

Women's Fiction in George Tarabichi's Psychological Perspective Nawal El Saadawi as a Model

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Abstract:

This study examines the psychoanalytic reading of Nawal El Saadawi's novels through the critical perspective of Georges Tarabichi. Over a critical career spanning half a century, Tarabichi analyzed more than five of her novels across two critical books out of his nine published works of criticism, providing studies that served simultaneously as literary and critical windows into her oeuvre. Utilizing the tenets of psychoanalysis, Tarabichi sought to delve into the depths of the human psyche embodied by El Saadawi's heroines to uncover their underlying worldview, which directly reflects El Saadawi's own vision, given her tendency toward autobiographical fiction. This is particularly evident in her novel **Memoirs of a Woman Doctor**, wherein the author closely identifies with and is captivated by her protagonist.

Keywords: Psychoanalysis, human psyche, worldview, Nawal El Saadawi, feminist fiction, Georges Tarabichi.

Introduction

Nawal El Saadawi has received a significant amount of attention from Arab critical studies approached from different perspectives and viewpoints, including historical, social, and psychological perspectives. These studies have emerged as reflections of the content and themes of her literary works.

Nawal El Saadawi is considered a prominent and liberated writer who writes in order to communicate her own vision of the world. Through her writings, she represents the suffering of oppressed women. Therefore, while reading her works, readers cannot avoid sympathizing with the female protagonists of her novels, as these characters embody different forms of women's oppression and struggle.

Among the most important critics who studied the writings of this novelist is George Tarabichi. His perspective toward Nawal El Saadawi and her literary production was distinguished by a particular critical vision. He examined five novels written by her through two critical books.

In his first book, *Literature from Within* (1978), Tarabichi studied the novel *Two Women in One Woman*. In addition, he examined four other novels and devoted a special critical study to them in a book entitled

A Female Against Femininity: A Study of Nawal El Saadawi's Literature in the Light of Psychoanalysis (1984)

This book represents the first work that reveals Tarabichi's mature understanding and application of the psychoanalytic approach. Through this study, his analysis of Nawal El Saadawi's novels

Two Women in One Woman

Memoirs of a Woman Doctor

Woman at Point Zero

The Absent One

becomes both a literary and critical contribution to the Arab critical dialogue that extends across a wide geographical and historical space

In this presentation, we will focus on the study of two novels among the large number of Nawal El Saadawi's novels analyzed by George Tarabichi. These are

.Two Women in One Woman, studied in his book Literature from Within .1

.Memoirs of a Woman Doctor, studied in his book A Female Against Femininity .2

The Book Literature from Within (1978) -1

George Tarabichi wrote his book Literature from Within with the aim of collecting a number of studies that he had previously written and published in the journals Al-Adab and Literary Studies during the first six years of his critical activity

From among all the articles he had published in these two journals, Tarabichi selected those works that he considered closer to academic studies than ordinary articles

The reader can easily observe, at the level of the content of these studies, that there is a central concern linking most of them together. This common concern is the critic's interest in the representation of women and the image of women within a patriarchal society

In this book, Tarabichi selected Nawal El Saadawi's novel Two Women in One Woman as one of the main works for his critical analysis. The first study in this book was entitled

".Nawal El Saadawi: The Female and the Myth of Individuality"

,In this study, the critic addressed the issue of men's control over the art of the novel considering this phenomenon as part of many human practices marked by gender discrimination and hostility toward women

At the beginning of his study, George Tarabichi distinguished between the male novel and the female novel. According to him, the male writer reconstructs the world through his novel whereas the woman's novel becomes a center of emotions because she writes it through her feelings and inner experiences

While the man writes mainly through the language of reason and intellect, the woman does not simply act as a reflecting mirror of the external world. Instead, she creates a particular world of her own within her novel. As a result, the world becomes something that is viewed and interpreted from her own perspective after previously being only an object of observation

Tarabichi argues that accepting the existence of a distinctive female novel does not mean considering every novel written by a woman as a female novel. Rather, a genuine female novel is the one written by a woman in a way that differs from the manner in which men write

However, he criticizes Nawal El Saadawi's novel *Two Women in One Woman*, arguing that it did not fully succeed as a novel because it lacked strong dramatic structure. His criticism therefore, was not because the author was a woman, but because of the artistic construction of the work itself

Nevertheless, Tarabichi later defends the novel by emphasizing that it possesses a rich flow of emotions and deep feelings, which compensate for the weakness of its dramatic structure — a structure that had historically been considered part of the tradition of a male-dominated literary art

For a long period of history, women remained merely a subject written about by men. Male writers described women from different perspectives, often taking pride in their ability to represent women, speak about their experiences, and explore the depths of femininity

However, women themselves were denied the opportunity to speak on behalf of their own feelings and emotions, or to express the hidden aspects of their own identities. Their inner selves remained marginalized, lost, and exploited, even by those closest to them in family relationships and affection

In the novel *Two Women in One Woman*, George Tarabichi adopts the psychoanalytic approach in studying the personality of the protagonist Bahiya

Bahiya appears as a typical patient in the critic's psychological clinic, just as she is a patient in the author's own literary clinic. Through his analysis, Tarabichi discovers that she suffers from herd phobia, which is her fear and rejection of belonging to the collective group

For Bahiya, individuality represents a path toward distinction and superiority, rather than a form of social isolation or class alienation. Therefore, she constantly searches for individuality and uniqueness

:Tarabichi states that

Individuality is a burden and a risk. Bahiya Shahin was often haunted by the desire to escape“ from herself, from her own reality, and even from her individuality, seeking protection from that ”.extraordinary power

Thus, Bahiya builds her entire life around the idea of separating herself from the “herd” of girls, female students, and women in general. She searches for her lost freedom, her stolen authenticity, and her separation from everything that forces her to follow the same path as others

However, according to Tarabichi, this does not represent true individuality; rather, it becomes a form of deviation

:As he explains in *Literature from Within*

The person whose only concern is to behave in the opposite way to others does not“ demonstrate individuality; he demonstrates only abnormality

The form of individuality that appears in Bahiya's personality does not remain limited to isolation and escaping from the behaviors followed by others. It develops into a desire for killing and suicide

The critic considers individuality to be a painful path, a path of suffering and sacrifice. Bahiya's attachment to pain reflects her desire to merge with the universe, the mother earth, and the origins of existence. This interpretation is connected to the psychological trauma of birth known as Rank's birth trauma

Bahiya suffers from separation anxiety, and in her unconscious she carries the Oedipus complex as a result of the influence of the patriarchal society

This psychological conflict sometimes forces her to return to an earlier stage before the development of the ego, a process known as regression

However, she attempts to overcome this psychological state through sublimation, by participating in political activity, which she considers a means of liberation from her permanent feeling of dependence on the herd and from her desire for individuality and distinction

Bahiya appears as a victim of a masculine society that wanted her to remain imprisoned within the role and framework imposed upon her

Through its hostile attitude toward her, this society contributes to her confusion and loss, as she struggles between escaping from the herd and seeking individuality — even if this individuality leads her to suicide and the desire to kill

George Tarabichi was concerned, in his study of the psychological dimension of literature from within, with examining the relationships between artistic characters and their internal psychological structures, while supposedly moving away from their relationship with the writer and the writer's own psychological and social structure

However, Tarabichi fell into a terminological contradiction, because in his book *Literature from Within*, he connected the psychology of artistic characters with the external environment and with the author herself

This is what happened in his analysis of Nawal El Saadawi, where he linked the personality of the heroine Bahiya, her desire for individuality, and her attempt to escape from the "herd," with the personality of the author herself, Nawal El Saadawi, who identified with her heroine and became fascinated by her

By returning to the writer's biography, Tarabichi found that Nawal El Saadawi reproduced aspects of her own life story in this novel, while modifying some events and details

Therefore, George Tarabichi moved beyond the concept of "literature from within," because he relied on elements outside the literary text, such as the author's autobiography and psychological life, in order to interpret what exists inside the text, especially the analysis of artistic characters

George Tarabichi also used the sociological approach in his analysis of the heroine of Nawal El Saadawi's novel. This was because the psychoanalytic approach alone was not sufficient to reveal the deep psychological dimensions and hidden aspects of Bahiya's personality

.Thus, the critic placed the sociological approach at the service of psychological analysis

The sociological approach is necessary and appropriate for discovering the psychological problems experienced by literary characters, especially through studying the social structure represented within the literary text and examining its influence on the development of psychological illnesses and complexes

It also helps explain women's suffering within a patriarchal society and the position adopted by society toward women

The Book *A Female Against Femininity* (1984) -2

The book *A Female Against Femininity* is the first work by George Tarabichi in which the expression "psychoanalysis" appears explicitly in the title, unlike his other books

This represents a clear declaration of his adoption of the psychological approach as an independent method for analyzing literary works

According to Freud, psychoanalysis refers to the process of examining and treating psychological complexes, repressed desires, and neuroses, by bringing them from the realm of the unconscious into the realm of consciousness

It also seeks to discover the causes of these complexes through methods such as free association and interpretation

Freud developed the theory of free association by adding concepts related to repression resistance, sexual life, and dream interpretation, in order to reach an understanding of the unconscious

For Freud, psychoanalysis means interpreting neuroses by revealing the role played by repression, instinctual sexual drives, and the unconscious in their formation

This is precisely what led George Tarabichi to add the term "psychoanalysis" to the title of his book, because his aim was to analyze the complexes, repressions, and psychological disorders of the artistic characters in Nawal El Saadawi's novels

At the end of his analysis, he also attempted to make a judgment about the author herself suggesting that she suffered from a female inferiority complex

This explains why George Tarabichi followed Freud's path in his psychoanalytic interpretation

This book represents the second stage in George Tarabichi's critical development, a stage in which he sought to establish a psychological approach independent from other critical methods

Through writing this book, we find that Tarabichi attempted to establish an ambitious project through which he sought to classify his critical writings into three stages

The first stage begins with autobiographical writings, followed by writings that share common themes and contents, and then moves toward the study and treatment of women's fiction

This book also came as a response to Tarabichi's desire to gather and analyze a group of Nawal El Saadawi's novels, including

Woman at Point Zero

Memoirs of a Woman Doctor

Two Women in One Woman

The Absent One

His purpose was to subject these novels to critical and ideological analysis from the perspective of psychoanalysis

:Although these novels differ in their details, they share an almost common theme autobiography

George Tarabichi also focused in this book on the psychological analysis of artistic characters. He began his study with the autobiographical novels of the writer herself

The second study in this book was devoted to the autobiographical dimension of the novelist through her work *Memoirs of a Woman Doctor*

This novel differs from the other novels of Nawal El Saadawi because it represents an explicit autobiographical narrative, published in the late 1960s in Cairo as part of the series “I Read

It presents Saadawi’s personal experience in rejecting femininity as a natural condition rather than merely a social one

,This perspective may explain why the protagonist suffers from a conflict with destiny itself rather than only with the social reality that created differences between the sexes

According to Freud’s perspective, Nawal El Saadawi suffers from an inferiority complex related to being created as a woman. This leads, according to Freudian theory, to the experience of castration complex

However, George Tarabichi does not adopt this expression exactly. In his view, the term is inaccurate when applied to a woman because Nawal El Saadawi is biologically female; therefore what she experiences is not the castration complex itself but rather the “illusion of castration

:The novel is governed by two main rhythms

.Fascination with the mystery of life .1

.Fascination with the mystery of death .2

By describing the conflict as biological, the critic was able to establish another equation: life versus death

According to Tarabichi, the heroine’s rejection of her femininity represents evidence of her rejection of union with the other. Consequently, this means that she rejects life itself

:As he explains

The love of life is based on the love of femininity or the biological reality, whereas the love of death is a psychological reality

The conflict between life and death represents the central axis of the heroine’s struggle in the novel. Tarabichi considers that the events of the novel confirm this psychological opposition and reveal the deep conflict within the female character

From this perspective, the female character in *Memoirs of a Woman Doctor*, who rejects her anatomical destiny even until death, appears in reality to be rejecting not only femininity itself but also the very dynamics of life and its natural cycle

.She does not want union with another person, nor does she want reproduction or motherhood

She rejects union because she hates man. She also rejects childbirth because she rejects motherhood, considering it a function imposed on women for the production and continuation of life.

The heroine expresses her rejection of motherhood and questions the value of her mother's existence and her decision to give birth to her. She says

What virtue does she have in giving birth to me? She was simply living her natural life like any woman, and then I came without her will... I came without knowing me, and without choosing me... She was forced to have a daughter, and I was forced to have a mother. Can a person love a creature that was imposed upon him? If my mother loves me unwillingly through her instinct what virtue is there in this love? Is she really different from a cat that sometimes loves its young and sometimes eats them

The heroine repeatedly returns to the distortion of the image of motherhood in order to express the extent of her hatred toward it, and consequently her permanent rejection of life itself. She addresses other women and criticizes their experience of motherhood, saying

Can a woman who possesses your knowledge and intelligence spend her life breastfeeding children like ignorant women, or even like cats and dogs

Her rejection of reproduction results from her hatred of society. She rejects it because society already contains, in her view, a huge number of human beings, and therefore does not need more births.

Manifestations of the Psychological Approach in Nawal El Saadawi's Novels -3

Two Women in One Woman and Memoirs of a Woman Doctor

"The Novel "Two Women in One Woman -3.1

In this section, we will discuss the most important psychological concepts used by George Tarabichi in his analysis of the novel Two Women in One Woman, which he studied in his book Literature from Within

Because psychological concepts originate in different intellectual and cultural environments the translator often has to modify the meanings of terms in order to make them suitable for another cultural context

This problem has always existed throughout the history of translation. Translation often involves conceptual challenges, as terms developed within one intellectual and cultural context may require careful adaptation when transferred into another context

George Tarabichi, who translated the works of Freud and Karl Marx, attempted to reduce this gap between Western conceptual systems and Arabic cultural systems by creating accurate equivalents for original terms connected to the content of their authors' works

This effort appears clearly in most of his critical books, where he repeatedly attempts to create a wider space for receiving and applying Western critical terminology within Arabic literary criticism

Manifestations of the Psychological Approach in Nawal El Saadawi's Novels -3

Literature from Within -3.1.1

Among these concepts, we find the term “Literature from Within”, which is the title of George Tarabichi’s critical book under discussion

At first glance, this term suggests that Tarabichi aims to study the internal relationships and structures that connect the different elements of a single literary work, including characters, language, and the harmony between these components

Therefore, George Tarabichi adopts an approach imposed by the literary text itself in order to explore its hidden dimensions and discover its internal mechanisms

This is what he clearly stated in the introduction to his book *Literature from Within*, where he explains

This is what we intended when we gathered these studies under the title *Literature from “Within*

Accordingly, discovering the hidden aspects of a literary text should come from within the literary work itself, and not through a previously prepared external method imposed on the text

It is worth mentioning that this concept of “Literature from Within” corresponds with the ideas presented by René Wellek and Austin Warren in their book *Theory of Literature*

However, the way these two critics used the concept differs from the way George Tarabichi employed it

The book *Theory of Literature* was published in 1948, whereas Tarabichi’s book was published in 1978. This indicates Tarabichi’s influence by the work of Wellek and Warren, despite the fact that he did not explicitly mention this influence in his sources and references

Nevertheless, this does not deny the existence of influence, because Western cultural symbols and references appear clearly throughout many of his books, even when he does not directly acknowledge them

To clarify the concept further, psychological study of literature from within means studying the relationships between artistic characters and their psychological and internal structures, away from their relationship with the author and the author’s own psychological and social structure

However, George Tarabichi fell into a terminological problem because, in his book *Literature from Within*, he connected the psychology of artistic characters with the external environment and with the author herself

This is exactly what happened in his analysis of Nawal El Saadawi, where he connected the heroine Bahiya, her desire for individuality, and her rejection of the “herd,” with the personality of the author Nawal El Saadawi, who identified herself with her heroine and became fascinated by her

Individuality, Superiority, and Separation -3.1.2

Among the concepts used by George Tarabichi in his book *Literature from Within*, which carry psychological meanings, are concepts derived from the theories of Freud, Adler, and Otto Rank

These concepts are closely connected, as each one naturally leads to the next

Individuality refers to the search for what distinguishes a person from others and separates him or her from similarity with the group

.According to Tarabichi, individuality is a path of pain and a path of sacrifice

However, this search for distinction may transform into abnormality and deviation from the group, because individuality, in one of its meanings, represents a form of superiority and elevation above others

Yet, there is a significant difference between individuality and superiority, and between simply refusing to be like others and attempting to place oneself above others

:The excessive desire for individuality leads to the desire for superiority, because

The person searching for individuality fears the inferiority of similarity with the surrounding “environment; therefore, his reaction may become a form of transcendence

, Thus, the search for superiority becomes a search for difference and distinction from others even if this distinction is achieved through unacceptable or harmful actions

In this way, similarity becomes associated with inferiority, while difference becomes associated with superiority

However, excessive pursuit of superiority may lead to a dead end, just as feelings of inferiority can

This is what appears in the character of Bahiya, the heroine of Nawal El Saadawi’s novel *Two Women in One Woman*

:George Tarabichi describes her by saying

“Individuality for Bahiya is not only represented in isolation, but also in killing and suicide“

This is exactly what happens at the end of the novel, as Bahiya commits murder and enters prison, where she is sentenced to death

She does not regret this action; rather, she considers it a form of distinction, uniqueness, and superiority over the rest of the “herd,” as she calls them

Individuality, therefore, sometimes becomes a way through which the individual hides a painful reality behind illusions and fantasies that have no real foundation

Thus, as previously mentioned, individuality becomes a source of suffering, similar to separation, because the newborn receives life through crying

From this perspective, the search for individuality becomes connected with the desire to return to the womb and reunite with the mother’s body, and consequently with the earth and the universe

"The Novel "Memoirs of a Woman Doctor -3.2

The most precise concepts in George Tarabichi’s book *A Female Against Femininity* are the psychological concepts

Tarabichi developed some new psychological terms and added them to the traditional terminology already known in Freud’s theories

In this work, George Tarabichi appears not only as a translator of Freud’s concepts but also as a developer of these concepts through his critical application

”.One example of this is the concept of the “castration complex

Freud used this term, but George Tarabichi transformed it into another concept: the “illusion
”.of castration

Therefore, we find that Tarabichi’s terminology in almost all of his critical works is
.characterized by precision

This precision is due to the fact that he translated many of Freud’s works and was fully aware
.of the exact meaning of psychological terms in their Freudian origins

Any research or comparison that attempts to distinguish between the use of psychological
concepts in George Tarabichi’s critical works and their use in Freud’s writings must take into
consideration that the critic who employs these concepts through translation is the same person
.who introduced this critical approach into the field of modern Arab criticism

For example, as previously mentioned, the concept of “castration complex” originates from
.Freud

However, George Tarabichi replaces this concept with another understanding: “the imagined
”.castration complex

This concept has a psychological and social dimension, because it refers to the woman’s
.feeling that she is an incomplete male

According to Tarabichi, this feeling is not a natural reality but rather an imagined perception
.formed within a social system dominated by masculine values in a patriarchal society

Through this distinction, George Tarabichi concludes that the castration complex belongs to
.the male, whereas the illusion of castration belongs to the female

.Freud, according to Tarabichi, did not clearly distinguish between these two concepts

:Therefore, Tarabichi differentiates between them

.The castration complex results from the sadistic attitude of others

The illusion of castration results from the individual’s own masochistic psychological
.condition

At the Level of Themes and Contents -4

George Tarabichi was concerned with the psychoanalytic study of artistic characters by
following their psychological complexes, repressed desires, and unconscious conflicts, relying on
.the scholars of the Freudian psychoanalytic school

The first complex he discussed was the Oedipus complex among the female protagonists of
.Nawal El Saadawi’s novels

He analyzed the stages of development of this complex from childhood and examined its
.psychological consequences

This is what he demonstrated in relation to the character Bahiya Shahin in the novel Two
.Women in One Woman, where clear signs of the Oedipus complex appeared

In contrast, regarding the heroine of *Memoirs of a Woman Doctor*, George Tarabichi did not
.indicate that she suffered from this complex in the same way

However, Tarabichi did not limit his analysis to the Oedipus complex alone. He also explored the deeper psychological dimensions of the artistic characters in order to discover feelings of inferiority and deficiency

These feelings accompany the female protagonists in Nawal El Saadawi's novels as a result of the oppressive patriarchal society that marginalizes women

The heroine dreams of becoming a boy in *Memoirs of a Woman Doctor*. Her rejection of her biological femininity makes her experience feelings of shame and what George Tarabichi calls "the illusion of castration"

:She says

All I knew at that time was that I was a girl, as I heard people say, and the word 'girl' had "only one meaning in my mind: that I was not a boy... that I was not like my brother"

This statement reveals the constant association between femininity and inferiority, while masculinity is associated with strength and superiority

The character also compares herself to her brother, who represents, in her perception, the privileges and power that society grants to males

The heroine Mary Barnes expresses a position similar to Nawal El Saadawi's attitude toward femininity. She reveals her desire to become a boy and her rejection of her natural female identity wishing to possess everything her brother possesses

She admits that she was unable to accept the appearance of menstruation and the development of her breasts. Therefore, she declares that she felt intense shame because she had always wished to be a boy

The oppression practiced by the patriarchal society against women pushes the female character to adopt a hostile attitude toward others

This attitude may take the form of sadism toward others or masochism toward the self, where the character derives a kind of satisfaction from causing herself suffering and pain

:Psychologists have discussed the relationship between

.Sadism and the love of life

.Masochism and the love of death

:This relationship represents the central axis of conflict in *Memoirs of a Woman Doctor*

.Psychology versus Sociology

,The sociological destiny of the heroine determined that she would be born female; however the psychological destiny she chose for herself was to prove that she was not a woman

However, Tarabichi's psychoanalytic reading does not stop at the boundaries of the individual's repressed desires. He recognizes that a character's internal conflicts cannot be separated from the social environment in which they develop. Therefore, his analysis expands from individual psychological structures to the broader collective forces that shape human experience. This connection between personal neuroses and social frameworks prepares the way for understanding the role of collective influences.

George Tarabichi also discusses the issue of the collective unconscious and its role in studying the relationships between artistic characters and the environment in which they are forced to live

Here, he returns once again to combining the sociological approach with psychoanalysis in order to study the psychological and social structure of artistic characters

He examines how social relationships and the surrounding environment contribute to increasing the intensity of psychological complexes, repression, and internal conflicts

At this point, George Tarabichi appears influenced by the theory of the collective unconscious developed by Carl Jung, Freud's student

Jung's concept of the collective unconscious refers to a set of moral, social, and religious values that organize social life. These values exist within the collective memory of the social environment in which individuals live, and they also exist within the individual unconscious where they exercise authority over the individual's superego

Conclusion

From the previous discussion, it becomes clear that George Tarabichi's study and analysis of Nawal El Saadawi's novels is based on considering her as a writer belonging to a socially oppressed group within a harsh and unjust patriarchal society, as she herself declares in her writings

Tarabichi is the critic who attempts to penetrate the depths of the personality — especially the personality of the author herself — because she writes her novels in the form of autobiographical narratives. Through this approach, he seeks to reveal and explain her vision of the world

In this study, he employs more than one critical method in order to discover the hidden dimensions of the literary text and analyze the characters of the novels

Two Women in One Woman

Memoirs of a Woman Doctor

The sociological approach proves to be necessary and appropriate for explaining the psychological problems experienced by artistic characters, particularly through examining the social structure represented within the literary text

This approach also helps to understand the impact of this social structure on the development of psychological illnesses and complexes, as well as women's suffering within a patriarchal society and society's attitude toward them

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Psychological Terms

:Oedipus Complex

A concept created by Sigmund Freud and inspired by the Greek myth of Oedipus. It refers to
a psychological complex in which the male child develops attachment and love toward his mother
.and jealousy toward his father, whom he perceives as a rival

:Regression

Regression is the return to an earlier stage in an individual's life. It represents one of the
defense mechanisms used by individuals to avoid psychological conflict or anxiety by returning
.partially or completely to an earlier stage or previous behavioral pattern

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