



Manifestations Of Dreams In The Novel " Mirror Of The Soul" By Nabila Abboudi

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Received: 29/07/2024 Accepted:25/09/ 2024

Published:22/11/2024

Abstract:

Arab women in general and Algerian women in particular, strive to assert themselves and secure a place in the world of thought and creativity. However, this endeavor has not been explicit due to societal constraints and the novelty of their engagement in such experiences. Consequently, they have resorted to embedding their thoughts, concerns, and aspirations in various forms, such as making their preoccupations manifest as dreams experienced by the characters in their feminist novels.

In this article, we will explore the thoughts of an Algerian novelist who has been imbued with the principles of global Arab scientific culture. She exemplifies a creative woman who has infused her dreams, aspirations, fears, and anxieties into her works. Through the dreams of the characters in her novel "Mirror of the Soul," she portrays the struggles, desires, and aspirations of Algerian women for a bright future, and the obstacles that hinder the fulfillment of their creative entity and independent self. By examining the novel "Mirror of the Soul," we will uncover perspectives on societal issues and the reality of women's experiences.

Keywords: Dream; Immortality; Liberation; Injustice; Fate; Mirror of the Soul

Introduction

Summary of the Novel:

The novel "Mirror of the Soul" is written by an Algerian author and represents the voice of the educated, dreaming woman (a university professor) who confronts a harsh reality circumscribed by societal traditions and the constraints of the present. The author strives to critique her reality and to express her dreams and aspirations through the body of the narrative. These expressions sometimes appear overtly when discussing general issues, while at other times they are hidden behind the characters, allowing her dreams or nightmares to emerge vividly.

The novel tells the story of a character named Said, who, due to fate, is born without known parentage and is raised by a woman named Nouara who gives him all the care a biological mother would, and perhaps even more. Said is captivated by the art of sculpture, through which he shapes the image of the beloved woman, the cherished city, and the ideal woman of his dreams. The novel continues to recount the disappointments Said faces at every turn in his life. He returns from abroad, where he believed he could change his reality and achieve fame and recognition as compensation for what fate

deprived him of. However, fate snatches away his adoptive mother, Nouara, and then takes away his passionate love, Ilham, whom he met in the expansive world of art. Ilham was a brilliant painter, embodying all his dreams, but she was taken from him by Imad, deepening his wound. Despite this, he continued to hold onto the love he had for her, hoping for her happiness, but fate again intervened and took her away due to a terminal cancer.

Said then experiences a state of loss and fragmentation. The author portrays how his friend Rachid supports him through these ordeals, serving as a balm for his persistent wounds. Every time Said's burdens seem overwhelming, Rachid eases them, lightening the heavy load. The narrative continues with the introduction of a new element that brings a glimmer of hope to Said's barren life. Fate, which had tormented him for so long, grants him a second chance at happiness by bringing into his life a small child abandoned by criminals in an inhumane and barbaric manner. Seeing himself in this child, Said decides to dedicate the rest of his life to providing the happiness he never had, becoming a source of support for the child in times of adversity. This act of giving and the joy of sacrifice transform Said into a new person, distinct from the man he once was.

Introduction:

Before delving into the dreams interwoven throughout the novel, it is essential to provide a general overview of these dreams, which are sometimes promising but mostly nightmarish. The novelist begins with the beautiful past cherished by every Algerian—the liberation revolution that restored Algeria's dignity, preserved the nation's integrity, and handed over the torch of the future, entrusting the duty of safeguarding it while aspiring to complete the liberation of thought following the liberation of the land.

The novelist allows us to revel in the beautiful dream of the heroes of the liberation revolution who sacrificed their youth, family peace, and the keys to the future, dreaming of freedom and hoping to experience it themselves or at least for future generations to live it. However, the nightmare that replaced this beautiful dream in reality depicted the liberated mind striving to free women's thoughts as an outcast rejected by society, tormented by all forces of evil. Yet, the novelist dreams of resilience and overcoming all obstacles, hoping to find a companion to endure the darkness of reality, so they can together assert their identity and establish their existence.

Despite the disappointments faced by Said, the novel begins with a beautiful dream from a glorious time and concludes with another dream anticipating a future filled with hope and joy. Said, having overcome all difficulties alone, dreams of a better future now that God has blessed him with a companion to dispel the darkness of his loneliness and ease his isolation. The novelist envisions a better tomorrow where the efforts of educated women lead society to the shores of freedom, justice, and equality, and provide a rightful opportunity for women's central role in society.

Through her work, the novelist presents herself as an intellectual torn between conflicting ideas. She frequently cites scholars, thinkers, philosophers, religious figures, and examples from the society she critiques in her novel. In her attempt to be a mediator among these diverse perspectives, she longs for liberation from a social reality she rejects. Consequently, she employs every culture on earth within her novel, hoping to find a solution. She invokes myths from Greek culture, such as Janus, the god of beginnings and endings, Cronus, who exerts control over time, and Hades, the giver of wealth and god of the underworld. She explores the Epicurean philosophy of hedonism and traverses the

realms of modern thought, touching on the romanticism of Victor Hugo and the fables of La Fontaine.

She embodies her reality in Baudelaire's "Les Fleurs du mal" (The Flowers of Evil) and explores women's conditions in Shakespeare's masterpiece "Les Misérables," extracting elements that reflect her own experiences. This allows her to create a beautiful and fragrant bouquet of ideas, attempting to dismantle the barriers that hinder interaction with her environment. She meticulously selects each flower from the gardens of human thought, forming a bouquet that is enhanced by the addition of her original garden flowers, which she consistently strives to adorn with beautiful garlands, thus maintaining their original splendor while preserving the authenticity of their roots.

Dreams in the Novel:

Both the sleeping and the awake dream. Dreams of sleep and wakefulness are both expressions of the self, with the difference being that the dream of sleep is spontaneous, "a dream defies reality" (Abboudi, 2020, p. 214), characterized by a great deal of unreality. They are "fragmented, elusive imaginations that are not worthy of being taken seriously, yet they are joyful. A dream expresses something specific that the unconscious tries to convey" (Shaker, 2018, p. 7). However, daydreams (literary dreams) are more truthful because they reflect the desires of a weary and frustrated soul. "Approaching the dream in the novel cannot be understood without considering the dream as a linguistic text, transformed from consciousness to unconsciousness, full of riddles, producing other interpretive and expository texts" (Al-Ghamdi, 2020, p. 19).

The novelist finds solace in unleashing conscious dreams, weaving a beautiful world that allows her to catch her breath, providing a semblance of illusory comfort and helping her fulfill some of her desires—even if only in the realm of imagination. This likely grants her some peace and tranquility that she lacks in a world rife with injustices and various forms of cruelty and oppression. Moreover, the use of sleep dreams allows the novelist to explore the dimensions of time, as the sleeper may witness events that, if translated into physical time, would span ages, but the dreamer experiences them in an instant.

The novelist employs both types of dreams because it is necessary for the characters in the novel to appear as real people living in our world, mirroring its finest details. Additionally, the dream allows the novelist to release her repressed emotions, to express her opinions with utmost honesty and ease, for it is ultimately a dream, and there is no censor on dreams. Daydreams enable her to express what stirs within her, what occupies her mind, what she wishes for, and what she fears. When a person is unable to achieve their goals in reality, they resort to dreams, overlaying them onto their bitter reality, becoming happy in their misery, joyful in their sorrows, savoring their torments, and dancing with delight amid their sufferings.

It is the magic of the dream that transforms everything into its exact opposite, the imaginary refuge that grants illusory comfort and happiness, allowing the dreamer a brief respite—a warrior's rest lasting only as long as the dream itself.

Dream and History:

Women are not outside the context of history; they are partners in shaping and influencing it. The Algerian woman, profoundly patriotic, has often celebrated the glories of the liberation revolution and the heroism of the Mujahideen. Her descriptions of the scenes of heroism and sacrifice from that era are so vivid that they make you live those

moments, despite not having been there herself. Her dreaming imagination and firm belief in the magnificence of that period of the nation's life make her immerse herself in a beautiful dream, exulting in the triumph over the colonizer, drowning in the details of that victory.

She dedicates the first chapter of her novel to a beautiful dream, making you experience that difficult period of the Algerian revolution, proud of the victory and defiant against the greatest colonial powers of that time. She guides you through the corners of history, where the vigor of the revolution and the sweetness of victory blend with the bitterness of loss and the heat of sorrow for what this noble people sacrificed to gain their independence. In doing so, she delves into the description of the heroes of that era: "The ideal perspective of the revolutionary woman appeared in the opening narrative threshold, poetic and akin to the whispers of a woman/self exhilarated by Algeria's presence as a reality, history, and struggle" (Baali, 2015, p. 72).

She also criticizes the current reality and its deviation from those principles, subtly criticizing the men of this period and those who inherited independence. The novelist combines the celebration of the past, criticism of the present, political commentary, and references to different historical periods within just two pages of the novel (pp. 30-31): "My fingers began to create the truth... the voice of suffering history emerged from them... stained with the blood of the revolution [...] enduring much torture... but preferred to be a sacrifice for the revolution rather than a treacherous traitor [...] I squeezed the years of the nineties... like the fifties, and it rained blood roaming the streets" (Abboudi, 2020, pp. 30-31).

The dream of Algeria, woven by those who ignited the spark of the revolution, envisioned a free and sovereign nation for a free and sovereign people. The novelist dreams of Algeria's liberation from the shackles of backwardness and stagnation, just as it freed itself from colonialism and servitude. While narrating the beautiful dream lived by Ahmed, the freedom fighter—one among the millions who sacrificed for Algeria's freedom—the novelist confronts the nightmare of the harsh reality, especially during the "Black Decade," a period she briefly alludes to, avoiding delving into the depths of that turmoil, and choosing not to reopen wounds that had only just begun to heal. However, its effects still cast dark shadows over our contemporary reality. The first chapter of the novel glorifies the revolutionary period, presenting a beautiful dream that temporarily escapes the bitterness of reality, offering a respite where we can feel our identity, our truth, our roots. This dream, while it stirs the conscience, also rekindles sorrows and griefs.

The novelist desires for the historical dream to come true, for the woman, who has been a victim throughout the ages, to be recognized and to gain her historical place. She sacrificed her child who went out as a fighter or a martyr, her father who could only be given for a captive nation seeking freedom, and her husband whose absence left her with all kinds of fears and instability. She dreams for history to do her justice, acknowledging her active and influential role. She wants the present to reflect the history she dreamed of through her literary work.

Dream and the Struggle for Existence:

Humankind has long been preoccupied with the dream of immortality and the fear of annihilation. From the earliest expressions of human thought, these anxieties and fears have been articulated in various forms, including poetry, sculpture, painting, and other

artistic mediums. The novelist is no exception to this, especially as a philosophy professor who has drawn from a wealth of cultural ideas and engaged with the thoughts of numerous civilizations. Within the narrative, she incorporates quotations from diverse cultures worldwide, reflecting a universal human perspective, and particularly that of the intellectual. She employs her novel to explore the yearning for immortality.

Through her characters, the novelist expresses this profound desire. The sculptor Said, for instance, embodies this beautiful dream of eternal existence through his creation, "Namouzen," a city perched on a mountain, standing tall and enduring through the ages. This city, in the novelist's view, symbolizes the dream of immortality, defeating its enemies and preserving the names of its lovers. For Said, the sculpture also represents his beloved, whose unchanging features defy death, making her as immortal as Constantine. Similarly, the character Ilham, an artist who loves painting, exemplifies another medium of expressing this timeless aspiration. Despite death relentlessly claiming Said's loved ones, starting with his nurturing mother and then the woman he passionately loved, the novelist portrays this relentless loss vividly: "It is the 'ghoul' we feared as children, the nightmare threatening our dreams" (Abboudi, 2020, p. 140). In the narrative, women are depicted as victims of society, giving everything and receiving nothing in return, only to be ultimately claimed by death. Their sole lasting legacy is what Said immortalizes through his sculpture, "Namouzen," which brings everyone together and grants them immortality.

The novelist acknowledges the inevitability of death and the overwhelming power of mortality. However, she wishes to see "life rebel against death" (Abboudi, 2020, p. 214). She endeavors to find a way to achieve spiritual immortality, asserting that "the pioneer is immortal in existence... engraved in memory... his body disintegrates, disperses, and evaporates, but his name remains, and the memory lives on" (Abboudi, 2020, p. 19). Art is the common thread between the protagonist of the novel, Said, and his beloved, Ilham, although they represent different perspectives. Said believes in his creative art to the extent of creating a goddess, Namouzine, a deity of memory. Her presence evokes all the values of immortality, grandeur, and the majesty of Constantine. It also brings forth the image of the dream lover, whose unique qualities Said continually imagines, mirroring Constantine's distinctiveness. Namouzine's presence also recalls the memory of Said's nurturing mother, who bestowed upon him boundless affection and taught him the meaning of sacrifice, embodying loyalty even in death. Namouzine rightfully deserves to sit on the throne of thought, earning the status of the goddess of memory.

In contrast, Ilham represents the artist who had the chance for immortality but chose to conform to societal norms that exploit art for their purposes and then quickly forget the artist once their objectives are met. Fate has granted immortality to the creator of ideas, while those who seek fleeting desires are doomed to oblivion.

The novelist desires for dreams to go beyond mere recognition of women's roles; she wants these dreams to bestow upon women the immortality humanity has longed for since the dawn of time. She wishes for them to achieve eternal life alongside those who have enlightened humanity and guided it towards the truth, those who lived by principles and paid the price for their steadfastness in the face of adversity, and those who faced the sword of injustice with unwavering courage, despite knowing that a slight retreat could save their lives. She aspires for them to attain immortality in the annals of history, rather than being transient figures without identity or legacy.

The Dream Man:

Men have long celebrated women in their poetry and have been captivated by them in their novels. Similarly, women have begun to depict their ideal man. The novel "Mirrors of the Soul" exemplifies this ideal man whom women dream of and hope to encounter in reality. The author meticulously describes this man, Ahmed, who rises above all temptations and is humbled by his love for his country. He chooses death over submission, imprisonment, and chains over betrayal; he is a hero who commands both admiration and respect. This is a stark contrast to the men of today as perceived by the novelist—those swayed by positions and gains, mired in politics to the extent of turning against their own, some even taking up arms against their compatriots in pursuit of political gain or its preservation, forgetting that Algeria is greater than all of this. The generations of today, perhaps more than those before, have seen men resign from their roles, at best, or compete with women for their femininity, at worst.

The character of Said, intricately described by the novelist, represents the image of the wronged man who has not been accorded his rightful social status as a human being who did not choose the circumstances of his existence. He is also not given his due as an artist who venerates higher values and dreams of immortalizing them in works of art that resist decay and oblivion. Through this character, the novelist highlights her ideal man—the one who protects her honor, safeguards her home, and confronts the most formidable forces on her behalf, unyielding to the harshness of reality or the might of any power, no matter its tyranny. "She did not see in him the man who enhances her femininity as much as she saw the hero... who was not defeated by tanks and cannons." He is the courageous and valiant Ahmed who sacrifices his life at the altar of freedom, ensuring that history preserves his memory. "When they decided to end his life... he did not die, for heroes do not die... as long as they alone inhabit time... and make history" (Abboudi, 2020, p. 30).

He is the genuinely loving man who venerates the woman as a mother, sister, and beloved, and she reciprocates the same feeling, seeing him as a father, brother, and lover. He becomes sacred in her eyes, as described by Said: "Love is my greater self... that diminishes whenever I see her, finding myself an adolescent... playful... unable to refine my voice or my movements, failing to control the liberated child within me... whose emotions betray him beyond his control" (Abboudi, 2020, p. 136).

Through the character of Ilham, the novelist dreams of a man who defies the conformity of the herd, who breaks free from the rigid social mold, seeking liberation from the prison of outdated customs and worn-out traditions that time has outgrown. "Oh, random man... oh, different form... beyond the ordinary..."

"O you, human tinted with the color of dreams... in shades of gray. Where are you?" (Abboudi, 2020, p. 140). The novelist continues to describe the ideal man through Ilham's voice: "I only want a warm chest from you... I don't want you as a man... because men are an endless planet... but I want you as a human... from whom I begin and to whom I end..." (Abboudi, 2020, p. 146). Through Said, as he reads Ilham's memoirs, the novelist writes: "This is how she saw me when I heard those words she had written for me... She painted me in her thoughts, and I filled her memory along with the one absent from her... her father" (Abboudi, 2020, p. 150).

The novelist portrays herself as someone who draws tenderness from the well of fatherhood. The father is that man who gives without expecting anything in return, loves tirelessly, offers selflessly, and would sacrifice his own life for his child. He is the epitome

of honesty, even if, outwardly, he seems to fall short—he truly does his best: "I dreamed, and I saw you return like the lost one... returning as a victorious warrior... gathering the spoils of battle in your hands... You came back with pride... glory, and heroism, and I believed in them and stood before them in awe. How have you become my father?" (Abboudi, 2020, p. 149).

Women desire men to fill the void left by the departure of their fathers, whether voluntary or forced, providing what they lost in their absence. The father represents everything to her. The text accompanying the novelist's picture on the book cover exemplifies the kind of man she dreams of—a noble human overflowing with humanity, a gentleman brimming with masculinity, someone who prioritizes her happiness and fulfills her dreams as her father did.

The novelist dreams of an honest man who gives, no matter how small the offering, as the measure is in what he can provide. Ultimately, men do not possess a magic ring to fulfill every wish of a woman, but it is enough that his contribution is valued on the scale of virtues.

The Dream Woman (Freedom and Breaking Chains):

The novelist's dream extends beyond the understanding that a woman is an independent being who should be treated as such. She dreams of a perception of women that transcends the stereotypical image they have resigned themselves to—living on the margins of life, mired in trivial problems, unable to face their reality, and resorting to magic and superstition as a recourse of the helpless. The character of Cherifa, the fortune-teller, symbolizes the narcotic consumed by most women, whether educated or ignorant, "forgetting that the solution might be in their hands" (Abboudi, 2020, p. 41). Instead, she dreams of women being aware of their significance, understanding their roles, and being as active as they should be. She expressed this beautiful dream when describing Ilham: "In her eyes, there is arrogance... the arrogance of a woman who believes in leadership... in her details, she is a creative beyond reality, her bed is surrealism, and within her boundaries, she is a woman to whom eyes bow in reverence" (Abboudi, 2020, p. 132). This is the hopeful image the novelist paints for women. This passage serves as a message to every woman who has surrendered to her fate and accepted the unequal share that relegates her to a subordinate role, always expected to show obedience and loyalty. The novelist's description of the character Ilham is more of a dream than a reality. Although this character is a talented artist who has achieved a place for her art, she is still haunted by a sense of subordination and is led by the mirage of appearances. She chose to marry Imad, an aristocratic figure with a charming appearance and fine attire. However, the novelist gives her a fate unworthy of an artist like her; Imad offered her nothing but temporary opulence before she was taken by the most dreadful soldier of death—cancer. The novelist then shows the reader that Ilham can be immortalized by Said through a sculpture, defying the passage of time. It is as if the novelist is offering women a choice between these fates.

The novelist does not want women to remain in the stereotypical role within society, where they are merely symbols of temptation and desire. Women were not created for this purpose; rather, she wants them to be noble aims and lofty goals. She dreams for women of immortality and ultimate symbolism: "Namozeen, you who conceal the woman... the female [...] Namozeen, you are the mother I cry in her arms [...] Namozeen, you are the virgin city... chaste... protected [...]" (Abboudi, 2020, p. 153).

The novelist desires the relationship between a man and a woman to transcend the monotonous and lifeless connections where both seek only to satisfy their sexual desires. Instead, she envisions it to be far more profound: "I think I agree with Balzac when he said: 'Love is not just a feeling... it is also an art.' What do you think? - I agree with both of you... I find art an entry to love. Art is ultimately conflicting emotions stirred by love" (Abboudi, 2020, p. 156).

The novelist also dreams that women rise above the material world that has dominated them for so long and kill within themselves the materialistic creature enslaved by bodily desires and the lure of wealth: "Forgetting that the disease might be within them... just as the cure might be within them. A woman can be the poison... and she can be the antidote if she chooses" (Abboudi, 2020, p. 35). This excerpt is a loud cry against women who have lost their way, following every call to the detriment of themselves and others. The novelist expresses this by making them the poison, with the only cure being the woman herself. She offers them a choice: to be a deadly poison or a healing antidote for themselves and others.

Unleashing the wild spirit in search of values and ideals, for which humans were created, she wants women to turn their world upside down: "And she realized what it means to be an artist... to choose painting, for an artist is not truly an artist unless driven by conflicting emotions [...] unless guided by their complexes to animate the inanimate and give life to things!" (Abboudi, 2020, p. 140). The novelist wants women to kill within themselves the fleeting material world and the allure of money, status, and power, to pronounce them dead within, and to revive the lofty values and ideals for which humans were created. By doing so, they save themselves from oblivion, fulfill their existential purpose, and secure their place in society.

The novelist's highest aspiration is to transform women into beings free in their lifestyles and thinking. She aims to show the consequences of succumbing to harsh realities and emphasizes that facing the truth is far better than chasing false illusions and empty dreams. "It is difficult to choose to live in darkness, to be the child of darkness; living in the shroud of truth is far more merciful than living a great lie" (Abboudi, 2020, p. 264). Confronting reality, no matter how harsh or costly, is worth it for the sake of proving the truth, attaining freedom, and affirming one's identity. "The Arab feminist novel [...] forms a social document that is closer to a heartfelt cry, filled with much sincerity and warmth" (Abu Nidal, 2014, p. 21), because writing allows women to say what they want without worrying about social constraints. Although the discourse may not directly express all ideas, the novelist embeds her intentions and wraps them in the voices of her characters in the novel.

The novelist often spoke through the character (Said), but she was expressing the dreams of a woman, the anxieties of a female, the ambitions of a young lady, and the wishes of a matron. Most of her discourse was voiced by Said when he spoke to himself (the female), and if we were to remove the name Said, the discourse would remain that of a woman who has unleashed her inner feelings and buried thoughts.

The character of (Said), who was marked as the lame, miserable orphan, was very fitting for that feminist reality which has not found anyone to adopt it and give it societal legitimacy. Society continued to view it with suspicion and contempt. Said found no acceptance and received nothing from society but some solace that did not change his situation or leave a historical mark. However, the novel's ending was hopeful and

optimistic, with a similar character to Said brought into the fold, giving him a dose of hope to continue the journey together. This indicates the possibility of like-minded individuals coming together to continue the journey towards their goals, hoping others will join to help achieve the ultimate aim.

The Dream City:

The novelist passionately adores her city, Constantine, which she envisions as a wronged and grieving woman shrouded in sorrow and engulfed by the darkness of a harsh reality. "Constantine, with its black shroud, appeared as a virginal body torn apart by fate, and sorrow raped it in a dismal wedding ceremony" (Abboudi, 2020, p. 10). To her, Constantine represents a resilient woman, defying invaders and conquerors. She dreams of a woman impervious to the ravages of time, maintaining her major landmarks regardless of the invaders, occupiers, or even her own people. She accommodates and endures all, remaining proud and standing tall, immortalizing those who loved her and held her in their hearts. Many invaders lie in unknown graves, while those who loved her live on in her memory, becoming emblems of pride she displays to the world.

Constantine is immortalized in the grandest sculpture: "Constantine, the mother... the virgin woman... the female... feminine in name... she has never aged or relied on crutches to continue civilization, nor has she ever worn glasses to decipher her original culture... a culture that never indulged in the aristocracy of silver forks and knives... nor in gold-sprinkled tablecloths... nor in the proud figure of a woman" (Abboudi, 2020, p. 206). Constantine, the prolific city, has throughout history given birth to great individuals who have altered its course and steered it in her desired direction. The novelist is consumed with love for the city, seeing it as the land of immortality and the mother of all virtues and ideals. Even if time's wheel turns and her honor is temporarily compromised, it is but a moment before the city regains its vigor and scepter.

"In the depths lies the secret of Constantine... the fertile... the prolific... which overflowed with sons and daughters, with creators and creatives... it is the homeland of life" (Abboudi, 2020, p. 206). The novelist dreams of a reformer who will restore the city's dignity, knowledge, and ethics, much like its devoted son Abdelhamid Ben Badis, who traveled east and west, reforming and defending its ancient identity and culture from westernization and cultural alienation. "Will I ever attain the scepter?" (Abboudi, 2020, p. 15).

Every beautiful thing evokes Constantine, deserving praise and admiration. When Said was invited to hold an exhibition in Petra, the Jordanian city that epitomizes human creativity in sculpture, he dreamt of sculpting Constantine (its streets, mountains, valleys, and bridges) as he envisioned it, the most splendid of cities. "Petra... reminded me of the Constantinian dream... that grew inside me... grew strongly, aspiring to the scepter" (Abboudi, 2020, p. 247). Through the voices of her characters, the novelist dreams of securing a place for the city in the annals of immortality. "This is how I want my friend... a creator born from the womb of Constantine to revive and immortalize it" (Abboudi, 2020, p. 247).

Dreams and Disappointment

The novelist portrays the constant and relentless struggle between rare success and overwhelming disappointment in most aspects of life. Disappointment pursues everyone with hope in this world, "oscillating between dreams and defeat; the former brings joy

and propels him forward, while the latter brings misery and causes him to retreat" (Qusantini, 1995, p. 226). The profound disappointment felt by the novelist and echoed in the hearts of every patriot is the greatest disappointment that has afflicted the nation. The nation, continually striving for dignity and pride, aimed to become a homeland that could embrace and be built by all. However, disappointment came swiftly. This disappointment is not overt in the narrative; rather, the novelist describes it with her distinctive style and eloquent language, choosing to subtly weave it into the fabric of the story. It is as if she is ashamed to discuss her disappointment in front of those who might gloat, so she reproaches everyone with a tone full of sorrow about a nation torn apart by colonialism. After the dawn of freedom, the nation was met with a great disappointment more painful to its people than colonialism itself. How could it not be when the wound was inflicted by a dagger from within, by one of its own? Independence was a beautiful dream marred by the disappointment of blind strife, nearly destroying the nation during the dark decade. This major disappointment spread its venom across all facets of life, with women bearing the brunt of it.

The novelist employs the concept of dreams as understood by society. A person might dream of their beloved in a certain situation, which could be interpreted as a bad omen for that beloved, or it might be interpreted differently. The character seen in a dream becomes symbolic, representing something significant in the dreamer's life. The novelist uses this idea to highlight the overwhelming disappointment in the daily lives of those hoping for a better tomorrow. It is as if even dreams refuse to be on their side, adding to the disappointments of waking life with the disappointments of dreams, increasing their anguish and misery. The novelist describes this situation filled with bleeding wounds when she depicts the miserable Said, who dreams of seeing his mother in her most beautiful form. When the moment's ecstasy reaches its peak, "she left... she went far away... and did not look back at me!" (Abboudi, 2020, p. 74). In the context of dream interpretation as understood by society, this dream signifies the loss of something hoped for or the deprivation of something desired by the dreamer. It is as if fate has decreed that he should be tormented even in his dreams.

The character of Khaled, whose appearance is modest and whose story is incidental within the narrative, serves as a supporting role that completes the scene without influencing it. He is the son of national disappointment, which cast him into the abyss of loss despite being known to have both a father and a mother. However, his situation is no better than that of Said, the illegitimate child with no lineage. This disappointment often emerges victorious in the arena of competing hopes. Both men faced immense disappointment, but the situation is even graver when the victim is a woman. The tragedy and misfortune are undoubtedly greater. The novelist artfully describes the disappointment endured by women in their struggle for self-affirmation in a society that has yet to fully recognize their rights and independence. Although some of its legislations—still merely ink on paper—appear to grant women rights that inspire optimism, these legislations have not significantly altered the reality. The society still denies women many basic life necessities and essentials required for fulfilling their roles, especially if it aspires to intellectual modernization.

The novelist highlights this persistent aspect of the hopes of the weak. The central character in the novel, Said, is an illegitimate, miserable, poor, and lame man. Despite being a sensitive and creative artist, he says, "Then my thoughts rejected me, so I returned to my defeated self, accustomed to disappointments, comforting it, purifying it from the deviance of rebellion" (Abboudi, 2020, p. 70). He represents the weakest link but is, in

reality, a symbol of oppression, injustice, and the ugliness of societal norms that crush the weak. Even as a victim, he refuses to surrender. He constantly gathers his fragments, buries his disappointments within himself, and strives to overcome the societal obstacles imposed on him. Ultimately, he determines his path, deciding on the necessary confrontation and preparation for the bright future he aspires to.

Ilham's character is a reflection of all those who are oppressed in a society that continues to worship materialism, paying homage to those in power and wealth while denying rightful claims simply because the interests of the powerful must be protected. In this context, those with power can accuse dissenters of heresy, immorality, disobedience to God's commands, or even treason and collaboration with the enemy. These accusations are readily available, adaptable, and can be used against anyone at any time.

In their view, women's liberation has nothing to do with their intellect, opinions, or welfare but rather with making them available for seduction and satisfying base desires. Women, being victims themselves, may at times participate, either willingly or under duress, in this crime. Patience may fail them, their resolve may weaken, and they might deem their rights too unattainable, thus accepting the roles assigned to them. The novelist does not exclude even the educated woman from this grim reality, even those with significant contributions to the arts who should be at the forefront of defending their rights and those of their peers. However, these women too succumb to the harsh reality and endorse the blatant injustice, but in the end, the current sweeps away anyone with a weak footing.

The novelist portrays the harmony between Said and Ilham and their suitability for each other, making us believe they could solve many of their problems together. However, Imad, with his distinguished appearance and prestigious status, takes the lead and wins Ilham's acceptance, raising Said's hopes with false promises: "Ilham, tomorrow is a new day that will change our lives. Be prepared for it." She smiled with her usual grace and said, "Indeed" (Abboudi, 2020, p. 155). The disappointment is profound when one is on the verge of achieving their goal, only for it to be snatched away, making the blow more severe than the deprivation itself: "I built a mirage of dreams" (Abboudi, 2020, p. 162), casting him into the depths of disappointment.

Ilham preferred to succumb to the harsh reality, being swept along by the dominant, overwhelming current that only those with firm intellectual foundations and deep roots in the soil of challenge can withstand. Instead of following her convictions, Ilham chose to go along with reality, avoiding confrontation and the attempt to change: "Imad has proposed to me. Won't you congratulate us?" (Abboudi, 2020, p. 157). This behavior further twists the knife of disappointment buried in the heart of hope. Not only did she sell him illusions and stray from what was right, but she also added another layer of disappointment by asking for his blessing for this act.

How painful it is for a person who believes they have a rightful claim to find themselves lost, with no support or assistance, facing betrayal even from those they considered allies. Each time they think they are nearing their goal; it slips further away as if fate has condemned them to misery and disappointment. Everything around them urges surrender and the raising of the white flag, for the strength of evil and its tyranny are insurmountable by someone weak like them: "I ran... I ran, and the closer I got to it, the further it moved away from me... then I realized it was a mirage... a mirage in the darkness" (Abboudi, 2020, p. 257).

Despite the novelist's elaborate depiction of the disappointments faced by the characters in the novel, she provides a hopeful end for those who stand firm in the face of adversity. This end is filled with the promise of a better tomorrow, heralding the arrival of a savior who will bring comfort to the forsaken, increase their numbers, and inspire hope with the saying, "nothing lasts forever."

The Dream of Repentance from Sin

Often, a person falls into sin, but the consequences of such actions can determine their fate. Some sins are unforgivable by society, especially those committed by women, whose repentance is seldom accepted regardless of its sincerity. This bleak reality, which deviates from the teachings of religion, can drive the sinner to commit even greater transgressions, potentially more destructive to society than atomic bombs.

The novelist portrays the character of Cherifa, who acts as a soothsayer exploiting the weakness and ignorance of women, turning their burdens into a source of income. This deplorable practice reflects the society's distance from its morals, religion, and natural disposition. The novelist dreams of seeing this old woman, whose life is nearing its end, repenting to God, purified by the tears of repentance, and abandoning her vile deeds. However, Cherifa persists in her wrongdoing, delaying repentance until she meets a tragic end, becoming the victim of a horrific crime that shakes the soul and breaks hearts: "But what saddens me is her departure in such a gruesome manner... I wished for her a different path... paved with repentance... adorned with purity" (Abboudi, 2020, p. 124).

A person can be their own worst enemy without realizing it; surrendering to sin and despairing of self-reform, compounded by society's harsh judgment, can drive them deeper into the abyss of hopelessness, increasing the weight of sin and the darkness of the path, enticing the sinner to continue to the bitter end. The novelist presents two contrasting models: Cherifa, who chose her path willingly and ended up as a murder victim, taking her sin with her, and Said, who had no control over his fate. Despite his struggles, he occasionally falters, tempted by the path of sin—such as his near fall with Fadila—but his tragic backstory, his birth under unfortunate circumstances, and his suffering from humiliation, oppression, and misery as a child of sin, along with his high values and ideals, prevent him from succumbing. As a cultured, principled artist with a sensitive soul, he understands the consequences of sin: "It is the voice of conscience... it is the self-reproaching soul that saved you from sin" (Abboudi, 2020, p. 88). He rushes to the door of repentance, knocking on it because he finds all other paths destructive: "And nothing was accepted from me except the tears of repentance" (Abboudi, 2020, p. 88).

The scene where Said nearly falls into sin is not the only significant moment in the narrative. The novelist also presents a dream that Said has while sleeping, born from the intense disappointment that fueled the fire of revenge in his heart. The shock was profound, and although he could not harm Imad, who had stolen the dream woman from him, nor did he wish to spoil her happiness, he suppressed his anger, adding this pain to his unending struggles. The desire for revenge and the drive for self-vindication remained dormant within him, only to be released in his dreams. The novelist illustrates how he took revenge on Ilham's corpse, symbolizing his deep-seated resentment towards her for making him soar among the galaxies only to cast him down into the depths of despair.

The novelist does not depict Said's vengeful thoughts towards Imad because, in her view, Imad was merely a man who loved and married a woman, thus concluding the story. The revenge is directed towards the woman who abandoned her emotions, visions, and values,

which she herself had outlined in her diary, and succumbed to the mirage that had previously destroyed other women. Said wakes from his disturbing nightmare in which he envisions himself gouging out the eyes of the woman who had plunged him into the abyss of sorrow. However, the novelist allows goodness to triumph over evil, and repentance over sin: "He thanked God that this revenge was just a dream and that he was saved from the clutches of revenge and sin.

Sin has never been foreign to humanity; after all, it was sin that led to their expulsion from paradise. However, God has promised them a return to gardens as vast as the heavens and the earth if they repent and turn back to Him. The novelist's discourse from the first line to the conclusion of the novel is imbued with the dream of repentance and returning to the path of righteousness. Repentance is a return to virtue, purifying the soul of the penitent and saving them from the pitfalls of evil. It is also a crucial necessity for society, which benefits from the avoidance of the harm caused by the unrepentant. If left unchecked, the sinner's actions would harm the community just as they harm themselves. The dream that consistently occupies the novelist is the repentance of the woman herself, her departure from the mire of lust, and her extraction from the abyss of surrender.

The Dream of Hope

The novelist dreams that the conclusion of this novel will herald a new hope that shines amidst the profound darkness, a hope encapsulated in the title of the final chapter. The final words often linger longest in memory and leave the most profound impact. She titles this chapter "And It Was the Beginning," signifying that after the extensive tragic narrative, there emerges a soul brimming with hope, dreaming of ultimate victory, refusing to surrender. Though it may weaken at times, the strength of the idea and the firmness of the belief provide the power to continue the journey, dreaming of a happy ending that erases past pains and compensates for life's disappointments that nearly broke her.

Despite the harshness of Said's suffering, the hope for a better future continues to tantalize his imagination, fueling his rosy aspirations. As an artist, he has the capacity to transcend all that he has endured, securing a place for himself and his loved ones in the annals of immortality, a domain reserved only for those who have proven their worth through rigorous trials. Said occasionally escapes the grip of disappointment, finding fortune smiling upon him in unexpected moments: "I thought that my fate and I were two parallel lines, but we met" (Abboudi, 2020, p. 205).

The novelist dreams of transforming our past, which drives its dagger into the heart of our memory, into a beacon of light that guides us through the remaining years of our lives. She dreams of making those we have lost live on with us, granting us lost tranquility, planting in us the hope of success, the hope of a bright tomorrow where their spirits accompany us in achieving the goals we were created for. Through the voice of (Said), burdened with all his worries, the novelist offers a glimmer of hope born from the depths of darkness, aiding him in continuing his journey:

"Said, I am neither an illusion nor a mirage. I am a reality that has come to comfort you in nights of doubt[...] Please, tear apart the cocoon of fear and embark on the true dream" (Abboudi, 2020, p. 231/232).

The novelist dreams of ceasing self-flagellation, of abandoning the futile blame that only perpetuates one's disappointments and allies with despair against oneself. Instead, she dreams, through Said's voice, who confesses to his friend Rashid:

"I halted the war I declared on myself [...] The war of self against self ceased [...] to find the light of liberation dawning after a long darkness" (Abboudi, 2020, p. 246).

The novelist dreams of influencing her society, which has not yet freed itself from the shackles of the past, the injustice of outdated customs, and the fetters of ignorance. She wants her society to embody the words of God: "And no bearer of burdens will bear the burden of another" (Fatir 35:18). She broadcasts this very realistic, wholly just, and absolutely necessary dream without forgetting that all this must be accompanied by the patience of the victims, their resilience, and their adaptation to their reality:

"He taught me to live with my reality and accept it, to coexist with my society and not reject it, but to compel it to recognize that I am part of it. Thus, I challenge its pride and defeat its arrogance [...] to find it erasing the label of 'bastard' and replacing it with 'creator... artist'" (Abboudi, 2020, p. 248).

The novel concludes where it began—with the hope of the freedom fighters who rose against colonialism. Despite all realistic indications suggesting the impossibility of achieving their goals, the voice of hope was louder, the force of determination stronger, and the certainty of faith in freedom more steadfast. This end mirrors the beginning, where hope shines throughout the universe, granting the oppressed their rights, healing the wounded, and bestowing them with hope. Said sees in the eyes of the boy he finds in front of his house:

"But their sparkle hinted at a bright hope, dispelling the darkness of despair and pain" (Abboudi, 2020, p. 261).

The arrival of this boy signifies a new beginning in Said's life, marking this day as the starting point for a new life and a new hope.

It is this hope that the novelist wishes to uplift the oppressed and the afflicted—foremost among them the woman who is her voice in this novel—promising them a better tomorrow where the sun of justice shines, and the winds of change blow, making society a warm embrace that gathers everyone under the roof of freedom, justice, and hope for a better future.

Conclusion

The novel addresses the dreams of a woman scattered by time across nights of injustice and mountains of patience, from peaks of success to valleys of failure, from the embers of truth to the coldness of illusion and mirage, from the throne of honor to the swamp of vice, from the light of faith to the depths of misguidance. It explores the essence of existence, seeking the path to eternity, and dreams of triumphing in the eternal struggle that has occupied humanity since ancient times—the struggle for survival and the desire to overcome mortality. The aim is to conquer death, which consumes everyone except those who have left a beautiful legacy, making them difficult for death to erase, for they have found their way to the realm of eternity.

She dreams of finding her place in human history, which has traditionally been the domain of men. She yearns for the opportunity to prove that she is neither lesser nor less

impactful than men. She aspires to secure a spot among the greats who have guaranteed their place in the annals of history and thus achieved immortality.

She envisions a man who rises with her from the lower realms that see women merely as beings for gratification or fleeting whims. Instead, she hopes for a partner who views her as a companion capable of completing his role in life, forming a harmonious duo that embodies true humanity rather than mere reproduction without purpose or goal.

She dreams of a woman who recognizes her own worth and overcomes the obstacles of her reality, fully aware of the role she was created to fulfill. She was not made to be an instrument of temptation or a commodity displayed on the roadside for the desires and instincts of others. She should confront her reality as it is, rather than being defeated and relegated to the margins of life and the realm of discarded goods. She should choose the path of chastity and honor rather than selling herself as a cheap slave in the market of human degradation, which diminishes her value and increases her misery.

The dream of transcending the human soul from the bondage of animalistic desires to the freedom of human inclination remains a vision that, although the writer sees as possible, requires men to overcome their own inclinations. They must perceive women as human values rather than mere satisfaction for physical desires, existing in a mood controlled by the whims of the self. She desires their assistance rather than their opposition.

She dreams that women will overcome their disappointments and pursue their highest goals with all their might. The world is full of obstacles that hinder anyone with hope from achieving their aims, yet success ultimately belongs to the patient and steadfast who believe in their capabilities, recognize the sincerity of their intentions, and are convinced that their goals are worth all the sacrifices. Victory will be theirs in the end, without a doubt.

She dreams of a woman who repents from sin with genuine repentance, lifting her from the abyss of despair she believed to be her inevitable fate, even though the path to return, despite its challenges and difficulties, is available. With sincere intentions and strong resolve, a woman can realize the nobility of her purpose and the exalted nature of the end goal.

She dreams of seeing her fellow women united around this beautiful dream of liberation from ignorance, desire, and weakness. They should support each other, reinforcing each other's efforts, as they are partners in fate and in the ultimate goal, companions on the path to achieving what they aspire to. She dreams of standing with herself, confronting her own self, being a support to men and receiving support in return, that society may do justice to her, and that she may face society boldly. She wishes to protect her rights from human transgressions and find ways to escape the inevitabilities of fate.

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