

Feminist Discourse in Saudi Fiction: Zeinab Hefny¹'s *Features* as a Model

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Abstract: Due to the increasing and successive development witnessed by the Saudi society in all fields, it is normal to find a reflection of such development in the literary sphere, especially fiction. Western influence on development of such literary genre cannot be ignored, but its influence on writings and thoughts of some Saudi women novelists was greater. Saudi female novelists have considered their novels as the strongest weapon by which they can defend women's rights and express themselves freely. Although these goals seem legal, such group of novelists adopt a rebellious strategy to achieve these goals, declaring their resistance against the long – established norms and traditions of their conservative society. Among such group who tend to present the Saudi community with western features is Zeinab Hefny. Hefny is a Saudi feminist writer known for her challenge of the dominating taboos within the Saudi community. She calls for absolute freedom of the girl, encouraging Saudi girls to abandon their old-fashioned traditions and frequently states her endorsement for illegal relations between men and women. The problem with Hefny's novels, especially *Features*, is that sex is employed catastrophically in her works, and therefore her works confuse critics whether to classify them as erotic or pornographic. This study is accordingly devoted to answer the following questions: Are literary works produced by Arab women writers erotic writings or pornographic ones? Is there a relationship between erotica literature and the needs of the Arab citizen who is oppressed and repressed not only sexually, but also politically, socially, economically, psychologically and culturally? Does Zeinab Hefny's *Features* belong to the erotic literature? Is it an attempt for freedom from all long-established shackles imposed on the thoughts of both men and women?.

Keywords: Saudi fiction, Feminism, Erotica, Pornography, Westernization, *Features*, Narrator, Stylization, Narratives.

INTRODUCTION

Critics and academics, including Dr. Saleh Alghamdi – professor of criticism at King Saud University, have investigated accuracy of using a term like "*Narrative Surge*" to express the abundance of Saudi narrative production. Dr. Alghamdi has further searched for the reasons that resulted in such phenomenon identifying them in two sets: national and international reasons. The national reasons, in Alghamdi's perspective, are related to political, social, intellectual, and technical circumstances originated in the kingdom during the past two decades, producing fair amount of freedom to discuss the public issues within Saudi society in general and women's issues in particular. This, in turn, has encouraged Saudi female writers to express their issues through multiple means, most notably the novel. The art of novel can be described then as the strongest weapon that Saudi women used to defend their rights, express their problems, resist their conditions, and express their emotions, especially when a woman hides her real personality behind a mask to write her autobiography. Dr. Alghamdi moreover predicts that women's' adoption of such technique of masking to write their autobiographies through novels will not last for long time as current circumstances elucidate that the coming days will witness

¹⁾ Zeinab Hefny is a Saudi writer, short story- teller, and novelist. She was born in Jeddah. She is a journalist since 1987 and writes for Arab and international newspapers and magazines. Hefny is known for her challenge of the dominating taboos within the Arab community, and is always criticized for using sex in her novels. She was prevented from writing and traveling after her story collection *Women at the Equator* (1996), which brought down broad arguments and criticism on her due to its dare and bold encounter with reality, and accordingly forced her to stay abroad. Hefny later wrote other collections including, *Your Shackle or My Freedom*, *Things that Still Missed*, *A Woman outside Time*, and others. Her literary production also includes several novels as *Dancing to Tambourine Beats* and *I No Longer Cry*. Hefny was invited for numerous international book fairs as well as many Arab forums and seminars where she gave lectures on woman issues. She then chose to depart Saudi Arabia to live in London. (See her interview at *Aafaq Magazine* at http://www.aafaq.org/search_details.aspx?id_arch-6843). Hefny strongly commends Nawal El Saadawy considering her a pioneer of the women's liberation movement and hopes to be Nawal El Saadawi of Saudi Arabia. She thinks that taking the veil off represents the

liberal Saudi woman. In addition, she calls for absolute freedom of the girl encouraging Saudi girls to abandon their old-fashioned traditions and stated her endorsement for illegal relations between men and women based on her claim of personal freedom. She thinks that a woman's veil classifies her among the terrorist groups. Hefny is also known for her excessive use of sex in her novels and that the plot of her novels is grossly based on sex and stories of lesbians, and adulterers and adulteresses (see her interview at *Illuminations* Program on *Al-Arabia TV Channel* with Turki Al Dakheel on Friday 18/5/2006).

Production of many exciting autobiographies by Saudi women.

As for the international reasons, Dr. Alghamdi relates them to the celebration and welcoming reception of the novels written by Saudi female writers by the Other in both Arab and Western world either through reading or publication mainly because of their critical and challenging themes. Novels written by Saudi female writers can be described then as the window that provided this Other with a rare and precious opportunity to penetrate into the Saudi community and know about secrets and details- which were unattainable for long time - concerning Saudi women's issues and intricacies. These novels, moreover, present unfamiliar, exciting and sometimes shocking examples of Saudi women. This urged Alghamdi to describe Saudi novel as "an important informative source that help critics, historians, and social researchers in their studies on the contemporary Saudi society, mostly neglecting the aesthetic aspects of the novel, which were not strong, anyway".² Among the important factors that encouraged the spread of Saudi women's novels was the publication of *Girls of Riyadh (Banat Al Riyadh)* by Ragaa Al Sanea, which is considered, in Alghamdi's point of view, a turning point in the history of Saudi fiction in general and women's fiction in particular.

In fact, the origin of Saudi women's novels can be traced back to *Give Up My Hopes (Wadaeat Amaly)* (1958) by Samira Khashggi and her *Eastern* magazine (*Mijallat Al Sharqia*), which first released in January 1974 and is considered the first Saudi women's magazine. In addition, Khashggi's *Brightness of Your Eyes (Bariq Aynayk)* (1963) paved the way for early Saudi women writers who resisted the shackles of traditions and customs. Khashggi's model was then followed by Nada Al Rasheed through her novel *Tomorrow is Thursday (Ghadaan Sayakun Alkhamis)*. Al Rasheed played an important role in development of the short story, which was initiated by the short story teller Najat Khaiyat through her

² "Rise of Saudi Feminist Novels." Web blog post. *Sardeyat. Alhayatt* Newspaper, Tuesday, 11 Jan. 2011. Web. http://sardeyat.blogspot.com/2011/01/blog-post_7755.html.

Collection, *Throes of Silence (Makhad Alssamt)* (1966), a pioneering model in this sphere. This pioneering contribution was followed by other prominent ones such as *The Lost Innocence (Albara'ah Almafqudah)* (1977) by Hind Baghfaar; *Love You... But (Ahbuk Walakn)* by Meriyam Alghamdi; and *The White Creep (Alzzahuf Al'abyad)* (1981) by Latifa Salem. This literary creativity continued later at the hand of Kairiya Al Saqa, Rukaiya Al Shabeeb, Sharifa Al Shmalaaf, Badria Al Beshr, Omaima Al Khamees, Amal Shatta, Salwa Damanhour, and others. Attempts were repeated in this regard and they all revolved around celebration of the flesh, man and woman relationship, and calls for rebellion against parental authority; which means that Saudi women writers have been obsessed by women's issues and concerns, and that they devoted their literary production for such issues and these concerns.³

It is also worth noting the use of vernacular words, such as names of cities, neighborhoods, streets, varieties of food, clothing, habits, ...etc, in Saudi national – featured novels written by women so as to create a realistic mood to make the readers feel and believe that this is the reality of the Saudi society; but in fact those female writers have elusively adopted such technique to introduce westernized concepts and thoughts into the Saudi society and present a different image comparing to the real situation within the Saudi community in an attempt to depict the picture that they desire not the real one. Among such group of Saudi women novelists who tend to present the Saudi community with western features are: Sara Alolaiwi as in her novel *Saudi Women (Saeudiat)*, Zeinwb Hefny through her novel *Features (Malamih)*, and Ragaa Al Sanea in her *Girls of Riyadh (Banat Al Riyadh)*. All these aforementioned novels belong to what is known as *Erotic literature*⁴ which involves a modernized type of language with

³ Al-Eween, Mohammad Abdullah. *Women's Image in Saudi Fiction*. 1st edition. Riyadh: King Abdul Aziz Public Library, 2002.

⁴ From Greek *erōtikos*, *erōs*, *erōt-*, *sexual love*. *Eros* in Greek mythology refers to god of love, fertility, sexual desires and happiness. He is always represented as the son of Aphrodite who oversees sexual affairs throughout human civilizations. He is represented as a blindfolded child symbolizing the inability to see flaws of the beloved. *Eros* is also portrayed with two wings flying into the blue sky, playing on his guitar or riding a dolphin; and he was also portrayed in Coptic arts and lamps. His counterpart in Roman mythology is *Cupid*. *Eroticism* in general revolves around a strong and an unbridled sexual desire, flesh, reckless pleasures between wine and sex, and sexual experiences controlled mainly by rapacity and infatuation. New and different cultural patterns, and follows modern Western and European models in this regard.

A prominent example in this group who belong to *Erotic literature* is Zeinab Hefny. Hefny's novels are

always about Saudi women's issues and problems within the Saudi society, especially the problems suffered by female breadwinners, the divorced, and the widowed and old women. She tackles the problems of these categories, as she herself states, through a literary style intermingled with fiction. A close reading of Hefny's works indicates her resisting attitude against social norms based on Islamic teachings, such as separation between men and women, male authority, and cultural reproduction or what is termed as *cultural interchange*. She always attempts through her characters (males and females), who belong to all social classes, to violate all taboos within the society. She does not only allow men to mix with women, or vice versa, but she also permits them to practice sex without marriage, including single, married, divorced, widowed and widower males/females, as in her novel *Features (Malamih)*. That means that chastity and noble masculinity are severely attacked and violated in her works, a matter that is firmly rejected and condemned by both religious/conservative people and liberals, whether in reality or in fiction. The problem with Hefny's writings is that sex is employed catastrophically in her works, and therefore her works may be classified as pornographic writings.⁵

Hypothesis of the Study:

Does Zeinab Hefny's *Features* belong to the erotic literature which implicates degradation and symbolizes for brutal reality deprived of humanity and morality, and is only built on fake values and hysterical contradictions? Or, is it (*Features*) a mere attempt for freedom from all long-established shackles imposed on the thoughts of both men and women? Does total submission for bodily desires

⁵ Isleem, Mohammad. "Forbidden Writing and Writing the Forbidden in Zeineb Hefny's Narratives." *Feminist Literature in Arabian Peninsula*. Tripoli: Arab Organization for Electronic Media, 4-6/ 11/2008.

Provide the writer with feelings of warmth, existential shelter, safety, and that sense of real and virtuous life where one can find rational individuals who are fully aware of their duties as well as rights to restore the required balance?

Relationship between Erotic Literature and Feminist Writings:

Western erotic writings by women have been associated with Feminism, a movement that appeared in the sixties of the last century. The feminist theory can be classified into three groups: ⁶

- 1- theories that advocate an intrinsic vision, including the psychoanalysis and French feminism;
- 2- theories that aim to identify or establish principles or feminist literary theories for the purpose of re-interpretation or revision of literature, culture and history, including liberal feminism and feminist criticism; and

- 3- Theories that focus on gender differences and policies, including gender studies, cultural feminism, radical feminism, and socialist feminism.

Rise of feminism, in fact, has resulted in serious debates and interest in issues and concerns related to a human being known as a woman, as it examines the cultural and social norms that determined female positions. For this reason, feminism advocated through its early theories the importance of reviving the feminist literature which did not receive sufficient attention at that time. In addition, rights of females to decide their sexual and erotic fate were the core of all debates belong to the feminist theory. Feminists accordingly claim that eroticism leads to woman's superiority not inferiority; it is the means through which a woman can undermine all forms of patriarchal domination. The Sixties and Seventies of the last century also witnessed appearance of such type of writings known as *Feminist Eroticism* to distinguish them from those written by males, which has always dominated the global literature. The *Feminist*

⁶ Kristi, Siegel. *Introduction to Modern Literary Theory: Literary Trends and Influence*.

Erotica can be described then as a result of new awareness began with modernity and went through several stages, and have been associated with what is known now as flesh writings. It thus launched a phenomenon later known as the sexual revolution from a feminist perspective. The feminist erotic writings have played a three-dimensional role: they seized the official patriarchal discourse that continued for a long time. In other words, women became a subject/doer and not an object in the erotic discourse. Women, on the other hand, shared the process of domination and hegemony in discourse which was restricted to men, and therefore they regained the exercise of power.⁷

Since phenomenon of erotica flourished in literature of Western women, and were originally related to women's liberation movements, it has been expected that it would influence Arab women writers, particularly those who have been engaged in women's liberation movements resisting all forms of injustice against women and seeking complete justice and equality between males and females. Amany Abo Rahma referred to the association between these two types of literature (i.e. Western and Arab literature), but she limited it to a mere imitation of western feminist writings by the Arab women writers. Abo Rahma accordingly described the content of these writings produced by such category of Arab women writers as an empty content without any political, social, or intellectual dimensions: "the feminist erotic writing was not the only phenomenon that we have borrowed from Western culture after extracting it from its civilizational, cultural, social, political, and intellectual contexts...."⁸

However, this phenomenon of erotica was received in a hostile manner as it goes between the two literary types: romantic literature and pornography, which tend to portray women's sexual activity as a passive and submissive activity; and that the separating line between romanticism and eroticism, and

⁷ Fadiman, Shawn. "Awaking from Infatuation: a Post-modernist Study." *Aesthetics of Met fiction: critical Studies*. Trans. Amany Abo Rahma. Syria: Ninety Publishing House, 2010.

⁸ Abo Rahma, Amany. "Feminist Writings between Erotica and Phonography." *Sex in Arabian Culture*. Web. 7/7/2015. <http://risalathob.com/threads/211/> between erotica and pornography is a fine line that can be hardly kept. In addition, producing an absolute definition of any of these terms may not be easy because the three terms often overlap, and also because the process of classifying any art or literature as erotic or pornographic depends on many factors and includes the prevailing cultural attitudes. ⁹ In her well-known article, "Erotica and Pornography: A Clear and Present Difference", Gloria Steinem refers to many essential differences between erotica and pornography as stated by many writers; pornography always refers to a special type of narrative or images that portray women's body as a property and commodity, and openly offers and calls for sex. The more the use of obscene language, the closer is the text to phonography than erotica; and the more the use of romantic language to describe the sexual activity, the closer is the text to erotica.¹⁰

Erotica is characterized by its protection and respect for the personal life and individualism of both men and women while pornographic literature neglects and tends to obliterate such individualism. The pornographic writer describes reality as it is as s/he "describes the womanizer and shameless experienced prostitute in a factual rather than fictional style as s/he is not a literary wo/man."¹¹ Erotica writing was employed in feminist literature through the struggle for women's rights and criticism of the society. Thus, the feminist Erotica literature is not limited to words or descriptions within the creative work, but it is a type of literature that seeks to achieve tendencies related to women's rights. In addition, the feminist Erotica literature was not the only phenomenon that Arabic literature had borrowed from Western culture after extracting it from its civilizational, cultural, social, political, and intellectual contexts. This may be justified that the popularity of these writings in Arab countries, especially in the

⁹ Faidmar, Shawn. "Awaking from Infatuation: a Post-modernist Study." *Aesthetics of Metafiction: critical Studies*. Trans. Amany Abo Rahma. Syria: Ninowy Publishing House, 2010.

¹⁰ Gloria, Steinem. " Erotica and Pornography: A Clear and Present Difference." November 1978: 77-80.

¹¹ Al- Aroud, Ahmad. *Controversialism on Nizar Qabbani in Arabic Modern Criticism*. Jordan: Yarmouk University, 2004.

last decade, was not connected to any purposeful literary , cultural, or social movements. Also, the Arab feminist, so to speak , did not achieve any important achievements on the intellectual, social, cultural or family level. Women in the Levant are still suffering from the oppressive patriarchal system , other fundamental problems relating to basic human rights (i.e. the right to education, health care , equal opportunities, freedom of choice and expression, and participation in political life), and the prevalence of violence against females. However, women writers tended to write erotica as well as pornographic writings till it became an obvious phenomenon requiring in-depth study and analysis of the reasons of its appearance and rapid spread away from its civilizational, cultural, social, psychological and political contexts. The literary feminism theory - in the West – asserts that women's literature has to have a complete feminist entity and embodies honestly the woman's experience in order to reflect, in detail, the reality she already lives so as to contribute to raising women's awareness.¹²

Feminist Discourse in Arabic Novel:

The feminist writing refers to those texts written by women and their themes revolve around women. These texts have general and common features, including: ¹³

A. **The Protesting Scream:** All women who portray women's reality and struggle to put an end for all forms of injustice and oppression suffered by women. They think that the Arab community is divided into a bi-one (men - women), and that injustice is suffered by women alone. This perception is part of the truth and not the whole truth because oppression in the developing societies affects everyone whether a man or a woman. On the cultural and literary levels, this protesting scream is reflected through the style of writing in the form of screeches and resistance against traditional and familiar artistic and literary styles symbolizing the rebellion against social constraints.

¹² Eaglton, Mary (ed.). *Feminist Literary Theory: A Reader*. UK, Cambridge: Blackwel, 2010. P. 151.

¹³ Nassib, Fathi. Characteristics of Zeineb Hefny's Short Stories. Web. Blog Post. *Alamatt for Interchange & Discussions*. http://www.aminmazen.com/pegas/index_3lamat-09.htm

B. Feminist Writing - in general - commits sometimes the same flaws that it criticizes. For example, if men perceive women's body as a commodity, feminists in many of their literary texts uphold the value of this body using it as the only weapon through which they can take revenge from men, which results in erotic expressions and emotions in their fictional and poetic literary texts.

The Arab culture anticipates the birth of a new generation of women greatly influenced by Western literature and will present to the Arabic literature numerous pornographic works which explicitly address sexual relationships. However, this does not mean that Arab culture, especially literature, is a copy of Western culture and blindly imitate it. The relationship the two cultures is based on interaction and conscious imitation.

¹⁴ But it is inevitable to say that the study of literary phenomena in modern poetry, novel and criticism, regarding form or content, is difficult if it is isolated from direct and indirect Western cultural influences. It is admittedly that writers of the Pen League, Abolo group, *Shier* (i.e. poetry) magazine, Karkok group, Nazik Al-Mala'ka, Badr Shaker Al Sayyab, Al-Bayati, and Salah Abdel Sabour etc., were influenced by the Western literature in modernizing their literary styles. Many modern creative writers admitted such influence of Western culture on verbal formulation and content of their texts; for example, Abi El Kassem Al Shebbi in his book, *Arab Poetic Imagination*,¹⁵ Badr Shaker Al Sayyab, and Adonis who did not hide in his lectures, which were published by the House of Arts under the title of *Arabic poetry*, that he was influenced by Western literature: "I 'd like to admit here that I was among those who follow the culture of the West, but I was also among those who early gave up of this after being conscious and able to re-read our heritage with a new perspective and realize their independence."¹⁶

¹⁴ Al Newihi, Mohammad. Issue of the New Verse. 2nd ed. Cairo: Al Fikr Modern House,1971. P. 36.

¹⁵ See, Al Shebbi, Abi El Kassem. *Arab Poetic Imagination*. 1st ed. Cairo: Kalimat Publishing House,2013.

¹⁶ See, Darwish, Asima. *Paths of Transformation: Reading Adonis's Poetry*. 1st ed. Beirut: House of Arts, 1992.

If the Western culture has all such influence on Arab literature and its prominent writers, it is natural then to influence the feminist literature and it is normal to find Arab women writers inspired by all types of innovation and creativity produced by the Western culture. Any liberal tendency led by women within the Arab world is perceived as synonymous for vice. For example, *Girls of Riyadh (Banat Al Riyadh)* by Ragaa Al Sanea, *The Others (Alakharun)* by Saba Al Harz, *Features (Malamih)* by Zeineb Hefny from Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, *Outside the Flesh (Kharij Aljasad)* by Afaf Albatanya from Jordan, *Harbors of Illusion (Marafi' Alwahn)* by Leila Al 'Attrash from Lebanon, *Beginning of Love (Asl Alhawa)* by the Tunisian storyteller Hazama Habaieb, *Silence of Butterflies (Sammt Alfarashat)* by Leila Al Othman from Kwuit, *The Little Girl (Algholamah)* and *Female Lovers (Almahbut)* by 'Alia Mamduh from Iraq, as well as Algeria, Morocco, Syria and Egypt. This study is accordingly devoted to answer the following questions: Are literary works

produced by Arab women writers erotic writings or pornographic writings, or they are repercussions of vulgar sexual inhibition? If we say that we live in a post-Freudian time and that the sexual revolution has limited the phenomenon of sexual repression, is it the way to fame, or a reaction to marginalization and exclusion suffered by women in these communities? Is there a relationship between erotica literature and the needs of the Arab citizen who is oppressed and repressed not only sexually, but also politically, socially, economically, psychologically and culturally?¹⁷

Defenders of erotica exert efforts to create legitimacy for erotic writings through their insistence on the presence of erotica writings in Arab literary, historical and religious heritage since long centuries. They support their attitude referring to some old and modern books to assert the historical presence of such erotica in some old and new books as: *Arabian Nights (Alf Leila Wa Leila)* and *Songs (Al' aghani)* by Al Asfahani, and others. In spite of the validity of their claims, the prevalence of this phenomenon

¹⁷ Abo Rahma, Amany. "Feminist Writings between Erotica and Phonography." *Sex in Arabian Culture*. Web. 7/7/2015. <http://risalathob.com/threads/211/>.

of erotica writings by women at this stage cannot be attributed to this Arabian heritage of male erotica writings. This heritage confirms male domination and female objectification, as well as it is not considered literature according to the admitted norms in either the past or the present time, except *Arabian Nights* and *Ring of the Dove*.

Most works which belong to this phenomenon are marked by their defective features of superficiality, intellectual and cultural shallowness, lack of creativity and imagination, poor literary styles, weak structure, poor language, and inferior moral level. These literary defects raise suspicion that these works belong to literature and that they are mere attempts by some women writers who adopt Erotica or pornography as a means for literary fame. On the other hand, those group of women writers have contributed to this increasing perception of inferiority against women which limits women's entity only to a body used to satisfy men's lusts and desires through their depiction of their female characters who run after their sensual pleasures away from spirit, mind and outside any social, cultural and political context. Another shameful aspect relating to works by these contemporary feminist writers is that they boldly exceed all limits in dealing with sexual themes, including frank discussion of the lesbian relations not only as an epidemic phenomenon within conservative societies, but they also give detailed descriptions of these relations through their erotica texts presenting them as something normal and not socially, religiously, or healthily rejected and condemned.¹⁸ So,

it has been expected to find all such protests, denial, indignation and rebuking from critics and readers within the Arab world against these obscene feminist texts. In an article devoted especially to address this issue, Hamid Toulst has briefly introduced perspectives of those interested in this type of literature and referred to their views that: "some of those who are interested in that literature perceive it as a type of literature written for

¹⁸ Abo Rahma, Amany. "Feminist Writings between Erotica and Phonography." *Sex in Arabian Culture*. Web. 7/7/2015. <http://risalathob.com/threads/211/>.

entertainment and telling bed rooms-related stories following the narrative style used by Scheherazade in the *Arabian Nights*. It is regarded within folk discourses as forbidden knowledge associated with scandals, and as sensualist and pornographic writings that encourage masturbation, committing adultery, and sodomy. In contrast, this type of literature is considered by others as a highly qualified type of literature, especially in terms of structural components, and in terms of its themes is a defiled literature."¹⁹ They boldly address lesbian relations as a wide spread phenomenon with detailed descriptions unconcerned by feelings of anger and resentment by their conservative societies. The boldness of their erotica writings thus enabled them to compete with men's creativity depriving them of this aura of uniqueness and domination with which they used to boast and brag for long time.²⁰

However, the feminist discourse in Erotica writings is intellectually weak as indicated through lack of intellectual depth and scientific strength; they are poor writings with weak contents and the reader can clearly observe their weak structure, obscene tone, and "copy paste" expressions like those deprived of the talent and abilities to be true writers. Novels related to this phenomenon cannot be classified as novels in the literary sense. The only common thing between them and real novels is the cover, and the reader can easily discover the difference and literary gap between these novels and their Arabic and English counterpart. This category of novels can be regarded as attempts to imitate novels. Texts written by this group of feminist writers are also based on ready or beforehand ideas and try to pass it into the society as evidenced through its poor language as well as their spelling, linguistic and grammatical mistakes. They are built upon and controlled by one rule, namely moral deviation. Their ideas are always the same regardless the variety of its language or its characters. A critical analysis of these novels

¹⁹ Toulst, Hamid. "Phenomenon of Erotica Writing by Women." *Diwan Al'Arab*. Web. http://www.diwanalarab.com/spip.php?page=auteur&id_auteur=1538.

²⁰ Toulst, Hamid. "Phenomenon of Erotica Writing by Women." *Diwan Al'Arab*. Web. http://www.diwanalarab.com/spip.php?page=auteur&id_auteur=1538.

asserts that this movement of Westernization tends to cause moral chaos under the guise of personal freedom under which prostitution, homosexuality and moral deviation can be shamefully classified.²¹

This of course presents a conclusive evidence of the falsity and artificiality of this feminist erotica literature published by commercial publishing houses in Arab countries only to achieve maximum profits through bombastic slogans as women's rebellion against the patriarchal dominating values and female struggle for freedom; but the reality in fact contradicts these allegations. It is not prohibited to write about body and intimacy relations between men and women if it has an artistic purpose. Global literature itself has elegant examples of erotica literature. There is a separating line between art and non-art, creativity and veraciousness, and between elevated depiction of a lofty love affair and frank sexual narration describing what should not be described. For example, the novels by great writers of the world contain wonderful erotic sections due to the writer's awareness and knowledge of principles of real art that is totally away from any form of vulgarity.

Feminist Discourse in Zeineb Hefny's Erotic Novel, Features:

Technical concepts of feminist creativity, especially in the field of erotica novel, are represented through addressing women's issues. This literary form is accepted if it is used to enrich art or creativity, and if it addresses taboo issues for treatment and solutions in an appropriate context according to norms and traditions established in Arab reality and away from any religious taboos or moral defects. Erotica literature is a lofty art and has its origin in Arabic literature through Algahiz and Ibn Hazm's prose, poetry of Emro'o Elkies, Omar Ibn Rabia, Bashar and Abi Nawas, and in modern literature only few men and women writers who are hailed to be creative in this field, including pioneering and prominent writers as Nizar Qabbani and Ghada Al Semman.

²¹ See, Albadah, Abdul Aziz. *Westernization Movement in KSA: Women's Westernization as a Model*. 1st ed. Cairo: Arabic Center for Humanities, 2010.

Representation of female body has shifted in the feminist discourse of the Gulf erotica novels published in the third millennium from the functional level (which focuses on physical description of the main character, including description of length, skin color, hair, eye shape ... etc.) to a level that seems more able to represent body issues or to the body based on the social sense which expresses self-consciousness, and perception of this body according to culture and norms of the society. According to Kholoud Al Sibie, this shift resulted in discussing issues relating to women's

identity from a cultural perspective without relating the concept of femininity only to physical and sexual features of women.²²

Dealing with women in Saudi novel does not however mean that it represents reality although most Saudi novels, either by men or women, revolve around female characters as in *Features* by Zeineb Hefny. Love themes and female characters are considered the pillars in narrative process; no novel without a woman and no narrative without love. In this regard, various emotional adventures were depicted to tell the story of vigorous emotions and desires in a collision with obstacles and shackles imposed by the society and the patriarchal system which resulted in women's victimization. The problem of this text is its use of pornographic style to achieve popularity at publishing houses as works that attempted to cause a change within the conservative Gulf societies and position of women within these societies, a matter that threatens the credibility of its literary creativity and foreshadowing a type of works organized only for marketing and financial profits.²³

The problematic issue concerning the feminist discourse in the novels by Arab women novelists, especially Zeineb Hefny whose works can be described as feminist strikes against masculinity, is that they always represent their female characters as victims of a corruptive relationship with men, in addition to their detailed descriptions of illegal sexual relations and practices as well as lesbianism.

²² see, Alsibai, Kholoud. *Female Body and Gender Identity*. 1st ed. Rabat: Gadawel Publishing House, 2011.

²³ see, Zeiad, Saleh and Manal Al'weel. "Saudi Cultural Scene: Between a Victorious Novel and a Heroic Reader." *Alkafila Magazine*. No. 26. May – June, 2007.

Hefny addresses in details this phenomenon of lesbianism in her works, using an eloquent, realistic, and simple language that greatly resembles the everyday language (i.e. language of the public), through exciting sexual experiences in her literary works, particularly in her novel titled, *Features*. This obsession with lesbianism, as shown in the novel, has urged the reader to think that Hefny herself is a lesbian. Being a pornographic novel full with sexual and porno scenes is in fact the reason behind the popularity of Hefny's *Features*: "I used to bury my pains in Hind's bosom; is it because each one of us hides such monster of isolation behind her ribs and drinks every morning this bitter cup of loneliness and lost dream! I used to bury my raging feelings of weakness at her soil of weakness to provide me with such feeling that I am still a desirable woman. Hind was always that being who shivers between my hands while practicing my madness with her" (Hefny, *Features* 117).*

In *Features*, Hefny tries to represent an example of a lesbian relationship as a compensating alternative for

the relationship with a man in cases of single/unmarried women as well as those who fell victims of rape. This is represented through the lesbian relationship between Hind and Thuraiya after she (Hind) departed her ex-female partner who left her to marry. It was also Hind's ex-female partner who introduced Thuraiya to Hind. Another example is the character of Samaher who flee into the world of lesbianism after being raped by her father since the age of ten and for five years. Although she imprisoned him, this bitter experience drove Samaher to state: "I wish if I could throw all men into a pit and set on fire" (*Features* 113).

An indicative evidence for Hefny's rebellion and challenge against her society is her words at the very beginning of the first chapter of her novel where she quoted Jean-Jacques Rousseau's words: "On the Day of Judgment, I will stand between the hands of my Creator holding this book in my hands and saying bravely, this is what I thought and did." Rousseau was a French philosopher, writer, and political

* Hefny, Zeineb. *Features*. 1st ed. Beirut: Al- Saki Publishing House, 2006.

analyst whose ideas, works, and social philosophy contributed to the birth of the humanistic revolution, an embodiment of his cultural, intellectual, and profound vision.

Ethical Aspects of Erotica Fiction in *Features*:

It is obvious for readers of Hefny's *Features* such interest in the content at the expense of form and technical elements, a matter that leaves the reader with the impression that body, in such type of literary texts, has become an icon that lost its being and meaning and became restricted only to ideas of excitement, boldness, and immorality, contributing, through one way or another, to tear the masks that the individual wears in front of the community to encounter temptations with an unmasked face. Attempt by these Arabic texts to represent body through writing or by writing about bodily actions, relationship of this body to other bodies, and depiction of the relations between individuals as only based on sexuality neglecting any limits that control such relations as well as social values, ethics, and religious standards which assert privacy and confidentiality of these human relations which should be kept away from any publicity. These attempts in brief are not appropriate or accepted within contexts of reception in Arab and Islamic societies because of their deliberate violation of the unity of the family which contradicts all human standards of nobility and sincere feelings which are not limited to bodily relations. A constructive analysis of the novel indicates that it revolves mainly around body and its related practices. This interest in the body as a dominant element in the novel without paying attention to women's issues, which is supposed to be the ultimate target behind its writing, means that the novel adopts

contexts with traditional styles based on personal visions. This analysis enables fundamental connection between full meaning and the constituting context of the novel's main idea depending on the Freudian vision of literary creativity which implicates that sexual repression is a motivating component for artistic and literary creativity.²⁴

²⁴ see, Swief, Mustafa. *Psychological Principles for Artistic Creativity*. 1st ed. Cairo: Dar Almaarf, 1959. P. 195.

However, Zeineb Hefny could not, in her novel, depict all spiritual, sensual, or physical human emotion in a deeply or attractive manner, nor she could use a poetic language and lofty narrative style without slipping into the abyss of erotic literature. The novel has many unfamiliar frank scenes and suffers from poor imagination, weak artistic techniques, poor language, and intellectual superficiality as it uses pornography as a way to fame. This kind of fiction and stories attracts teenagers intellectually and culturally, that is why it is considered a blind imitation to what is called "literature of lusts" that appeared in Western literature after World War II and popularized after the sexual revolution in the sixties of the last century. Thus, the novel includes, as is the case with Arabic feminist erotic novels, obscene language hardly found even in the most vulgar sexual novels in Western literature, as it tends to what seems exotic to the local community and deviant in terms of human behavior in order to attract attention and easily gain popularity in the literary field.²⁵

It can be asserted that the prevailing model in all these writings is the transformation model, which takes two forms:²⁶

1- Transformation to the renewal and social transformation model through the freedom to choose a life partner instead of assigning this task to a group, the practice of adultery, expressing desires, drinking of alcohol, and accepting the legal status of divorced women which are entirely rejected by traditional society as rejection of spousal betrayal.

2- Transformation within redundancy formed by all types of men through the relation between men outside marriage which may be described as waiving their rights a waiver of them about their right to polygamy, which granted by this tradition.

²⁵ see, Hoshiar, Godat. "Erotica Literature." *Saqya*. Web. <http://www.saqya.com>.

²⁶ Isleem, Mohammad. "Forbidden Writing and Writing the Forbidden in Zeineb Hefny's Narratives." *Feminist Literature in Arabian Peninsula*. Tripoli: Arab Organization for Electronic Media, 4-6/ 11/2008.

However, Zainab Hefny encourages - based on idea of moral, social and cultural Westernization - deviation and rebellion against the traditions and norms of the Arab and Islamic nation. She wants to

convey a message to the self and the Other that women are shackled by iron handcuffs and chains, and that these chains are represented in terms like forbidden (*Haram*) or not accepted socially. She accordingly does not mind that a girl goes through an experience that may bring her shame and rejection from her Arabic community. In an interview with Deutsche Welle, Hefny declares: "I write freely without censorship and do not erase a letter. "She thinks that "Saudi society has become eligible to accept this kind of literature and youth are now insatiable to learn everything because of the impact of the internet."²⁷ Zeinab Hefny believes that "Arab women are controlled by so many customs and traditions, and when she becomes a writer it is an advantage singled out by God for the rest of women to enable them to be free from shackles of traditions by offering her ideas and vision freely. Writing is the world of freedom even on a personal level." Hefny also expressed her pleasure because many women writers are now following her model."²⁸

Hefny always presents rebellious female characters through her works but her depiction of rebellion differs from the traditional type presented by other Gulf women writers. Rebellion in Hefny's works is coated with sexual liberation and she justifies that attitude that she represents a form of human rights. Thus, most forms of rebellion in Zeinab Hefny's novels were against injustice, tyranny, and deprivation suffered by women. It can be considered a call for women's rights from Hefny's point of view, but calls for rights should not be expressed through immorality and indecency, which make women lose their self-respect. Regardless of the purpose of employing sex in her writing, Hefny is famous for her boldness in reality as well as fiction. So, her bold style of writing is considered a reflection of her subconscious thoughts and repressed desires that she enjoys or searches for as she herself always asserts that it is

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<http://www.shorouknews.com/news/view.aspx?cdate=15122011&id=90dec509-041c-4e4a-88a4-2a4913044762>.

²⁸

<http://www.shorouknews.com/news/view.aspx?cdate=15122011&id=90dec509-041c-4e4a-88a4-2a4913044762>.

meaningless to hide these desires as practicing or reading about these desires do not implicate any harm, as Hefny believes.

Narrative Structure in Features:

A thoroughly reading of Hefny's novels elucidates that the writer is greatly influenced by the art of short story and its writing style, especially when she ends her chapters with shocking and exciting events. In *Features*, there is only one event or theme tackled through the relationship between Thuraiya and Hussein, beside some other characters including their son Zaher,

Thuraiya's friends, and Hussin's family. This theme is sex and its relevant actions, reasons, and surrounding conditions. The novelist here deals with events in several ways: the character of Thuriya who narrates the story according to her point of view, the character of Hussin who narrates the same events according to his point of view, adding both events to private details of their lives before marriage and after divorce when each one decides to complete his future alone. Hussin becomes a big businessman in London and Thuriya becomes an owner of a big clothing store in Jeddah.

Hefny adopts in *Features* a technique seems very close to that of William Faulkner's in *The Sound and The Fury* and *In Search of Walid Massoud* by Gibra Ibrahim Gibra.²⁹ The novel includes problematic events and characters and ends with the death of most of its characters. It also depicts a type of life full of a lot of paradoxes. However, the novel in general has many literary defects. It portrays miserable male and female characters and it is shamefully filled with qualities of hypocrisy, lies, falsehood, prosecution, deprivation, and cowardness. The novel succeeds in portraying these painful life experienced by the characters through tracing their origin, portraying their surrounding conditions. The writer thus has shocked us with shameful reality experienced by characters of the novel, and of course will not live by the community that is on its way to solve the problem of sex and all taboo problems. Zeineb Hefny states

²⁹ Al'assfar, Mohammad. "Reading Zeinab Hefny's *Features*." *Feminist Literature in Arabian Peninsula*. Tripoli: Arabic Organization for Electronic Media (4-6/11/2008).

that she read a lot of books in psychology and sociology to depict such types of characters because, according to her point of view, portrayal of any character depends on psychoanalysis. In addition, Hefny asserts that her novel *Features* psychologically addresses man-woman relationships, referring to the great influence of Nawal El Saadawi's book, *Women and Psychological Conflict*.³⁰

A striking aspect in this novel is the excessive death of its characters. The writer deliberately sends her characters into death to get rid of the narrative details that she has to write about these characters if they have remained alive. For example, the death of Thuriya's parents, Hussein's uncle and his wife, Hussein's step brother (Saleh) and his wife who was older than him, character of Zaher (the son), and the main character herself (Thuriya). However, she keeps only the male character alive, the man who destroyed Thuriya's life, and lets him marry a young English girl who delivers him a son (Zaher) in the north with its cold climate. Hefny's *Features* exemplifies how a family can disintegrate and collapse because of a man's exploitation for his wife to get a job and money, accompanied by the showing off traditions of sending

the son for an internal expensive school, a matter that produces a weak and an introvert personality deprived of love and family affection which easily urges him to volunteer in Afghanistan and to die in a suicide attack at the age of adolescence.

The writer seeks through events to clarify how the society adopts clear double standards between conservatism and other hidden aspects of life done behind closed doors where one can find delinquency and women selling their bodies for money. Thuriya is a victim of this hidden or masked face of the society where she drowned in illegal relationships. Zainab Hefny amazingly tells the story of Thuriya as she depicts the reality in the framework of motives of getting money and wealth, and how these motives are used to possess women. The novelist lets events and actions develop through Thuriya's awareness. She addresses relationships between men and women and domination of men, as represented through the

³⁰ "An Interview with Zeineb Hefny." *Feminist Literature in Arabian Peninsula*. Tripoli: Arabic Organization for Electronic Media (4-6/11/2008).

two main characters: Thuriya and Hussein. These two characters share the heroic depth in this novel although the writer added other characters including sons, brothers, sisters, fathers, and mothers. This can be described as a structural building of a novel born from the womb of the writer's thought and came with such a distinguished narrative structure. It is deliberately built on the tragic end of most of its characters, such as the tragic end of their son Zaher at a terrorist attack, so as to let the reader realize that such strong connotation between characters is only flimsy filaments flimsy and thus the reader feels their sins, sorrows, pains in a society that drives them to live reality with its positive and negative aspects: "It is said that our dreams sometimes tell what will happen to us in the future ..." (Hefny, *Features* 9).

In the third chapter of *Features*, life returns to Thuriya and the writer specifies a special scene for her in order to enable her to recall memories and events concerning her past, present, wealth and her son, who rejects her style of life. The writer starts exploration for new themes to surprise her readers perhaps to satisfy his pride, but she had to be more careful not to bring down the level of surprising in the third chapter than in the second one. However, she brings the character of Fouad again to meet Thuriya in an expected scene on a plane flying to London. In my point of view, the writer wants only through this scene to rise Thuriya's lust again that plays a big role in her life and, in this sense, she is able to recall her memories, an issue that gives the writer the right to repeat what she thinks as appropriate to link the events of her novel again. Fouad's return, although expected, causes a surprising mood in the third chapter and gives a pleasant sense of recalling feelings of

yearning inside Thuriya for practicing her lusts with a man as she likes and desires.

In the second section of chapter III, the writer lets her heroine free to shed the light on the mysterious world of women, in which all forbidden things are done in complete secrecy. Being free and without any responsibilities, Thuriya (as the writer wants her to be) has now the opportunity to join world of lesbianism which she discovers by chance: "I accidentally joined world of lesbians; this feeling may find its way into my heart when I met Hind for the first time..." (Hefny, *Features* 110). Focusing on such hidden aspect of the society clarifying lesbian relations between girls in such strange, fragmented and contradictory society indicates boldness of the writer. Later, Fouad returns back to Thuriya to resume their relation in a complete secrecy; and Zaher rejects his mother's type of life and her irrational vision in satisfying her desires through money, women and so on. Zaher then decides to travel to Afghanistan for jihad, leaving a letter to his mother, a matter that readers expected.

In chapter IV, the writer returns back again to the world of lesbians with endless conversations in this regard. For example, the dialogue between Thuriya and Hind, and then the community which goes into Thuriya's world either through purchasing or through bed scenes. The writer, again, recalls through chapter IV memories relating to Thuriya's past life and her first love with Iqbal, who was considered an imaginary love for Thuriya. The writer also takes her readers through this chapter to discover the relationship between Thuriya and her brothers whose great dream is Thuriya's inheritance. Those brothers do not care about her life, lesbianism, her silent or declared lusts as long as the man is away from her life and her inheritance (i.e. their future treasure).

Again, the writer returns back to Thuriya's lesbian relationship, addressing it in detail, and depicts it as the real outlet for the remaining years in Thuriya's life as well as the decisive stage to manage the passage of time and years as she has lost her sense of life. Now she leads a meaningless type of life. Chapter IV ends then with Thuriya's absence from world of lesbians and its details.

In the last chapter of her novel, Hefny addresses social and familial relationships which are reduced with the death of the father who has the ability to bring his children together. This relationships might be ended or vanished with the hustle of life to appear only in weddings, holidays, consolation, disease or inheritance. The writer then lets her reader accompany Thuraiya in all her trips and her travelling for the costly treatment till the few remaining days in her life, and then she surprises her readers with Thuriya's dream in which she regains her son, Zaher, forgetting that he died before this dream. It is in fact the impact of aging and its consequences of loneliness, misery, and pains that Thuriya suffers at the end of this juncture in her life ,

turning then to politics again and US occupation with its strategies of killing Iraqi people since their bleeding country succumbed unwillingly.

Thuriya then died due to physical and psychological paralysis. Although her health was improving slowly, this improvement did not enable her to live longer; she gave in and died in an unsatisfactory, dramatic and miserable condition alone without anybody with her but her Asian maid. Hussein became one of the prominent businessmen in London and obtained permanent residency and eventually married his English secretary who did not exceed twenty-five years old and then gave birth to a boy called Zaher.

Features seems to be the latest model of the plurality of narrators as we have more than one narrator, including: the main narrator represented through the main female character, Thuriya, in Part I, III and V; and the subsidiary narrator who is involved in the story and is one of the characters as represented in Part II through the character of Hussin and in Part IV through the character of Hind; and the narrator of narrators as chapter VI.

There is a present narrator who uses the pronoun "I" but this presence is divided based on his participation in the story. Accordingly, there is a self-narrator like Thuriya, an observing narrator who witnesses events and participates as Hussin and Hind; and a narrator who is not included in the story, or what is known as "external narrator."

As for the character of Thuraiya, she is considered a first person narrator and a main/pivotal character in the story. Using the pronoun "I", Thuriya narrates with her female voice how her childhood was financially poor but emotionally rich. This financial deprivation stained her heart with feelings of jealousy towards her friends, including Noor. A girl with a socially and financially persecuted self, Thuriya finds in her pushy husband an opportunity to get rid of her social and psychological situation which resulted in her feelings of self-split and conflict between the social and emotional values that she had learned in her father's house that she should respect and appreciate marriage and be a loyal wife, on one hand, and between her desire to escape from poverty to a rich and open world. That is why her desires became in a harmony with her husband's desires, and she accordingly took advantage of her body and her beauty to join the high classes. Although she already realized her dream, Thuraiya, in turn, lost her relationship with her husband, son, family and the whole community and lived a world of lesbianism and moral depravation till she died alone in her house.

- **The Narrator:**

The narrator is defined by Mario Vargas Llosa as "an always different figure, an outcome of literary imagination the same as other characters (i.e. about whom he narrates the story) but he is more important."

Types of Narrators:

1- First Person Narrator (a character in the story);

2- An omniscient or an all knowing narrator who has access to all the actions and thoughts within fiction without being included in the story.

3- The confusing narrator. He is termed like that because we do not know either he is an internal narrator or an external one.

The first two types are more traditional and more familiar than the third one which has been produced by modern fiction. Pronouns vary according to the narrator type: the third person narrator uses the pronoun "he" or "she" and does not take part in the story, the first person narrator uses the pronoun "I" to tell the story, and the second person narrator uses the pronoun "you".³¹

In *Features*, Zeineb Hefny uses rotation between the first pronoun "I" and the third pronoun "S/He", while the second pronoun "You" was rarely used. However, the first person pronoun "I" is mostly used through the first person narrator(s). In the first section, which is chronologically former, the female voice, as presented through the character of Thuraiya, dominated as the writer tends to exemplify

³¹ Liosa, Mario Vargas. *Messages to a Young Novelist*. 1st ed. Trans. Saleh Almani. Beirut: Dar Al Mada, 2005. Pp. 44-45.

through this female character women's reality and their relationship with men. The narrator here plays the role of an objective observer, someone who keeps a distance between herself and other characters she narrates about so as to narrate neutrally about them. Here the role of the narrator is limited to storytelling as she does not intervene with her point of view. The second section is narrated through the first person pronoun "I" through which the male character is presented. In the third section, however, the writer mutually uses the first pronoun "I" and the third pronoun "S/He" where the writer abandons her neutral technique that she was committed to in the first two sections and showed which caused a confusion for many readers and critics that the writer is herself the narrator.

The narrative structure is embodied by the third person pronoun through narrated parts in the context of introducing the character, and in other parts through the first person pronoun which is used for self-expression in a context full of a more psychological views because of the matching between "I" of the narrator with "I" of the character. This matching has three forms:

- the co-narrator (a woman narrates celebrating her body). This form is associated with the self- dialogue scenes (a woman talking to herself).

- External – Dialogue scenes and their free direct style (the woman tells others, either an individual or a group , about herself).

- (To a lesser extent) with the outside narrator to tell about the fictional character.

Female's celebration of her beauty and body appears frequently in the novel; and is not an ordinary celebration, but a necessary one as it enables the female character to achieve multiple goals, mostly with physical significance. So, the body seems , according to Abdullah Ibrahim , as "a motivating factor for events and a subject for the plot, which attracts other elements of the narrative structure and redistribute them in the narrative space"³², in addition to being a tool for personal growth and complexity.

³² Ibrahim, Abdullah. *Modern Arabic Narration: Semantic and Narrative Structures*. 1st ed. Beirut: Arabic institution for Studies and Publishing, 2013. P. 167.

Self-narration in the novel consists of three basic forms³³:

- Self- narration by Thuriya;
- Self- narration by Hussin; and
- Self- narration by Hind.

If the narrative is based on three self-narratives, it appears through two models: the parallel narrative where each character tells about its world, psychological impulses, and the social constraints that mimicked its character and psyche; the second model is the contextual narrative which means that there is a central story, that is Thuriya's story, and this story includes other subsidiary stories which appear according to its priority and domination, such as: Hussin's story (as a husband and divorced), and the story of Hind (the lesbian) who suffers sexual and familial/social repression.

In *Features*, Zeineb Hefny chose to make the narrator tells the story directly and make this narrator one of the characters. Here the difference between the internal and external narrators appears clearly. The former is linked to autobiography and here the author intermediates between the narrator and the character, and the boundaries between them disappear; while in the second model the narrator is a character in the novel. This can be clarified as follows:

- Self- External Narrator: (reality), where the author narrates her own autobiography using the pronoun "I";
- Self- Internal Narrator: A character tells its imaginative story using the pronoun "I", including characters of Thuriya and Hussin in *Features*; and
- Self-Internal Narrator: including characters of Hind, Noor, and Iqbal.

It is worth noting that *Features* is dominated by the consequent narrative in which the narrator tells events

preceded the narrative time. This type of narration is manifested through the frequent use of the past tense and the emergence of the phenomenon of spatial description in detail.

³³ Motassem, Mohammad. "Internal and External Self-Narrators." *Magazine of Literary Critics*. Rabat (October, 2010).

A prominent aspect in *Features* is the absence of the narrative time although there are signals which refer to specific political events, such as Palestinian Crisis, the war in Afghanistan, the Gulf War and Iraq's invasion of Kuwait, and attacks of September 11 in America .. etc. The writer uses various important issues: war, politics, and world issues where she makes the reader remember important events without feeling distances and borders. She has been able to recall the war of 1967 without confusing the reader's mind with ideas. She lets the reader hear the dialogue that was going on between the family members of Thuriya or listen through radio to the news of war and its consequences; and she continues to address the repetitive political issues: Palestine, Israel, Afghanistan, and Iraq..., these areas which are always infested with weapons, dead and murdered people which drive their inhabitants to escape for other cities in the world and share their sorrows with each other. Surprisingly, the writer talked about the war without citing deaths or martyrs or even expresses her deep sadness toward the stricken peoples.

The novel depends many times on specific time to historicize narratives of the characters who narrate about their own lives. As for the element of place, it is embodied through the movement of the characters in specific places during narrating about important events such as Mecca, Jeddah, London, Paris and Cairo, "I do not exaggerate if I say that winter in Jeddah does not visit us, but in the months of January and February, which is not cold winter..." (Hefny, *Features* 7). The place, around which events revolved is the city that resembles human features with its abundant and diverse races, but it keeps the place where Thuriya was born and her mother brought her up according to family and social conservative rules; a city that resembles the sailor. The writer was not attracted to this place only because it was the place where she was born and where she lived, but because it has all desires and all contradictions. The novelist added Makkah beside Jeddah. This connotation between place and time asserts the courage of the writer to declare the place and time of the events to attract the reader's attention for women's issues within the local community. It is known that there is a chronological time which is quite fixed time, such as year, day, and daytime... etc, and there is a psychological time swinging in a different way depending on our emotions.

Special places for optional residency are included within the concept of diodes (poverty /richness), including:

* **Places of poverty:** represented in the novel by more than one place which reflect the time periods in which the characters have passed within the novel, including the house of Hussin's uncle where Hussin has lived in Mecca before the death of his uncle, his marriage, and before moving to Jeddah. He says, "I and Saleh used to sleep in one room; Saleh at his small metal bed and me on an old mattress on the floor" (Hefny, *Features* 61).

- The Family House where Thuriya lived before marriage. The husband describes this place and its poor stuff saying, "When I visited the house, it was not difficult to guess that they belong to the lower middle class; the apartment was less than normal" (Hefny, *Features* 84). Thuriya also described it saying, "Our house was located in Al Baghdadia neighborhood, a modest apartment in an old building overlooking the main street ... I remember the difficult question: how can happiness join a house that lacks money? I was afraid that Nora comes to visit us and sees my humble bedroom which corresponds a small space in her room, or to see our old furniture ... I subconsciously compare between my narrow bedroom, which is densely populated by a lot of people, and which equates half the size of our apartment" (Hefny, *Features* 16).

- The Husband's/Hussin's House: which was a poor place at the beginning as she describes, "Does my ambition stop at the borders of this narrow apartment and cheap furniture. Our apartment was modest" (Hefny, *Features* 47).

* **Places of Richness,** including the following features:

- The villa / the house by divorce where Thuriya lived with her husband Hussin after he was promoted in his work. It reflects the social and economic transformation of the family. Hussin says, "We bought a villa (...) located on the Corniche in Jeddah, one of the stylish and modern neighborhoods at that time" (Hefny, *Features* 53).

- The villa / after divorce). Purchased by Thuriya and then she turned it into a business venture at which she runs her investments. Thuriya describes it saying, "It was a small villa that I bought at the same neighborhood where I live, and I allocated it to open a big tailoring in addition to the clothing business" (Hefny, *Features* 115).

- Nour's House/before Thuriya's marriage: This house represents the spatial contrast to the house of the poor family through which Thuriya used to hold a comparison between her house and that luxurious house which reflects differences between the two social class. Thuriya says, "When I visited the house of Nour, who invited me to her party, I was astonished by such level of luxury, everything reflects such luxury that I have never seen in my life [...] She took me to her bedroom. The room was spacious with a small balcony overlooking the garden [...] we sat on the bed [...] when I sat down on the bed, I bogged down into its mattress. I remembered my metal bed and how my

mother tries from time to time to stuff its cover with cotton to make it comfortable for our backs during sleeping"(Hefny, *Features* 26).

The difference between the time of past events and the time of present events is clarified through the long time duration between the two periods. The characters of Thuriya, Hussin and Hind started from the present to recall past memories in order to narrate their stories. They all agreed on the importance of the past to explore the special worlds of the psyche which produced the self in its present status. Returning back to the time of the story, we find that it takes about sixty years for the main narrator, Thuriya. This time duration can be divided into the following stages: family life duration which covers twenty years. During that stage, Thuriya suffered financial and social poverty, and the result was her feeling of jealousy, she says, "now I am almost twenty years old with a secondary school certificate"(Hefny, *Features* 41). The marriage stage which covers fifteen years. In this stage, Thuriya married Husain, a pushy guy. He trades on her beauty to join high classes; she says, "Why do I feel the fear creep into my heart? Is this because I am to start a different life after I got used for fifteen years to having a partner in my life?" (Hefny, *Features* 13).

The stage of divorce / and after divorce: This stage covers twenty-five years. That stage witnesses Thuriya's transition from one relationship to another, whether with men or women. She has lost all moral values to end her life alone as a patient at her home only with her maid. She says, "After my divorce from Hussein and moving in my new villa, I was to arrange my life plans again"(Hefny, *Features* 103).

Language of the novel:

Although Zeineb Hefny's *Features* is sometimes harshly criticized for its intellectual and cultural superficiality, creative and imaginative poverty and its poor style and language, an objective and neutral critical analysis shows that it, like any literary work, has some creative and artistic linguistic structures that the writer developed to express the horror of reality, negative phenomena, and human feelings related to body adopting literary style, puns, and, sometimes, a passing reference for sexual practices, and on other times we find the writer describes these sexual practices in detail. This has resulted in a romantic and poetic description of sexual encounters which enabled the novel to be closer to erotica novels. In my point of view, the problem with Hefny's novels, especially *Features*, is that sex is employed catastrophically which may be interpreted based on her interest in man-woman relationship and taboo issues in the society. Some critics sometimes see that there is nothing wrong with Hefny if she dared and addressed secret and hidden issues, that rarely discussed, developing for them direct and frank verbal contexts exactly as uttered by common people in real life and as found commonly in inherited utterances, away from any formality and

outside boundaries of conventionality based on necessity and requirements of events, purpose, or the artistic necessity.

It is also necessary to mention that using frank and direct narrative language here, with its exciting properties, not only adds vitality to the sexual theme, but also provides readers with a pleasant sense with its tone and rhythm if it is employed in an appropriate context. Such sense of pleasure caused by the narrative language seems to be similar to that caused by poetic language resulted in such feelings of ecstasy and mirth, especially in the hearts of poets. Although there are some linguistic gaps in the novel, we should appreciate the writer's adherence to using a good Arabic narrative language and that she does not follow other writers who abandon the classical language and use slang language in their works.

The novel is also characterized by its easy and interesting style as it adopts an easy language, selective sentences, and easily conveys the required message to the reader. Adopting such flexible and easy narrative style and the expressive language of positive and negative aspects in reality, and description of events and lusts with minimum number of phrases have attracted and entertained the reader, especially in the last chapter where the writer uses easy language to describe the real story with all its details in a way that touches the reader's heart and enables him to follow the events without exerting any intellectual efforts or doing any intellectual brainstorming. It can be said that the writer was able to attract the reader through her elegant philosophy.

In the last lines of the novel, the writer decided to make her heroine free for a life full of surprise and aging, using very strong semantic phrases. The writer changed her style of language in the final stages of her story and resorted to her culture and her private lexicon to use such statements as: (Do they have also suffered aging?) And (some others were buried in aging sands and desert); rich statement extracted from her great private lexicon as if she wanted to tell the reader that this writing style belongs to Zeinab Hefny and her great luxurious dictionary. With all these positive points in Hefny's novel, I think it would be much better if she used her literary talent to treat or, at least, contribute to treatment and solution of these problems instead of immersing her characters in lusts and sinful relations. In my point of view, Hefny just highlighted the problematic issues and this is not the required role of any writer who is interested in prosperity of his/her society.

Stylization of the Fictional Writing:

The novel of *Features* refers to the conflict between the writer's ideas and the traditional aspect of life as well as conditions of life and progress in general due to the presence of education, press and relative openness

to the movement of culture. Saudi novel has witnessed a very important development and the writers used this form to express the events and issues of the society, adopting this fictional narrative style and setting up the plot of their works with their depiction of different characters. In Zeinab Hefny's case, there are no ambiguous structures or forms as she adopts an important technique in the fictional narrative process based on various images that finally portray the relationship between men and women and the shock of first discovery as well as the nature of relations that led to her divorce and familial breakdown, which was beyond a life struck with a rift.

The novel develops special language and style as it is built upon direct narration and bold expressions which refer to a distinguished writer with an exciting experience. The stylization is embodied, as a unique technique and a specific style, in the selection of images and metaphors. Wayne Moore, for example, associates between the metaphors used by the novelist and the social circumstances she belongs to, referring to the lifestyles of the community of women. There is an instinctive and innate trend that can be attributed to the woman as indicated through her use of specific images and specific forms of language and therefore may justify the repeated reference to certain symbols in feminist writings due to this feminist or instinctive feature. This is reflected in the symbolic employment of the language in women's creative writings and self-expression through endless symbolic idioms requiring a professional critic to be aware of secrets of language and its meaning as this language turns into a symbolic system, as Julia Christivia terms, to become a space for signs which "make fiction show hidden meanings of the language, mainly variety and diversity of instincts."³⁴

³⁴ Christivia, Julia. *The Text Theory*. Trans. Farid Alzahi. 3rd ed. Casablanca: Tobiqal Publishing House, 2014. P. 34.

The female character in *Features* has a particular style which indicates that the cultural structure of women is the most powerful factor in the formation of some images and metaphors. Thus, many heroines in the novels written by Arab women writers were found to be familiar with unfamiliar practices outside boundaries of our familiar social context. However, the narrative structure in *Features* suffers some weakness, especially in the character of Thuriya who talked about the conviction of her parents for being poor, and their carefree life that they lived, but she did not explain why she was different or why she rejected such poverty, as if she felt it was enough to mention that poverty was the reason to sell her body for money. In addition, Thuriya did not also justify why her husband, Hussin, agreed and supported her shameful behaviour to get the money, positions, and relationships that make him rich. The novel only allows him to tell his story. Although

the character of Thuriya is more convincing than the character of Hussin because she relates her resistance with the social reasons, Hussin's character follows the same technique of clarity and directness away from any artistic confusion. It is obvious through her novel that revealing hidden sexual deviations in the behavior of individuals does not make a novel alone even if this novel becomes famous due to this disclosure of sexual deviations, or if it text is printed more than once as a result of the curiosity of the readers to see expressions of feminists concerning the hidden feminist sexual relations. Transformation of the character from protesting into rebellion cannot be considered a complete transformation until we observe a transition from the direct approach to art. Most feminist novelists resorted to such direct approach using the first person narrating style as exemplified through the narrator in *Features*, Thuriya, and as in other novels. This character tends to be the only narrator in the novel addressing the readers directly to introduce herself and tell them the social reasons that motivated her for such rebellion, as well as her personal reasons that led to the rebellion, using the first pronoun for narrating. The problem with this novel is its inability to convince the recipient with what it presents. She tells the recipient about her feelings and desires, referring to the conditions of her family without creating the required images to portray these feelings and desires.³⁵ In addition, the novel avoids complicated images and structures and uses an easy style. It is also characterized by its suspense which stems from the plot and raises the reader's curiosity. The novel includes chapters and scenes organized in a none - acerbic irony with tragic and comic paradoxes at the same time.

Semantics and their Signified Meaning:

-The Title:

The writer chose this title to be in a harmony with the underlying meaning. She did not intend to shock the reader or astonish him by such title; she just chose it to be the axis that she can use to go through other axes in the novels. This title also enables us to predict the nature of storytelling in the novel as Zeineb Hefny provides here features of the other hidden world, of what lies behind the impregnable walls of her society; those impregnable walls which were built upon former perceptions and prejudices that have been criticized by those who are fascinated by norms and culture of the West, where you find – according to her viewpoint – a closed and conservative society, dealing firmly with everything that offends public decency.

- Names:

Names of the characters in the novel reflect the type of the character. For example, the name of Thuriya, which means in Arabic language richness and supremacy, reflects Thuriya's ambition for richness and supreme type of life. Hussin also is a name derived from beauty in Arabic language and in the novel we find that Hussin is a handsome man.

However, other characters' names do not match their reality. For example, Zaher is a name that means prosperous and flowered as an indication of prosperity, beauty, and happiness, but we find that the character of Zaher, the son, is the opposite to all these optimistic features as he was unlucky since his birth to his death.

³⁵ Al Faisal , Samar Rouhy. "Transformation of the New Gulf Feminist Fictional Character". Arrafid Magazine. Sharja: Department of Culture & Information. Web. http://www.arrafid.ae/192_p17.html.

- **Body signs:**

The novel has semantic and symbolic contexts which are as important as the linguistic ones, including symbolic contexts with a sociological dimension such as the art of tailoring and fashion, techniques of sitting at public places, eye contact as an "language indicative" to circumvent the outlawed, and using other body organs in space, such as different positions of legs to express the relaxed mood or shyness. "I was still wearing a robe over my bed gown; it was clear that I have just got up with my hair scattered on my back ... etc." (Hefny, *Features* 7).

These Symbolic systems and contexts can be innocent , childish and express satisfaction and femininity; and they can also be misused. Purity does not conflict with natural femininity/ womanhood if it is not resulted from it; while misusing and misunderstanding of these contexts perceives all symbolic as shameful, especially if they are related to women's behaviours.

- **Characters' Motions:**

Thuriya is the heroine who starts the novel and she is also the character who ends it. She is the pivotal character who spent her life between the arms of men, and in the search for prosperity and wealth despite her low social status. She is the woman who invoked all the ways and means to get Nour and live with her in order to explore life style of high classes. She expresses this saying, "I wish I had a wealthy fellow, such as those I see on my way to school" (Hefny, *Features* 23). Then, another female character is introduced, namely Nour. Nour is a rich, beautiful, and smart girl who who lives her reality spontaneously and not artificially as Thuriya. The writer attempts through *Features* to emphasize presence of instinctive lusts that the girl is born with, indicating that there is no way to escape temptations of a young man who satisfies her feminine being and her desires even if he does not touch her body.

In the second chapter, the writer hastily recalls the history of Thuriya's husband, Hussin, to whom she chooses Mecca to be his city. He was born as a tramp who came to life to find himself alone and live on remnants of milk , mercy and compassion provided by

his uncle's wife. This uncle was a harsh man who denied Hussin's rights in inheritance and trade of his father, claiming that he bought everything from Hussin's father before his death. This chapter is characterized by its sad and tragic tone where the character appears as a tragic hero in a movie because of the painful and tragic type of life that he leads. In fact, chapter II indicates the writer's geniality and her ability to portray a dramatic narrative scene in accordance with reader's appreciation. In this chapter, Hefny depicts aunt as a merciful woman, while his uncle is depicted as a harsh man as well as a tyrant: "I shed too much tears on her. I never felt I am an orphan till she died. She was my mother, and I did not have another mother but her. My biological mother was just a picture or drawing, but my aunt was the beautiful reality..."(Hefny, *Features* 76/77).

- **Semantics of the Face:**

The writer was able to produce a spontaneous, not complicated, dialogue between Thuriya and Nour on young men. However, the reader was unable to discover the underlying meaning behind Nour's question to Thuriya if she has a boyfriend or not: "We talked about many things and Nour was very bold, her way of thinking looks older than her real age. She astonished me when she suddenly asked: 'Do you have a boyfriend?'; I felt shy and shook my head to tell her, 'no'. ..." (Hefny, *Features* 26). The reader will later discover that this question was paving the way for other big issues. The writer let her reader to go through developing stages with the character, starting from the state of shyness when the girl was asked such bold question, which indicates that the writer has such ability to attract her reader's attention without causing any confusion or distraction for his ideas.

External Narrative in Features:

The writer's writing style depends on autobiography in form and content. The novel is mostly narrated through the pronoun "I" by a female character, in addition to the novelist herself who is considered the top narrator. It is perceived through the novel that the writer has a special viewpoint which is not compatible with the nature of Saudi society, nor with its privacy and its distinctive details, in spite of the diversity of social classes within the Saudi society, including the poor as well as the rich. On the other hand, the nature of this society appears clearly through social and familial relations which are not much different than in other Arab societies, especially concerning the relationship between Thuriya's parents. This asserts that Saudi society resembles all other Arab societies concerning traditions , customs, and behaviors; and that it is like all world communities in its human issues which revolve around love and hatred, poverty and wealth, truth and lies, supremacy and humbleness, and all other oppositional binaries. The novel uses the self/ individual aspect to talk about life and its details. The reader feels that when he reads

those confessions by male and female characters and realizes that they are abnormal. The novelist emphasizes this self-aspect through her use of the first pronoun "I" to allow her characters to talk about their lives in a way that makes the reader feel that there is no escape but to believe them. Also, the writer left some signs through the names and events that lead the conscious reader to realize that events of the novel occurred between social strata that share the same beliefs and culture, or perhaps it is the novelist's culture and her social background that give such impression without being fact. Her aim is to identify the Self in the novel presented through the first person pronoun "I", which agrees with or differs from the pronoun "I" used by the author as an external narrator. Also, the personality of the writer as an external narrator should not be confused with the internal narrator who is a character in the novel and whose presence can be felt through its subjective appearance and its artistic formation within the novel.

In this regard, Dr. Abdullah Alfaifi - a poet and critic, and a member of the Saudi Consultative/Shura Council - expresses his critical viewpoint about the novel and its writer's attitude towards the characters, saying, "some feminist writings may do the opposite of what they call for and the situation is worsened by cunning of the male community, which results in worse portrayal of women that cannot be accepted by women themselves as they are portrayed as creatures no brains, conscience, consciousness, or humanity. This is exactly what Hefny's works, especially *Features*, do with women's image. To violate the legality of the literary work, employing it to convey an ideological discourse (this discourse is related here to Feminism), violating all legal means to achieve this target, including maximizing trivial things and minimizing great things as done through any revolutionary discourse. This prevents the noble message for which the text was organized. For example, the main female character, Thuriya, in *Features*, is portrayed as a depraved person, not only morally, but mentally as well; and in that, of course, great distortion of women's mentality and personality. Thuriya was portrayed as an easy prey for her and, later, her husband's destructive ambition and exploitation. Strangely, she has not exerted any effort to change and remained the same till the last moment in her life. She spent all her life amenable to her desires, ambitions, and lusts till her miserable end. She never listens to her conscience and spent her life indulgent in her lusts, even after she became with no need to satisfy these lusts, but she deliberately employs her wealth and experience for further discovery, or as she said, "moving between gardens as butterflies!" (Hefny, *Features* 148). This denies the credibility of perceiving her as a victim of poverty or the society. How to perceive her as a victim if she remained the same person before marriage and after marriage, before divorce and after divorce, before wealth and

achievements of dreams and after wealth and achievements, and in or outside her local community. She remained the same till her death. In contrast, Hussin, her husband, changed as he listened to the sound of his conscience. He repented and was crying and suffering, even during their experience as a couple. Also, the character of Fouad, Thuriya's boyfriend, finally woke up, changed his speech, and started to talk about family while he was advising Thuriya (Hefny, *Features* 152).

This may drive the reader to exclaim about what the writer did with the character of Thuriya! Men are depicted as rational figures who resort to the language of reason and values, while the woman - as represented through the novel - remains a weak figure with no will, personality, or rationality. She is the real enemy against herself. Are women really such diabolical creatures? Of course "No", but Hefny herself has not been able to come out of the social-patriarchal dictionary through her portrayal of a Chehrzad-like character who takes seduction as a weapon. The character of Thuriya is further considered worse than that of Chehrzad because seduction for her is no longer a means, but it becomes for her an end for further goals. She has failed to be a loyal daughter, a caring mother, or a good wife, as she says, "I am a selfish mother whose baby does not have a share in her life, but I blame my husband who exploits me to achieve his desires. I sometimes ask myself with deliberate maliciousness: would he succeed to dominate me if was not an easy prey?!" (Hefny, *Features* 123).

It is a fair trial where Thuriya is condemned firstly and then all other women; a fair trial based on the reality introduced in the novel, not the actual social reality. For example, the novel presents positive examples of women as Hussin's aunt and Thuriya's mother who lived the reality of poverty and social pressures, more severe than that of Thuriya, but their difficult circumstances did not urge them to do as Thuriya. Accordingly, revelation of both poverty and social repression shows that Thuriya is an abnormal figure, not only due to the reasons mentioned by the writer to exaggerately defend Thuriya, condemning the community economically and educationally through her discourse.

In fact, Thuriya's character can be found in various communities, which means that the text has selected a human model and exaggerated in depicting its reality in order to stigmatize the whole community and attribute her failure to the failure of the public system. These technical defects explain why *Features*, at the cultural level, goes contrary to the direction which the author previously declared that the novel was written for constructive purposes. At the technical structure level, although the story is repeated by each character, the reader feels that he stands in front of adjacent mirrors through which he sees the private world of each character. For this reason, the writer specified a chapter for each character. Although this may be criticized as

redundancy, the writer was genius in her depiction of the psychological conflict and environmental conditions of the characters, especially the character of Hussein; although she sometimes let her characters utter some philosophical statements that echo the

writer's voice not the characters' voices, which sometimes look inappropriate to intellect of these characters.³⁶

Sociology of the Novel:

Zeineb Hefny tends through her novel to criticize the contradictions within the local community, according to her point of view, adopting the sociological approach. However, she introduced herself as I was: a dinky who deserves contempt or a great figure with elevated intellect," in an attempt to add a sense of objectivity and impartiality. This however has resulted in discrepancy with the method that the writer used when she resorted to eroticism to unveil a macho society whose women collide against each other, even if Thuriya (the heroine) in the novel is able to fool this society and control its own destiny. There are numerous references in the novel to customs and traditions of Saudi society and self-insurgency of hated habits by refusing them and then justifying them, on one hand, or to be influenced by the Western thought and foreign culture, on the other hand. Although the novel, as perceived by its author, addresses the hidden aspects within Saudi society, but it is an unjust and irrational attack against the conservative Saudi society. Mainstream models cannot be applied here exclusion will lead to prevalence of anti-thought, lack of understanding of reality, and rejection of the corrective vision of the current situation. The Saudi writer, Gaber Mohammad Modkhali, has expressed that in his article, "Reading Zeinb Hefny's *Features*"³⁷: "from the first moment you hold the book, you feel you are between the arms of sensual red nights, or you face the humanitarian eclipses that will attack our society, a society from which the writer chose a picture for the cover of her novel including a metaphysical man wearing black, or female features in the face of this metaphysical man. In the second edition of the

³⁶ Alfifi, Abdullah. "Courses". *Al Jazira Magazine*. The Cultural Attaché (Monday, 25 June, 2007).

³⁷ Modkhali, Gaber. "Reading Zeinb Hefny's *Features*." *Arram Magazine*. <http://www.zhauthor.com/html/2007.htm>

novel, which Saudi bookstores refused to sell – except in rare cases- you feel how the publisher feels satisfied when he offers the novel through its back cover to display the following words:"If only I have the conviction that life is overcrowded with men like my father, are able to make the lives of their wives happy even if money does not visit their life...etc."(Hefny, *Features*, back of the novel's hardcover."

In the last chapter of the novel, the writer uses a language that implicates such sociological and social dimensions. She addresses the reader through a metaphysical separation between her and him, using the conscience of the silence, saying, "This is the end of dreams and life of luxury that a man wishes and follows in ways contrary to his principles, dogma, doctrine, and the nature of human beings who are divided into the poor who eats and drinks and the rich who eats and drinks as well, but with differences."

The social dimension experienced by the community is an unfortunate side and the writer masterly depicted it. However, "the tone of shaming, revealing, and confrontation with taboo escalates in some texts to reach the degree of challenging and violent clash with constants and holy aspects, which converts the text entirely to an ideological discourse devoided from any aesthetic elements."³⁸

A close reading of Hefny's works indicates her resisting attitude against social norms based on Islamic teachings, such as separation between men and women and male authority. She always attempts through her characters (males and females), who belong to all social classes, to violate all taboos within the society. She does not only allow men to mix with women, or vice versa, but she also permits them to practice sex without marriage, including single, married, divorced, widowed and widower males/females, as in her novel *Features*. That means that chastity and noble masculinity are severely attacked and violated in her works. The novel ends properly with a social life full of contradictions, where lesbianism matured at a time when hunger and misery have an interesting taste and the sense of honorable and pure life can not be restored even with the time machine.

³⁸ Al Dammen, Samaher. "Challenging Taboos in Saudi Feminist Novels." *Alwassat Bahraini Newspaper*: No.1911 (Friday, 30 Nov.2007).

Conclusion:

It is obvious that at the time that Hefny's writings violate all prohibited things in Islam and prevailing rules and conditions within the society, they establish for a new culture with new values, for another law that is of modernity which imposed itself as a global value since colonial extension to the present day through various ways. It also seems that Hefny's thoughts have influenced many contemporary Saudi women writers for more than twenty years. But is this a safe condition? If the future alone can answer this question due to the struggle between modernity and traditionalism, there are some indicators that encourage optimism such as the decision taken by the authorities to prevent writing with Hefny's writings and writings by those who follow her example. It is a neutral attitude where these writings are not prohibited but not allowed. Iraqi critic, Mohammed Al-Obeidi, sees that "the reader feels when he is writing Hefny's writings that she attempts through her themes to

familiarize the process of sex, but in a dialectical context. The reader observes in her novels that she writes only about sex, although in other cultures of the world, writings are used to address prominent themes whether through old arts as displayed through wall paintings or old sculptures. The literary text was the main focus for these writings as sex is the main focus at Zeineb Hefny's writings."³⁹

The writer mistakenly thinks that she can delude the reader that she addresses a mentally troubled world and a marginalized social group which exists and imposes its presence in the community. The writer has chosen to talk about personality to stand firmly on the pedagogical reasons and return to stage of childhood and self - constitution.

This novel does not claim to provide fancy images away from reality even if some writers claim that. The novel with its constituting characters and events assert that representation of reality, based on the writer's perspective, is the main purpose of the literary work and its constituting components. It is not pure fiction because it addresses reality. The writers write their novels to mirrorize/reflect the reality.

³⁹ Al Obidi, Mohammad. "Zeineb Hefny". *Aklam Magazine* (April 7, 2006).

However, the type of novels they produce presents a distorted mirror of the reality instead of reflecting its real image. This type of novels increases and decreases, minimizes and maximizes the details represented about the reality according to their writers' mood. Through their suspected storyline, they deliberately falsify truths, slander, fraud, and develop a new reality plagued with illegal actions and place it instead of the real one which is based on chastity. Corruption may be manifested in any community but the problem with these writers is that they highlight the ugliest parts of the truth and claim that this is the truth. For example, Zeineb Hefny's novels portray conservative societies as erotic societies dominated by all types of illegal and degraded behaviours before and after marriage. The society is depicted in her novels as if it is a stronghold for adulterers and the adulteress.

As noted in *Features*, the main focus is on homosexuality as it revolves around a morally and religiously perverted couple. The husband pushes his wife to the arms of his bosses at work to gain promotions and higher positions. The wife, in turn, rushes into this path of lusts exerting her body for other

men rather than her husband. The story of this couple presents moral degradation as a common path in the community to get career positions. In order to confirm that she does not present an abnormal image, the writer goes further in her description about this shameful image, a matter that increases its ugliness which drives the reader to think that these sinful and shameful actions are common and practiced by men in our society if they need to get promoted in a job; so anyone who got a high position should have been sacrificed his wife's body.⁴⁰

In an interview with a cultural magazine, titled *AAfaq*, Zeineb Hefny has stated that erotic literature is not new to our culture as it exists in our cultural heritage. She also adds that she has no objection if young literary men and women write this type of literature if their aim is to unveil the negative aspects in the society. The Saudi novelist, Zeineb Hefny, later asserts that she does not feel regret "and will never

⁴⁰ see, Al Ojiri, Abdullah Bin Saleh. From Absurdity of the Novel: Perspectives from Reality of Saudi Novels. www.dawahmemo.com.

feel regret because of any letter I wrote with my pen because I write out my convictions. Unfortunately, the Arab personality is based on self-flagellation and bashing of others, and love digging all the time in graves of the past." She also states that, "Yes, I am a pioneer in uncovering hidden aspects inside the Saudi society; I am also the first one who opened the door for such form of erotic literature that exists today within our Saudi cultural society, but I did not write erotic texts such as those in the tabloids which are written for fame and money, but I wrote an elevated art and sought to have my unique style through which I expressed my perspective concerning negative aspects within my society. I tended to reveal the hidden side in our society. What is happening nowadays in Saudi Arabia is like a cultural revolution in which you can find trivial/false and precious things. All revolutions in the world had negative and positive aspects overlapped at the very beginning of the revolution, but in the end only truth and precious aspects remain."⁴¹

⁴¹ see, Zeineb Hefny's Interview with *AAfaq Magazine*. http://www.aafaq.org/search_details.aspx?id_arch-6843.