

Soueif's 'The Returning' and 'The Nativity': A Portrait of the Other as Others

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Abstract : Throughout Aisha, her first collection of short stories, Ahdaf Soueif draws a multilayered picture of the Other as others, picturing a series of encounters of her protagonist with this very Other as a set of binary elements. The current essay includes a comparative study between two narratives, namely The Returning and The Nativity. The Other is portrayed as a male/female binary in The Returning and as 'The Foreigner' in an exotic land vs. the local in The Nativity. The analysis is to focus on Aisha, the main female character, who figures as conforming to the portrait of the stereotyped Arab Muslim woman as a sex-subject, submissive, and maudlin character, confining her vision of the Other to the boundaries of her cocooned self, epitomizing a self-centered vision of the world. This reduced vision results in the possibility of viewing the Other as a hindrance to her attaining a clarified and centrifugal representation of the latter, herself, and the outside world. The encounters could also be considered as the character's opportunity for a less stigmatized perception of the elements set forth. The main queries to be probed are: what are the different perceptions of the Other by the author in the narratives set forth? How does the protagonist's encounter with the Other(s) impede her ability to understand the Other, herself, and the world around her? Or how does this encounter allow her an enlightened vision of the aforementioned elements to forge a new start? The possibility of imagining a dialogic relation between different perceptions of the Other opens up new perspectives for adopting magnified representations of the later, oneself, and the world, dilating one's imagination.

Keywords : dialogic, female, foreigner, local, male, other, others

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