color, the territory of jouissance. According to Schroeder (1998) jouissance is a phenomenon of the body. It creates inhibition and fear while giving a new interpretation of the ‘real’.

ماذا عليّ أن أفعل في لحظة كهذه؟ ماذا تفعل النعجة في اللحظة التي يكون حد السكين مسلطاً على عنقها؟ ويكون الدم الحار يغلي في عروقها؟ هل كنت قادرة على أن أصرخ؟ أن أفزع إليهما وأنشب أظفاري في وجهيهما وفي لحمهما الملوّث؟ كيف لي أن أستطيع وقد كبلتني المفاجأة. وكنت النعجة تحت حدّ السكين. غمامة سوداء انتشرت في الغرفة حتى كدت أتصور أنني في كابوس مزعج لكنها الحقيقة واضحة أمام العين. الحقيقة بكل تفاصيلها تخرق حياتي.

‘What can I do at a moment like this? What does a sheep do at the moment when the knife is about to slit her neck, while blood is boiling up in her veins? Could I scream off? Jump on them and scratch their faces and polluted flesh? But I was tied up with this shocking surprise. And I was like this sheep at the mercy of a knife’s edge. Then a dark cloud spread all over the room until I almost imagined that I was in a disturbing nightmare; but the truth is crystal clear to the eye. It permeates my life with all its details.’

This paragraph depicts the very act of castration while announcing separation from the mother. Thus, we perceive that the protagonist is about to quit one order and move into another. She has developed a castration anxiety, and she already feels the loss of phallus is inevitable. In these moments she is vacillating between imaginary and symbolic orders, In Lacan’s theories fears concerning the phallus loss are found in the zone of the imaginary. On the hand the ‘symbolic’ meaning of castration is properly highlighted as a different order. Thus, within the protagonist’s anxious mindset there is a hesitant journey between both the ‘imaginary’ and ‘symbolic’ orders coming from the terrible fear of being castrated.

تعاش الحياة مرتين: مرة للحلم، ومرة لتحقيق الحلم، وقد عشت الحلم بكل أبعاده. كان سالم هو الأفق الذي امتدت إليه سواحل أحلامي وهو الشمس التي اتجهت إليها بكل شعاعات آمالي. تمنيته، ولأجله حاربت أمي التي رفضت وأخي الذي أخذ دور أبي بعد وفاته.

'Life is lived twice: one as a dream, and then to achieve or realize this dream; and I have lived it in all its dimensions. Salem was the horizon to which the coasts of my dreams stretched. And he is the sun to which I turned with all the rays of my hopes. I wished him dearly, and fought for him against my mother's decision (here we can see Oedipus, castration, quarrel over the father), and my brother, who took my father's role after his death.'

The sun is the symbol of the father in psychoanalysis, it represents the authority, the "superego" and the "ego ideal" (<https://www.jepense.org/symbolisme-soleil-signification-spirituelle/>). Fighting against the mother's decision indicates the rebellion/quarrel of Oedipus, the quarrel over the father and the castration. Moreover, by now the protagonist is fully living in the semiotic mode as she enters in an alternate world of dreams. She is submerged by dreams, thus transported by the unconscious, which, for Lacan is the reality. At the same time, she acknowledges the loss that gave her 'jouissance'.

When she declares that her dream has been fulfilled, we notice how fulfilled she became in that dream-world because it was ruled by both the unconscious and the real. She was reacting to her fantasies and composing with her male-driven fantasmagoria. But upon waking up to the concrete reality of her marital life she started to realize the true loss that greatly affected her. Thus, from Oedipal projection to the agony of the loss she is submitted to the Name of the Father. She becomes this little child who endorses the symbolic order and starts to utter the word 'I' (<http://cahiers.kingston.ac.uk/concepts/castration.html>). This is an act precipitated by the symbolic castration. It takes the child into the areas of symbolic order.

وعارضت أختي التي تزوجت قبلي بخمس سنوات، وأنجبت ولم تعش حياة مريحة. حاولت أن تفهمني أن الزواج شيء مؤلم، وأنه الحظيرة البائسة التي تقضي فيها المرأة سنوات عمرها، تشرب وتأكّل وتنام وتلد مثل الأرنبة وأن الزوج ما هو إلا مالك لمفتاح هذه الحظيرة، يفتحها متى شاء ويغلقها متى شاء. يخرج منها ما لا يرغب فيه من الدواجن ويأتي بالجديد دون معارضة ودون استئذان من أصحابها. باختصار أرادت أن ترعبني من فكرة الزواج معللة ذلك بأشكال الذل التي عاشتها في حياتها الزوجية، متصورة أن هذا سيثبيني عن عزمي، وأنه كفيل بأن يجعلني أنظر إلى سالم نظرة تخوف. وبالتالي أرفض.

'I opposed my sister, who had married five years before me, gave birth, and did not have a comfortable life. She wanted me to understand that marriage is a painful thing; that it is the miserable barn where a woman whiles away her years eating, drinking, sleeping and giving birth like a rabbit. And that the husband is the sole owner of this barn's key: he opens or closes it whenever he wants to. He takes out the unwanted poultry and brings new specimen without any opposition or permission. In short, she wanted to dissuade me from the idea of getting married, justifying it with the humiliations she experienced in her married life, thinking that this would discourage me, making me look at Salem with fear... and therefore I refuse.'

Here, we are reminded by Lacan that castration is necessary phase for the child so that he/she can finally embody the role of the desiring subject. On this particular phase Lacan adds that the child is unable to self-locate in desire without self-castrating. It is a process that entails the loss

of the primary jouissance, which is later obtained in a modified (<http://cahiers.kingston.ac.uk/concepts/castration.html>)

This paragraph focuses on the symbolic order which is transmitted by the family: first by her mother who refused Salem, then by her brother who assumed father's role in the previous paragraph, and finally by her sister who embodied the twin social and traditional rules. Here, we refer to Hook (2016), who rather claims that symbolic order relates to the influence of sociocultural family rule, especially within patriarchal societies where the father-figure looms large.

كان سالم رجلاً وسيماً، تفرض عليه مهنته أن يكون كذلك، فهو يعمل مديراً لأحد البنوك، وعليه أيضاً يجب أن يكون لطيفاً مبتسماً مع البشر المترددين عليه، رجالاً ونساءً، وحتى مع العاملات معه، وكنت واحدة منهن. سطت على قلبي معاملته الناعمة واثلجت صدري كل يوم ابتسامته الرائعة، وشغلت تفكيري أناقته وذوقه وأنا أعشق في الرجل أناقته وذوقه. وكنت أرى زميلاتي في العمل يتهاقطن للحصول على اهتمام منه ولم أكن أفعل. كنت في قرارة نفسي أعلم أن رجلاً كهذا تتمناه جميع النساء، يتمنى امرأة لا يستدير عنقها إليه بسهولة ولا تتودد، ولا تندفع، فكنت هذه الواحدة التي تقف بكل شموخ وثقة أمام ابتسامته ولطفه، وأمام كل ما يمتاز به من مركز ووسامة.

She describes Salem in the following terms:

'Salem was a handsome man; by profession he was obliged to look well-groomed. He works as a bank executive; thus, he must be cordial and smiling with people in his environment: customers, whether male or female, even his staff, and I was one of them. His soft behavior overwhelmed my heart and his wonderful smile lit up my heart every single day; and his elegance and refined taste filled up my mind. I adore such qualities in a man. I could see my team-mates flocking around to gain his attention, but I didn't. I knew in my heart that such a man, wished for by all women, wished for a woman who did not turn her neck to him easily, did not court, and did not rush, so I was the one who stood right there with all glory and confidence in front of his smile and kindness, and in front of all his status and handsomeness.'

In the passage above Salem's tender behavior reflects one of the chief characteristics of the mother when she reacts softly to appease the child's fear or worries. The conflict between women is also evident, especially the 'jouissance' that they feel when they compete for the attention of a particular man. There is stiff competition the man's phallus, which is a symbol of power that satiates the loss that they feel. Thus, the triangle of feminine desire, feminine jouissance and feminine loss pivot around the man.

عيون في الحقد وأحياناً والحسد الغيرة نظرة ألمح بدأت الأيام ومع، وقوة بصمت، أحببته داخلي في لكني والاحترام والاهتمام الود تستحق خاصة حالة ويعتبرني بينهن من يصطفيني أنه أدركت فقط عندها زميلاتي. لقد نعم شيء كل وتفسد وولهي احتراقي رائحة تفوح لا حتى أحترق ألا على حريصة وكنت يشتعل حيي كان يتقدم ووجدته، والصبر الكتمان على يقوى بعد لم وعندها الخاص الشيء نظره في لأظل هذا ففعلت، تمنيته بكل وقفت لكنني ديني غير من أنه حجتهم كانت، أهلي رفض توقعت ولكني، فرحاً فطرت، يدي طالباً إلى السعيد البيت وضمنا، الحب وانتصر، الرفض وجه في القوة.

'But deep inside I loved him, silently and strongly, and along the days I glimpsed the looks of jealousy, envy and sometimes hatred in my colleagues. Only then did I realize that he singled me up and considered me someone who's worthy of friendliness, attention and respect. My love lit up brightly and I was careful not to

burn it so that it would spoil everything. Yes, I desired him, therefore I behaved this way to keep in his eyes the special thing; and then, as he could no longer afford secrecy and patience, I found him asking my hand. I was flooded with happiness, but I expected my family's rejection, their argument being that he is from a different religion; but I stood firm against their rejection, and love triumphed, and we secured a happy home."

At this stage the protagonist, like her mother before, becomes man's object of desire and his special love. She is in pre-Oedipal discursive mode. Her body is burning deep inside, and she was always cautious of being immolated, troubled by the burning scent that her body will emit. In fact, she reveals her great burning desire because it indicates the libidinous power she is after. And when that power is aroused she will be engulfed in sexual energy, the source of envy and jealousy. These notions (object of desire, libido, sexual immolation and jealousy) are analyzed by Zuern and Rega (1998), who write that Lacan regards jealousy in pre-Oedipal children. When they grow up, their aims and desires are influenced by the desires of others, particularly their competitors.

هكذا ملأت الطمأنية قلبي وسكن الأمان وجداني كله، ونسيت في غمرة هذا الاطمئنان أنه ما يزال يتمتع بكل الحيوية والوسامة واللفظ، وأنه ما يزال مطمئناً لكثير من النساء. ولربما كان هذا هو خطأي الكبير الذي وقعت فيه. لم أشعره بخوفي، ولا غيرتي، ولم أعد أغدق عليه من الحب ما كنت أعطيه إياه في السنوات الأولى، ولعل هذا الاطمئنان هو الذي جعله ينساق في علاقة لم أكتشف خيطاً من خيوطها، ولم ألمح وجهها من وجوها. وتصورت أنني وحدي سيدة البيت والقلب وسيدة المستقبل ونسيت كلام أختي، وتجاهلت أن للرجل عيلاً لا تشبع مهما امتلأت.

'This is how reassurance nestled in my heart and the whole sentiment of security filled up my conscience, but in the midst, I forgot that he still enjoyed his full vitality, handsomeness and kindness; and that he is still coveted by many women. Perhaps this was my big mistake. I did not make him feel my fear, nor my jealousy, and I no longer poured on him the love that I showed him earlier, and perhaps it was this reassurance that made him drift into a relationship whose threads I did not discover, nor did I glimpse her face. I imagined that I was the sole lady of the house, of his heart and the lady of the future; and I forgot my sister's words, and I ignored that a man has an insatiable eye, no matter how full it is.'

She was looking for the port of security and safety where she could anchor herself in the protective shadow of her husband. There is linking of safety with *l'objet petit a*, for the former is related to her mother – the safe harbor she provided through her relation. These are scenes that the protagonist is living like fantasies that seep through her semiotic discourse. She vibrates in her own story of how Salem chose her over many other women. This libidinous vibration plunges her in a world of fantasies where she firmly holds the belief that Salem can only love her and no one else. She saw in him only what she preferred to see, and by doing so she created an image of Salem that fits with her fantasies. Still, what is recurrent in the protagonist's symbolic and semiotic narration of the events is repetition in her discourse. In this respect Verhaeghe (1996), observes that Freud came up with the notion of repetition as a compulsive act signifying the subject's unsuccessful attempt to explain things where words are too hard to describe them. Freud has associated this act with the interference of libido and anxiety.

نمت على بساط الأمان حتى وجدته في لحظة مفاجئة على سريرتي معها، وكنت في سفر قصير عدت منه فجأة، أحسن إلى بيتي ولكنني وجدت في البيت ناراً.

‘‘I slept on a secure mat until I suddenly found him on my bed with a woman, and I was on a short journey from which I suddenly returned, yearning for my home but I found the house on fire.’’

Here, the security of the mat evokes the safe and soothing relation of mother (*l'objet petit a*). The protagonist returns to a state of regression, entering again in her world of childhood when, in her bed, the love of the mother provided all the comfort that she needed. In a Lacanian reading of this text such consciousness is evoked as object a. Wolf (2019, p. 28) claims that what was previously known as consciousness by Hegel, is henceforth seen by Lacan as object a because it is charged with recognition. In ‘Men Fadlak, Tallekni’ it is desire (in all its male revocation and female violent urge) that gets recognized. Such acknowledgment awakes the heroine’s awareness about the recognition of desire. It is the mechanism that instigates in her the dialectic of semiotic. It is dialectic of an injured girl who lived too innocently by the protective shadow of her husband. She is deprived of her phallic desire. Thus, she wants to return into the womb of her mother, the hidden pre-oedipal refuge. She is falling apart, disempowered, and her state is that of phallic powerlessness.

In the end of this chapter, we note that it was imperative to conduct a psychoanalytical analysis on this short-story so that an accurate diagnosis could be provided on the protagonist’s “*état d’âme*” or “*état d’esprit*” her “*state of mind*” or “*mindset*”. Thus, our findings are discussed in the following section.

Key Findings

One our main findings based on this psychoanalytical examination is that the female protagonist of Al-Othman is living amid an unresolved Oedipus complex. She is roaring with pain but at the same time she is regressing into her cherished infantile world where such pain did not exist at all. She grew up in this ‘womb’ daydreaming and fantasizing about a totemic phallus.

Another key finding is that because of this complex the protagonist does not fully enter into the paternal language. We rather see her hovering in the vicinity of this language then retreating into a semiotic mode. A behavior that lets her fluctuate between the imaginary and the symbolic orders.

Therefore, these findings confirm our hypothetical observation that she oscillates between the semiotic (the maternal language of the body as conceptualized by Kristeva) and symbolic orders (the Lacanian embodiment of the paternal law).

Through her pre-verbal description of her husband’s disloyal affair the protagonist veers between these two opposing orders. In the past, she lived in an Edenic state where she was this docile lamb shepherded by her husband’s phallic guidance. Now she is bleeding from the stabbings of that phallus that loomed over her and gave her full protection/security.

The semiotic tone emerging from her pre-oedipal discourse wants to avenge and overcome her husband’s infidelity. She seeks to reclaim her female sexuality by voicing her near-hysterical language that is nostalgic about the phallus.

In this context, Al-Othman’ weaponizes the tenets of feminist literature to disseminate a semiotic order that fights against the overwhelming male order (Wolf, 2019, p. 56). Her

protagonist is in the throes of the Name-of-the-Father (Felluga, 2011), both the real father and the substitute father. They are the characters who conduct the process of symbolic castration. Salem embodies the role of the father who steers marital life through the prisms of his sociocultural influence: he impersonates the triple rule of husband/father/patriarch. He incarnates the laws, as well as the prohibitions that control the heroine's sexual desire/speech. He is an amalgam of four crucial notions that consist of the superego, the phallus, the symbolic order and the Oedipus complex.

Conclusion

Al-Othman lets her protagonist live in two contrasting words: the symbolic and the symbiotic. In reality, she subverts an order whose origins reside in Freud's 'Totem and Taboo' and Levi-Stauss's 'Structural Anthropology'. Thus, instead of orbiting around the phallus, the castrated heroine regresses in embryonic state and starts to orbit in her own semiotic order. She was this object of man's desire and special love (pre-linguistic state). Now her own entrails are aching with the impulses of life and death. In truth, she is torn apart between these opposing impulses as she tries to endure the consequences of losing the 'object petit a'. Her house is on fire; so is her mind. Regression is the only way out to abolish this loss from her conscience; and in her regressive refuge she is throbbing with jouissance.

According to Groves and Leader (1995, p. 140) the jouissance that Lacan formulated was about a devastation that was too unbearable for the organism. Thus, it is lived, and felt, as an enormous suffering, like something outside the realm of 'symbolization and meaning'. Earlier she was living in the jouissance of love, when clad in her white dress she was whirling away her insouciance like a dance maid. Indeed, she had nothing to worry about: she was protected by her father/husband, she had the full support of his phallic love. But now she is driven by hate, whose color is black. Her love is betrayed; a betrayal that castrated her desire as well as her wish to possess the phallus of her husband. Her desire has just been annihilated since another woman is now possessing that phallus. And with her unresolved Oedipus complex we see her oscillating between semiotic and symbolic orders.

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