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A Paratextual Reading of Nawal El Saadawi's *A Daughter of Isis*:

Manoeuvres on the Fringes

Abstract

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A paratextual reading will not engage with the text itself, but with the elements which mushroom in the peripheral zone of a printed book, such as titles, forewords, prefaces, introductions, epilogues, illustrations, blurbs, and photos. In this zone, certain features, emanating from a particular discourse, are highlighted to promote the book to its potential readers. Paratextual features tend to change in translated texts to suit the new target audience. This paper attempts to examine Nawal El Saadawi's translated autobiographical work *A Daughter of Isis* from a paratextual perspective, highlighting the discourses which lurk on the fringes of the text. To a Western audience, the book is presented as a feminist document written by the prominent feminist Nawal El Saadawi, who has a long history of battling with patriarchy. A number of paratextual elements introduced to the translated text stress this aspect and market the book along those lines. For some critics, however, the book can be read as yet another Orientalist document, which wittingly or unwittingly propagates orientalist discourses that circulate in the West regarding Arab women, hence furthering Western hegemony and superiority. It is the aim of this paper to examine the paratextual features of this translated autobiography, the discourses they evoke and the different views regarding the purport of her works.

Keywords: Nawal El Saadawi, paratext, autobiography, feminism, Orientalism, Gerard Genette, patriarchy



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قراءة النص الموازي (الباراتكست) لـ "ابنة إيزيس" لنوال السعداوي: مناورات على أطراف النص

مستخلص الدراسة

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أي قراءة للنص الموازي (النص الملحق أو الباراتكست)، لا تتعامل مع النص ذاته ولكن مع العناصر التي تبرز على أطراف الكتاب المطبوع مثل العنوان، المقدمة، الخاتمة، الرسوم التوضيحية، الصور، وما إلى ذلك. في هذه المنطقة تحديداً تنبثق بعض السمات المرتبطة بخطاب معين بهدف ترويج الكتاب لقرائه المستهدفين. وغالبا ما يتم تغيير النص الموازي إذا ما تُرجم الكتاب ليناسب الجمهور الجديد المستهدف. في هذا الإطار، تحاول هذه الورقة قراءة النص الموازي لكتاب السيرة الذاتية المترجم لنوال السعداوي والمعنون "ابنة إيزيس"، مع تسليط الضوء على الخطابات الكامنة فيه. يُقدم الكتاب للجمهور الغربي كوثيقة نسوية بقلم الناشطة النسائية البارزة نوال السعداوي، المشهود لها بتاريخ طويل في مجابهة النظام الأبوي. ويؤكد على هذا الجانب النسوي عدد من عناصر النص الموازي للكتاب المترجم وهي ذات العناصر التي يتم تسويق الكتاب من خلالها. ذهب بعض النقاد إلى أن هذا الكتاب المترجم يمكن قراءته من منظور استشراقي، إذ يروج عن قصد أو عن غير قصد للخطابات الاستشراقية المتداولة في الغرب عن المرأة العربية، وهو ما يؤدي بدوره إلى تعزيز الهيمنة والتفوق الغربيين. تهدف هذه الورقة إلى مناقشة سمات النص الموازي لهذه السيرة الذاتية المترجمة، والخطابات التي يعززها النص الموازي وردود فعل النقاد المتباينة تجاهه.

الكلمات الرئيسية: نوال السعداوي، النص الموازي، السيرة الذاتية، النسوية،

الاستشراق، جيرار جينيت، الأبوية

A Paratextual Reading of Nawal El Saadawi's *A Daughter of Isis*: Manoeuvres on the Fringes

Paratext: An Introduction

The term "paratext" was coined by the French literary theorist Gerard Genette (1930-2018) in his 1987 book *Seuils*, which was translated into English in 1997 as *Paratexts: Thresholds of interpretation*. According to Gerard Genette, the difference between an author's text and a printed book is the introduction of new features or elements by the author, editor, or publisher which allow for its "reception" and consumption" (Genette, 1997, p. 1) by the potential readers of the text. The prefix "para" means beside or alongside, since these elements are situated beside the text; they include but are not limited to "an author's name, a title, a preface, illustrations" (Genette, p. 1). As Jansen argues "[p]aratexts are neither fully attached to nor detached from the text, but they conform to a liminal zone between its inside and outside" (Jansen, 2014, p. 5).

These features are embellishments necessary for the presentation of the text, for the text can "rarely [be] presented in an unadorned state" (Genette, 1997, p. 1). Genette takes it a step further and argues that the paratext is not just an adornment, it is more accurately the "threshold" that will either encourage the reader to buy the book and consume it or dismiss it altogether; according to Genette, it creates "the possibility of either stepping inside or turning back" (Genette, 1997, p. 2).

Thus, the inclusion of these elements is not haphazard or fortuitous, but is done deliberately to make the book appeal to the readers. The added features are meant to constitute a point of attraction to the reader, though of course they might induce feelings of indifference or disinterest, since reactions are not uniform or homogenous. In their vicinity to the main text, these paratextual elements create a space or zone that is "not only of transition but also of transaction: a privileged place of a pragmatics and a strategy, of an influence on the public"

(Genette, 1997, p. 2), which means that this is where the negotiation to buy the book takes place and where the deal with the reader is struck. It is an extremely important space that either wins the reader over by convincing him/her to buy the book, or repulses him/her: paratexts are “sites of reception where readers or viewers ... (re)consider their own construction as audiences” (Jansen, 2014, p. 7). The word “transaction”, with its commercial connotations, indicates that the paratext is a marketing zone, and an extremely important place for both author and publisher to produce optimal attraction. The introduction of paratextual features alters the reception of the book, and its interpretation by its potential readers and consumers. According to Genette, this is done through a "strategy", through tactics, manoeuvres, plans and ruses devised carefully by the publisher, editor and author of the book to win the round.

Paratexts are either textual or visual in nature. Forewords, introductions, dedications, epilogues are all linguistic in nature, but illustrations, diagrams, photos, paintings, drawings, layout, font size and type, edition type (hardcover or paperback) are visual elements which definitely impact the overall presentation of the book and can act as forces of attraction. With autobiographies, the visual element is usually paramount as photos, cards, and documents are oftentimes used on the cover of the book, and/or infiltrate the very the fabric of the text.

A paratext is typically divided into two subcategories: peritext and epitext. Peritext constitutes all of those features which are closely related to the printed book itself: author's name, title, subtitle, introduction, foreword, prologue, dedication, acknowledgments, footnotes, epilogue, appendix, book jacket, book blurb, author biography, testimonials and so on. Epitext refers to the elements which remain contiguous to the book but do not constitute a part of the printed book, such as interviews with the author, newspaper articles, reviews, letters, diaries, “posters, advertisements, press releases ... periodical bulletins addressed to booksellers, and "promotional dossiers"” (Genette, 1997, p. 347). The latter are used to market the book, promote it and increase its circulation. Many a times, a reader is able to find a book

through a publisher's flyer, a review or a T.V. interview with the author. It is important to note, however, that there are two different kinds of epitexts: public epitext (interviews, articles, conversations, etc.) and private epitext (letters, diaries, memoirs, etc.), the latter is basically "private communication" (Genette, 1997, pg. 5) eventually made public; it was not meant to circulate publicly right from the beginning, but was later incorporated into the epitext.

Interestingly, sometimes epitexts become peritexts, as when an interview with the author is appended to subsequent editions of the book. Genette remarks that "whereas on many occasions we have noted the relative neglect accorded the peritext by the literary world (including specialists), the situation of the epitext is obviously very different. Critics and literary historians have long made extensive use of the epitext in commenting on works" (1997, p. 346). That is why Genette tries to set the balance right by elaborately explaining the peritext rather than the epitext in his book. Perhaps this is what accounts for the fact that the book is lopsided, as he dedicates the first 340 pages, out of a total of 403 pages, to discussing the peritext, whereas the epitext is discussed in the remaining pages. It is of course needless to say that the greatest contribution of Genette's book is its introduction of this novel way of examining books to the field of literary studies. In fact, Genette's concept was soon embraced not just by literary scholars, but also by specialists in other different fields such as book history, translation and media studies (Bös & Peikola, 2020, p. 5). Within the latter, it has extended to include "manuscripts, orality, films and television, and even digital media" (Ciotti & Lin, 2016, p. vii).

Paratext and Translation

When Genette introduced the concept of the paratext, what he had in mind was the printed book in its original language and not its translated version. He "did not tackle the complementary issues of paratext which is translated, or translation as paratext" (Pellatt, 2013, p. 1). So he neither addressed the idea of a translation being a paratext to the original book, nor

did he address how the paratexts of translated books are a completely different enterprise; “[h]e ignores... the case of translated literature, which has special characteristics of its own regarding its position within culture” (Kovala, 1996, p. 120). Critics eventually applied his formulations regarding the paratext to their readings of translated works, since paratexts in the case of translated works are pregnant with added dimensions. In stressing the added importance accorded to paratexts in translation, Urpo Kovala says:

What is interesting about the paratexts of translations is not their position around the text, which is often in complete accord with the conventions of the target culture, but their special role as mediators between the text and the reader and their potential influence on the reader’s reading and reception of the works in question. When studying this role, it is necessary to study the historical and cultural context of this process of mediation as well. (Kovala, 1996, p. 120)

The role of the editor and publisher here is introducing the text to the readers of a different culture, tongue, historical background, hence the need to mediate the text in such a way that suits the cultural and ideological expectations of the target audience. Paratexts are now involved in “meaning production” (Kovala, 1996, p. 121), they are tailored in such a way that would meet the “structured background assumptions” (Kovala, 1996, p. 121) of the target readers. In so doing, they evoke stereotypical images of the translated text which would sit well with the target readers. What happens in translated works is that the paratext will “shape the intercultural reading of the text very substantially” (Pellatt, 2013, p. 2).

Another point which Genette did not take into consideration is that there are different players who heavily influence the paratext. In his theory, Genette proposed that the paratext is mainly controlled by the author. This assumption came to be problematic for a number of reasons:

First, the insistence on a connection between authorial responsibility and paratext

conflicts with Genette's reader-focused statement that any contextual or factual information may serve as paratext: it is hard to see how such information could come under the control of the author and his allies or how the author could assume responsibility for it in any meaningful way. Second, there is an incompatibility between the criterion of authorial responsibility and Genette's statement that all peritexts are paratextual.... While these contradictions might be considered relatively minor... they are magnified as soon as we try to adapt Genette's theory to translated texts. (Batchelor, 2018, p. 14)

As indicated by Batchelor, the domination of the author over the paratext has been contested for several reasons and in a number of contexts. When it comes to translated texts, the paratext becomes the domain of the editor, publisher and translator rather than the author. Authorial power gives way to the intervention of new players who seek primarily to adjust the text to its new recipient culture. Batchelor, thus, argues that "translation studies scholars do not adopt Genette's conservative view of translation as transparent reproduction of an original, but pay attention to paratexts as sites of translator intervention or adaptation of the text to its new environment" (Batchelor, 2018, p. 25). The new players will tailor the text, through the addition of a number of elements, to make it suitable for the new context it is going to be read in. They will wittingly highlight and stress certain aspects of the text to make it more appealing to its new consumers.

Nawal El Saadawi and Autobiography

The current surge in women's life writing can be seen as the legacy of women's rights movements and feminism, coupled with the rise of technology, all of which have definitely played an important role in giving voice to women writers and empowering them. Far from traditional printed books, autobiographies nowadays come in different shapes and forms: blogs, facebook statuses, "a deportation list, an art exhibit, reality TV, Internet websites and chat

rooms, memos and propaganda documents, memories—as well as familiar literary genres, such as the play, the long poem, the short story” (Perreault & Madar, 2005, p. 2). This, however, has not always been the case. Life writing is about exposing and revealing one’s life, a thing that has been denied women for so long in patriarchal societies which seek to dominate and silence women. Under sexist strains, women have a long history of curbing their desire to write, writing under pseudonyms, or fearing to publish what they write. Etherington-Wright, for instance, finds that “[t]hroughout the nineteenth century autobiography was a masculine mode dominated by professional males, such as generals, politicians and by middle and upper class men who were successful, and who related their ‘history’ in a linear manner, from young adult to eminence” (2009, pp. 4-5). In the Arab world, women’s position was even worse as they suffered from both patriarchal and colonial constraints. When asked about what Western feminists were oblivious to as far as Third World women were concerned, El Saadawi said:

We cannot speak about equality when the natural resources of our countries are being exploited and sucked out by imperialist powers and multinationals. In the West today they do not face these problems. For us in the Third World, because capitalism and imperialism have distorted our societies and we live on the margins of existence, the problems that face us as a people, irrespective of gender, bring us together. ("Arab Women and Western Feminism", 1980, p. 178)

Her words show how women in Arab countries suffered from both patriarchy and imperialism which drained their countries, and created inhuman conditions for both women and men alike.

Arab countries “underwent fundamental sociological, economic and political changes, as they progressed from colonial rule through nationalist movements of independence” (Golley, 2007, p. xxv). Contrary to common opinion, the result is that when “we examine the autobiographical writings of Arab women themselves, we find that they have been courageous and creative in both the lives they have lived and the ways in which they have written about

them” (Golley, 2007, p. xxvi). El Saadawi is a case in point. Not only did she write novels, short stories, plays and essays, but she also wrote autobiography, the most daring of these genres in conservative societies which typically seek to keep private life under cover. El Saadawi not only wrote her autobiography with great boldness, but what is particularly unique about her writings is that “she is almost the first Arab woman to raise the issue of sexual oppression publicly in a daring manner; before her, only forms of social, economic, and political oppression were discussed by Arab feminists” (Golley, 2003, p. 131). The price El Saadawi had to pay was heavy. She was no longer tolerated by the medical institution and was eventually dismissed from work as a doctor when she published her first daring book *Women and Sex* in 1971 (Royer, 2001, p. 9). Speaking of the consequences of her bold writings, she said:

Well, the attack on me was severe at the beginning. Because everything was hidden, kept under cover. Speaking about virginity or sex or female circumcision was at that time very difficult. Not only religious people but also politicians were furious. I even lost my job There was total censorship of all my writing so that I was obliged to publish books outside Egypt. But there was also a positive side to it. People began to think about these issues. ("Arab Women and Western Feminism", 1980, p. 179)

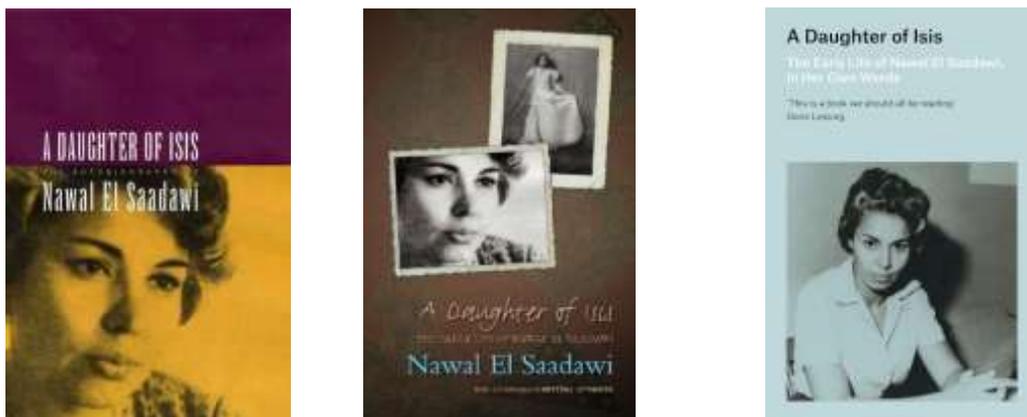
She continued to be a controversial figure, supported by the leftists and abhorred by conservatives and fundamentalists alike. This did not deter her from going on with her battle against reactionary beliefs and attitudes; her single-minded determination to raise the awareness of people about the injustices of patriarchal class system was not to be thwarted.

The reception of her works abroad was different. Regardless of the artistic merit of her literary works, which are rather direct and didactic, the militant feminism that sparked her writings was greatly acclaimed abroad; she was often invited to give talks, or teach in foreign universities. The autobiography at hand, for instance, was written in exile while she was a

visiting scholar at Duke University in the mid-1990s. Throughout her career, she accumulated numerous foreign awards and her works have been translated into several languages.

A Paratextual Reading of *A Daughter of Isis*

Initially published in Arabic in 1995 under the title *Awraqi...Hayati* (أوراقى...حياتى; *My papers...My Life*), El Saadawi's autobiography was to be translated and published in English by Zed Books under the title *A Daughter of Isis* in three editions: 1999, 2009, 2018. There were several other editions such as the 2000 Spinifex Press edition, the 2013 and 2018 editions by Bloomsbury Publishing, which were imprints of the Zed edition. In the process of republishing the book, some paratextual elements were added, altered, disappeared, changed place or were highlighted. This paper will mainly focus on the second print edition, which was published in 2009 by Zed Books, since it is better to rely on one edition for ease of reference. This edition has also been signaled out as it lies midway between the first and third editions, hence allowing comparison with both the previous and subsequent editions by the same publishing house. Quick comparisons with the Arabic versions will also be presented.



The three covers of the translated autobiography in order of their publication by Zed Books: 1999, 2009 and 2018. The one in the middle is the main target of this research.



The covers of the Arabic editions in order of their publication: 1995, 2000, 2006 and 2017.

Generally speaking, if compared with the Arabic editions, the covers of the English editions rely on clear personal photographs of the author, while the Arabic editions (except for the third edition) use photoshopped photos of the author, or a drawing as is the case with the second Arabic edition of the autobiography.

The photos used on the translated book covers are of the young Nawal looking strong and determined. Unlike the first and third editions (1999, 2018) which only use one photo, the second edition of 2009, which is the main focus of this paper, uses two black and white photos, placed against a brown background. The first and the one that is foregrounded is that of the grown-up Nawal with a deep, preoccupied and pensive look. Remarkably, it is a close-up of her face, making it so prominent, clear and defined, as opposed to the second photo which acts as a background to the first photo, and is rather distanced, since it is a long shot of the younger Nawal holding the skirt of her white dress with a smile on her face. The contrast between the determined look of the grown-up woman with the light-hearted happiness of the younger girl, reveals that what is to be covered in the book is the journey between those two selves, the process of growing up, and maturing. Interestingly, the story behind the photo of the young Nawal is revealed on page 120 of the autobiography, where the photo appears with the caption “Nawal, aged eleven, on stage as the goddess Isis, Menouf 1942”. This is where the reader gets

to learn that Nawal played the lead role as Isis in a play performed at school, and was applauded by the audience for her extraordinary performance. Following the success of the play, she became known as Isis.

Right under these two photos on the book cover comes the title of the book *A Daughter of Isis: The Early life of Nawal El Saadawi*. Things fall into place once the reader knows that the title of the English translation has been derived from that episode in her early life. The translator diverted from the Arabic title which is to be literally translated into *My Papers...My Life*, and a new title that would appeal to the Western readers, who, generally speaking, are impressed by the Ancient Egyptian civilization, replaces the Arabic title. What is being stressed in the title is the ancient Egyptian identity of El Saadawi for she is associated with Isis the ancient Egyptian goddess, and is considered to be a modern extension of her. The title of the book is not totally the invention of the translator, but is derived from the fact that she played the role of Isis as a young pupil at school, and came to be known as Isis by the people of her town. All the translator did was highlight this particular episode and stress the ancient Egyptian identity of El Saadawi. It is worthwhile noting that in the first edition, neither the subtitle *The Early Life of Nawal El Saadawi*, nor the photo of the little Nawal appear on the cover. With the second edition of the book, the publisher now stressed that the book was about the young Nawal, hence the introduction of the subtitle and the second photo. The subtitle now clearly indicated that it was the early life of El Saadawi that was to be covered in this book, a bildungsroman of the little daughter of Isis who fully blooms into a grown-up determined goddess backed by her ancient Egyptian matriarchal divinity. With the third edition, an addition is made to the subtitle so that it now reads as *The Early Life of Nawal El Saadawi, in her Own Words* to stress that the story is related by El Saadawi herself, hence creating a more personal and engaging effect.

Then comes the name of Nawal El Saadawi, on the cover of the second edition, bigger

in font than the title of the book itself and in eye-catching blue, which clearly contrasts with the dull and pale brown colour of the cover. Her name vividly stands out and instantly stresses the fact that the book derives its importance from the author's identity: Nawal El Saadawi, who is known for her militant feminism. Right under the dominant blue-coloured name of El Saadawi comes "With a Foreword by Bettina Aptheker", which is another important piece of information highlighted by the publisher so much so that it is stated on the front cover of the book. Bettina Aptheker, in her capacity as a radical feminist, activist, professor and author, writes a foreword to promote El Saadawi's book, which again presents the book as a highly feminist document. Thus, the cover contains indicators which mark its trajectory, and bespeak its feminism. In comparison with the first edition, the second edition now boasts of a number of paratextual additions which highlight more information about the text and further stress its feminist purport.

After quickly glancing at the title, the reader will usually flip through the introductory pages of the book. The first introductory page of the book contains two quotations that come under "Praise for the Book", one of them is presented by the eminent Doris Lessing, renowned for her activist and feminist profile and winner of the 2007 Nobel Prize in Literature, which means she was already a Nobel Laureate two years prior to the publication of the 2009 edition. Her praise for the book reads as follows:

This brave book brings to life all too familiar news items from some traditional cultures where women are treated throughout their lives as misfortunes, compared to their brothers; are forcibly clitorectomised, married off at the age of ten. The author fought injustice all her life, succeeded in becoming a doctor... then a writer. In our culture women's education was fought for by our grandmothers and great-grandmothers; reading this we are reminded not to take our good fortune for granted. This is a book we should all be reading. (p. i)

Her words immediately stress the feminist streak of the book, for the readers are told that El Saadawi's text not only exposes the maltreatment women are subject to in traditional patriarchal societies, but is a book written by a strong woman who challenged that society, carved a different path for herself, and redefined her role. It is this political dimension that is stressed and it is the reason why, according to Lessing, it is a must read. In fact, the last sentence "This is a book we should all be reading" is moved to the cover of the third edition of the book, and becomes a new marketing tool added to the third edition which appeared in 2018. In publishing and republishing books, editors and publishers seek new strategies to promote their products. Bettina Aptheker's name is removed from the cover of the third edition, and what is stressed now is Doris Lessing's praise for the book.

Back to the second edition, which is the main focus of this paper, the second praise comes from the prominent *Modern African Studies*, and reads as follows:

In this book we see how, from an early age, Saadawi combines her love of the Arabic language with her awareness of gender-based oppression to create texts which are as subversive as they are moving. (p. i)

Again the praise which comes from this established journal emphasizes the feminist bent of the text at hand, since El Saadawi is highly aware of "gender-based oppression", and knowingly writes a "subversive" document to shake the dominant patriarchal discourse of her society and disrupt its seeming stability.

On the following introductory page, titled "About this Series", the reader is reminded of the legacy of El Saadawi and the relevance of translating, publishing and republishing her works:

Nawal El Saadawi's writing has the power to shock, move, inform and inspire. Her powerful stories of the lives of ordinary women in the Middle East remain as relevant today as when they were first published a quarter of a century ago. (p. iii)

The last sentences of "About this Series" come in the following page and read as follows:

A vociferous political activist, Saadawi has been imprisoned in and exiled from Egypt, and put herself forward as a candidate for presidential election there in 2004. Her work has been internationally acclaimed, and she has been awarded numerous honorary doctorates and prizes. Saadawi's major works are classics of contemporary Middle Eastern literature. It is hoped that these beautifully designed reissues will engage a new generation of readers. (p. iv)

What this reissue of the book is meant to do is to "engage a new generation of readers" and to keep El Saadawi's legacy alive. By continuously publishing her books, and presenting new "beautifully designed reissues" of her earlier books, publishers and editors preserve her history and work.

Still flipping through the introductory pages, the following introductory page numbered (v) is another title page which mentions that the translator of the book is Sherif Hetata. Sherif Hetata (1923-2017) was El Saadawi's husband for 43 years. A feminist to the backbone, a leftist and activist, he was one of her fervent supporters and translated a number of her works into English. In the text itself, on page 14, there is a black and white photo of both of them: El Saadawi, with her wild white hair, occupies the most part of the photo, while her then husband Hetata is seen happily smiling behind her. Underneath the photo comes the caption "Nawal and her husband Sherif Hetata, 1989". The fact that Hetata was her husband is an epitext for it is an extra piece of information that is to be gathered from one's reading and knowledge of El Saadawi's life, or that the reader would eventually know, if he/she were to read the book.

In an interview that was conducted with him, and when asked by the interviewer about the name tag on the door of their apartment, which bore Nawal El Saadawi's name and not his, as is customary in Arab countries, he said it was his decision since her fame outshone his. His answers were quite progressive, bold and daring. The interview was conducted in Arabic and

was translated into English and published on YouTube 14 years ago. However, their marriage was to come to an end. Speaking of their divorce in an interview by Rachel Cooke, which was published in 11 Oct 2015, El Saadawi said:

My third husband [Sherif Hatata], the father of my son, was a very free man, a Marxist who'd been imprisoned. I lived with him for 43 years, and I told everyone: this is the only feminist man on earth. And then I had to divorce him, too. He was a liar. He was having relations with other women. Oh, the complexity of the patriarchal character. He wrote books about gender equality, and then he betrayed his wife. Ninety-five per cent of men are like that, I'm sure. (2015)

All of the information related to El Saadawi's marriage to Hetata and their eventual breakup is an epitext, since it is not part of the printed text. Reading the book without knowing all of that information will not hinder the reader's understanding of the text. Knowing this information, however, might throw a different light on the text. Of course the epitext is not constant, for it depends on a number of variables: the reader's areas of interest, and his/her background information about the subject (in this case El Saadawi's life and works, which are quite extensive, as El Saadawi was a prolific writer, with many books, autobiographies, interviews, articles, lectures to her name). Another important point is that they divorced in 2010, thus, their divorce was not yet an epitext on the publication of the first and second editions, but became an epitext starting from 2010. Another variable would be how much of the epitext the reader knows, and the language in which the epitext circulates. For instance, the story has part two, which circulated in the Arabic press, for Hetata married an Egyptian cinema scholar and critic, who was many years his junior, and remained married to her until his death in 2017. Amal Elgamal, his new wife, had interviewed the couple extensively prior to their breakup to write a book about them, which she eventually published in Arabic in 2014 under the title *Nawal El Saadawi and Sherif Hetata: A life Experience*. All of this information

circulated in the Arabic press and became an epitext to both El Saadawi's and Hetata's works, and Elgamal's book attracted attention on its publication particularly due to the sensitivity of the case.

The sharp dividing lines between private/public and personal/political are dismantled in autobiography. Not only does the private become public, but the details of private life receive the same kind of attention accorded to public events. Thus, the life of El Saadawi, with all of its details, becomes the focus of life writing, and all extra information related to her life, even if not included in the text, becomes important within any paratextual reading of her autobiography. This is what Genette clearly explains by giving the example of Proust's life in relation to his work:

most readers of *A la recherche du Temps perdu* are aware of the two biographical facts of Proust's part-Jewish ancestry and his homosexuality. Knowledge of those two facts inevitably serves as a paratext to the pages of Proust's work that deal with those two subjects. I am not saying that people must know those facts; I am saying only that people who do know them read Proust's work differently from people who do not and that anyone who denies the difference is pulling our leg. (1997, p. 8)

Thus, according to Genette, any biographical information is not to be treated as mere gossip, but could become instrumental in our understanding of the text, and could go as far as reshaping and redefining the way we look at the text.

On pages vii and viii, the reader is to find the titles of the chapters. The English titles are not a literal translation of the Arabic titles, but are new and catchy titles created by the translator. Some of them read as follows: "Allah and McDonald's", "God Above, Husband Below", and "Thank God for Our Calamities". The decision to change the Arabic titles and create fresh English titles, which would entice the readers to engage with the content, is again another strong paratextual tool. These new chapter titles are rather daring, and would verge on

being heretical for conservative minds, but so are most of El Saadawi's titles for many of her books in Arabic had extremely daring titles, and were heavily attacked such as *The Fall of the Imam*, which was published in Arabic in 1987 and then published in English in 1988, after it had been translated by Hetata. Another play which caused uproar just because of its title was *God resigns at the Summit Meeting*. After its publication in Arabic in 2006, charges were immediately pressed against her by El Azhar accusing her of heresy and apostasy, and all copies of the play were destroyed (Newson-Horst, 2012, "Foreword"). Thus, daring and bold titles are in keeping with the spirit of El Saadawi's works.

After the list of chapter titles which runs on pages vii and viii, the reader is to encounter another important paratextual feature, which is the four-paged foreword written by Bettina Aptheker, the renowned feminist. The beginning of the foreword reads as follows:

Dr Nawal El Saadawi embodies the international struggle for women's liberation. Activist, memoirist, essayist, novelist and among the first women physicians in her country, Saadawi has been translated into twelve languages and her books are available all over the world. (p. ix)

Her four-paged foreword continues to recount important milestones in El Saadawi's life with deep love and appreciation, and the last words of Aptheker's foreword read as follows:

As I finished reading Nawal El Saadawi's autobiography I felt a sudden sense of loss. I didn't want to leave her. I went back and read the last sections again, and then again, until I remembered how many other books she has written. Then I felt delight that I will be able to return to her words and to her stories, and that so many others will share in them. (p. xii)

Before deciding to purchase a book, or even deciding to read it electronically, the reader is likely to look at its cover, the blurbs, the publishing house, and scan the table of contents, the foreword, the photos and so on. Thus, the paratextual features discussed above would impact

the reader's initial encounter with the book, with varying degrees. It is noteworthy that they continue to "inform the process of reading, offering multiple points of entry, interpretation, and contestation" (Smith & Wilson, 2011, p. 6). So their impact lasts even during the reading process itself, offering new insights every time the reader contacts the book.

The white and black photos which infiltrate the body of the text with the captions that come underneath are another important paratextual element used extensively in the translated autobiography. The number of photos amounts to eighteen photos used within the text. The personal photos, which range from familial to professional photos, give a sense of authenticity to the autobiography, and breathe life into it. The visual dimension is extremely important as it helps the reader visualize the topic at hand, attach a face to the names, and also creates a sense of warmth and intimacy. It is an important tool employed by the publisher: "[a] canny publisher will provide illustrations to enhance the priming begun by the verbal messages of the introduction. The non-verbal components of paratext are powerful tools in the presentation and manipulation employed by the translator or the commissioners of a translation" (Pellatt, 2013, p. 3). Unlike the Arabic autobiography, the English translation gives due importance to the visual component.

Thus, the English autobiography introduced a number of paratextual changes and additions to the translated text: a new book cover, a new book title, different chapter titles, a foreword and words of praise, and made use of both familial and career-oriented photos.

It is important to note that there are a number of factors which shape the paratextual features of a book like *A Daughter of Isis*. First, it is an autobiography, which by definition requires a different set of paratextual elements to increase the circulation and consumption of the book. To engage the readers in life writing, the editor and publisher will usually include personal photos, catchy blurbs and testimonials which vouch for the book and highlight its points of strengths. Second, not only is it an autobiography, but it is also a translation, thus,

new paratextual elements are added to make the text more compatible to its new market and new caliber of readers as has been discussed earlier. Third, not only is it a translated autobiography, but it is also an Arab woman's translated autobiography. These three factors definitely change the nature of the paratextual elements used in the book at hand.

Reactions towards the Reception of El Saadawi's Translated Autobiographies

El Saadawi's works, which were translated into "English, French, German, Italian, Dutch, Danish, Swedish, Norwegian, Greek, Portuguese, Urdu, and Persian" (Golley, 2003, p.131), were celebrated worldwide. Critics received the foreign reception of her works differently. Some were of the view that her works were part of the Orientalist feminist discourse propagated by the West and part of the postcolonial translation project, while others were of the view that El Saadawi's works, whether in translation or in its original language, had been consistently strong, rebellious and honest. The following will be an examination of both reactions towards her works.

Sanaz Fotouhi is of the opinion that these autobiographies "appear to be involved in further self-orientalisation" (2012, 28). What these translated autobiographies according to Fotouhi do is affirm stereotypical images of Middle Eastern women. Fotouhi also finds that the paratexts of these translated autobiographies further this orientalist attitude: "[t]itles and covers, blurbs and promotions for these books often draw on notions of silence, veiling and unveiling, oppression and imprisonment, highlighting the acute difference between women's lives over there and here" (2012, p. 29).

In the same vein, Gillian Whitlock argues in her book *Autobiography in Transit: Soft Weapons* that life writing can be used as "a soft weapon" that helps deliver certain messages and propagate certain ideologies and discourses meekly and stealthy not violently or abrasively, since propaganda in modern democratic societies is no longer "the violent and coercive imposition of ideas but a careful manipulation of opinion and emotion in the public sphere"

(2007, p.3).

Speaking about reception theory and how texts can change meaning depending on their context, Amal Amireh argues, in her important essay "Framing Nawal El Saadawi: Arab Feminism in a Transnational World", that "what El Saadawi says or writes is less important than the places from which she speaks and writes, the contexts in which her words are received, the audiences who hear and read her, and the uses to which her words are put. This approach recognizes the multiplicity of meanings that a text can have in different contexts" (2000, p. 216). Thus, according to Amireh, there is no such a thing as a uniform reaction towards a book; each reader is likely to react differently towards a given book based on his/her personality, culture, preferences, gender, age, and even the historical period he/she belongs to. Amireh argues that Western students, for instance, tend to read *Woman at point Zero* by El Saadawi as a text which confirms their stereotypical views about the East where women suffer from circumcision and the veil (2000, p. 241), whereas, when she herself read El Saadawi's book *Woman and Sex* as a teenager in Gaza, she was ravished by its strength and power (2000, p. 242). That is why she argues that we must "historicize not only the writer and her work but also the reader" (2000, p. 242). Her words clearly show that the way El Saadawi's text is received say in her homeland is different from the way it is received in a Western country and that its consumption in a Western culture will definitely be influenced by stereotypical images which the West has formulated about the East.

In her book, *A Critical Study of the Works of Nawal El Saadawi, Egyptian Writer and Activist*, Diana Royer argues that the U.S. culture tends to coopt foreign cultures in such a way that will serve its own interests. For instance, when the U.S. markets items from other cultures, this is not done to get to know foreign cultures better, but it is all done from a purely utilitarian perspective and "in terms of what we can gain from them--whether on a small, aesthetic level (the purchase of a handcrafted necklace) or a larger, economic one (the purchase of oil)" (2001,

p.4). Her words square up with the view that the marketing of El Saadawi's books is done from a purely colonial or more accurately neo-colonial perspective that seeks to further the power of the U.S. over Arab countries.

Against this Orientalist charge, Luma Balaa argues that El Saadawi "is against neocolonialism, and if she presents the vices of Egyptian society, this does not mean she is calling for Western intervention. She is affected by Western discourse but not to the extent where she essentializes or orientalizes the East" (Balaa, 2018, p. 249). Similarly, Fedwa Malti-Douglas defends El Saadawi in the face of those detractors who view her as "a tool of Western imperialism" (1995, p. 9). According to her, the reason why she is so heavily attacked is that she "treats gender problematics with a directness that is rare, not only in Arabic letters but in mainstream media throughout the world. It is this directness that makes her so threatening. The image-of-the-Arabs-in-the-West argument is but a smokescreen. What really matters is the attack she is waging on values long cherished—and not only in the Middle East" (1995, p. 9). The danger of this position, according to Malti-Douglas, is that anti-imperialism can turn into "a trap" as nationalists who seek to fervently defend their countries against Western values and ideas will only further those who wrongly exercise power from within (1995, p. 9).

This very topic of El Saadawi being a part of the imperialist or Orientalist discourse was raised in a debate that was held in a Television programme (the video is available on YouTube as indicated in the Arabic references); on one side of the debate were El Saadawi and her then husband Sherif Hetata, and on the other side were Mohamed Emara, an Islamic scholar and member of al-Azhar's Academy of Islamic research, and Nabih El Wahesh, a lawyer who pressed charges against her accusing her of heresy. In the course of the debate, Emara accused El Saadawi of writing for the West and of being funded by the West. Saddened and deeply hurt by his accusations, she said his accusations were extremely dangerous as they aimed at mutilating her reputation for she was being portrayed as a traitor who was recruited by the

West. Those accusations, according to her, were groundless, and triggered by the fact that her books were widely sold in the West. Towards the end of the debate, she expressed her sorrow that the intelligentsia of her country readily pelted baseless accusations at her, and found that to be a clear indication of Egypt's regression. In fact, not only did El Saadawi believe she was writing for her own people, but she also believed that liberation had to be carried out from within. In an interview, she said: "I cannot expect western women to come and fight the Iranian revolution against the veil or 'international' women to come to Egypt to fight our economic struggles against the imperialists" (1980, p. 178). Another important point that should be noted concerning her alleged alignment with the West is that her books were not only translated in the West, but were also translated into Urdu and Persian.

Conclusion

A paratextual reading of the translated book *A Daughter of Isis* will easily detect evident changes such as its new book cover, new title and chapter titles as well. Many other features were also added to the translated text such as a foreword, testimonials and photos. As is typical of translated autobiographies, the new version accommodates the expectations of the target audience and markets the book along those lines, and the inclusion of paratextual elements is carefully planned and manoeuvred by the translator, editor and publisher to increase the circulation of the book. This is what some critics regard as a part of the ongoing orientalizing of the East by the West. Though this argument holds true, the counter-argument is also valid for a number of reasons. First, El Saadawi primarily addressed Arab readers, not Western readers, and her corpus was delivered in Arabic, then translated into other languages. Even after becoming an international figure, she continued to write in Arabic, and decided to stay in her homeland Egypt, where she died in 2021. Second, El Saadawi herself attacked radical feminism which emanated from the West and believed that Western feminists could not change the conditions of Arab women, and that Arab women had to hold the reins of change

themselves. Third, her book titles have always been shocking and this is not a feature specific to her translated works, but remains a consistently characteristic feature of her Arabic publications too. The tone, themes and content of all her works have been consistently bold, and audacious. It is for this reason that she was expelled from work, her books were banned, and charges were pressed against her in courts of law. Thus, the paratextual manoeuvres which can be easily spotted in the translated version are, after all, in keeping with the general spirit of her works and are not an anomaly; they only accentuate and highlight her boldness. Detractors of her works find that her discourse intersects with feminism, womanism, orientalism, imperialism, or neo-imperialism. The reason for this would be the nature of her writings which expose the political, economic, social and religious factors which lead to the denigration of Egyptian women. In her fight against established ideas sanctioned by long-standing traditions, she was readily aligned with the West. Finally, it is worthwhile noting that as a translated text, *A Daughter of Isis*, serves as a paratext to the original Arabic book.

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