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Confession and the Feminine Self: A Comparative Study in Selected Poems of Wafa'a Abdul Razzaq and Sharon Olds

ABSTRACT

There is no doubt that any creative writing whatever its form or genre carries aspects of self-revelation and repeats confessions of the self. It also reflects its views about the world and the other. Yet, with feminine literature, confession takes further dimensions because the world of the woman is a world that reveals without declares. It is a world that diagnosis without shows. Confession is a new type of writing. It is the product of many social and cultural transformations, especially what the feminist movement has produced. Therefore; the literary woman becomes capable of defending other women and enhancing their attitudes and perspectives. Female poets become the voice that reveals the inner world of a female because literature in general and poetry, in particular, is the outcome of culture.

This paper which is entitled *Confession and the Feminine Self* searches in the relations of communication and absent between the culture of an Iraqi poet; Wafa'a Abdul Razzaq (1952-) and that of an American poet; Sharon Olds (1942-). It clarifies the aspects of differences and similarities in revealing the feminine self. The research consists of an introduction that sets as a background to the feminine self. First section deals with the theme of fear and pain. The second section studies the theme of motherhood while the last section tackles the theme of the body. The researcher depends on an analytical approach in dealing with the subject. The researcher also depends on Arabic references not because English references are not available but in an attempt to reveal the Arab way of thinking. The research ends up with a conclusion that sums up the findings of the study.

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البوح والذات المؤنثة دراسة مقارنة في مختارات شعرية لوفاء عبد الرزاق وشارون اولدز

م.م. جنان حميد جاسم / وزارة التربية / مديرية تربية ديالى

الخلاصة:

لاشك ان الكتابة الابداعية ايا كان شكلها أو جنسها تحتمل جوانب من البوح الذاتي وتكرر اعترافات الذات الى جانب تصوراتها عن العالم والآخر بشكل أوسع. ويأخذ البوح أبعاداً أخرى ذلك أن عالم المرأة عالم يكشف دون أن يعلن ويشخص دون أن يُظهر. فالبوح نمط جديد من الكتابة ومن نتاجات تحولات اجتماعية وثقافية كثيرة ولعل أهمها ما أفرزته الحركات النسوية. لهذا أصبحت المرأة الابداعية قادرة على أن تتحمل مسؤولية الدفاع عن بنات جنسها وحمل وجهات نظرهم والكشف عن عوالمهن الداخلية لأن الادب والشعر خاصةً ابن ثقافته. وقد ارتأينا البحث في عوالم شاعرتين تنتميان الى ثقافتين مختلفتين وما يجمع

بينهما هو اتفاقهما على نمط كتابي واحد. والبحث عن علاقات التواصل والانقطاع بين ثقافتيهما. يتكون البحث من مقدمة تتناول الذات الانثوية. ومبحث أول يتناول دراسة ثيمة الخوف والالم. ومبحث ثان يسلط الضوء على ثيمة الامومة وآخر تناول موضوعة الجسد. وانتهينا الى خاتمة لخصت أهم ما تم التوصل إليه من استنتاجات.

INTRODUCTION

Female writings have a clear presence in any literature whether in English or Arabic literature. Many studies have been written or translated into Arabic in addition to what has been written in Arabic to reveal the importance and the talent of female writers. This study adopts a concept that feminine writing depends on the difference. This means it forms values and reveals visions that equalize and make a balance with masculine writing whether in its comprehensive understanding of the world or in exposing issues concerning their inner worlds. The trajectories, styles and concepts of Feminine writing have been developed. This is because of the increasing awareness of the status of woman and her rights and achievements as well as the integration of her self awareness (Ba'li,2009:33). Women write in different fields of creative writings. But this research will concentrate mainly on female confessional poetry. The woman writes confessions and revelation in an attempt to prove her being through changing her self from a theme into a productive self of writings. Woman tries to break the social acts and the cultural systems that make the feminine self a cultural subject, not a cultural self (Al-Ghathami,1996:29).

It has not been easy to understand the world of the woman because of the shattered image that was written by man overages. People have known the world of the woman through the man's point of view. This has produced female writers who wrote under what can be called as subjugated femininity. But the matter is different from confessional poetry because confession has not been treated as a theme but as a new style of writing to express life itself. In

confession, one becomes in a confrontation with oneself and with others. Confession is a penetration to the depth of the self. It is a bare appearance in front of the other either in the language used or in the articulation of contemplations or premonitions and thoughts. In this respect, female writers oppose the poetical structure since it is an aesthetic, suggestive and effective structure. Woman tries to write her self or write about her self. So the reader has to be more sensitive, has deeper thinking and wider imagination to sense what is beyond the words or images. The self of the writer always exists in the texts since the images of the texts are the product of the writer's consciousness and imagination. But sometimes confessions of the writer only attempt to escape from the unjust and oppressive reality to his/her lost paradise (Raheem,2007:21). Confession is a kind of freeing the self from the social, religious and even political taboos through masking and evasion. The main reasons behind masking are to avoid the direct disclosure of facts on the behalf of the art, to avoid trapping in the social, religious and political restrictions and to disclose the self as the writer wants and wishes not as what it is (Raheem,2007:25). Thus, this research deals with the confessions of two poets from two different cultures. Wafa'a Abdul Razzaq is an Iraqi poet. She was born in Basra. Her poetry mirrors her inner world. She prolifically produced many collections of poetry and novels. In the other hand, Sharon Olds is an American poet. She was born in San Francisco, California. She is famous for her powerful and frank revelation of her personal life. They differ in their visions, cultures, intellect, language, diction and style. The researcher tries to shed lights on the affinities and the differences of their poetical confessional experience through dealing with the themes of fear and pain, motherhood and the body as a human experience. But the concentration will be on the Iraqi poet since she lives in a conservative society where the woman can not evoke her inner feelings directly or tackles social taboos.

1- FEAR and PAIN

As a fact, fear is a natural state in a human being. However, the researcher is going to deal with fear and pain as a textual state. Fear is instilled in poetical memory of the poet. It becomes part of the poet's unconsciousness because the poet is the producer of the text and at the same time a woman.

The character of the woman in Arab society is formed and grown under a masculine culture in which a woman is subjugated to man. She feels like a body woman instead of making this body sacred. Therefore, the fears of the poet appear in her language, diction and images as shown in "Thirst of Water":

A woman hides the mulberry leaves
with sexual maturity and laughs.
She bears the hunger of water,
and the salt of the gusty eyelid.
She asks the unripe dates of the house,
what is the secret of the black-eyed creation?
Then comes a gloomy woman,
who has left the tranquillity of questioning the grass,
and weaves the hunger of a water
She comes back to mend the chest of whoop,
pulls the stem of words from the womb of the earth
and gushes the breath from the nipple of the horizon.
She opens yearning- an ocean,
harvests the wanderer of the turmoil,
and descends from the firebrands of the clouds
'N' that is replete with summer
And weaves the hunger of water (*Grant me Myself and the Map*,2009:46).

In this extract, three basic issues are revealed according to its lexicon; disguise, pain and vindication of life. All of the three issues are related to the speaking

self of the woman. The "leaves of the mulberry" have a connotation with mythology. The leaves of the mulberry have a positive act. After seducing Adam, Eve used these leaves as a cover and a veil to hide her private parts. Eve took the whole responsibility of this act of seduction whereas Adam was disguised behind the female act. Consequently, Eve is charged with nakedness due to what man has revealed. The disguise of the man behind the act of seduction is a negative act, so it is time to exchange this role. Woman in this poem announces her role as the protector of the act of seduction. This means the woman protects man from his sin. A question will be raised here whether the cry of the woman has resulted from her fear of the man himself or fear of facing and confronting the culture that adopted such views? To answer this question one has to follow the assumptions raised in the poem. The use of "mends the chest of breath" is an attempt to intensify the closure and the disguise. The woman tries to end what man did. In this case, a woman does not describe fears of her self but she fears on man- her life partner. This fear is always accompanied by the feeling of pain. Fear in "comes a gloomy woman" and "descends from the firebrands of clouds" is from the unknown. The word "gloomy" suggests the unknown and the loss. The fear from time is suggested by the word "comes" which expands and embodies an unusual feeling of pain in "descends the firebrands of clouds". It is a hard description when the firebrands meet the clouds. But the cruellest pain when two opposite worlds meet. Two worlds one fears the other and one distinguishes and ends the other. The poet also says in "Allowed Space":

One evening,
I packed the delight of ten o'clock
I was gathered as the light in the candle
I felt my winter and be united
To split into faces
I wiped off my space, drew,

I looked for me by myself.

By the hissing of the lack and my soul,

I packed the tissues of the hand-palm

I read the cup of the neck,

then cried.

The luck was misty,

and the coffee covers the wrinkles of the cup (*Grant me Myself and the Map*,2009:26).

Here the circle of the feminine self is crystalized to refer to the fear from the reality or the unknown. Loneliness gives self multiple features. The self splits unwillingly and becomes numerous. It appears as numerous images that gather reality and unreality. This self percepts the complexity of finding a real image to itself. The poet says "I gather" which joins the breaking up. The break up is connected with the time "evening, ten o'clock". It also refers to the end of the day. Confession here combines all the passing seconds of the day and the self percepts that before the beginning of a new day. This new day is the unknown and this is obvious in the last line "the luck was misty". The mist symbolizes the unknown vision whereas "luck" symbolizes the future. The poet uses certain words as "gathered, split into faces, and searched me, the lack..." to symbolize the straying, splitting and the inability to catch the real image of the self. This is due to the fear of the self from the future and the unknown. Fearing the future generates a continual worry to visualize the present moment. The fear of the poet from the future is not only of being a female but also because she is a visionary poet. This is clear in "the coffee covers the wrinkles of the cup". The cup is used to detect the luck while the "wrinkles" that are hidden behind the coffee refer to her fears of the future. The poet adds:

At night,

everything,

everything will calm down

except for the bird that suffers the doubled pain of flying (*I Doubt Till*,2016:68).

The poet tries to use the formula of time-place to express her fears from the unknown future. Time is used clearly in the "everything at night" whereas there is no reference to place. The bird refers and symbolizes the feminine self. The fear, worry and the instability of the self make her fly. The flight of the self is a reference to the fear of the place. The self flies from one place to another in a search for a shelter. This travel of fear and worry makes a paradoxical relationship with the shelter. The shelter of the feminine self is not necessarily the man but the static culture that has been established by the man along ago. This male culture makes woman search and sense her world that had been designed by man. This world was hard and impossible to be changed. The poet also says in "The Start of the Scream, The End of Speech":

The fire had many questions made of flame

What for your birds break their wings?

And shorten the space?

Had he mistaken my sweat?

When he hadn't slept on my hand

We had been two rivers made of sorrow,

Groups of life (*I Doubt Till*,2016: 71).

The verb "break" is directed to the "questions". It is accompanied by the fear of contemplating and moving to another world. Questions are generated from the knowledge of reality and looking forward to changing this reality. But facing such questions by using "break" arouses fears and worry from asking the questions. Therefore; forcing the self to be silent and preventing her from asking questions does not mean defeating woman but shows her continual search for creating her world. But this world is still a hypothetical one. It is a world from words and is formed in writing. The poet continues her search for a perfect world for the feminine self as shown in "Amusing Game":

Inbreathe me
I, whom you had written,
Ten times
To talk with me as a tribe
Probably, you are annoying me
To continue the people a burden
On the medals
My beloved words
You are the amusing game of reality (*Mongolian Tale*,2008,568).

Writing the self, conversing with the self and deriving other-selves are only reactions to the act of facing. Writing the self is a reflection to create a parallel world; a world in which woman can write, converse, oppose, annoy, and forgive her and at the same time create the act of existence to "continue the people". The paradox here is that this world is not a real world. It is a world of words. Words are the only things that can face and change reality. Words can make a safe shelter for the feminine self to start the change. Thus, the fear here is not a negative act. On the contrary, it defends the self and pushes her to reproduce a self free from the constraints of the prevailing male culture.

As with Wafa'a Abdul Razaq, Sharon Olds expresses feelings of fear and pain in her poetry. She reflects personal feelings as an individual experience that is governed by her poetical talent and her mastery of using simple language to affect and arouse the imagination of her readers. In "The Fear of Oneself", Olds says:

"As we get near the house, taking off our gloves,
The air forming a fine casing of
The ice around each hand,
You say you believe I would hold up under torture
for the sake of our children. You say you think I have

courage. I lean against the door and weep,
The tears freezing on my cheeks with brittle
clicking sounds.

I think of the women standing naked
on the frozen river, the guards pouring
buckets of water over their bodies till they
glisten like trees in an ice storm.

I have never thought I could take it, not even
for children. It is all I have wanted to do,
to stand between them and pain. But I come from a
long line of women
who put themselves first?" (*The Dead and The Living* ,2009:55)

Here we can notice three basic issues. The first is revealed in the symbolic use of (house/gloves). The gloves here refer to a thick casing that covers the self. The gloves are as the house that covers the dreams of man and encircles man's ambitions with love and warmth. But the act of taking off represents the separation between the bare self and its confessions and the dominating culture of the others. In other words, the house and the gloves are safe places but this safety is only a casing that can be removed easily. Then the self comes to know its bitter truth. This bitter truth is the fear of oneself. Fear equalizes thinking of being brave. This means that fear/bravery equalizes house/gloves. Both are related to each other. Being brave is an image received by the other whereas the world of the self is formed within fear and pain.

The second matter is revealed in "lean against the door and weep, tears freezing" which reflects the weakness and fear of the woman and the self. The proof is her staying outside the house. This deepens the image of fear of the house which supposed to be the place where one can find peace of mind. Then comes weeping which is resulted from the weakness and the inability to face this weakness. After that, cold air comes. It symbolizes the inner warmth of the

self. The result of the casing, weeping and the air is deprivation of expressing oneself.

The third issue is that the poet tries to tell about all women through revealing her views about suffering, fear, pain, and deprivation in "I think of the women". The use of "guards" or "imprisoned women" emphasizes the sufferings of women. The poet refers to the history of fear and repression against women in "But I come from/along the line /of women". This shows the consuming of the prevailing culture. The question is going to be raised here is that; can the poet change such outworn views and face them? Or would she give up? The answer comes in:

"I lean against the huge dark
cold door, my face glittering with
glare ice like a dangerous road,
and think about hot pokers, and goads,
and the skin of my children, the delicate, tight,
the thin, top layer of it
covering their whole bodies, softly
glimmering" (*The Dead and The Living* ,2009:55).

"My face glittering" refers to the poet's hope against "glare ice"/ the fear and pain. It shows a woman's reaction against her feelings of fear and pain and transforming this to the opposite action. The poet assures this in "think about hot pokers" and "hot pokers" are a symbol to firebrands that embody the renovation of the image of the self that appears as a negative self at the beginning of the poem.

As with Wafa'a Abdul Razaq, the poet gives the feminine self a wider scope to understand not only the female world but also the world in general. Sharon Olds shows her feelings of pain through "The Food- Thief". The poet succeeds in joining two paradoxical things. They are unified in their human

feelings. The poem is built on a group of hungry people who does the theft. The cruelty of hunger and its pain spread through the whole poem. Those hungry people lose their feeling of hunger because they have experienced and got used to its pain. Whereas feeling of kindness and feeling the humanity are reflected in the expressions of the dead body which is the victim of hunger:

"They drive him along the road in the steady
conscious way they drove their cattle
when they had cattle, when they had homes and
children. They drive him with pliant
peeled sticks, snapped from trees
whose bark cannot be eaten-snapped?
not cut, no one has a knife, and the trees that can be
eaten have been eaten leaf and trunk and the
long roots pulled from the ground and eaten" (*The Gold Cell*,2011:12).

This extract shows the outcome of hunger. There are no more families, no children, no sheep, no trees or leaves to be eaten and no life is left to this group. The poet describes every minute detail to express and emphasize the human sense and the pain of humanity at the same time. She refers to the leaves of the trees and "no one has a knife" to show that there is no need to use a knife neither in defending oneself nor in preparing food. There is no horrible thing than hunger. Such details show the pain of the victim whether this victim was an animal that had experienced what hungry people had experienced or not. Unlike that animal, man has a stronger ability to survive. The poet describes this scene silently. There is no noise and no movement but the movement of the dead body. The poet does this intentionally to make this image similar to the image of the female body. In real life, a woman can not express her feelings and sufferings so she let her body do so as in:

"They drive him and beat him, a loose circle of

thin men with sapling sticks,
driving him along slowly, slowly
beating him to death. He turns to them
with all the eloquence of the body, the
wrist turned out and the vein up his forearm
running like a root just under the surface, the
wounds on his head ripe and wet as a
rich furrow cut back and cut back at
plough-time to farrow a trench for the seed, his
eye pleading, the iris black and
gleaming as his skin, the white a dark
occluded white" (*The Gold Cell*,2011:12).

In using "They drive him, beating him, he turns to them with all the eloquence of the body, wrist turned out and wounds", the poet transformed the scene to be visual to have a deeper impact on the reader. This scene is filled with colours and movements that refer to the suffering and the pain of the body. In "running like a root just under the surface" the simile is very clear and direct but it reflects two things. The first is the feeling of weakness and emaciation and the second matter is the flowing of blood in veins which refers to life and the spirit. This dichotomy refers to the relation of the mortal body and the immortal spirit. It also exceeds this to another dichotomy between "life and their life", as in "they know the life he is asking for/ it is their life". This represents a painful and severe paradox when the dead imagine hungry people rushing to consume this body. The life of hungry people is determined by the life of others that they should have to possess. This poem, in general, reflects the value of the body and the feelings of fear and pain through the images and the sensitive, alive and direct language used by the poet.

2- MOTHERHOOD

Motherhood is not only a state of being a mother. It refers to the biological, psychological and mental feelings of transformation as well. The self in this state acquires social and cultural features according to the society it belongs to. This state involves a sentimental change and an intensive sense of responsibility (Qintar,1992:67). Motherhood is universal as well as a human feature. Being a mother is an instilled behaviour that is the same all over the world. It is an acquired behaviour that is affected by outside factors whether religious, social, cultural or intellectual (Qintar,1992:19).

Motherhood forms a special kind of confession and revelation. When the other confirms the divine status of a mother, this does not mean that the other feels or senses her private inner world. On the other hand, revealing the feelings of the mother and exposing her world form a comfortable discourse to female readers. At this point, the female readers will feel and live their private world because it is the confession of a female-directed to the female society. This will produce a balance for the feminine self.

Hence, the researcher will concentrate on what the texts reveal concerning maternal views on things. Such views give a new concept to the female world away from the concepts presented by a man. It is important to refer to the fact that the world of woman and the world of man can not be separated. One completes the other physically and spiritually as in:

The clouds have filled their thoughts.

The eyes have a promising glance.

The smell of the heart has clothes,

as she has extended her breasts to the river so as not to see except a

rare child

who sings for the farewell (73)?

What is common between a child and its mother is the feminine sense. The "clothes" in "the smell of the heart has been clothes" refer to the first

meeting of the child with the outer world. This world will be the inclusive environment in which the self of the child constructs. At the same time, the poet uses "she extended her breasts to the river" to reverse the formula. The river is the source of life and the source for clouds and rain. The opposite image is of the "breasts" that stands for the mother who will take the universal responsibility for the child when others give up their responsibilities. This relation appears clearly in the use of "mother/river" and "cloud/thoughts" especially when the thoughts are connected to the pronoun "her". This assures the feminine vision of the poem. This vision is repeated in other poems, such as in "The Sea is not a Child":

I take my head out of the wall

(To remember what the tree told its branches)

A bullet precedes me. It looks exactly like me

Everything turns to be a child,

even the leaving phantoms.

My mom opens her arms

My face comes out of her heart pocket

To overruns me to the doorstep.

But the bullet opens the world of the sea (*Dairies of the Child of War*,2010:776).

In this extract, the map of life is drawn at the cruellest moment of the inevitable death. This time the confession comes out of a child's mouth. The poet wants the reader to see that there is no separation between a mother and her child. The vision of motherhood and childhood is unified and becomes one especially when the poet says "everything turns to be a child." This line reflects the feminine feeling of a mother towards things. Everything turns to be felt as a child feels. It is a return to childhood where everything is pure and innocent and to grant life its values. Nevertheless, in the end, everything goes to the arms of the mother, "my mom opens her arms". The arms of the mother are the earth

that receives the dead body. The mother and the earth are united in being the protector. This unification between the visions of a mother with her child can not be found in the writings of men. The poet in the preface to her collection "*Do not Lament the Stature of Crystals*" (2018) affirms the vision of motherhood and declares "Now, I feel them like an orange flower. It is rounded by the sun like a wave beseeches shining on the lightning of the sky. This is because I write about their attributes". In "Sanctity of Crystal", the poet says:

I glorify grief since it is the son of my mother.

I glorify the flowing of milk in her prayers.

I glorify the outdoors,

as a father to the poor

and a shelter to children

who wipe of shoes (23).

The poet emphasizes and repeats "glorify" to show that everything connected with the mother whether spiritually or physically is sacred- (mother ----- grief--- children). Then the word "milk" connects the three. Grief is the son of the mother. It grows in her lap and feeds it with milk. Grief here becomes a companion with childhood. It shares children the same care as the mother.

In the "Portrait of Bachelor House", the poet emphasizes the spiritual relation of marriage between the world of woman and man:

The wall that is not torn away is
a false prophet.

A prophet we do not accept to be the prophet.

And I have seen a lost prophet

who is stumbled and

whipped by the throat of the wall (*A Barefoot House Walking* 394).

The prophet in this poem symbolizes the falsehood, the lost and the stumbling. Such adjectives refer to the woman as a female and as a wife. This woman can transform the wall from its silent state into an effective dynamic state and be an environment to cover the falsehood, a sparkle to illuminate the way for the lost people and a paved way to prevent stumbling. The woman here is the source of life since she is life itself (Mahmood, *Aesthetics of Silence*, 2002: 124).

Unlike Wafa'a Abdul Razaq, the poetry of Sharon Olds reveals the world of motherhood directly and frankly in all its minute details. Olds uses her own experience to reflect certain views and attitudes she has been adopted. The poet repeats many themes especially of sons and grandsons as in "New Mother", "My Son's Father Smile", and "The Unborn". In such poems, the poet describes the intimate relationship of a mother with her child. The poet concentrates on the suffering of giving birth and the pain associated with. Here is a clear emphasis on the real identity of a mother and her role in life as if the poet wants to give a new function to the female body to express the feminine self. The function of the female body is related to children and the continuity of life and not related to the submission to the male body. In this respect, she is similar to Wafa'a in tackling this theme but she differs in the way she treats it. As in the "The Unborn":

"Sometimes I can almost see, around our heads,

Like gnats around a streetlight in summer,

The children we could have,

The glimmer of them.

Sometimes I feel them waiting, dozing

In some antechamber - servants, half-

Listening for the bell.

Sometimes I see them lying like love letters

In the Dead Letter Office

And sometimes, like tonight, by some black

Second sight I can feel just one of them

Standing on the edge of a cliff by the sea

In the dark, stretching its arms out

Desperately to me" (*Satan Says*,2010:15).

The poet emphasizes "I feel them" to tell the reader that the poem is built on assumptions and fancies created in the imagination of the poet. Therefore; all the images of the poem are connected with "I feel them", that is generated through the certain incident. So the researcher suggests the following diagram:

Incident----- feeling-----associations of images.

Outside effect----- inner effect----- imagination

From this diagram, we can understand the nature of feelings that creates the images. Such feelings are related to the feminine self of the poet. The use of "I can almost" and "we could" is to emphasize the title of the poem "The Unborn". It is an individual imaginary action that would not have happened. The similes are used to enrich and deepen the speaker's feelings of motherhood and then pass them to others. The poet insists on the theme of motherhood and presents it in a different way as in "The End". This poem is about the domination of the other/ husband on the decision of abortion. The thoughts are going to be generated spontaneously. The poet makes the victimized mother the core of the poem because the role of the mother springs from having sons. The poet also shows the outcome of such a decision on children. Despite the use of "we decided to", but there is an implicit condemnation of man because sharing the decision springs from a feminine perspective, not of a mother.

Sharon Olds reflects her personal feelings as a mother and at the same time expresses her views towards her mother as in "The Borders":

"When she lay down, to pray, on me,
she was always ferociously courteous,
fastidious with Puritan fastidiousness,
but the barrier of my skin failed, the barrier of my
body fell, the barrier of my spirit.

She aroused and magnetized my skin, I wanted
ardently to please her, I would say to her
what she wanted to hear, as if I were hers" (*The Unswept Room*,2008:39).

The poet uses the image of "the barrier of my spirit" to show the unification between two bodies and two spirits. This image embodies the completion of the affections between two females. The meeting of the body of a daughter with the body of her mother refers to a sense of incorporation and unification. By instinct, the daughter is part of the mother. The poet uses "to please" to refer to the sacred vision of the mother and in consequence, she shows her attitude towards her child.

In this respect, both poets express their maternal feelings to reveal the feminine self. They succeed in breaking the oppression of silence to get the mental, spiritual and physical healing.

3- THE BODY

The researcher will deal with the body as a cultural text that hides its psychological and social suggestions. The body is a web of signs and effects (Mahmood, *Bets of Hybridization*,2018:109). At the same time, the body has a poetical function especially when it has become an aesthetic discourse rooted in the unconsciousness (Al Hafidh,2008:34). However, Abdullah Ibrahim sees that honouring and celebrating the body or revealing its transformation in a repressive cultural society is one of the supports for the feminine writings (2011:215). Moreover, the function of the female body is not confined to be a female identity as had been in Arab culture. But it has become a discourse that

tries to build and rebuild a new culture based on female confessions. Such confessions will play their roles in revealing the importance of the female body through the language and exploring the feminine self for itself. Thus, the main function of writing about the body is not to erase the previous concepts but to support the feminine self through facing the silence and hushing the body. Silence in the texts can be anticipated because silence has endless boundaries (Mahmoud, *Aesthetics of Silence*,2002:18). Confession is a direct speech that can be examined in the text through the usage of the language and the social, religious and political norms.

The female body is associated with sin and desecration from the early beginning of creation. The story of the sin of Adam and Eve is used to change its human and sacred value to a worldly sin. It is an ideological transformation as seen by Sameer Al-Khaleel (2018:28). In "Blindfolded Whiteness", the ideological function of erasing the female body and in consequence, erasing the female self is very clear:

Oh! God, who am I?
Tell me of what creatures know.
I am walking out of my self.
Raise my head for me
and teach me how to read my instincts
away from holes, have me in mind every morning,
on an obedient body to its bend.
Don't lead me to blindfolded whiteness,
Time encompasses me by its breaths
and trees are mere bells
in a street where guards roam.
Oh! God, have You created me,
to the mercy of an axe.

A creature like me does not fear but the poem
and Your oblivion.
By whom I would content, to purify myself from this phantom
Link me with hell
My hands are solid,
How can I beseech you, then?
.....
Send your purity
To prepare me to fertilize your seven skies
in a form of a poem made of women,
whose feelings are an udder
and their udders are space (*Mongolian Tale*,2008:600).

The image of the body performs more than one function. The poet addresses God and makes a spiritual comparison to spiritualize the body and give it its real meaning away from the worldly concept that considers the female body a sin. In her turn to God, she reveals the positive view of her body. The female body is pure. It is the place where spirit exists. She asks about the essence of creation and man has to know its secrets. It is God who taught Adam the names while the angels taught him how to respect and treat his body. Therefore, why has a woman been confused to own her body? Why is a woman responsible for her body when this body is loyal to its acts? Such existential questions will have implicit answers in the poem. Some of these questions are concerned with what others think about the female body. They see it as "a street where guards roam, the mercy of an axe and blindfold whiteness". While the answers express both confession and fear, as in "a creature like me does not fear but the poem". The poem equalizes confession. The poem is more dangerous because it is a cultural struggle, not a behavioural struggle. The behaviour has a limited effect because of its geographical scope whereas the poem (language) has a wider scope. The end of the poem declares the victory of the poem/language. This is the

ideological function of the body. The poet also displays another feature of the body. It is purity as "Throw away your purity/ to prepare myself to fertilize your seven skies". The poet also uses certain symbols as "my hands are solid, their hair udder, and cancel death on my shoulder". The first symbol of the hand refers to the act of marginalizing and breaking up because the hand is the factor of change of every action. The second symbol is the udder. It refers to the spiritual values of a woman. Woman equalizes life and also gives life. The woman is a symbol of continuity. The third symbol of cancelling death shows the theme of the poem. It means cancelling and changing the prevailing views of the violated body. In using "by whom I would content, to purify myself from this phantom", is a call for freeing the body from its cultural prison and preserve it from the bars of slavery. The poet shows another function of the body in the "Photographer":

Take photos

Oh, wanderer

A woman whose enemy is her shadow.

Her dream fears her

and fears her precedence (*Mongolian Tale*,2008:609)

Here the woman fears her own body. She fears that her body will let her down. The shadow is a reflection of the image of the body. The shadow will be an obedient follower to the movements and pauses of the body. This means that the body is formed within the text where desire and freedom are forbidden. In other words, the shadow stands for the feminine self. It is forbidden from expressing its feelings, desires and be a slave. It means that the self is imprisoned in the body because of the traditions and customs. In another poem, the shadow appears to reflect the mystical unification between the female and the male bodies. The image of the male body appears earlier as a shadow to the female body. It can also be read as the untold or silenced one as in "I am the start, the end / the virtue, the step / I am a deserted garden / it doesn't bloom

without your existence"(12). Such dichotomies emphasize firstly the importance of the female body being a source of life in "start/end". Secondly, they affirm the purification dimension of the body. This produces another dimension of the body. It is the male body through the image of a deserted garden. This deserted garden is the female body that does not come back to life and does not continue without the existence of the male. The body of the man is the icon of action but its being and continuation are determined by the female body. The poet repeats this thought in many poems as "I am The Slaughtered Heaven". She says "why embracing is insensible and coward/ Remove the curtains ... and be / I have no being without your love" (16). This mystical and spiritual dimension does not prevent the poet from asking questions that are in her minds as:

I do not grow apple trees
so as not to illuminate the face of another god
I'll grow my questions that divide the seven skies
I'll destroy the arrogance and write me (32).

The poet uses the symbol of the apple tree as used by most of the Arab poets as the enclosure that covers the body. It refers to the release of the body from the limitations of the idea of violation that appears in the poet's use of "not to illuminate the face of another god". This is what can be called the superstition of the violated body. The poet also refers to the spiritual dimension of the male body in "The sons sense that you are with us now"(69). The utterance of 'sons' is a reference to the presence of the divine relationship between the female and male bodies. Sons have social and religious connotations in old and modern societies. And the historical connection of the two bodies embodies in the presence of sons. The poet intends to change her poems to a body through the use of 'hot language' to express her suppressed desire of the adventitious thought as in " I am the hot language/ her heaven is the adventitious thought'(143).

In "Throw me in you, for you," the poet tries to make affinity between the spiritual and the secular and are united to produce seed of life:

O, my child, the sea.

To name you a bird

to make the blue fly between two prophecies.

Spread your wings and listen to the echo of chanting.

My eyes are the east, my heart in the west.

Take whatever direction you like (*Light Entrance*,2011:291).

The female body is turned to be a space for the male body. The poet emphasizes this idea as a new culture to face the cultural restrictions and regaining the status of the female body is sacred. Man can flourish the female body without controlling or restricting it. According to the poet, the male body is a factor that keeps the female body alive. To her, male restrictions are belonging, "I adore the cunning of orbits, that walk to a silent dust / creating its belonging and testify". The divinity of the body is implicit in uttering "testify" while "belonging" refers to the moral and sensory act of the body.

Take me to your meaning

And melt what I have missed.

Breed me fire

To be sleepless, hilarious flowing in your veins

On the handkerchiefs of a land

I've crowned with her scents (74).

"Breeding fire" is a symbol to purify the body from lust. Fire alone can purify nouns and rename them. The unity of the female body and the male purifies the female body from its slavery, restrictions and falling. The poet adds:

You get me back from you and have climbed

I am not the cloud

I am the loving who embraces her child and

Take it where certainty exists

This sacred sublimation and the embrace are new dimensions the poet has raised and adopted to give the female body its meaning and role after it had been marginalized for long.

Thus, the poetical confession has acquired its feature through the poetics of the poet and her ability to use suggestive language and create an imaginary world that is hard for others to enter. The poet uses a diversity of allegories historical, natural or sometimes mental to pave the way for the reader to share the female inner daily world. The poet's confession is only a message to assure that the female body equalizes the male body in its needs, hopes and contemplations.

With Sharon Olds, the image of the body is differently treated. This is probably because of the western upbringing and the western society she belongs to. For Sharon Olds, the female body is free and has the right to express its wishes and desires freely. Here, the female body is going to be treated through the body of the male. It is also important to mention that the poems are going to be treated as body texts. Sharon Olds uses her experience to write about the body and to give her poems a legacy to reveal the human experience which is the same all over the world. In the "Station", she says:

"Coming in off the dock after writing,
I approached the house,
and saw your long grandee face
in the light of a lamp with a parchment shade
The colour of the flame.
An elegant hand on your beard. Your tapered
eyes found me on the lawn. You looked
as the lord looks down from a narrow window
and you are descended from lords. Calmly, with no

hint of shyness you examined me,
the wife who runs out on the dock to write
as soon as one child is in bed,
leaving the other to you" (*Satan Says*,2010:5).

Place plays an important role in understanding the nature of the female body, its status, freedom and even the restrictions that confined it. The poet uses the dock and the lawn to refer to the open vast space while the narrow window refers to the closed space and the narrowness of the place. The dock is built to receive ships that are coming from the wide seas. There is an open horizon and there are open areas. From the dock, journeys are set up towards the open seas. Meanwhile, the lawn whether small or vast is still an open place in comparison to the closed house. The house has a narrow window. There is not enough air or light to pass through. The narrow window also refers to the small rooms of the house. In other words, the dichotomy of wideness/ narrowness has a direct connection with the female/male self, which will be shown through the body. The poet also uses "down" which forms an implicit dichotomy with "above". Olds concentrates on "down" to connect it with the self and in consequence with the body. It means that man is superior to woman.

The wide horizon has a relation with the female self. This self is shown through writing and filiation. Writing and filiation refer to the wide knowledge and human sense. The male self emerges through superiority and narrowness. If this is true, how can these two selves emerge through the body? The answer is that the female body is revealed through the body language of the male. At the same time, the personality and the characteristics of the male reflect the personality and the characteristics of the female and in return, they will resemble the vision of the male. This means a woman has introduced man with such features and has given him the freedom to reflect her body. It is a complicated scene used to expose the poetic vision of the poet. It also reveals the narrow and the superficial scope of man's views in discovering the world of

the woman. This feminine world can not be limited by the body. The poet emphasizes the implicit wider vision and horizon of the woman than that of the man. Thus the poet presents the features and characteristics of the man to say he views woman through his body, not through his mind and soul. The poet describes the face of the man as "long grandee" that is identical to his self. The poet also uses "long mouth" to show how man has marginalized the female body and looked at her from outside only. Man repressed her from exposing her feelings and in return her self. But woman challenges such views through her confessions and writings. In the "New Mother", Olds presents two images of the female body. She describes the feelings of a new mother towards her body as a wife and at the same time as a mother:

"all of you so tender, you hung over me,
over the nest of the stitches, over the
splitting and tearing, with the patience of someone who
finds a wounded animal in the woods
and stays with it, not leaving its side
until it is whole, until it can run again" (*The Dead and the Living*,2009:53).

This extract reflects the monovision towards the woman. It shows how the man sees the woman from one corner and neglects other values. The female body is shown as a repressed body. It is a kind of resistance to the inhuman wishes and desires. It is also a kind of achieving freedom as in "The Infinite Bliss":

"When I first saw snow cover the air
with its delicate hoof prints, I said I would never
live where it did not snow, and when
the first man tore his way into me,
and tore up the passageway,
and came to the small room, and pulled the
curtain aside that I might enter, I knew I could

never live apart from them
again, the strange race with their massive
bloodied hooves" (*Satan Says*,2010:7).

The poet here makes a comparison between nature and the human self through the relation between the woman and the man/husband. The snow covers the air and affects the land. It is as the meeting of two bodies and two human natures in communication.

Both poets want their poems to be models of powers and to be useful. In their confessions and making their lives visible, they open social space and break the barriers. They go beyond the limit to free the self and give it the feminine identity.

CONCLUSION

Woman writers all over the world need to reveal their inner world in one way or another. They tried to write under pseudonyms because they were oppressed by the dominant cultures in their societies. Therefore; they proclaimed facing the obstacles and confess their feelings, desires and hopes through writing. Jacques Lacan states "I identify myself in language"(qtd. in Cavallaro,2003:30). To reveal their feminine self, woman poets writes under the genre of confessional poetry. Such genre emerged in the late1950s. It deals with the mental, physical and psychological experience of the life of the poet. It reveals the poets' inner feelings. So, Wafa'a Abdul Razzaq and Sharon Olds succeed in constructing their feminine self in their poetry. They free the self by using words as a weapon against pain and fear. In their poetry, the feminine self is changed to a concept to present the theme of motherhood as a power of change. Both poets write their bodies whether implicitly or explicitly to create and to present the feminine self to their readers.

Both poets tackle many themes but they differ in how they handle such themes of pain and fear, motherhood and the female body. What unites the two

poets is the poetic human experience. Such human experience finds responses, especially with female readers. Poetry mirrors their life and reflects their needs and desires. It is a kind of both remedy and pleasure.

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