

## THE DEPICTION OF MASCULINITY IN NAWAL AL-SAADAWI'S FICTION

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**ABSTRACT:** *This study examines the image of man in a number of novels by Nawal Al-Saadawi, the famous Egyptian novelist, whose works have aroused a lot of controversy in the Arab world. Throughout her works, Al-Saadawi consistently portrays man in a very negative manner. No matter what his social or educational background is man is at all times the symbol of oblivious tyranny, ruthless cruelty and callous oppression. The man as a father, for example, does not escape her vehement attacks. He is held as ignorant, foolish and tyrannical and sways between absence and presence. What makes her assaults harsher is her skillful employment of irony, paradox, sarcasm and other elements of figurative language. These tools help her in creating an analytical, descriptive language, which allows her to trace the tiny features of man. However, her constant focus on attacking man as a man undermines her literary accomplishments along with her aesthetic attitudes.*

**KEYWORDS:** *The image of man, the father image, irony, doubleness, feminism criticism, Arabic literature.*

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### INTRODUCTION

Nawal Al-Saadawi has no doubt provided the Arabic library with a great number of works in diverse genres all of which deal with the Arab woman. She wrote novels like *Memoirs of a Woman Doctor* (1958), *The Absent One* (1969), *Two Women in One* (1971), *Love in the Kingdom of Oil* (1993) and *Zeina* (2009). She also wrote short story collections such as *I Learnt Love* (1957), *The Thread and the Wall* (1972), *Death of an Ex-minister* (1978) and *Adab Am Kellet Abad* (2000). She has experience in writing plays, like *Twelve Women in a Cell* (1984) or *Isis* (1985). Her memoirs (non-fiction) are also numerous. Consider *Memoirs in a Women's Prison* (1983) and *My Life*, which appeared in three volumes. More than ten books (non-fiction) were published in Arabic

and more than twenty books were translated to English or other languages. To this remarkable amount of books, which obviously reflects her extraordinary talent, Al-Saadawi has been an undaunted activist in the field of women's rights let alone her academic achievements as a physician and psychiatrist.

In every single work, Al-Saadawi asserts her attitudes regarding social practices and customs, in general, and man-woman relationships, in particular. She often portrays an image of man that is harmonious with extreme viewpoints endorsed by radical feminist movements. According to Abu Zaid, these movements preach different ideas. While some believe they can change inherited customs and traditions and bridge the gap between men and women, others seek to turn the present conditions upside down and others aspire to use scientific research to create a third species (1990, 17).<sup>1</sup> The discussion of these proposals is not our concern. Rather, we are going to detect the image of man (his various identities included) as displayed in Al-Saadawi's novels and examine the literary tools employed by her to illustrate this image.

### **Man's Image in Selected Works**

#### **The Father as a Symbol of Absolute Authority**

The success of a narrative work relies mainly on the various images that the writer draws for his characters. According to Taha Wadie, the writer is likely to achieve this end when he presents a human experience through depicting a group of characters in a specific temporal and spatial reality" (1984, 45). To put it differently, these characters can convince the reader of the genuineness of the fictional life it portrays when the illusory life "embodies a cause through which the writer seeks to create a philosophical attitude or a certain vision towards a particular reality which the characters of the novel live" (1984, 3).

Looked at from this aspect, therefore, Al-Saadawi has not managed to offer a good narrative art depending on the reality of the character and its ability to provide the reader with an authentic imagined life. To the contrary, more often than not, she resorts to abstraction which in human ties, as George Tarabishi maintains, lacks the power to be persuasive just as art alone cannot create a fine story (1995, 16). She presents man as an abstract exemplification of man and woman as an imperceptible configuration of woman rather than as living creatures enjoying factual existence. Although this image of man offered by Al-Saadawi is consistent with modern and postmodern visions, which emphasize a liking for fragmentations and distortions, she, nonetheless, focuses on man awhile excluding women.

When the father figure, representing tyrannical masculinity according to radical feminists, loses his image as a man, then his image as a father is eradicated, too. The result is that father figure, to quote Tarabishi, becomes merely "a member in a flock of sheep whose population are defined as men" (17). This is exactly the image of the father after his death in Al-Saadawi's *Death of an Ex-minister*. Featureless, the father's face,

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<sup>1</sup> . All translations from Arabic sources in addition to the titles of the cited works are ours.

[b]ecomes like all fathers' faces. And all fathers' faces look exactly like the carton faces which we used to buy on the holiday. The eyes are no longer eyes but two big holes. When we look inside them, we see nothing. The nose is a protruding piece of cartoon, which also has two slots that are nothing but two holes. And under the moustache there is a long moustache. (1983, 28).

The drastic switch from the rank of a minister whose figure transmitted awe and respect to the deteriorated point of nothingness intensifies the notion of man's degeneracy. What adds insult to injury is that this description is given by the man's own daughter rather than by a stranger.

In *The Absent One*, a more negative image of the father figure is painted. Here the father stands for a germ, or an invisible virus, which reproduces, spreads and changes quickly to adjust to new environments forever causing harm and destruction. The narrator says,

The house was quiet and clean all days except Friday. Her father used to moisten the bathroom while taking a shower. His towels were always dirty.... Her mother placed them in boiling water explaining to her, "To purify them of germs..." One day the teacher asked, "Girls, where do germs live?" Foadah said loudly with a voice full of confidence, "In Dad's handkerchief!" (18)

The young girl's spontaneous reply may sound naïve and humorous but it also exposes the deeply rooted animosity and revulsion that the mother has for her husband and the daughter has for her father. Worse, their attitude signals the destruction of the family ties. Fathers have lost their traditional or natural roles as the providers of love, care, warmth and protection for their own family members. Worse still, the fathers, as wives and daughters maintain, are members of a race that functions as messengers of dirt, pollution, hatred and crime directed at the other race. This provides the victims, the feminine race represented by the mother and the daughter, with a good reason to hate the other race represented by the father. Indeed, in an attempt to explain this extremely hostile attitude, the commenting narrator asserts this hatred is not without a convincing reason imbedded in the past, "When her mother gave birth to her, the former raised the newborn baby girl to her father. When he realized she was a girl, he turned his face away and did not kiss her. That was reason enough for his wife to hate him and afterwards, Foadah hated him too" (69). Clearly, rather than give an objective analysis of or fair report on the relationship between the father and female members of his own family, the narrator sees things from their perspective and justifies their feminine response. Yet, the narrator limits the females' attitude to hidden feelings and silence.

In *The Absent One*, Sameerah transcends the position of oppressed silence and hidden abhorrence to the point where she accuses her father of committing a hideous crime. She says, "He killed my mother. He killed her because I loved her and did not love him. I wish he had realized I could have loved him if only he had loved me. I knew though I was a child that he did not love my mother or me. He just liked to eat and be full" (52). In addition to the point discussed earlier, this extract adds new clashing attitudes. The standpoint of the female adult here relies on her understanding of the father's behavior when she was a child. But what if that child has misrepresented the father's attitude? Besides, it reveals the daughter's inability to show love. If

the father's hatred breeds the daughter's hatred, perhaps, the daughter's love could have produced love and conquered hatred. Instead, the daughter finds it easy to present herself as a victim and portray her father as a criminal or an animal whose sole concern is to gratify his instincts: eating and drinking.

The father image is not always dealt with consistently. At times, the antithesis is contained within the thesis and the result is that the readers get a complex, contradictory perception of the father. To be more specific, in *The Absent One*, the father image appears through polar concepts: presence and absence. On the one hand, the father is rejected and denied despite his presence and on the other, his attendance is desired and he is longed for and sought for when he is absent. After her father's absence, Foadah feels at some moments she is sorrowful and her conscience pains her for not having wept over her father's death:

She suddenly discovered that she loved her father and that she wanted him. She wanted him to look at her... and fold her within his arms. She buried her head into the sofa's cushion and burst with weeping. She wept because her father passed away and she did not weep. In a moment, she wished her father could be revived then die so that she could weep. Then her conscience would be relieved. (52)

Her attitude reflects perhaps a schizophrenic case where her vision is blurred because she affirms that she detests her father along with his race at the same time that she longs for him and scolds herself for treating him badly (Sawsan Naji, 2006 229, 226). The daughter's attitude, however, does not indicate longing as much as it shows a tendency to play a designated social role. It can be a lament over failing to play the role of a daughter who should cry in the wake of her father's death. Otherwise, she could have wished his resurrection so that they can relive the past and enjoy their familial ties.

Thus, Nawal Al-Saadawi has deprived the father figure of all his dignified and elated responsibilities and emptied the term of its positive allusions, meanings, connotations and associations. He is no longer perceived as the ever-flowing spring of mercy, compassion, warmth and love. Rather, she depicts him as an abstract inhuman filled with brutality and cruelty, selfishness and hatred. These images are naturally far from the real image of the father, and in consequence, the reader cannot sympathize with a figure lacking credibility or factuality. In so doing, Al-Saadawi has forged her characters in such a way that they bear single-dimensional vision and has turned her creative works into intellectual creations in literary disguises that unfortunately lack the criteria of contemporary fiction.

It is very likely, that Al-Saadawi has undergone this course under the profound impact of her personal attitudes. In depicting the character of the father, she, as Sawsan Naji maintains, lets the father utter her own ideas sweeping the readers with many confessions characterized by exaggerations condemning all men. More important, Al-Saadawi uses terms and metaphors so adverse, predetermined and flat that the text lacks innovation, imagination and creativity. As a result, her characters suffer from a want for freedom of mobility and flexibility, which are

necessary components for providing the fictional character with reliability and efficiency (Naji, 2006 226).

Naji's interpretation of Al-Saadawi's works is interesting but is not without its bias and prejudice. On the artistic level, Al-Saadawi's has created two major types of characters: females and males. Women are presented as victims throbbing with life, competence and consistency while men as their polar counterpart. Al-Saadawi may be morally wrong to dig this unbridgeable gap between the two genders who make up our societies and guarantee the survival of the species of man, but artistically her works are flawless.

### **Vicious Men versus Virtuous Women**

The abstract picture painted by Al-Saadawi for the father in her novels is not in isolation from the overall picture she has painted for man since the father, as she maintains, represents the whole male community along with their cruelty, harshness, domination, egoism and arrogance. All men have these criteria regardless of their background, ethnic belonging, educational level or names.

Al-Saadawi even gives a list of groups indicating their offensive practices. Revolutionary men, Al-Saadawi asserts, are dangerous and wicked. "Men with the revolutionary principles," Al-Saadawi states, "do not differ much from the other men; through their intelligence they obtain what the other men get through their money" (1973, 97). About men in the ruling authority she says, "Their selves are distorted and voracious and their appetite for money, sex and authority is limitless and kept without surveillance (1973, 32). Commenting on their desire for possession she adds, "It is like a chronological, incurable disease" (1973, 60).

In *The Absent One*, she talks about two other factions in community: the religious people and the husbands. The former group are hypocrites, pretenders, imposters and phonies and are all harnessed to serve the rulers. As for the husbands, they are harsh and ruthless. Love, compassion and serenity have abandoned their hearts giving way for severity and cruelty (1969, 35).

However, that does not mean that other groups of men referred to in this novel are exempt. As a rule, Al-Saadawi repeats again and over again, all men are corrupted criminals including, "parents, uncles, cousins, spouses, lawyers, journalists, and all the men from all professions" (1969, 35). She even goes to the extreme point where she uses malevolent words to label imaginative, representational characters with connotative names. She says, "All are dogs bearing various names: Mohammed, Hussein, Fawzi, Ibrahim and Bayoumi" (1969, 15).

A similar notion is restated in *The Children's Circling Song*. When Hameedah, the female character, looks at the figure of a man, she can see the features of the face and realize they look like her father's, brother's, uncle's, cousin's or any other's because men's harsh and rough features are one and matching; their loathsome body appearances are identical and recurrent (18, 1976). Hence, all men, as Hameedah, accepts as true, are *en masse* branded as criminals. Conversely, women cannot be murderers by capacity of their gender because there is a need for masculinity for crime to be committed (1976, 88).

Al-Saadawi's taxonomy leads to the establishment of two separate camps: one that encloses all the villains, the thugs, the crooks and the scoundrels and one that encompasses all the virtue doers and the innocent people. What connects the two camps is obviously not love and compassion but hatred and abhorrence. This explains why Ferdaws in *Woman at Point Zero* spits at any man she happens to see (1973, 47).

What characterizes the relationship between man and the woman is a severe conflict that measures up to a ruthless, destructive war where the use of all weapon, which can help the woman, attain her goal is legitimate. He insists on her attitudes even if that war means the devastation of man or the human society. Therefore, destruction rather than construction is the link that typifies the relationship between entities created to complete each other. The destruction of man, his society and everything related to him is the goal that Al-Saadawi asserts. A quick look at the titles of her works will give an authentication of this assumption: *The Death of the Only Man on Earth, The Fall of the Imam, Death of the Ex-Minister, or When Man is Defeated*.

The names picked for men and those selected for women uncovers the strategy to create the two polar camps referred to earlier. The camp of the virtuous women includes names such as Foadah (the "she- heart;" she invents a feminine form to reject the authentic name which has a masculine form in Arabic), Bahiyyah (the gorgeous woman), Zakia, (the pure woman), Nafeesah (the precious woman), Fareedah (the unique woman), Ain Al-Hayat (The eye of life) and Hameedah (the praised woman). Even men affiliated with this group are feminine and are coined to bear names reflecting their desired interior-- I mean preciousness, purity, clearness, uniqueness and perfection. Consider Saleem (the healthy man), Fareed (the unique one), and Hameedoh (the praised one). In contrast, the camp of the villains are named Hamzawi, Qafrawi, Alawi, Mohammad the Watch-maker etc..., which are all common names with negative indications reflecting the author's vision. Besides, they are in one line with her project to terminate man, as said by Naji (2006, 350).

The process of terminating, beating and conquering man takes additional forms. In *When Mans is Defeated*, for example, the major female figure dominates her male counterpart. The man does his utmost to defend his masculinity, regains himself after submitting to the woman instead of her submitting to him, and is pushed by an impulse to spank her on the face. He tells her, "You are not a woman but a man!"

He did not know why that had happened. He never imagined that there would be a woman like him (i. e. a man like him). She too did not intended him in particular. Rather, she wanted to conquer his arrogant manhood, to feel him while he is humiliated, injured, confused in his submission to her, and crying out of weakness, and defeat in the wake of his weakness and humiliation and to wrap around his neck her silk thread and drag him after her. Like him, she sought victory no matter what the means or the price was. (1990, 47)

Since the conflict between the two sexes, as portrayed by Al-Saadawi, is anthropological, psychological and historical (ibid, 101), then it is only logical that fear dominates their relationship.

Man fears woman just as woman fears man. This may lead to a situation where each is affiliated with a camp of his own gender trying to conquer the other opponent camp. The result is a comprehensive non-stop war that aims at causing destroying rather than promoting life.

As expected such a conflict cannot help the woman attain her legitimate rights for hatred does not breed justice and equality. Ironically, as Al-Saadawi says, when man converts his admiration of the woman, the mother figure, the ancient goddess, who stands for fertility and generation, into an unconscious revulsion, he is doomed to hate the whole world including his father, mother and even himself (1983, 37). Such a man will only be a tool for demolition rather than construction. Moreover, just as hatred does not generate equality and justice so fear does not create a healthy society based on these values.

Importantly, the author has been trapped by this feeling of hatred and as a result she has placed her characters within a maze. In their attempt to crush man, they terminate themselves, too. Their scheme to destroy man in order to remove an obstacle hindering their progress will eventually bring about a confusion and paradox in their attempt to express their own vision. Since their hatred of man has become their only concern in life, they also hate their femininity, their major link with man, and in consequence, themselves. This is exactly what has happened to Bahiyyah Shaheen in *Two Women in One*, who hates herself and rejects her femininity. Worse, she abhors the feminine element immersed in her proper name, which like leather bridle, links her to lists of girls (1971, 26).

The same reaction is echoed in *Memoirs of a Woman Doctor*, where the female young figure regards her femininity as chains tying her to bed. Worse, these chains have coiled her with disgrace and scandal and restricted her body. She hates men, their pants, their veracious, swollen eyes, and their thick moustaches which look like dead insects (1985, 8).

Ironically, despite their intense dislike of the species of men, Al-Saadawi's female characters are often engaged in locating an ideal man tailored to their needs to gratify their vision of reality. This perception of the ideal man is naturally derived from their prejudiced imagination. Bahiyyah Shaheen, for example, carves the figure of Saleem in such a way that he seems sexless. He is portrayed as the man of her dreams, the rebel who, like her, believes in change, and the savior who, in agreement with her perspective, represents the future free real man and, therefore, will be a proper substitution for the egoistic man (Naji 2006, 80).

In *The Absent One*, we meet Fareed, another man who is invented to suit the heroine's desire: "He was not any man.... He was different; he was different from the others. And how was he different?.... She did not know exactly though there was something in his eyes that she did not see in other men's eyes" (7). Obviously, Fareed is an imaginative, non-existent character whose whereabouts or background is not known to her. She knows nothing about his family belonging or social circle: "She knows none but him. She even does not have the traditional knowledge about him. She does not know what his father is, how many acres Fareed may inherit from him, how much his salary is, his identity number or birth date.... However, she knows him in blood and flesh" (14).

Instead of promoting Al-Saadawi's notions and upgrading the case of women, the figure of Fareed serves to intensify Foadah's restriction. As a matter of fact, Al-Saadawi has replaced one chain by another. She initially plans to crush the man's species and to carve a substitution. Unfortunately, she becomes so strongly attached to the carved figure that she loses herself. After her close attachment to Fareed, Foadah undergoes a painful experience: she believes that "Fareed was sucking her pains and dreams, and in consequence, she has become without pains or dreams; she has become a different Foadah, not that one that her mother gave birth to. She has become without a past or future" (7). Worse, she realizes that her initial pride in knowing nothing about him is deceptive. Thus, she asks, "But where is Fareed? Who is he? She doesn't know anyone that knows him and whom she doesn't know; where is he? And she does not know whether he was really existent one day? Perhaps he was an illusion. Maybe he was a dream "(50).

The same conclusion is drawn in *The Fall of the Imam*, in which Fadl-Allah, another sculpted figure by Al-Saadawi, produces the opposite of desired end. Created to meet the expectations of the heroine, "he sticks to her more and more. He wants to be annihilated in her; and she sticks to him more and more." Once each seems to achieve perfection through union of soul and body with the other, he/she realizes he also has lost himself/herself: "She wants to be annihilated in him. Each one has become the other. She has become him and he has become her. No force in the universe has been capable of separating one from the other any longer" (1987, 9).

One reason for the failure of this union can be ascribed to the creation of artificial types of men and women. To be more specific, the ideal feminine man carved to meet the expectations of a masculine woman signals the attempt to create breeds that seem to complete each other but are in fact at odds with God's purpose of creation. Hence, they are doomed to fail.

## LITERARY TOOLS

### 1. Irony as an Artistic Tool

Irony is the major tool that Al-Saadawi employs to draw the man image in her works. As an artistic literary tool, irony can serve Al-Saadawi's plan efficiently and provides her with an impenetrable mask. Artistically, irony is defined as, "a deliberate attack on a person in order to deprive him/her of all his/her weapons, to strip him/her of all forms of disguise or protective measures" (Ibrahim Nabila, 1987 137). Aware of these benefits, Al-Saadawi has used irony as a key tool in depicting the artistic and descriptive portrait of man. Her starting position has been abstracting man within the context of the launched conflict where woman legalized the employment of all kinds of weapons to achieve the sole objective of eliminating man.

What intensifies the sense of irony is Al-Saadawi's inclination to paint verbal cartoon portraits of men. She achieves this through appeal to hyperbolic descriptions as detailed by Mohammad Ananie in his *Art of Comedy*. He says that a descriptive image is characterized by extreme exaggeration[N]ot for the sake of exaggeration in depicting a facial or body feature but because the artist realizes the importance of this feature and therefore decides to highlight it through amplification. In other words, the artist does not oppose nature but traces its lines amplifying some

lines or diminishing others in such a way that s/he breaks down the external compatibility between the features and highlights the underlying flaw. Just as the artist focuses on one person's feature, so the writer resorts to the enlargement of one psychological characteristic and makes it dominate the others, which originally endowed the individual with balance... So, we encounter in the cartoon image the confusion of ratios between the various elements of the character when a certain psychological feature is amplified more than necessary. (Ananie, 1998 29-31)

Al-Saadawi has employed this cartoon photography remarkably and consistently because it serves her negative vision of man as a beast. Therefore, the majority of her descriptive pictures are consistent with her concept and struggle against man and the community from which he emerges. The nose of the teacher of religion in *The Absent One* is hooked like the beak of ducks (62). Osman's uncle in *When Man is Defeated* has a long brushy mustache on his upper lip as if he were a wild brute (67). The uncle's gasping in *She was the Weaker* is like an injured bull's; when he looks in the mirror, he is confronted with a chest as hairy as a monkey's. In *Memoirs of a Woman Doctor*, the husband has two big ears as flat as a rabbit's; as soon as man enters a room together with a woman, he is turned again into an animal walking on four and loses his power, muscles, domination and command: "How weak man is!" After she is admitted at the faculty of medicine, she soon finds out that there is no difference between man and woman and that the woman is like man and that man is a beast (1958, 70, 81, 32). And Mohammad, the watchmaker, in *The Absent One*, has a sticky smile while his protruding eyes shake from under the glasses like the eyes of a frog which looks stealthily under muddy water; when Foadah opens the window, she is surprised to see her boss snarling like a sick animal (1969, 39, 40). Once she focusses her gaze upon him, she develops the clumsy metaphor into a funny silent cinematic scene:

What she initially saw was the pointy-head of a man's black shoes, followed by a thin, short leg of leaden trousers..., then a large, conical, white head with a small bald spot at the center, which, like a mirror reflected the sunrays, showed itself. Then, a squared leaden shoulder, then the second short, thin, leg....And before the boss declares his exit..., the driver will be on the alert standing steadily and opening the rear door with his left hand, while his right hand is ready to rise the moment the bald spot of the boss on the staircase. (ibid. 41)

In *Two Women in One*, men on the tram in are more degraded than animals:

Their faces are battered with the government's hammer exactly like coins. They sit in silence stuck to each other while their lower halves fixed and foggy over the benches. Their upper halves shake in a slow and organized manner exactly like the tram's movement. Their large skulls, like the pendulum, are swinging. Their shoulders, which are broad owing to the thick stuff of the suit, are stuck together and their ties are wrapped around their necks like gallows. (1971, 38)

Irony is not only reflected in imagery but also in conversations. Let us consider the following dialogue between her superior at work. She suddenly says to him loudly, "I have been working in the research department for six years. I believe it is my right to do my research as of today."

It seemed as if she had uttered something shameful or said a nasty word thus causing his baldhead to turn red. His appearance, while sitting behind his desk, looked as a monkey sitting on his head and raising his buttocks in the air. In consequence, a smile accidentally escaped her lips and she heard him saying:

“Why are you smiling like this?”

She said, “You can ask about the time I disappeared from work but it is by no means your right to ask me why I smile like this! I will not let anybody, no matter who he is, step over any of my rights. I know how to defend them.”

The redness of his baldhead turned into faint yellow making his head look like a melon. Amazed, he said, “What were your rights that I walked upon?”

She waved her hands in the air and said, “You walked upon two important rights: first, my right to smile. Second, my absolute right to choose the way in which I smile.”

Shocked, his eyes, which were pounded in his face, widened thus moving aside some accumulated flesh. Greatly astounded, he said, “What are you saying, Miss?”

She said instinctively, “Who told you I am a miss?”

His eyes got wider while saying, “Aren’t you a miss?”

Here she banged her hands on the desk and shouted, “How do you dare ask me this question?! Who gave you that right?! The list?!” (1971, 42).

The extract is quoted in full to highlight the great sense of irony felt in the tone of the female character, the narrator and the author. However, the dialogue once again attains the contradictory goal. It is the woman’s impulsive eruptions, peculiar attention to marginal figures of speech, queer gestures and unexpected moods of conduct, that turn her into the center of irony.

In another dialogue conducted between two male characters in *Death of the Ex-Minister*, the narrator attempts to immerse a common talk between a teacher and his young student with irony, which proves superfluous. After Sameer learns writing and reading, the teacher asks the young pupil to write down his name. The teacher says,

“Write down your full name!”

He wrote, “Sameer Aziza...”

He wrote his mother’s name. The teacher looked at his notebook angrily then deleted “Aziza” with a red pen and said to him, “Write down your father’s name.”

Then Sameer wrote “Adam” (1983, 38).

### **Paradox and Doubleness of Character**

Paradox can be sharp when it transcends its artistic goal and deals with hot issues and exposes the contradiction between submission and revolution, acceptance and rejection, and the real position of the speaker and the formally adopted attitude. Paradox signals the discrepancy between the exterior and the interior, fact and fiction and beliefs and deeds. One effect of paradox is that it creates two contradictory characters of the speaker and doubles the character of the listener and, in consequence, perplexes the reader. In the process of quoting Booth, Ibrahim confirms that paradox is an intelligent game between its architect and its reader. In addition to activating the

reader, the architect of the paradox urges his reader to reject the literal meaning in favor of the hidden, implied import, which is in contradiction with the explicit one (1987 132).

It seems that Al-Saadawi has been aware of the various benefits of paradox and she makes good use of them promoting thus the artistic aspect of her writings. In *Death of the Ex-Minister*, for example, the minister suffers a severe case of two conflicting characters. He is confused whether he is the person sitting on his desk or it is someone else and cannot tell which person he is. Although Al-Saadawi's aim is to attack the male figure, the scene may be differently examined. Beyond the humorous effect of this clash, the scene represents the tough condition of modern man regardless of the gender.

In *The Fall of the Imam*, paradox, which is attained owing to the profuse use of roleplaying, is directed at the ruler and his assistants. Camouflaged with a rubber mask, the bodyguard plays the role of the *Imam*. He replaces *Imam* in prayers and walks among the ministers but nobody discerns his reality. He adopts the role so faithfully that he believes he is the actual *Imam*. When he is prone to doubts, the chants of the crowds reasserts his self-confidence, puts on the *Imam*'s face, and walks with his head up. Once his task is over, he goes down to the lower floor and goes out together with the servants disguised in his true face. Clearly, the conflicting characters of the *Imam* blurs the readers.

The game of role-playing and hence confusion includes other aides: the security chief (mayor), a position granted to him by the *Imam*, often wears black glasses which allow him to see people but keep him immune to their gaze. The great author, standing next to the opposition leader, focuses his right eyes on the throne while his left on the women's balcony while his pen stands out of his upper pocket. The opposition leader directs his right eye at the throne while his left eye is directed at security chief. At night, they exchange smiles and drink toasts to friendship and loyalty. They are "bitter friends" one is affiliated with the party of Allah while the other with the party of Satan. God creates both in a legitimate manner like two stepbrothers: "their mother is one but their father is two," two enemies united by hatred and the love of one woman: the *Imam*'s wife (1987, 9).

And in *The Death of the Only Man on Earth*, paradox is an apparent literary tool used to indicate man's doubleness of character and hence hypocrisy, deception and cheat even in his links with God. Al-Saadawi ironically affirms that all men are slaves: to God in prayer's time and to the mayor all the time. Everyone knows that in Qufu At-Tin there is only one worshipped God. They know him, and sometimes they sit with him in front of the shop and give him everything he wants. *Sheikh* Hamzawi every so often feels proximity to God especially in the Friday prayer when all men, headed by the mayor, line up behind him. Nobody dares to move his arm, hand or finger until *Sheikh* Hamzawi starts the ceremony. At that moment, the *Sheikh* feels he is the closest to God, closer than the chief himself. Then he intends to be slow in the different parts of the prayer: in rising, sitting and kneeling. From time to time, he looks from the edge of his eye to the back to see the mayor and the other men waiting in reverence for him to perform any movement with his head, hand or finger so that they can follow him. No matter how long he slows, the prayer ends within

minutes. Men disperse and some may step over his feet while rushing out after the mayor carrying their grievances in their hands (1975, 51).

In employing paradox, Al-Saadawi makes good use of literary devices upgrading her works and activating the reader. However, she undermines her achievements when she invests her literary accomplishments to assail man. She advocates that man is condemned to acting, hypocrisy and cheating. He is molded in the context of the American literary tradition of the "Confidence Man" defined by Karen Halttunen as "a skilled actor" who can easily "deceive others through false appearances." Through promising friendship and entertainment and exhibiting good manners and stating moral attitudes, he leads youths who are just entering the city into "a gorgeous theater - the seducer's natural habitat" (Halttunen 1982, 2). Replace "youth" with "women" and you get a comprehensive picture of man as perceived by Al-Saadawi. Indeed, Al-Saadawi, believes man is a true reflection of this confidence man. Worse, men, as she maintains, deceive themselves when they think they control the truth. "Are they gods?" she ironically asks.

## CONCLUSION

It is a fact that Al-Saadawi has made a good use of developed literary and artistic elements such as irony, paradox and other elements of figurative language, dialogue and narration. She is skilled at depicting the scenes and characters. It is also a fact that she demonstrates a wide knowledge of the topics discussed. Yet, her commitment to launch a destructive war against man as such, rather than fight for women's freedom undercuts her accomplishments. In Al-Saadawi's works, one can see that the artistic image has cooperated with the intellectual attitude to draw negative duplicates of men with complete disregard for their ranks. In other words, she gives a biased, indiscriminate notion with a lot of exaggeration. One such exaggerated, predisposed image of man is that of the father whom she depicts as the ignorant, foolish tyrant, who practices his presence by imposing his absolute authority. She also portrays the image of man representing the extreme authoritarian masculine regime, which must be demolished and redeveloped in such a way that is well matched with radical feminine philosophy.

This conflict based on the principle of demolition manifests itself in Al-Saadawi's language, which is fundamentally descriptive and analytic. Her tendency to trace the picture she seeks to portray and her focus on marginal issues and appearances rather on major issues weaken her style, demeans her moral attitudes and dwindle intellectual positions. Worse, she is trapped within a maze of redundancy and superficiality.

It is very likely that her tendency to be accurate and analytical in her language is an echo of her psychological and individual experience. Through this type of language, Naji assumes, she expresses herself during her interaction with reality (2006, 371). In the process of looking for herself, Naji maintains, Al-Saadawi embraces an ideology that is different from average philosophies and endorses an identity that is poles apart from her reality. Equipped with her new identity and philosophy, she places herself in an authoritarian relationship with the other to confirm her new personality while unwilling to confess the other's identity. So her conflict with man

reaches a position where she deletes him from her consciousness without finding an alternative, shaking thus the foundations of her aesthetic attitudes and disrupting the fabric of her narrative (2006, 371).

Al-Saadawi's unwavering commitment to the cause of women exacts our admiration particularly at a time when loyalty and obligation have vanished. Yet, this very blind and extreme devotion fails her and dries her moral standards. As a result, one is confused how to categorize her creation. She submits to her personal ideology turning her works into a field where she discloses her fanatical philosophy and radical attitudes towards men.

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