

**Defining *Magic Realism* in  
ElMusadafa's *The Forbidden Garden***

By

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## Abstract.

This article will discuss some of the most prominent definitions of the critical concept known generally under the term *Magic Realism*. It is also known as “Magical Realism” (Pietri 161, Flores 112), “the Marvelous Real” (Carpentier 75), “the Supernatural Real” (Guenther 33), “New Objectivity” (Hartlub 3, Guenther 33) and “The Fantastic Real” (Chanady 6), among other denominations primarily associated with postcolonial literature. It will attempt to arrive at a clear and comprehensive understanding of the literary ideals and practices denoted by this term. It will then attempt to redefine that concept in its discussion of one of Suhair ElMusadafa’s latest works, *The Forbidden Garden- الحديقة المحرمة* (2018), translated into English by the author and republished in Canada in 2022. It will argue that this novel’s narrative structure, characterization, and general symbolic and allegoric approaches offer an enlargement of some of the most significant ideals of *Magic Realism* as defined hereafter. This is particularly the case with regards to this novel’s event sequencing processes, characterization philosophy, and cultural ideals and practices including its concept of the nature of both reality and fantasy. This novel’s unique formal philosophy, identity politics, ironic stance and multi-layered allegorism offer particular cultural and aesthetic challenges and ideals that negotiate the fabric of readers’ understanding of life, self and morality.

Key words: *Magic Realism* , Suhair Elhusadafa, The Forbidden Garden, Postcolonial Narrative. The Marvelous Real.

## 1- Introduction:

*The Forbidden Garden* first published in Egypt in 2021, is the first of Suhair ElMusadafa’s works to be translated into English (published in 2022) and the eighth, so far, in her long history of creative narrative writing. Starting in 1997 with her first collection of short stories “Lenient Attack- هجوم ودبع-فتاة”, she produced six more works: in ١٩٩٩ “A Girl Experimenting her Demise- فتاة

“تجرب حتفها”, in 2003 “The Devils’ Play- لهو الأبالسة”, in 2008 “Miss Egypt – ميس إيجيب”, in 2013 “The Hyenas’ Journey – رحلة الضباع”, 2015 “Hot Whiteness- بياض ساخن”, and in 2019 “Day of Impulse Control- يوم الثبات الانفعالي-”.

Being the latest serves as a blessing and a burden for those who is naturally used to specific cultural equities when reading a woman writer, a middle-eastern woman writer. One, whose intellectual struggles for fundamental rights dwarfs some of the most known Egyptian office - feminists’ with various sparkly bureaucratic titles.

It is a blessing because it offers Musadafa’s latest and most refined experiments into the narrative structure, particularly addressing women's conditions in a cultural reality immersed in extremists' dangers. It is also a burden, for the sheer depth and volume of critical implications allegorically embedded in almost every corner of this book, from characters' and locations' names to sub-plots major and minor relationships. Readers will undoubtedly observe, and promisingly enjoy, a profoundly unsettling literary experimentation with event-sequencing (or de-sequencing), character multi-faceted-ness (or paradoxicality) and a partially Orwellian, partially Swiftian, ironic insights into persistent mystical and political questions and issues that daunt still local and universal imaginations. They will not avoid confrontation with the unknown, the fantastic and the disturbing. Nor will they be able to set aside feelings of alienation, estrangement, or disgust at facets of human cruelty, bestiality, or hypocrisy. However before discussing this work and its intricacies, it is perhaps essential to define and redefine the field of literary innovativity it employs for a narrative strategy and a general mode of representation.

Simultaneously, and just as forcefully, they will face cultural questioning into the legitimacy of "consensus" as a democratic principle, the nature of "wealth" in capitalism, "the rights of representation" of minorities and the marginalized, the meaning of "death" as an existential

dilemma, indeed, even into a utopic "communism" versus practical capitalism, among others areas and issues. In short, readers will have the combined richness of a multi-layered symbolism embodied through an intrinsic three-dimensional interaction among a sophisticated intellectuality, a unique cultural reality, and progressive formal aesthetics.

## 2- What is *Magic Realism* ?

At the very first sight, the term *Magic Realism* seems decidedly contradictory almost a misnomer. On the surface, the two words comprising the term could not be any more clashing. Whereas most dictionaries associate the word "magic" or "magical" with "inexplicable influence", "enchanted quality or phenomenon" (Thompson 533), "the supernatural" (Webster 617) and "the impossible" (984) (Webster 984) (Cambridge 400), they consecutively associate the word "Realism" or "reality" with "what is possible" (Webster 1346) "how things are" (Cambridge 537), or "things in their true nature" (Thompson 749). In this sense, how would the word "magic" or "magical" be used to requalify the reality of the "real" in "realism", and vice versa: how, indeed, would the realism of the actually "real" be used to redefine what is basically impossible and magical? In other words, how truly "real" is the reality we seem to take for granted, and by a very small extension also, how magical, or unreal is its assumed opposite, and in conjuring both; what exactly is meant culturally and aesthetically?

The answer to this question has two parts; the first relates to the epistemological implications of the questions embedded within both parts of the term as cultural concepts, while the other relates to the resultant paradoxicality of this term's reference to an artistic and literary movement that spanned over the whole of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and up to the present.

### 3- How magical and how real? The Oxymoron:

The question of “reality”; that is the concept of whether or not the world exists independent of perception, seems to summarize the point about the oxymoronic contrast between what is real and what is magical. Where realism to denote a perception dependent world, its very basis would be invalid. But, as reality exists, perception-dependent or not, the very notion of human faculties interfering in its very formation underlines the subjective, rather than the objective, nature of this existence. If, in other words, what is real and what is magical are not as far apart as superficially assumed, their conjunction in a single term might denote a cultural practice that is basically expressive of the natural functions of the mind in its dealings with the world, rather than one which goes against its grain. This is the point underlined by the above questions of the term “*Magic Realism*”. The kind of realism meant in this, and many other concepts and notions, is simply that which does not exclude other human faculties in its pragmatic functioning. It is a realism that is dependent for its very existence on the human faculty to imagine, conceptualize and build abstractedly even when it sometimes claims independence. In his *Truth and Justification* (2003), German philosopher Jürgen Habermas argues:

The ontological assumption of the generic primacy of nature further requires an epistemologically realist assumption of a mind-independent objective world. Yet within the linguistic paradigm the classical form of realism that relies on the representational model of cognition and on the correspondence between proposition and facts is no longer viable. (Habermas 10)

The reason why “it is no longer viable” is simply that there is always a distance between “proposition” and “fact”, preventing correspondence of the two. That distance, or gap, between the spoken/written (proposition), and the tangible/felt/ascertained (fact), is where perception enters

and works. It is also where language takes precedence and control. How wide or deep such a gap or distance is, remains a matter of great debate.

On the one hand, there are those who see such a gap virtually non-existent claiming reality to be completely independent of any and all human agency. In fact, according to some critics, most people see reality as more or less, pure presence, untouched by consciousness. In his “*After Method: mess in social science research*” (2004), John Law argues:

Most of us would, I guess, implicitly commit ourselves to the further sense that this external reality is usually *independent of our actions and especially of our perceptions*... Another more or less related common sense is that this external reality comes before us, that it precedes us... I would call this particular version “*anteriority*”. A further common-sense is that external reality has, or is composed of *definite forms or relations*... This I will call the assumption of “*definiteness*”.  
(Law 24-6)

Yet, Law himself answers his descriptions of the consciousness-independent reality arguing:

Reality and the statements that correspond to it are produced together in the disciplinary and laboratory apparatuses of inscription. But in specific circumstances (and we are all, and all the time, in specific circumstances, there is always also a large hinterland of inscription devices and practices already in production. This means that an equally large hinterland of statements and realities that relate to those statements are already being made. There is a backdrop of realities that cannot be wished way. (Law 31)

It is in this particular sense, that the constitutive action of perception defines reality through presentation in language, since no part of the unperceived would, in principle, exist. Perception is therefore by definition an active function of the mind, to which imagination and other human faculties are necessary participants. This also refutes the assumption of perception- independent reality and debunks its major points. Habermas argues:

For us, language and reality inextricably permeate one another. All experience is linguistically saturated such that no grasp of reality is possible that is not filtered through language. This insight constitutes an strong motivation for attributing the kind of transcendental role to the intersubjective conditions of linguistic interpretation and communication that Kant reserved for the necessary subjective conditions of objective experience. In place of transcendental subjectivity of consciousness we now find the detranscendentalized intersubjectivity of the lifeworld. (Habermas 30)

By this definition, the magical becomes partially real, and the real is partially magical, since both entertain a perception dependent agency capable of defining and redefining the actuality we accept as our own. Realism, in this sense, becomes at best virtual; more a possibility than a tangible unchangeable certainty. Tia DeNora argues:

It is there, I suggest, that we can learn from the realm of magic and conjuring, in terms of how perception can be directed and how that process itself can tell us about how culture gets into action. This learning in turn helps us to see how realities should be understood as ‘virtually real’ (DeNora XXVI).

But do "reality" and "realism", as concepts, culturally denote the same thing? If the above discussed concept of “reality”, as an inter-dependent perception-shaped medium, is seen to be true,

what would the term “realism” then denote. According to *Cambridge Dictionary* it is said to denote “things and people in art, literature etc. shown as they are in real life” or people accepting or dealing with “the true facts of a situation and do not hope for things that will not happen” (Cambridge 537). But if the “true” facts, or “the ways people are”, are in fact only perception-dependent, wouldn’t the term realism then only mean at best a particular point of view or angle of vision, or better still, only a method of perception among other, equally valid, methods? In such a case, wouldn’t the term “realism” then only denote an assumption of factuality lacking conclusive evidence, and is therefore, at least partially, false and illusionary? The French philosopher Jean-Francoise Lyotard comments on the propagation of such concept and its cultural consequences in the following statement:

Realism, whose only definition is that it intends to avoid the question of reality implicated in that of art, always stands somewhere between academicism and kitsch. When power assumes the name of a party, realism and its neoclassical complement triumph over the experimental avant-garde by slandering and banning it -that is, provided the "correct" images, the "correct" narratives, the "correct" forms which the party requests, selects, and propagates can find a public to desire them as the appropriate remedy for the anxiety and depression that public experiences... Modernity, in whatever age it appears. cannot exist without a shattering of belief and without discovery of the "lack of reality" of reality, together with the invention of other realities. (Lyotard 67-7)

As the cultural concepts involved in the construction of this term themselves denote active perceptual participation in the state of being called reality/magic, it follows that the over all designation implied by the term in literature denote a double-sided participation on the part of

readers. On the one hand, there is the normative participation in the construction of what is real, in the “life world” to use Habermas’s words (Habermas 30). On the other hand, there is the participation of readers in the construction of “a” reality particular to literature and is thus assumed by readers in both cases; the real and the magical. Christopher Warns argues:

central to critical discourse’s problems with *Magic Realism* is that it is an oxymoron: magic is thought of as that which lies outside of the realm of the real; realism excludes the magical. “Magical Realism”, in its very name, flouts philosophical conventions of non-contradiction. (Warns 2)

However, as shall be made apparent in the coming pages, the very contradictory and oxymoronic nature of the term, as well as its implied questions of reality, is precisely what proves most useful in designating the semiotic and political significance of its literary manifestations and forms. As critic Maggie Ann Bowers suggests, “it is in fact the inherent inclusion of contradictory elements that has made and sustained the usefulness and popularity of the concepts to which the terms refer” (Bowers 1).

#### 4- History, Definition and Cultural Significance

The term *Magic Realism* is an oxymoron, an appropriate condition given that it designates a narrative strategy that stretches or ruptures altogether the boundaries of reality. (Warns V)

The term *Magic Realism* was first coined by a German art critic Franz Roh (1890–1965), in the title of his book *Nach-Expressionismus, Magischer Realismus: Probleme der neuesten europäischen Malerei- 1925- Post-expressionism, Magic Realism : Problems of the Most Recent European Painting* in which he defines a new style of painting following Expressionism:

I attribute no special value to the title “Magical Realism”.” Since the work had to have a name that meant something, and the word “Post-Expressionism” only dictates ancestry and chronological relationship, I added the first title quite a long time after having written this work. It seems to me, at least, more appropriate than “Ideal Realism” or “Verism,” or “Neoclassicism,” which only designate an aspect of the movement. The point at which the new painting separates itself from Expressionism by means of its objects. Immediately we find that in its reaction to Impressionism, Expressionism shows an exaggerated preference for fantastic, extraterrestrial, remote objects. Naturally, it also resorts to the everyday and the commonplace for the purpose of distancing it, investing it with a shocking exoticism.

(Roh 18)

As is quite apparent from the quotation above, the term was initially intended to describe a style of painting that rejects previous radically-abstract paintings of expressionism and impressionism for a subtler, more robust, representations of both the fantastic and the familiar together in the same frame. The new painting differed from its expressionistic predecessor in the clarity of its representations and its attention to accurate life-like details in the work of artists such as Otto Dix, Max Ernst, Alexander Kanoldt, George Grosz and Georg Schrimpf (Roh 22).

The influence of such style of painting spread across the European continent to Italy, France and Holland to form a larger cultural parallel to the concurrent surrealist movement that was prevalent at the time (Bowers 11). Since its very first moments of inception, then, the term and the artistic concepts it designates have always been concerned with the philosophical question of reality long before it was even thought of in literary circles (Guenther 43). What is also quite plainly observable is that it had always maintained a tenuous combination of the two perceived

aspects of life the imaginative and the real. As Bowers suggests: “Magic realist painting shares with modernism an attempt to find a new way of expressing a deeper understanding of reality witnessed by the artist and writer through experimentation with painting and narrative techniques” (Bowers 7).

A decade or so after a group of German magic-realists held an exhibition in New York in 1931, an American exhibit under the title of “American Realists and Magic Realists” was held in 1943 catering to some of the newest American Hyper-realist painters such as Edward Hopper (1882-1967) and Charles Sheeler (1883-1963) (Cudden 487). In the late 1940s, the Austrian novelist Georgo Saiko started to present work of a semi-realistic nature expressing great interest in what he called “magischer Realismus- *Magic Realism*” publishing a book under the title *Die Wirklichkeit hat doppelten Boden. Gedanken zum magischen Realismus- “Magical Realism”*: *Sources and Affinities in Contemporary German and English Writing* (1952), in which for the first time, the term itself was used to denote a certain literary practice (487-8)

However, following the translation of Roh’s book into Spanish as early as in 1927, the Latin American absorption and subsequent redefinition of the concept into full-blown literary theory and practice took place. The first use of the term *Magic Realism* to refer to some of the literary works written in Latin America came in 1948 by the Venezuelan author Aarturo Uslar-Pietri (1906-2001) and the Cuban author Alejo Carpentier (1904-1980). Both were diplomats who have lived in Europe during the 1920s and 1930s and were greatly influenced by many of the artistic and cultural movements at that time including surrealism and *Magic Realism* (Bowers 13). Largely acknowledged as instigator of the Latin-American brand of *Magic Realism* to which he has bestowed the term “*lo realism maravilloso- The Marvelous Real*” (Echevarria 99).

Expanding his initial thoughts for a purely Latin-American type of narrative writing expressed in the Venezuelan publication *El Nacional*, he wrote a long influential prologue to his novel *El reino de este mundo -The Kingdom of this World* which he published in 1949. In this prologue, he proposed what he saw as a major difference between the Latin-American and European branches of *Magic Realism*. For him, European “*Magic Realism*” is largely “monotonous” and “fabricated” marking “unsettling imaginative poverty” (Carpentier 85). Carpentier argues:

The marvelous inelous begins to be unmistakably marvelous when it arises from an unexpected alteration of reality (the miracle), from a privileged revelation of reality, an unaccustomed insight that is singularly favored by the unexpected richness of reality or an amplification of the scale and categories of reality, perceived with particular intensity by virtue of an exaltation of the spirit that leads it to a kind of extreme state. (86)

His description and implied messages influenced a whole generation of Latin-American novelists working with the newly-founded medium of *The Marvelous Real*. Participants in this movement who managed to internationalize its newly-founded style and obtain universal recognition include critic and editor Angel Forbes in his translations and critical commentaries of Spanish novels and short stories (Forbes 1960), the Argentinian novelist Luis Borges (1899-1988) whose novel: *Historia universal de la infamia-1935- A Universal History of Infamy* (Borges 6) is regarded by many scholars as the first Latin-American *Magic-* or *Marvelous-* realist novel. The now infamous Colombian Nobel-Prize winner novelist Gabriel Garcia Marquez (1927-2014) particularly in his novel: *Cien afi.osde soledad – 1967 – One Hundred Years of Solitude*, and of course, the Cuban novelist and commentator Aljio Carpentier (1904-1980) are among the most prominent pioneer

participants in this Latin-American branch of the movement. On the other side of the Atlantic, prominent magic realist writers include Angela Carter, Gunter Grass, John Fowles and Emma Tennant (Baldick 146).

In this sense, it is perhaps possible to distinguish three distinct groups of magic realists whose combined effort and ingenuity has resulted in the conceptualization of *Magic Realism* and the corps of literary works it endeavors to describe. The first is the German branch defining mostly post-expressionist paintings as they offer largely realist but slightly imaginative representations of the world (Roh 28). The second, and much more significant trend is the Latin-American one whose emphasis on the particularity of the imaginative or the *Marvelous* component of the concept informs the particularity of the authors' cultural heritage and ethnic pride. The final group is basically a continental European trend where works like Gunter Grass's *Die Blechtrommel-1959-The Tin Drum*, and Milan Kundera's *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting* (1979), and Salman Rushdie's *Midnight Children* (1981) offer a much more culturally dialectic or balanced practice of both the realist and the imaginative combined in the postcolonial era of the present, where the magical serves as a compensation for the reality of the colonized past.

The definition of the term, then, has three parallel groups of critics and writers corresponding to the three stages of its development since the beginning of the twentieth century. The first group, led by the German art critic Franz Roh, sees it as a form of recalling of memetic classical realism with a predominantly surrealist twist, opposing the form of pure abstraction ordinarily encountered in expressionist and impressionist traditions, while firmly grounding itself in the hard, cold reality of the lifeworld. For example, Amaryll Beatrice Chanady defines *Magic Realism* by reference to the fantastic, arguing:

The fantastic differs from these modes of writing, because two distinct levels of reality are represented. One is our everyday world, ruled by laws of reason and convention, and the other is supernatural, or that which is inexplicable according to our logic. (Chanady 5)

The emphasis here is largely placed on “levels of reality”, rather than on reality and its opposite. In this sense, the concept designates an understanding of the imaginative or “magical” aspects of the work as themselves pointing to a different stratum in the same composition of what is perceived as reality. “In the fantastic”, Chanady Argues, “the dominant world-view in the text is very similar to our own, and the laws of verisimilitude coincide largely with ours”. “Against the background of this logical world” he continues, “the narrator introduces a level of reality which rational man cannot accept” (5-7). It is this insistence on the predominance of reality and realism that marks the conceptual understanding of this literary and artistic concept of *Magic Realism*. It always has a firm grip on the real; the logical; the sensible, whose strangeness sometimes recalls an imaginative, a fantastic or an illogical form of figuration or rhetoric to allow expansion of, not competition with, the real. The existence of the imaginative, in other words, becomes a mere appendage to the real, predominantly aiming to increase its anchorage in the logical and reasonable.

Similarly, historian and critic Irene Guenther suggests that “it was not the subject matter that made this art so different. Rather, it was the fastidious depiction of familiar objects, the new way of seeing and rendering the everyday thereby creating a new world view, that inspired the style” (36). In other words, it is the way in which ordinary reality is extended through imagination that made all the magic possible; an expansion of reality into imagination, but reality nonetheless. The same view is more or less examined by Angel Flores who defines this narrative mode as “cold and cerebral and often erudite storytelling” (113) where the imaginative elements of “the awesome

and the unreal” is largely bound up with a service to “the common and the everyday” as “the unreal happens as part of reality” (115). Other critics in this group have also spoken about this mode of narrative writing in similar terms. For example, Scott Simpkins sees the existence of the imaginative or the marvelous aspect in *Magic Realism* as only “a supplementation to improve the realistic text” (145). Similarly, Theo L. D’Hean sees it as fundamentally “relevant to surrealism” “infusing the ordinary with a sense of fantasy” (191).

The second group of critics who have offered their insights into the cultural implications of this term, are those who consider it a complete denial of reality and a way to redefine its whole existence through the magical, the fantastic or the imaginative. The first ever of this group whose book, *Letras y hombres de Venezuela* (1948), this paper could not find a comprehensive English translation for, is the late Venezuelan novelist and Minister of Education Arturo Uslar Pietri (1906-2001) who argues:

What became prominent in the short story and left an indelible mark there was the consideration of man as a mystery surrounded by realistic facts. A poetic prediction or a poetic denial of reality. What for lack of another name could be called a “Magical Realism”. What for lack of another name could be called a “Magical Realism”” (Pietri 16)

The emphasis here, by contrast is firmly placed on the imaginative. What is fantastic and illogical, for this groups of critics, is the main target of this sort of artistic or narrative representation. The existence of the real is simply a background with which to show the dreamy, the imagined. and consequently, further relate to it in readership. What is logical, or real, is seen by them as simply already discovered and utterly mundane and is, therefore, only a background of

difference to emphasize the insightfulness of the dreamed, the imagined, the conjured-out-of-thin-air. Here is Luis Leal's definition:

In *Magic Realism* key events have no logical or psychological explanation.

The magical realist does not try to copy the surrounding reality (as the realists did) or to wound it (as the Surrealists did) but to seize the mystery that breathes behind things. (Leal 123)

In other words, the whole point of reality depiction is simply the foundation of the magical whose very existence as such depends utterly on this contrast both symbolically and aesthetically.

As Rawdon Wilson suggests:

I am interested in fictional space. How, in reading or viewing a fictional world, is space (the sense of direction and distance, the sheer up and downness and back and forthness, the scale) to be imagined? *Magic Realism* makes the problem extremely interesting. The copresence of oddities, the interaction of the bizarre with the entirely ordinary, the doubleness of conceptual codes, the irreducibly hybrid nature of experience strikes the mind's eye. (Wilson 210)

The imaginative dimension of the narrative - or the "the sheer up and downness and back and forthness" in Wilson's words, take precedence in this group's concept of *Magic Realism* over any realistic or memetic approaches to the lifeworld. The whole purpose of its very existence as a mode of narrative writing, for them, is the highlighting of this fantastical demarcation of the real, or "the irreducible hybrid nature of experience" in Wilson's words. Reality, then becomes an appendage to the immensity and surprisability of the imagined and serves only to underline and foreground it. There are those who even claim that the magical in *Magic Realism* redefines what

is actually “possible” in the lifeworld of readers through a process of “textualization” where normative boundaries surrounding reality are fundamentally interrogated and debunked:

The magic in *Magic Realism* emerges from the interpenetration of irreconcilable worlds. Textualization is arguably the paradigmatic topos of *Magic Realism* because of the way in which it showcases this mystifying phenomenon. Texts may encompass worlds and worlds may be texts, but the way they come together, clash, and fuse in a textualization violates our usual sense of what is possible. (Theis 244)

Other critics have suggested that this particular Latin-American tendency to emphasize imagination and the fantastic over realism and the logical harbors a postcolonial rejection of dogmatic empiricism and realistic materialism that justified Western colonization of their countries to begin with. For example, Stephen Selmon argues:

In a postcolonial context, then, the magic realist narrative recapitulates a dialectical struggle within language, a dialectic between “codes of recognition” inherent within the inherited language and those imagined, utopian, and future-oriented codes that aspire toward a language of expressive, local realism, and a set of “original relations” with the world... These texts implicitly suggest that enabling strategies for the future require revisioning the seemingly tyrannical units of the past in a complex and imaginative double-think of “remembering the future.” This process, they tell us, can transmute the “shreds and fragments” of colonial violence and otherness into new “codes of recognition” in which the dispossessed, the silenced, and the marginalized of our own dominating systems can again find voice and enter into the dialogic continuity of community and place. (Selmon 411,22)

Through their double-coded language of realism and imagination, works of *Magic Realism* resist inherited linguistic forms of defining the world which carry within themselves a vast tyrannical legacy of marginalization and oppression. They encode those aspects of the tyrannical past as realism while redefining and debunking it with an overwhelming dose of the magical and the fantastic that envelop their truer ethnic and national pride. It is, for Selmon, a process of re-liberation through clashing and redefining the two linguistic dimensions in their historical and literary significance as a way to re-affirm identity:

The systematic control of the imaginary by the dictates of a restrictive conception of mimesis based on verisimilitude, decorum, and imitation of consecrated masters and legitimated models, the “parameters of a pragmatic reason geared to the most routine aspects of daily life” and morality. This control of the imaginary replaces the Christian cosmological centering in the sixteenth century, when the “cult of a reason incarnating permanent, universal laws came in service to, and at the same time was the desideratum of, political centralization”. Medieval theocentrism gives way to the centrality of reason, which leads to the evacuation of *poiesis* from the concept of mimesis, thus deforming the Aristotelian notion by restricting subjectivity to the imitation of an external reality in accordance with the precepts of hegemonic rational paradigms. (Chanady ١٢٥)

Put in simpler terms, the ways in which the colonizer viewed the importance and immensity of reality according to his own cultural heritage (within certain parameters of memetic and intellectual anti-subjectivism) is rejected by the colonized in Latin-America as both alien and intentionally hegemonic. As such, they preferred a concentration on the imaginative aspect of the artistic act and subdued the anti-subjective “realistic” one as politically and culturally

heterogenous and counter identity. Wendy B. Faris suggests that “in dismantling the imported code of realism “proper””, they have actually managed to enable “a broader transculturation process” within which “postcolonial Latin American literature established its identity” (145).

The third and final group of critics do see *Magic Realism* as an expression of quite balanced dialectic of both sides of the oxymoron equally and reciprocally. Critic Stephen Selmon is a very obvious example of this:

Although most works of fiction are generically mixed in mode, the characteristic maneuver of magic realist fiction is that its two separate narrative modes never manage to arrange themselves into any kind of hierarchy... In *Magic Realism* this battle is represented in the language of narration by the foregrounding of two opposing discursive systems, with neither managing to subordinate or contain the other. This sustained opposition forestalls the possibility of interpretive closure through any act of naturalizing the text to an established system of representation. (410)

The same is the case with critic Pragyan Prabartika Dash who argues:

While accepting the rational view of reality, it also considers the supernatural as a part of reality. The setting in a magical realist text is a normal world with authentic human characters. It is not at all fantastic or unreal; it is a mode of narration that discovers the natural in the supernatural and supernatural in the natural. It is a mode in which the real and the fantastic and the natural and the supernatural are more or less equivalently and coherently represented. (1)

The whole idea of *Magic Realism* as an oxymoron is simply to highlight its dialectical integrated nature combining the two ends of the spectrum in one referential meaning that describes

a literary intellectual state in which each defines and redefines the other. As this article has argued from the very beginning, the concept designates a fundamental dissatisfaction with existent concepts of the real, known under the term realism, and its resultant cultural and philosophical biases. In the realm of literature, the expression of this dissatisfaction is embodied by this narrative practice and is thus injected with an equal doze of fantastical redefinition of the real to compensate for such cultural and philosophical biases. As editor and critic Lois Parkinson Zamora suggests:

Magical realist apparitions also unsettle modernity's (and the novel's) basis in progressive, linear history: they float free in time, not just here and now but then and there, eternal and everywhere. Ghosts embody the fundamental magical realist sense that reality always exceeds our capacities to describe or understand or prove and that the function of literature is to engage this excessive reality, to honor that which we may grasp intuitively but never fully or finally define. Magical realist texts ask us to look beyond the limits of the knowable, and ghosts are often our guides. (498)

##### 5- *The Forbidden Garden: The Two Worlds of Magic Realism*

The three major definitions of *Magic Realism* discussed in the above lines are quite surprisingly evident in this novel, each having its own merits and deserving its own consideration. To begin with, this novel can be seen as divided in two intertwined, but fairly independent, narrative lines. The first is utterly realistic describing typical village-life events (Najee Elzaraeyb) with a protagonist /narrator – a first-person witness – who works as a journalist in a local newspaper. Here, we learn in vivid description and blunt psychological analyses the details of village life and the common concepts of villagers and their internal relationships. The second narrative line is completely fantastic/magical or imaginative. It is the land of the holy spring found

by yet another protagonist first-person narrator; Alhem, who just happens to be, as we learn in the beginning, the long-banished uncle of the journalist, and who talks to readers through a dairy he wrote about his daily life in that land. The land of the spring is a completely fantastical world with its own metaphysical geography, social value-system, dress codes and mythological beliefs:

this is a warm and merciful sun sending a refreshing cooling breeze that is mild in temperature and soft in touch. Before me and to my left and right are fields in mountain steps of bright-purple flowers of yellow and green crops and fruits in all shades and denominations. I distinguish barley, wheat, beans, oranges, palms, grapes, olives, figs, mango and even bamboo, and many more. If this is not paradise, what indeed is? (Musadafa 70)

In *the land of the spring* there is no concept of death, or hunger or need, there is no currency and no economic or social hierarchy, and gold is the main metal abundantly around with which to forge tools and decorations. In short, it is a communist Eutopia. The heavy dose of fantasy in the narrative description of the land of the spring counterbalances the equally heavy dose of realism offered in the description of Najee Elzaraeyb's village life. Those are equally intensive, equally oppositional, counter descriptions of two totally different worlds.

Her is a description of primitive medicinal practices of villagers as narrated by Alhem, the uncle, in his diary:

Few days before I left Najee Elzaraeyb, I noticed my grandpa's hands were shaking very badly. So, I felt sorry for him and for the still screaming guy on his lap:

- Let me do it. Grandpa, I have seen you do it hundreds of times!

He suckles on his lips and replies:

-You fool, you do not even know what an ear is composed of, never mind a whole human body! Didn't you tell me the other day that all my screaming, hurting patients were miraculously cured by themselves, not because of my silver rings? Didn't you ask me: "what is the relationship between earlobes and back pains?" He continues suckling on his lips.

As soon as the patient is taken away by his family, I throw my own head in grandpa's lap, laughing and teasing him even more:

- Yes, indeed, grandpa, what is the connection between ears and legs?

- You want the one pound, fool, that is all. Here you go! Take it and leave my lap alone. But I fall into sweet sleep on his lap, and when I re-open my eyes, I find him massaging my earlobes while shaking his body as if in a Sufi meditative dance reciting:

- This is the lobe of the fool's ear, the tendon of the fool's ear, the wax of the fool's ear, the tragus of the fool's ear! Oh boy! Give me the needle and the ring to make a hole!

When I hear this, I freak out and leave him very quickly, while he is laughing very loudly. (Musadafa 63-4)

This kind of description of the medicinal practices and inter-familial relationships intertwined in one dialogue offers the kind of "blunt cold" representations of reality defined earlier by the first group of critics. There are literally tens of such examples where memetic reality is represented uncompromisingly throughout the whole narrative structure. From this particular point of view, it seems easy to argue that these vivid descriptions of the reality of life in a far-way village at the dawn of the twentieth century are the target of the whole narrative structure and the main

purpose of its existence; that its magical or fantastical world view are present only to contrast and redefine that world and highlight its deficiencies and shortcomings; and that the contrasting backgrounds of imaginative fantasies are thus only peripheral extensions to the fundamental groundings of what is tangible and real.

By the same token, there are equally as many descriptions of the fantastic imagined world in this novel to warrant the other side of the argument just as forcefully. The availability of natural resources and the respect it recruits from inhabitants, the healing powers of nature, the simplicity of the social justice system and many other features presented in the fantastical world of the spring land combine to centralize fantasy as the worthier centre of attention for the narrative structure as the second group of critics have argued. Reality, here represented by the life conditions of Najee Elzaraeyb; the life conditions governed by patriarchal honor customs and land ownership traditions. The imagined land of the spring, by comparison, is one governed by natural healing powers and abundance, at least on the surface.

Yet, the two worlds truer and most profound significance lies in the paradoxicality of their combination which the narrative structure itself made sure to weave quite cleverly within the fabric of one another. The niece/journalist of the escapee murder-suspect who will turn out to be actually his daughter, is herself the reader of his dairy in which his story of travelling and living in the land of the spring is written in his own words and by his own hands. Meanwhile, the story of his daily living in the spring land itself carries within its various events and dialogues his memories of the village life and of his family. On the one side, the daughter/journalist, Waheeda, thought to be niece, tells of her living conditions in the village (memetic reality) while reading the dairy (the magical or the marvelous) of her father, who was thought to be her uncle. On the other hand, that father -who was thought to be uncle – writes of his own newly-found world and of his daily

encounters with its inhabitants (the magical or marvelous) while remembering in great detail his past life in the village (memetic reality) in the dairy read by his daughter.

In other words, both protagonists' first-person witnesses tell of both worlds one way or another, within their seemingly exclusive respective worlds. This intense intertwining of both worlds in the narrative fabric itself is very significant despite the apparent dichotomies in time and setting. It denotes a parallel unrepresentable intertwining between the real and the unreal as perceived through time and space.

However, the matter gets much more complicated as readers progress in the work. Alhem's fantastic journey into a world he thought was paradise did not entirely correspond to his initial description. It has not turned out to be as free of crime, oppression or mysticism as initially thought. The world of the real, on the other hand did not turn out to be as demonic and final as first thought. Both actively interfere in redefining themselves by themselves without ever relegating that final definition to an ultimate solution or truth. The land of the spring turned out to be also guilty of the same sort of crime and oppression, jealousy and uncontrollable wrath, while the village crime turned out to be avenged and satisfied. The worlds which seem in the beginning of the narrative as clear-cut realist or fantastic, oppressive or just, humane or inhumane, is redefined throughout the narrative many times over in so many different directions that the very thought of one-way-or-the-other seems itself ridiculous and utterly unfathomable. The definition of the third group of critics does not only apply here, but get extraordinarily expanded with this work's narrative insistence on keeping most of its implicated questions referring to the paradoxicality of both the Marvelous and the Real quite open and resistant to finality. As we shall see in more detail in the coming pages Where the *Marvelous* claims realism by virtue of its human agency while the *Real*

claims inexplicability by virtue of its intricate details and complex sociality. Brenda Cooper suggests:

What has become clear, as the many varied, multi-shaped and coloured pieces fleetingly settle, only to take off again into space and time, is that magic turns to myth and back again, in a kinetic kaleidoscope of fictions of dizzying, daring and brave narrative experimentation. All these novels, ...teem with images, symbols, mysteries and interpretative puzzles. The density of the writing, and at times the frustrating difficulty of the reading, can be accounted for in terms of these frenetic journeys. (Cooper 216)

6- Plot Structure: the continuous redefinition of the real and the unreal.

This is nowhere more evident than in the structure of this narrative's plot and its delicate intertwining of familial relationships and gender politics. The basic story starts at the village of Najee Elzaraeyb and goes back in time for four full decades, when a young female journalist who happens to live with her step grand-mother, Waheeda, hears the news that her uncle Alhem who had escaped the village nearly four decades earlier is found alive and well by the authorities with an isolated previously uncharted mountain area of the north-western desert of Egypt. Readers initially learn that Alhem was driven out of his village by his mother Waheda, after being accused of murdering three young bothers of the other strong, but Christian, family in the Village; the Gabrials. Though she knew that he was innocent of the crime, she pushed him to flee for fear of retribution by the Gabrials. The step brother of Alhem, Abdulkader, was also involved in the incident. It was his shouting at Alhem to stop shooting, that made Alhem's guilt apparent to everyone in the village. The crime was officially registered as an accident with the authorities thanks to the efforts of Alhem's and Abdulkader's father, Alhem the great, who pledged with the

Gabrials to cease escalation of any expected chain of retribution between the two families in return for the bulk of his farm-land, which constituted half the village cultivatable land mass. He also proposed a marriage between his son Abdulkader and their daughter Mariam to seal the deal.

Following the death of Alhem the great, the grandfather of Alhem and Abdulkader, which happened soon after, the marriage of Mariam and Abdulkader, who was already married to Zaynab with kids, took place. Seven month later, Waheeda, was prematurely born. Although Abdulkader's obsession with Mariam was deep, long-standing and well-known to the villagers, she disappeared without a trace soon after leaving her seven-day aged daughter, Waheeda, in the lap of Waheeda, her husband's step mother. Her own mother, Munira, however, and the remaining siblings, Magid and Odeit, all immigrated to Canada, leaving Priest Putrus in charge of their estate. Gradually, readers learn that Mariam, the mother, was in fact in a love relationship with Alhem, and did not have any feelings for Abdulkader whatsoever, and that her brother, Nasir – one of the murdered three siblings – was deeply in love with one of Abdulkader's sisters, Ragaa, and were found out by Abdulkader long before the murder incident. Abdulkader and his mother, Entisar, then conspired, and managed, to marry Ragaa off to one of her maternal nephews to cover up the scandal according to their traditions.

Waheeda, the daughter, the younger image of her mother Mariam, is the first narrator of the narrative, who was contacted by the police to satisfy her uncle's conditions for coming out of the hidden hole in the ground with his spring-land people. She starts the narration in her first-person address, and from her first-person witness perspective. Later on, when she reaches the spot of her alleged uncle's hide-out, she is given a dairy of his, containing his daily encounters since he had escaped his village in fear for his life. The dairy, in which Alhem's voice is now the only narrator, serves as a source for the second first-person witness perspective in the narrative structure.

Waheeda, the daughter, narrates what she knows in one instant, while Alhem, through his dairy, narrates what he does in another.

Throughout the novel then, there are two narrative perspectives, witnesses, and first-persons telling the same story from two totally different locations or settings, realities, and timelines, both of which are marked by flashbacks and current events, imagination and memetic reality. Mariam narrates her own (memetic) reality from her own perspective, speculating on what must have happened, and on what would, from her imagination, in one instant, while Alhem narrates his own (fantastic/marvelous) reality from his, remembering what had actually happened in his past. One is a realistic memetic with a dose of imagination, while the other is imaginative, fantastic with a considerable dose of memetic reality. As Kluwick Ursula argues:

the potency of magical realism lies in its capacity to explore the protean relationship between what we consider rational (what is knowable, predictable, and controllable) and irrational (what is beyond our complete understanding and control)... it juxtaposes various reality discourses not in order to place them in a binary opposition but to explode the very idea of the binary by showing that it cannot possibly express the nature of reality: no matter how contradictory the two codes seem and no matter how many serious conceptual problems their conjunction causes, here they are, side by side. (Ursula 13,18)

The whole point of intertwining the narrative lines between characters and events on the one hand and timelines and settings on the other, is precisely this “explosion” of duplicity between the rational and the fantastic, in which neither is ever completely clearly-defined or even independent. The purpose is evidently the reconceptualization of both in the cultural consciousness of the current zeitgeist for broader horizons of sentience and understanding.

After the Gabriel's return for a visit, Mariam re-appearance from behind a false wall that led to hidden cellar in her mother's house where she was hiding for forty years, the death of her father, Abdulkader, and the completion of Alhem's dairy, Waheeda finally pieces together what truly happened then.

Alhem and Mariam had spent a night together in her bedroom where they were discovered by her sister and some of her brothers, Alhem had managed to escape and hide before anyone could catch and recognize him. Mariam refused to talk except before Alhem's grandfather. Furious for the loss of their family's honor according to their traditions, Nasir and his brothers went looking for Alhem and his brother knowing that it must be one of them. By then, Abdulkader was alone drinking in the field while Alhem was hiding nearby. When they found Abdulkader, they all went into fist fighting but it ended in all of them departing peacefully. Abdulkader had earlier hidden his grandfather's rifle beside a nearby tree, and thought to get rid of all his problems at once. Killing Nasir and framing Alhem for the crime would hit two birds with one stone, since he would be guaranteed having his grandfather's estate inheritance, as well as Mariam with whom he was obsessed, all at once. He took his grandfather's rifle and waited for them and when Nasir saw him and hid behind his other two brothers, Abdulkadre shot the gun and the three of them were instantaneously killed. He thought they were infidels and adulterers and deserved to die. He then shouted Alhem's name before everyone, framing him for the murders.

Waheeda, the step mother, had by then found Alhem, who did not really know what was happening except that he loved Mariam and was caught sleeping with her. Waheeda pushed him to escape the place in fear for his life. After his father's, and grandfather's deaths, Abdulkader realized that the estate is now Gabriel's with Waheeda, the daughter as the only present heiress, so he pretended that he was her father to keep up the standing among villagers as still a landowner.

Alhem, on the other hand, embarked on a wholly new adventure with the land of the spring, its leader, daughters and inhabitants. He learns two very important facts about life among the people of the spring. The first is that people's lives there revolve around a spring of water with magical powers that sustain them, as they believe, to which they make offerings of their dead in appeasement. The spring accepts or rejects their offerings depending on sinners' confessions of guilt. When sinners confess their wrong doings, the spring initiates a tornado-like concoction that swallows the bodies of the dead and returns them back to the people of the spring, as they believe, in the smiles of new-borns next morning. That is why the people of the spring have no concept of death, and forbid mentioning the word itself amongst themselves. The spring also sustains their unique ecology and offers them all kinds of crops and fruits all around the year regardless of seasons or conditions. It represents a deity for them; one which controls their lives and allows their very existence. The second fact he learns is the presence of a forbidden garden, where wrong doers and political dissidents get banished. It is a far enough part of the spring land to prevent people of from approaching it or communicating with its inmates.

Sheik Bedair was the original ruler of the spring-land, until challenged one day by the current ruler, Sultan, who miraculously appeared in the middle of the spring with a young blond lady he called Hori (Doreice). Doreice was in fact the daughter of an English Garison general stationed in Egypt during the British occupation who was lost in the desert while on a desert trip with her friends and was eventually found by Sultan who worked as a desert tracer. Sultan claimed to have descended from the heavens into the sacred spring to rule its people according to a holy book whose contents he alone knows and was given Hori, or Doreice, as a gift from the sacred spring for carrying out God's orders. At Sheik Bedair's objection and subsequent calling for a sacred spring test, both men went in as a life-or-death test of survival. However, Sultan emerged

triumphant, swimming in the scared waters of the spring easily and freely while Sheik Bedair was swallowed by its tornado into oblivion. Here is what Sheik Bedair said right before he went in:

Yet, I shall fight you within the spring itself. I know full well that both of us cannot get out. But I am an old man, and so if I had given our sacred spring endless offerings of bewilderingly beautiful brides perfumed in sage and saffron, and if I have gladly known its book by heart, why would it send you to us with another?! However, people, be my witness, for I shall now be your offering to your sacred spring. I will uphold your grandfathers' commandments not to enlist the wrath of your God by desecrating his sacred spring. (ElMusadafa 90)

Sultan has become the divine ruler of the spring who has come "to save you from the end of the world and from yourselves" (ElMusadafa ٩٠). He inhabited the Jen's cave and said he would beat it out, and save the people from it. He is the only one allowed to slaughter animals and is therefore responsible for feeding all of them. Among his many decrees as the divine ruler is the prohibition of uttering the word "death" or anything related to it, using spring-offering in its stead. He decreed the banishment of his political opponents and criminals into a secluded place in the spring-land which they all call "the forbidden garden", and revere as full of unspeakable dangers.

Alhem's relationship with the ruler Sultan begins when he first enters the spring-land through Sultan's cave and with trying to cure Sultan from his ailment through ear-piercing with silver rods which Alhem had learned from his own Grandfather back in his village as a child. Their relationship, however, was always marked with doubt on Sultan's part, and fear on Alhem's, particularly after discovering the sculptor, Sakr, at his last breaths. Latter readers learn that Sakr was poisoned by orders of Sultan. The sculptor, Sakr, was one of Sultan's most prominent political opposers, who told Alhem that he had gathered all of Sultan's gold and forged it into a single statue

of Hori (Doreice), whom he loved dearly, and hid it somewhere in the yellow mountain. Sultan has two daughters from Hori (Doreice), Jamila and Labiba, and Alhem thought Labiba was actually Sakr's daughter from Hori (Doreice) who had long despised Sultan and was consequently banished to the forbidden garden.

After being sentenced to five months imprisonment in the mountain prison for uttering the wrong word; namely death, Alhem finds out that most prisoners are there for similar crimes, and that they have attempted several failed coups against Sultan before. Hori, is more or less, the leader of the prisoners, and the leader of the opposition, so to speak. She surmised that Sultan's power derives from his knowledge of the forbidden garden and so asked Alhem to venture into it and learn what was inside. Alhem also learns the true story of Sultan's ascendance to power written in a secret scroll by Labiba and hidden in Hori's cave, which had nothing to do with descending from heaven but with deceiving the spring's people's eyes and ears. He also learns about Hori's love for the sculptor, their parenting of Labiba, and Sultan's resultant imprisonment of Hori in the mountain jail. Sultan had kept Labiba because he realized her gift of long-distance sight and declared her the spring-land's fortune teller. Labiba also works for Hori and tells her what happens in the spring. In the forbidden garden, Alhem learns the truth which is that Sultan sends wizards and witches there who happen to all be of old age.

The woman, Kaseeba, who were tossed in the forbidden garden on a charge of practicing witchcraft, reunites with her long-forgotten father who had spent thirty years amongst the forbidden-garden's banished on a similar charge. Jamila manages to kill Ghanem to whom she was promised in marriage, and Sultan dies at the effect of the poison Alhem had managed to slip into his drink before being banished to the mountain to spend his five-months prison-sentence. Before his death, Sultan agrees to marry off Jamila to Alhem who takes over as the ruler of the

land of the spring. Labiba is the only one who knows of Jamila's murder crime and becomes Alhem's greatest enemy for not choosing her as a wife.

Alhem pardons the prisoners in the mountain and the forbidden garden, but erects his own old-world style of prison and cemetery where the dead get buried not offered to the spring. After three decades and a number of children with Jamila, Alhem actually kills her and hides her body in the passage way he rediscovered to the outside world. At his dying moments, Suhail, the eldest of Sultan's sons, admits to killing Sakr, the sculptor, at the behest of his father. Labiba has become Alhem's wife in her sister's stead, dying of natural causes a few years later. Tamra led a failed coup against Alhem, but gave up after Labiba's death. Alhem killed an intruder that came through the tunnel which he used to enter the spring land, and the spring's water turned to grey with floating rotten bird-corpse on its surface. Her is where the work ends.

As is probably very evident, there is not one main chain of events constructing an overall plot within which all other events can be seen as constituent parts or sub-plots. Instead, there are several intersecting sequences of events narrated concomitantly between the dairy and the memories of its writer, Alhem, and the reader of the dairy, Waheeda, and her investigations into the events. There is Waheed's voice, and through that, comes another voice; Alhem's, by virtue of his dairy, and the two voices with their memories and investigations and feelings, speak to readers intermittently as, and when, the first voice of Waheeda, the reader of the dairy, permits. Readers would then have flashes of the narrative lines between memories, findings, feelings and emotions of speakers, descriptions of people and places, hopes and rationales as well as events from both voices, crossing one another in all dimensions of space and time. The result is mostly a very deliberate aesthetic deconstruction of linearity in the sequencing of timelines and events, a continuous state of definition and redefinition of characters and events foregrounding and re-

defining one another on both the realistic and magical sides of the narrative. This challenge to linearity, aesthetically frustrates readers' conventional expectations of easy identification and simplistic comic relief, for a deeper cultural reach into the much truer conflicting aspects of humanity relating to the question of justice, human intent and what Bowers calls the "fixed categories of the truth" (77):

The violation of literary conventions fundamentally interrupts the process of reading, drawing attention to the unspoken norms and assumptions by which a reader will judge a fictional world as realistic or fantastic. In destabilizing received notions of the real and the fantastic, magic realist fiction reveals the extent to which both categories are a matter of social and cultural consensus, or even of rhetorical effect. (Hegerfeldt 200)

For example, the first murder crime readers learn about in the beginning of this narrative is of three brothers in Najee Elzaraeyb. This is the memetic *realist* world, and is accordingly presumed to be the main crime mystery of the whole narrative. However, it is quickly intersected by the many murder crimes committed in the *Marrvelous* world of the spring land; Shiek Bedair's, Sakr's, Ghanem's, Sultan's, Jamila's and the intruder's. Which of those crimes carries the most significant connotations with regards to the general cultural or aesthetic impact of the narrative; but, more importantly, which is structurally more constituent, and why?

The murder of the three brothers serves as a critiquing of the memetic-realist timeline of archaic traditional honor killings and land possession rivalries for status and pride. It is vital to the sequence of events that led to the escape of the main character; Alhem, which in itself builds the skeleton of the narrative as a whole.

However, the other crimes build perhaps a more realistic picture of the kind of evil man could be drawn to if in search for power. More significantly, they point out the kind of evil, unchecked power is likely to instigate regardless of identity or circumstance, even if in paradise. They are also structurally vital in the overall sequence of events that builds the significance of the fantastical world. Without them, such world would be just too dull, uneventful and insignificant to protrude in the minds of readers. Without them there would be no substance to the sequence of the fantastical world.

Yet, the true significance of both sets of crimes lies not in their structural or cultural significances individually, but in their intersecting statuses as overshadowing and underlining one another. The heinous crime of murdering three youth by Abdulkader, for honor and pride, is intersected by another equally heinous crime of murdering a wife during love making for nothing worse than lusting for her sister. The unjustly accused in the first crime, who was banished off his land and people, is himself the culprit of the second. The circumstances that led to the first are thus redefined and re-questioned by the circumstances that led to the second.

Alhem was decidedly in fear for his life knowing that Jamila had murdered Ghanem just to get to him. Abdulkader loved Mariam wholeheartedly, and killed for her, just like Alhem loved Labiba and killed for her; or have they, indeed? Abdulkader was under the spell of Mariam, the hold of honor and land-ownership traditions, while Alhem's was under the spell of Labiba and the need to silence her opposition to him as a ruler. Who is the oppressor, and who is the oppressed here? Every series of events in the narrative falls within the same intersecting circle of definition and redefinition endlessly without a final resolution or a stance taken by the narrative one way or the other. Talking about postmodern metafiction, Critic Linda Hutcheon argues:

This is deliberately doubly coded narrative, just as postmodern architecture is a doubly coded form: they are historical and contemporary. There is no dialectic resolution or recuperation in either case...The present and the past, the fictive and the factual: the boundaries may frequently be transgressed in postmodern fiction, but there is never any resolution of the ensuing contradictions. In other words, the boundaries remain, even if they are challenged. (71,2)

Another example of this pertains to the nature of the love relationships presented in this narrative in which there are many; Nasir and Ragaa, Alhem and Mariam, Abdulkader and Mariam, Shiek Muhamed (Alhem's and Abdulkader's father) and his wife Entisar, Alhem and Jamila, Alhem and Labiba, Hori and Sultan, Hori and Sakr, Tamra and Alhem. In the case of Nasir and Ragaa, Nasir loved Ragaa so much that he was willing to have his ear maimed according to traditions in order to marry her, but at the same time was so furious of his own sister's love for Alhem that he went looking for a fight which eventually caused his murder.

Hori was initially so infatuated with Sultan, that she did not want to return to her family and land for him, only to fall head-over-heal, much later, for Sakr; the sculptor, in the spring land which eventually caused her banishment to the mountain prison, and Salr's own murder. Once inside the spring land, Alhem forgot all about his love for Mariam, and went on a spree of love relationships with just about every young woman he met including Tamra. Sultan, once so deep in love with Hori; Dorcie, that he actually named her Hori; the heavenly companion in paradise according to Islam, dumped her once he hears of her affair with Sakr, calling her a whore. Once learned of Entisar's un-curability, Shiek Muhamed, Alhem's and Abdulkader's father, went ahead to remarry Waheeda, Alhme's mother, despite his heart-felt love for his first wife.

None of those relationships seem to correspond with any degree of certainty to the cliché concept of love inherited in the culture, even though their initial descriptions certainly allows readers to at least remember the concept. Talking about Zynab, Adulkader's first wife, Waheeda, the step grandmother recalls that:

She had such bad luck in her marriage, poor thing. She was always present around him, always in love with him and ready for him, but he chased after the scent of the absent Mariam... Adulkader seemed to have inherited his father's fate, and Zynab seemed to have inherited mine. My husband loved his first wife Entisar to a degree that I have not seen or heard about before (ElMusadafa 310)

Significantly, the same sort irony regarding the cliché; love-conquers-all, is repeated with regards to Mariam and Alhem, and Hori and Sakr. Yet each one of these characters either have loved again or was engaged in a, more or less, similar relationship. With a change in the circumstances, the characters also changed their emotional content, aspirations and ways of understanding what love is in the first place. Alhem did not recognize Waheeda, the daughter, and thought she was Mariam. That is how much he remembers the woman whom he was banished for; whom he was running for his life because of. Similarly, Adulkader had forgotten all about his pride and all about Zynab's love for him, and is seen crying at Mariam's door step in order to allow him in. The same can be said about almost every love relationship presented in this work.

The idea is quite straightforward; nothing in reality is quite straightforward no matter how deeply incarnated its concept is in the cultural consciousness of the time. All are shaped by the various socio-cultural pressures present at the time, and nothing is innately natural, or unquestionably given. The narrative delineates readers' inherited concepts not only of love and power, but of themselves as independent sovereign subjects free to do as they wish. Instead, the

subject's constitution and behavior are wholly dependent on the conditions of power relevant to his/her time and space, and not on some conception of how reality should be.

#### 7- Characterization and Heterogeneity

The single most prevalent element of construction in the characterization of this novel's personnel is their implicit paradoxicality; that is the depth and breadth of contradictions with which they were all mostly presented. Let us take for example, Abdulkader, whom readers would mostly see as the absolute villain, at least initially. As readers we learn very early on in the novel that he is somehow responsible for the murder of the three brothers, the reason behind his daughter's utter frustration, the banishment of his brother and the disappearance of his second wife Mariam. Readers find out for sure that he is responsible for all of that near the end of the novel. He is presented since the beginning of the novel in such a way to arouse suspicion around him, therefore, at the end readers are hardly surprised.

However, readers also learn of the depth of his love to Mariam, his caring for Waheeda her daughter, and the softness of his treatment to his first wife Zynab. This is the other side of his character, the heterogenous side, which depicts a much kinder man than initially thought. Significantly, it is this very paradoxicality and behavioral heterogeneity that anchors his character's credibility in readership by offering humane (wrong or right) groundings for his deeds. It is this very paradoxicality and heterogeneity that endows his character with dimensionality and depth as a human having mixtures of all shades of color.

Another very obvious example of this sort of multi-dimensional characterization can be seen with the character of Alhem. Again, in the beginning readers get the impression that Alham is little more than a boy with zero experience and very little depth of character. His mother had to push him away with a palm-tree leaf in her hand to force him to flee for his life, and his brother

framed him for a triple murder he did not commit quite easily. He slept with his beloved in her own bed under her family's own roof and had to hide in the barn when he was found out, leaving her to face consequences alone. His behaviors are mostly childish marked by lack of experience and character banality. Then readers move to the spring land to find a well-calculated Alhem, who manages to heal the sick and love many women reciprocally, endure prison, venture into the forbidden garden alone, and plot against the ruler, succeeding to kill him and take over his kingdom.

This Alhem is the one taught by four years surviving in the desert alone eating whatever he could and discovering and learning about life and the past. As he concluded that Sultan was about to kill him once he learns the means with which he managed to enter the spring-land, Alhem plotted to poison him right before he went to spend his sentence in prison. This way Sultan's death could not be traced back to him. He plotted and carried out the deed then went to spend his sentence with the rest of Sultan's enemies and victims to learn more about how to defeat and oust him. There he made friends with Hori, Sultan's banished former wife, loved Tamra, and discovered the truth about the forbidden garden. He armed himself to the teeth with knowledge that can easily topple the regime and place him on its tip top, which is what happened. When he came down to the valley after spending his sentence in prison, Sultan was barely alive, so he obtained his approval of marriage to one of his daughters, guaranteeing Alhem's succession as a ruler of the spring-land. He now has power, love, friendship and respect, all of what he lacked throughout his life.

Here too, the paradoxicality and heterogeneity of the internal composition of Alhem's character is the source of its credulity and credibility. They are the depth definition of his being as human full of mistakes and rights as well as their underlying journey within the self as adventurous as its represented to be. Without such dimensionality and distance within, the character loses its

vitality as life, and becomes a cliché; unbelievable as it is banal. The combination between the innocent village Alhem with his love for Mariam and vulnerability for exploitation by his brother, and the partially calculated and partially survivalist Alhem he turns out to be, offers the animating force that breathes life into that character and makes it both understandable and identifiable both at the same time. As critic Jean-Pierre Durix suggests “the main characters are larger than life and veer towards the allegory” (146)

Most other characters, such as Waheeda; the grandmother in Law, Hori or Dorice; the foreigner former wife of Sultan, and Sultan himself; the killed ruler of the spring land, follow, more or less, the same implicit strategy of combining heterogenous qualities and traits in such a manner that makes them complementary and enhancing of the richness of their composition adding multiple dimensions to their credibility as human beings in both the wrong and the right sides of morality.

### **8- Symbolism and Allegory**

Most of the character's names used in this narrative has a bearing one way or another on the contents of their represented characters. Abdulkadr as a name implies in Arabic the meaning of capability and power. He was capable of planning a whole conspiracy to avenge his sister's honor, frame his younger brother, and take over both his brother's beloved and the family's estate all at once. Waheeda, his step mother takes a portion of her name, *the lonely* in Arabic, being the mother of Alhem her only off-spring and the lone mother of Waheeda the daughter of Mariam. Sakr; hawk in Arabic, again takes a portion of his name being the only one in the spring-land who knows the ends and outs of all its treasures and passageways. Hori, Sultan's first wife, obviously takes after her name which is that of paradise companions in the afterlife of the faithful in Islam, because of her beauty and fair skin. Jamila, Sultan's daughter, beautiful in Arabic, is also very sexy and is

always interested in cosmetics and self-presentation, while her sister Labiba as her name suggests; the clever one in Arabic, is the remote viewer, the wise thinker of the place, and the right-hand advisor of Sultan. This goes on for the rest of the characters in this narrative, except for only one name; Alhem, which takes a more wholesome historical symbolism than all other characters in this work.

The name is very much reminiscent of the word *Elohim*, in plural meaning Gods, Eloah singular; The Hebrew god of the Old Testament. Here is what in the encyclopedia Britannica states about it:

**Elohim**, singular **Eloah**, (Hebrew: God), the God of Israel in the Old Testament. A plural of majesty, the term Elohim—though sometimes used for other deities, such as the Moabite god Chemosh, the Sidonian goddess Astarte, and also for other majestic beings such as angels, kings, judges (the Old Testament *shofetim*), and the Messiah—is usually employed in the Old Testament for the one and only God of Israel, whose personal name was revealed to Moses as YHWH, or Yahweh (*q.v.*). When referring to Yahweh, *elohim* very often is accompanied by the article *ha-*, to mean, in combination, “the God,” and sometimes with a further identification *Elohim hayyim*, meaning “the living God.” Though Elohim is plural in form, it is understood in the singular sense. Thus, in Genesis the words, “In the beginning God (Elohim) created the heavens and the earth,” Elohim is monotheistic in connotation, though its grammatical structure seems polytheistic. The Israelites probably borrowed the Canaanite plural noun Elohim and made it singular in meaning in their cultic practices and theological reflections. (Britannica, 16-06-2023)

The name is originally pre Judaism, belonging to the Canaanites which means it is Sumerian in origin predating the whole three divine religions. It was also used in several non-monotheistic religions in Phoenicia which means it is not only ancient referring to the divine, but also as general in its reference as readers might care to imagine.

The symbolism of all other names in this narrative aim to imply types, rather than identities. Each one of these names represents a type of humans not only his own narrative identity. This seems to be the reason behind their naming in this particularly general way. Abdulkader is the capable type of personalities who can plot and carry out plans no matter how ruthless. Waheeda is the type that suffers and endures alone, while Sakr is the type that seeks to spot and learn about places and things. Jamila is the type that presents her femininity first and fore most, while Labiba is the type that prefers intellectuality and wisdom, and so on.

The symbolic signatures of each name implicitly signify general types of human beings of which each character occupies a portion. Each of these characters then would only function as a representation of that type of human being rather than a self-contained identity of its own. The narrative lines, in this case, would function as a small universe in which such types of characters play their allocated roles while presenting their paradoxical depths and contradictions as constructive dimensional richness of their types rather than identities.

Alhem, by this definition, is the biggest type of all; the type around which all other types revolve; the divine, the one. He is the only one in the story that enters the magical world coming from the realistic world, and is able somehow to return back from it. Even inside the magical world, he is the only one who ventures willingly into the forbidden garden, wins its people and comes back to his prison with a load full of goodies and things. He is the only one who has ruled undisputed that magical world and is able to maintain his authority up to the last moment when

that magical world ceased to be magical. He is positioned as the representative of the relationship with the divine destined to rule in his name, and be loved by everyone despite his many crimes.

But perhaps the biggest symbolism used in this work apart from names, is the allegory of *the spring land* itself, and within it, the allegory of the forbidden garden. Reminiscent of *The Arabian Nights* in its fantastical features and geography, of Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* (1726), and George Orwell's *1984* (1949). At first sight, readers would be surprised and familiarly entertained at the description of the spring-land:

Instead, this is a warm and merciful sun sending a refreshing cooling breeze that is mild in temperature and soft in touch. Before me and to my left and right are fields in mountain steps of bright-purple flowers of yellow and green crops and fruits in all shades and denominations. I distinguish barley, wheat, beans, oranges, palms, grapes, olives, figs, mango and even bamboo, and many more. (ElMusadafa 70)

It is familiar because it caters for the culturally settled fantasy of a paradise abundant in food and perfect in weather, and surprising because it is claimed to actually exist, even if only in the magical world. But the symbolism does not stop here, for even in paradise there are rules and belief-systems that have to be observed and revered. There is a ruler who rules by divine right and claims to have been sent a book by God, only he can know or read. A book, which contains rights and wrongs all should follow or else be punished. A book, which gives him the right to imprison, banish or kill people at will. The paradise imagined initially has suddenly changed to an Orwellian nightmare where *the big brother* (the lord in this case) is always watching and ready to punish whoever dares to challenge his power or question his authority:

I also notice that he grits his teeth and stifles his anger while his right eyelid shivers when I ask him a question he doesn't want to answer? I am sure he is the only one here utterly alien to the place, just like me, talking in-plane Arabic, just like me. If it weren't for him, I would have probably believed it true that this was indeed paradise!... I remember the Lord's words to me: "ruling is not an easy thing, my son! A ruler must seek the help of a tattoo-artist, a weaver, and a fortune-teller. He must know who sleeps with whom while cursing him? Who tells jokes, tales, lies about him he hasn't heard yet, who is thinking to attack his din at night while in bed, and finally, who has it in him to lead these people when they stand for themselves against his dominion? (ElMusadafa, 84, 93)

The fortune teller is a symbol for the state security apparatus, while the weaver represents production of manufactured goods or the supplier of much needed fabricated items for everyday use. As for the tattoo artist, she represents the media apparatus with all its artistic and ideological constituents being the third and most important ruling tool. These are the main pillars of any totalitarian system of government; a financial establishment (the weaver) responsible for production and distribution of goods, an informational establishment (the tattoo artist) responsible for controlling people's minds and manipulating their concepts and beliefs, and a security establishment (the fortune teller) responsible for spying on people, predicting danger possibilities and carrying out punishments. Ironically, even in paradise, the implicit message of this work dictates, where all human needs are readily met without a question, liberty is not given but has to be won.

Within the spring-land, there is a place everyone is forbidden to enter or even approach. It is called *the forbidden garden* whose borders are fenced with long trees and marked on the ground

by chalk never to be crossed by any of the spring's people. The forbidden garden is different from the spring-land's prison in the yellow mountain. It is a place decreed by the divine ruler to be forbidden to all, and is therefore surrounded by fearful stories of mystical evil powers and such like control mechanisms propagated by the ruling establishment. Alhem, while in prison, and at the behest of the chief opposition leader, Hori, ventures into the forbidden garden to discover none of its previously claimed Jen mysticism and evil powers. He discovers only the spring-land's old wise people accused of witchcraft. The forbidden garden is then a representation of a political prison where all the wise older men and women who would oppose the regime are banished.

9- Time consciousness, irony and political critique:

As we have seen above, the combination of the realms in which this work weaves its events and personages invents an entirely different wholly new world view, where characters represent not only their specific identities in their respective timelines, but their human types at large, and where events redefine one another constantly as the imaginative and the realist restructure one another's fabrics and significance. As is also evident by now, both the highly local and realist and the extremely universal and imaginative are seamlessly intertwined employing surgical narrational flashes twittering in the voices of two first-person (s) omniscient narrator(s) in a large mosaic of events and characters, offering a narrative canvas that allows for multi-layered perspectives and understandings. It is typical of *Magic Realism* in its clever combinations between the fantastic and the intensely local, some informed readers might at first sight conclude. Indeed, this article has discussed those very perspectives themselves in the above pages. However, this work is anything but typical in terms of its formal approach, even more significantly, its cultural, and aesthetic ideals. For example, the sort Orwellian allegorical codification (*Animal Farm*-1945, 1984-1947) to parody the shortcomings of both the communist and capitalist socio-political value-systems, are

further enriched with Swiftian ironies on the cruelty and futility of human judgement, “the singular book of morality”, “the singular ruler” and “the banishment of the elderly”. The spring-land is a communist eutopia where abundance is the norm, where Najee Elzarayeb is the capitalist dystopia where scarcity is the norm and people are divided by class, religion and gender. Yet, ironically, both suffer the same human shortcomings of greed and lust for power and oppression of the weak. Both are filled with murder and rage, and thus both parody one another quite effectively.

More significantly, this is embodied in the various very powerful, quite desperate love subplots in this novel as well. The Weaver’s, Jamila’s, Labiba’s, Alhem’s, Mariam’s, AbdulKader’s, Nasir’s and Ragaa’s have all ended absurdly and tragically. This is a debunking of conventional cultural value systems especially identity and gender roles in a patriarchal culture. It critiques traditional morality (honour killings), sexual politics (Ragaa and Mariam), masculine patriarchy (Nasir’s and Abdulkadir’s control of their sisters), and conventional concepts of femininity (Jamila , Tamra and the various male descriptions of the female body) and the very bases of their comprehension universally. The allegory of *the forbidden garden* alone, both a prison, and a place of passive resistance and curiosity, combines a critique of organized religion, radicalized ideologies of any denomination, with very well-thought satiric reflections on inert political dissidence, and playful parodies of capitalist identities and socialist concepts of dynamic group consciousness.

The most complex aspect of this work, however, is what *Paul Ricoeur* calls “phenomenology of time consciousness” and defines it as follows:

If the notion of temporal experience is worthy of its name, we must not confine ourselves to describing the implicitly temporal aspects of the

remodelling of behaviour by narrativity. We need to be more radical and bring to light those experiences where time is thematized, something that cannot be done unless we introduce a third partner into the discussion between historiography and narratology, the phenomenology of time-consciousness. (Ricoeur, 254)

This is how events are connected in the before-and-after readership perception as this article has pointed out earlier. If we are to imagine the time fabric of this novel as a three-dimensional cube, its narrative form works by illuminating various differential parts in concomitant, if oppositional, spots within that cube simultaneously. Readers' role would be to visualize that three-dimensional time structure in any chosen form of synchronicity for this narrative. Time, in this novel, then, plays one of the most, if not the most, crucial role in the definition of its various layers of significance and irony, because it does not only define the location of events in the general logic of narration, but also their imagine-ability, feasibility, credibility and comprehend-ability.

The events are supposed to have spread over about four decades at the end of the colonial era, before and after Egypt gained official independence from the British Crown. The first murder crime of which the story begins is committed by a member of a wealthy Muslim family against three young victims from a neighbouring less wealthy Christian family. The novel begins when authorities discover the fantastic world, or rather when the realist and the fantastic worlds collide. At first look, the two worlds, Alham's and his daughter's, offer two parallel realities as complete and mirror-opposite to one another in every aspect imaginable. Where there is poverty, deficiency, repression, ugliness, and death in the real world, there is richness, abundance, sexual fulfilment,

beauty, and life in the fabulous. However, both cannot escape the irony of brutal human nature; greed and lust for power.

With a deeper look, each of the parallel worlds contains within its superficial borders both hell and heaven. Far from simply mirroring one another's distinct unshaded colours, they each have their counterbalances between repressions and freedoms, abundances and deficiencies, beauties and ugliness, and crimes and benevolences. The fabulous world that seemingly cannot stand the sound of death can ironically stand the murder of Sakr, the sculptor, the banishment and torture of its political dissidents; wise older men, and the ignorance of reading only one book written by their chieftain and claimed to be of heavenly origin!

The real world that endured the murder of the three youth also vindicated Alham from prior convictions of murder, freed Mariyam from her self-imposed banishment, and done away with Abdulkadir at the end. The idea of a singular ideology offering clear-cut definitions about either end of whatever spectrum one cares to choose is not only satirized and laughed at but profoundly thematized as perhaps partially the root of most cultural problems. Here is Waheeda the daughter, concluding; "they are all culprits and victims at the same time" (EIMusadafa 412).

This flexibility of narrative forms offered by this kind of time-consciousness intrinsically allows for further explorations of every character, or group of characters, events, or chain of events, as particularly significant from their points of view. Such approaches' apparent dynamics may very well be the play of religious frictions between ideologies of different equally forceful doctrines in a culture with religious mentality dating back for thousands of years. Another would be the sexual dynamics under culture segregation, which allows individuals very little room to express their desires openly. A third approach would very much be in terms of political influence and the unjust

distribution of power, and the many faults and injustices underlying systems of representation and methods for moral and aesthetic legitimation.

Whatever the study approach, this work offers its unique time-consciousness both formally as twittering flashes of narrative parts, codes, and allegories, and contextually as a multi-dimensional insight into the universal human condition rather than only the feminist.

Naturally, this reading approach attempts to convey as many aspects of this work's cultural particularity as possible both aesthetically and intellectually. However, what remains quite surprising for this reading, is how enriching such particulars happen to be when conveyed in practice within their proper general context. Readers should be the judge of that.

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