The Theme of Marriage
In
Ghada Al-Samman and Virginia Woolf: A Comparative Study of Two Novels

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Conclusion

Comparative literary studies are mainly concerned with the relationships of different literatures. These aspects deal with ideology, literary movements, literary themes and styles. One of the functions of Comparative Literature is that it brings cultures closer and enhances understanding between the peoples of these cultures.

In this study I discuss the theme of marriage in the Al-Samman’s *Al-Riwaya Al-Mustaheela: Fosayfisa' Demashqiya* (The Unwritable Novel: A Damascene Mosaic) and Woolf’s *To The Lighthouse*.

The feminist commitment of both writers is clear and I do believe that both are greatly involved in improving women’s status. Yet, their ultimate goal is to secure freedom and justice to all males and females since both are considered as victims of society.

Both writers are revolutionary: both call for blowing up the worn-out traditional division of roles for men and women in their respective cultures because it emphasizes men’s authority over women. They attack the old-fashioned ideas and social customs which treat women as inferior and subordinate to men.

I deal with the feminist ideas and schemes in the second chapter of this study. There are common points stressed by both writers. The necessity of
women's education, work, freedom and equality with men are essential to both writers. They are courageous enough to deal with a sensitive issue which is women's sexuality. Woolf calls for recording the experiences of women's bodies. Al-Samman calls for a sexual revolution. This attitude towards women's sexuality stems primarily from the notion of giving women the chance to have and express the sexual experience not for the sake of looseness and the false concept of freedom, but for the need to acknowledge human rights. It should be stated that calling for a sexual revolution in the Arab world is against Islamic norms of behaviour prevalent in most of the Arab countries. Woolf presented certain homosexual and lesbian characters in her novels seeking alternatives for women-men relationships. One should remember that she spoke about the 'androgynous mind' which is neither feminine nor masculine in an attempt to erase the binary opposition of the two sexes. This concept of the androgynous mind leads me to believe that Woolf tends to have utopian ideas and this concept of the ideal mind is a good example, while Al-Samman is more realistic and direct in expressing her ideas.

Al-Samman's and Woolf's feminist schemes then emphasize the social, economic and sexual freedom. In the discussion of the theme of marriage in *To The Lighthouse* and *Al-Riwaya Al-Mustaheela: Fosayfisa' Demashqiya (The Unwritable Novel: A Damascene Mosaic)* I raise some points regarding marriage in the Arab and English cultures. As the
historical background in chapter one reveals, in the English and Arabic cultures, as in most cultures of the world, the mother spends her life taking care of her children and serving her husband. She is deleted as an individual after her marriage; she is no longer x or y, she is Mrs. Z or Umm Fulan. In *To The Lighthouse* Woolf does not give us Mrs. Ramsay’s first name as if to emphasize the loss of women’s individuality. In *Al-Riwaya Al-Mustaheela: Fosayfisa’ Demashqiya (The Unwritable Novel: A Damascene Mosaic)* Al-Samman presents many married characters as Umm Muwafaq, Umm Maher and many others.

Throughout their novels, discussed here, Al-Samman and Woolf make it clear that a woman loses in marriage. A married woman loses her freedom, talent, individuality and sometimes life. For example, Hind, the talented writer, who is forced to abandon her creativity when she is married to Amjad; then loses her life trying to give birth to the male baby Amjad desires. Mrs. Ramsay, the typical ‘Angel in the House’, also loses her individuality when she is overwhelmed by her domestic duties and does not even have a life of her own.

Husbands like Mr. Ramsay and Amjad control and suffocate women without ever considering that they may have their own minds and ideas. But who is responsible for killing talents and wasting lives? Al-Samman and Woolf answer this question in their novels: the society with its cruel and inhumane rules. The general view in both cultures seems to be, that a
woman is born to suffer and make others happy. The Arab society prefers males, women must have male children to enforce their positions in their houses. Falak, for instance, is constantly pregnant and tired because her husband Abdel-Fattah wants more males. As a good wife, she has no other choice but to obey him.

The Victorian traditions make Mrs. Ramsay spend her life trying to please others in an attempt to achieve self-satisfaction, but the price is costly. She is responsible for assuring everybody’s needs without finding anyone who considers her own needs. Husbands like Amjad, Mr. Ramsay and abdel-Fattah are representatives of Victorian and Arab men who are egocentric and domineering, seeking to control and imprison women. On the other hand, the society is also responsible for men’s suffering in marriage.

Woolf and Al-Samman assert that raising boys and girls to be only husbands and wives is very dangerous for both sexes because it makes them believe that marriage is the ultimate goal for them. Both writers dismiss this idea and present alternatives; they present the feminist characters who learn, work and decide freely whether to marry or not and if they choose to marry, on what terms to do so. These feminist characters include Lily Briscoe and Faiha’. Woolf stresses the idea that women can be liberated if they kill the “angel” inside them. Woolf suggests that a new kind of relationship can exist between men and women which is friendship.
rather than love and marriage. Although Al-Samman called for the sexual revolution earlier, she is more traditional and optimistic in *Al-Riwaya Al-Mustaheela: Fosayfisa' Demashqiya* which could be attributed to the fact that the novel deals with the period from 1940s-1960s. She presents the feminist future for Arab girls through Faiha' who learns, works, chooses the man she wishes to marry on the basis of equality between her and her husband. Al-Samman is also successful in exposing many aspects of the Arab social life such as the symbolic imprisonment of women in their houses without any kind of education, women's fear of polygamy, the sacred concept of virginity and lying the girls' lives on this issue, the early age of marriage for girls, divorce and men's tyrannic control over women.

Both Al-Samman and Woolf attack the stereotyped images of men and women represented in their novels. They stress the urgency for new kinds of relationships between them and a new way of bringing up children.

As for style, I think that Al-Samman's study of English literature as well as her life in Europe and her extensive readings influenced her style a great deal and coloured her writings. Both writers belong to the modernist movement and ideology. The devices and techniques used by both are basically similar: the use of stream of consciousness, realism, tragic atmosphere, fragmented characters, and the extensive use of figurative language. Yet, Al-Samman adds some other techniques in her writings such as the use of more than one type of writing such as the bold type for
reporting the thoughts or feelings of the characters, stream of consciousness, and the ordinary type for the narrative voice.

Finally, I would like to say that the most significant thing that both women writers have in common is their ethical commitment to make people more human and the world a better place to live in.