

The Image of Woman in Ali Ahmad Bakathir's Literary World: A study of Selected Plays

Redhwan Qasem Ghaleb Rashed

Department of English -Faculty of Art-Hail University, Saudi Arabia

&

Department of English, Amran University, Yemen

Abstract

This research sheds light on an important area in Bakathir plays, woman's image, which has not been studied by any researcher to the best of my knowledge. An important objective of the study is to show how Bakathir portrays women in his selected plays and why his attitude towards women distinguishes his literary works among his contemporary writers. The significance of the study stems from the fact that such issues remain controversial and differs according to the writer ideology and background. Moreover, Bakathir, as well as his philosophy of woman is still unknown in the realm of world literature in general and contemporary Arabic literature in particular. The paper analyzes the image of women in Bakathir's plays: *The Secret of Shahrazad* (1951), *Cats and Rats* (1962) and *The Tragedy of Zeinab*(1966). However, the focus will be primary on *The Secret of Shahrazad*. It will display the way in which a woman is introduced and its relation to Bakathir's vision. It is clear that he presents an unprecedented splendid image for a woman in his plays. Not only does he highlight the woman in her bright images, yet he deliberately investigates the history and legends that encroach the holiness of the woman. He rectifies the history blunder and reinterprets the legends. The woman is portrayed in a positive and bright image, and the misconception that had been stickled to women for ages is tackled positively and logically. It is clear that Bakathir's portrayal of woman is colored by his own vision which is based on Islamic ideology.

Keywords: Ali Ahmad Bakathir, image, Shahrazad ,vision, woman, work

Cites as: Rashed, R. Q. G. (2019). The Image of Woman in Ali Ahmad Bakathir's Literary World: A study of Selected Plays. *Arab World English Journal for Translation & Literary Studies*, 3 (1) 113-126. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.24093/awejtls/vol3no1.9>

Introduction

Women have suffered from marginalization beyond description, both at the social or political level as well as on the level of official literature including oral literature for ages. All the stories turn a blind eye and ear to the positive role played by women throughout history that highlights the negative image and diminishes her status. The state of deterioration experienced by women in most part of the world particularly in Arab society dates back to the wrong perceptions passed down from the tribal patriarchal culture. Such culture deprives women of gaining virtues through the experience of hard work and creative work. The change of this desperate situation requires overcoming those misconceptions that are based against women. This definitely causes material and moral weakness for the entire society. An Arab woman has been subjected to different forms of abuse through different ages. She has faced a false consciousness with traditional references; historical references and social legends are sometimes employed to distort the image of a woman. The whole society looks at a woman as a devil power that should be controlled; otherwise, the peace of a man is at risk.

Due to the fact that literature is a mirror of society, a woman has been a focal point in many narrative works. She was a mother, sister, wife, daughter and beloved. Woman is half of society and the active role and the basis of this great edifice. She is a planet that enlightens a man. In her absence, a man will dwell in darkness. Yet, the truth is that a woman is often seen oppressed, negative and subjected to male domination. She is as usual dependent and suppressed. This repression ranges from customs to traditions, circumstance of society and its patterns in dealing.

Many literary writers have tackled the image of a woman in their works that reflect the situation in which women experience in their societies. Unlike the other writers who introduce woman negatively, Bakathir (1910-1969) not only introduces a positive image of a woman but also reinterprets the legends (that distorted the image of a woman for ages) in a new way that preserves the dignity, integrity and honesty of the woman. He begins to rewrite that story, preserving women's status and consideration, correcting the history mistakes or reinterpreting the legends (Al-Zabidi, p.1). His view about women is based on his own philosophy and Islamic ideology. To him, a woman should be appreciated, respected and given the opportunity to participate actively in the betterment of society. However, he expresses his dissatisfaction with some disadvantages which affect the expected role of women. Bakathir, says:

In my opinion, the woman of modern age is no more a female one because she leaves her home and works and does many activities, which make her extend the limits of her feminism. Furthermore, she did not pay the sufficient attention of the works of her home, and she neglected the children because she believed that these tasks are the responsibility of the servants. (as cited in Al-Shami, p.305)

When he was asked, "Do you think that woman should not work?" He replied,

No, she should work, but she should not be transferred into a male because of her extroverted behaviors; it is not suitable for her to undress her body in a disgusting way, even the husband does not like to see his wife naked. She will be annoyed in her way, in

transportation, and in her job if she behaves openly and impolitely. She should be introvert so that she can avoid the annoyances of others. She should do the works that suit her nature, and she also should avoid the behaviors that make her fall in the trap of those who run after their sexual motifs. (cited in Al-Shami, p. 305)

Bakathir seems to be of the view that both women and men are essential for the development of any society as both have a role in the growth of society. In effect, Bakathir is considered one of the few contemporary writers who appreciate women and who were able in their literary works to reconsider women and highlight them in a bright image. He even rewrote some legends that have abused the sanctity of women. He reinterprets the story of Shahrazad in Arabian Nights in a way that preserves the dignity, chastity, and faithfulness of a woman. He introduces an honorable model for a woman as it will be shown in the study. One can say a woman occupies a prestigious place in the works of Bakathir where she is honored and given her right of appreciation and respect. Women are no longer seen as man's belongings, but rather respectable. She can move all things around her.

Bakathir's achievement

It has to be noted that Bakathir is a committed, multi-talented writer. He was a poet, playwright, novelist, writer, thinker, researcher and translator. He "wrote more than thirty plays, as well as a morath on dramatization in nineteen volumes of early Islamic history and conquests" (Badwai, p112). His most famous novels are *Wa Islama* (Oh my Islam) 1944, *The Red Rebel* 1949, and of his most famous plays are *Malhamat Omar* (Epic of Omar) 1963-1966 and *Sirr Shahrazad*. This variety confirms that he presented in his literary work different colors and different forms of literary expression of poetry, historical novels, poetic plays and prose plays. He was committed to the values and principles of Islam while preserving the technical aspects. His preaching doesn't dominate his work; he combines his commitment and art beautifully and exquisitely. Bakathir, a committed writer to the Islamic vision of the universe and life composes dozens of novels, plays and poetic works that include his vision in the interpretation of contemporary history incidents. He quotes some verses from the Holy Quran to introduce his novels and plays, and he borrows some historical characters and events to treat some modern problems. Bakathir initiates the novel, *The Red Rebel* (1949), with a quotation from the Holy Quran "And when we intend to destroy a township, we address our commandment to its rebellious people, but they transgress therein; so the sentence of punishment becomes due against it, and we destroy it with utter destruction" (Al-Israa – Ayah 17). The epigraph is a message of warning for the expected disastrous consequences. In fact, the novelist wants people to learn a lesson from the Algramata revolution and its miserable consequence and to avoid committing the same mistake in their present life (Al- Kaoud, 1992, p.2). In the play, the Tragedy of Oedipus, he re-drafts it in accordance with the Islamic vision. Its ending is contrary to what is known. It opens the doors of repentance to man whatever the work of the worst. Similarly, he does the same in *The New Faustus* (1966) play. Bakathir reintroduces the character of Faustus as a realistic human personality after having ruled out superstitious elements. In *Salamat Al-Qess* (1943) novel, Islamic vision is employed. The priest declares that love becomes a motive to think about the kingdom of God. It provides access to revealing self-secrets. The priest doesn't know the effect of the grace of God upon him until he has tried love. He doesn't

enjoy worship except in response to the effects of immaculate love (Al-Khateeb,2009). Bakathir who employs the legends, migrates to history to address the reality and future of Arabs and Muslims. He tries to instill in them the spirit of work, hardness and steadfastness through their parents and grandparents who were a beacon of dignity and independence (Al-Kaoud,2010, p.93). Bakathir employs his literary work, legends and history to serve the Islamic thought hoping to regain the golden age of Arabic and Islamic civilization.

Despite his leadership in each of these areas, the theater has dominated his production and attracted his attention. His plays have dealt with many mythological, historical and political topics. Bakathir, the great Arabic poet and dramatist influences every generation of writers since his death and he continues to have an enormous impact on contemporary dramas and poems. He establishes himself as a great author and poet in the realm of Arabic literature. Despite of his contribution, he is given less scholarly attention comparing with his contemporary figures such as Taha Hasyan, Tawfiq, Naguib Mahfouz etc. both in the Arabic –Islamic world and in the west. On the contrary, he has been marginalized and doesn't get sufficient study and literary status he deserves due to the two main reasons: “ the first is that the majority of the critics and literary writers both individuals and institutions who have non-Islamic visions intentionally neglected him and his works due to his Islamic attitude and ideology; the second is that Bakathir preferred to live a way from spotlights and media”(Al-Shami,2016,p.18).It should be mentioned that Bakathir doesn't not care about ignoring his work and fighting it and doesn't not leave his artistic work, but faces the challenge with a challenge of another kind. He says, “I will not stop writing and it's not necessary to publish what I wrote while I am alive. I do see new Muslim generation who receive and welcome my literary works”. (<http://library.islamweb.net/media/print.php?id=222409>)

Bakathir is a committed Muslim who strove to illustrate the importance of following Islamic teaching as a means of reforming the self and society. Verses from the Holy Quran that aim at spreading awareness about the importance of following Islamic teaching for the betterment of individuals and society are quoted in Bakathir's plays and novels. For example, in the plays of *Tragedy of Oedipus* (1949) “Follow not the footsteps of Satan; surely, he is to you an open enemy. He only enjoins open you what is evil and what is foul, and that you say of Allah what you do not know” (Al-Baqarah- Ayah-169-170) and *The New Faustus* (1966) “only those of His servants who possess knowledge fear Allah. Verily Allah is Mighty, Most forgiving” (Fatir- Ayah-29). He employs his literary talents to further the causes of Islam in society, politics, and education. He strives to inform his audience of their religious obligation and drawing inspiration from the annals of Islamic history. His Islamic ideas are employed to correct the ideas and behavior of the society as it will be elaborated while studying *The Tragedy of Zeinab* (1966). He tries in his plays to get away from direct preaching through presenting words and social ideas of his privacy. In such works, he introduces topics of women, liberation, gender equality and curatorship between spouses. It seems that he wants to say that the solution is to return to the values of Islam without extremism. His Islamic tendency is clearly seen in his plays that always start with verses from the holy Quran which summarizes the intellectual content for every literary work. Bakathir's Islamic tendency has a great impact on his writing and ideas. The impact of Islamic tendency is reflected in all his literary works for example in a novel *Salamat Al-Qas* where he sees fate as a cornerstone

of faith that must be accepted by the believer. Abdul Rahman Al-Qas when he remembers his good mother who sacrificed her life to devote himself to worship and science, he grieves upon her death. Yet, "he took himself with patience and contentment by the judgment of God, he resorts to prayer and worship Whenever he is toured, he was satisfied with du'aa 'and had mercy on her" (Bakathir, Al-Qas, p. 5-6).

Bakathir tackles topics of high privacy such as misunderstanding the concept of women's liberation in "Al Dinea Fawdha" (1961) and the fall of material relationship in (Cats and Rats)(1962). Though he read the European culture and he was influenced by western literature, he remained enthusiastic and adhering to Islamic culture defending it by his art and literature. To him, Islam is a means to building a complete civilization. The solution to the problems of Arab and Islamic world lies only in return to Islamic principles. He derived the Islamic thought from its original resources i.e. the Quran and Sunnah (Prophet Muhammad's sayings). Thus, he denied the superstition and heresies that were prevalent in Hadramout (a city in the south of Yemen). He called upon people to purify their faith from impurities and to renounce religious stalemate and inaction.

Women Portrayal in Bakathir's Play, SIRR Shahrazad (The Secret of Shahrazad)

Bakathir, the dramatist, is known for his positive portrayal of a woman in his plays. His positive attitude and treatment of woman do not end at this point; he positively reinterprets and rewrites some historical and legendary stories that decrease and humiliate the status and the role of woman in a way to defend the woman and her prestigious place. Al-Zabidi, (2008) confirms this view and states that " Bakathir rewrote and reinterpreted the legends and historical stories that decrease the status of woman and he corrected the mistakes of the historical writings, and he supported a woman to regain her suitable status and right place"(p. 1).

According to Bakathir's view (in the *Secret of Shahrazad*), Shahryar, the king used to marry a woman every night and killed her in the same night due to his impotence but pretended the immorality of those victims. Bdoor, the wife of Shahryar refuses to swim with him, and as a reaction, he swam with some maidservants, and she felt jealous of this behavior and planned to awake jealousy in her husband; she invited to her room a black castrated servant who is incapable of doing anything with women. When Shahryar saw him there, he killed him. As Othello does with his innocent wife Desdemona, Shahryar murders his innocent wife Bdoor though he knows that she is innocent. After killing her, Shahryar decides to marry another fair woman whose name is Shahrazad. To avoid the fate of Shahryar's previous wives, Shahrazad is skillful and successful enough to invent a plan by which she could avoid death. She used to narrate to her sister and to him some fine and romantic stories every night. Her effective way and style attract his attention and win his love and admiration. Gradually, he starts admiring and appreciating his wife Shahrazad who could also take him out of the psychological complex. He loves her and is greatly influenced by her distinguished style of treatment. She is clever, successful and skillful enough to convince him that he is a real man with full powers, skills, and abilities. She could take him out of his complicated life to fly in the world of fancy and romance. In fact, she along with the teacher Redhwan manage to convince Shahryar to repent and pay the dowries of his wives and to

compensate the families of the dead wives who were victims of his devilish thoughts and behaviors and to stop his crimes. Moreover, she succeeds in convincing him to leave the authority and the throne and to go for adventures as Sindbad does. She decides to accompany him in all his adventures and journeys.

In the play, a woman is able to change the situation which is seen disgraceful. She refuses what has been done by Shahryar. She manages to cure him of his love for bloodshed, turning him into a seeker for knowledge. This means a woman in Bakathir view may differ from some other writers' because our orientalism still looks down upon women, seen second to men. Shahrazad is life, and the light of knowledge. She is the hope that Bakathir holds to change Shahryar. She is seen able to express her opinion and to take her decision. At the same time, she is seen dedicate and feminine. Taking a decision and giving her opinion don't diminish her character and value. We have not seen conventional women subordinate to men. Shahrazad attracts the king to a vast human horizon. She reeducates him and he is able to see the other objectively. This has bridled the evil within him and has matured his vision of life and human being. In her preaching, she adopts exhilaration and pleasure, attracting Shahryar through the image of a balanced vision. The imagination is mixed with reality in which Shahrazad resorts to art to save Shahryar from his complex that pushes him to commit a daily crime. The art also saves her from death that lurks her after her wedding night.

From the previous outline of the story of the play, it is clear that Bakathir portrays women in a bright and distinguished way. He reinterprets the legend of Shahrazad in a new way that preserves her dignity, chastity and honesty. He examines this legend carefully. In fact, he is not convinced with the accusation of the woman that she is faithless. Bakathir discusses the legend that is seen illogical and starts asking why Shahryar killed his first wife? Why she betrayed him with a black servant? Did not she find in the palace a handsome person? Why the king announced this issue? Is it better for him to keep it secret allowing none to know about it? Is she his wife? Why he did not kill her and claim to the people that she died? What pushed him to marry a virgin girl and kill her in the next day? Is he so heartless? (Bakathir,1985, p. 61). These questions lead him to write *The Secret of Shahrazad* arriving at a logical interpretation for the king's complex. We come to know that the king has become impotent as a result of his excessive use of alcohol and women. He used to marry every night a virgin girl and he kills her to hide his impotence. Shahrazad comes to know Shahryar's secret from his physician Redhwan. She is smart to understand the implication of her teacher intended to save her from the fatal fate (1985,p.64). She collaborates with him to cure Shahryar from his illness. She perceives his weakness and employs her intelligence requesting him not to sleep with her under the pretext she is still too young and she cannot bear a fatal man like him. In such a way along with sweet talk and good behavior, she manages to keep him away from the failure so that he does not feel the bitterness of disappointment and the weakness of impotence. When she realizes that, he recovers from his impotence, she allows him to sleep with her. Because of that Shahrazad wins the love and affection of her Shahryar. Thus, he keeps her alive.

Shahryar's first wife doesn't realize his illness and thought he is no longer interested in her. Thus, Bakathir here has acquitted the women from the charge that has been afflicted for more than a thousand year. He doesn't care that if he acquits the woman, he shall cling to the men the lowest and ugliest qualities. In the myth's old form, the reader may find excuse for Shahryar conduct. The crime committed against innocent girls is attributed to their belonging to gender of woman who betrays him, making him hate women. Not only does Bakathir acquits Shahrazad, but also he cures Shahryar from his ailment taming his brutality, creating a human being who loves goodness and beauty. Shahrazad convinces him to atone his crimes by paying blood-money for the virgins whom he killed. She makes him renounce the monarch and plans to travel. Shahryar says, "Take me with you away from this palace...to where to trace the traces of Sindbad in the depths of the earth" (Bakathir,1978, p. 124). One can say Shahrazad has brought a change in the meaning of masculinity; the masculinity he believes in and which is (not denied by Shahrazad) nothing but animal tendency. He is an animal man while Sindbad is a human man (Ismail, 1981 p. 102). Shahrazad not only saves her life but also saves Shahryar from his psychological problem that has disturbed him for years. She makes him realize the enormity of his error and the misdeed. She manages to satisfy his ego and makes him feel that he is a man (p, 190). When Shahryar wants to kiss her, she avoids him trying to satisfy his vanity as follows:

Shahryar: Woe! What are you doing?

Shahrazad: I avoid your eyes looks Sir. They are scary.

Shahryar: What frightens you in them?

Shahrazad: What frightens a jealous girl from the eyes of the deadly man.

Shahryar:(His face shines) Deadly? How do you know I am like that?.....

Shahrazad: They say you are the greatest philander who has ever been born.....(Bakathir,1978,p. 74).

Shahrazad takes a contrasting approach to Bodoor (his first wife), satisfying Shahryar egoism (Ismail, p. 192). She made him feel that he is a source of her admiration and that he is a philanderer. She succeeds in getting him out of the illusion of virility (p.194). She manages to inform him about the baseness of his manhood which is a source of his vainness.

One can say, Bakathir defends the innocence and faithfulness of woman. He modifies the legend of Shahryar who is presented in other writers' works as a brave and strong hero who kills the criminal, adulterous wives. Bakathir accuses Shahryar of being unable to go for a sexual relationship with his wives so, to hide his impotence, he kills all the women he marries in the first night. Shahrazad discovers the secret of Shahryar, and she could overcome his problem. She doesn't not only save her life, but she also could help him to get out of his psychological complex and encourages him to repent and save the lives of other women. Shahrazad is portrayed as an intelligent, wise, beautiful, brave, faithful, honest, successful, skillful, romantic woman and wife with heroic and leadership qualities. Bakathir is successful to portray Shahrazad in a very interesting and an admirable way. She could protect her life, save other women, win the love and admiration of her husband, encourages and convinces him to repent and skillfully win our admiration and appreciation. She is a distinctive heroine who is introduced in the play as an

important woman who belongs to a prestigious family. Najati, (2013) points out that "Shahrazad was brought up in a great house and rich family who paid attention to education and knowledge and she was well brought up"(p79). Moreover, Shahrazad is portrayed as a kind, cooperative and unselfish woman. She is also presented as a genius and strong woman as Najati pointed out; he furthermore, she has a strong faith and belief in God; she believes that the power of Allah overcomes the power of Shahryar (p. 80). Shahrazad enjoys the characteristics of the apostolic personality who lived supreme values that push her for sacrifice and redemption. To save the girls of her time, she suggests to her father to marry her from the king so that she perhaps can save herself and the other girls. If she is killed, then it will be a sacrifice for the girls of the Muslims. This has changes the stereotype of women. Shahryar himself acknowledges the role of a woman in his life. He recognizes the positive role of women in his life.

It seems that the playwright intends to portray Shahrazad as a symbol of modal and distinguished Muslim woman. Najati (2013) states that " we should never forget that the author Bakathir portrayed Shahrazad as a real Muslim woman with faithful believer and her Islamic views and believes are clear in her speeches as well as works and deeds"(p. 81). Among the important features of Shahrazad are her self-confidence, eloquent speeches, intelligence and her wide culture. Najati summarizes those significant features of Shahrazad and pointed out that

The important features of Shahrazad can be summarized as follows: first, she has a wide culture and knowledge, second is that she is so clever. However, the third feature is that she is a quiet and balanced woman with strong character that enables her to control some difficult and critical situations and the fourth is that her self-confidence whereas the fifth is her eloquent speech and her ability to talk fluently (p.81-82).

Bakathir's positive portrayal of Shahrazad comes out of his Islamic ideology and his own philosophy, which appreciates woman and her roles. Najati, (2013) pointed out that " Bakathir's positive vision of woman confirmed his deep belief in Islam the religion that appreciates and admires woman and her roles"(51). It seems that Bakathir takes the general framework of the mythical theme and changes it in a way that appears to be compatible with his Islamic idea. He makes changes that let the legend looks more logical and more believable. The atmosphere that dominates the myth is an Islamic atmosphere and most of the characters believe in God and live in an Islamic society.

The Tragedy of Zeinab(TZ) (1966)

This play revolves around a beautiful lady called Zeinab. It tells us about her courage and her struggle to liberate her country from the invasion. She loves her country more than she loves her self. Her sole concern is her country and her people. She doesn't hesitate to sacrifice her life for her country. She is presented as a brave fighter who reminds us of Khawla Bint Alazwar who was seen in the battlefields defending her religion and nation.

Zeinab: Give me a gun General Fardiah.

Fardiah: What are you going to do with it?

Zeinab: I will use it to fight with you. (TZ, p. 30)

Bakathir here wants to say struggling or fighting is not limited to men in the battle-field and defense of the homeland. Women have been working side by side with men since ancient times. She has been with men even in the war. She struggles to live a decent life. Bakathir shows that a woman is able to fight like men perfectly if she is given an opportunity to assert herself and when we stop describing her as a weak creature.

Zeinab is a symbol of Arab nationalism. She is interested in the concerns of the country and the nation by achieving the great goal of establishing the People's Army. When Mohiuddin asks her about the time of their marriage, she requests him to wait .

Mohiuddin: How long?

Zeinab: till the successive melancholy and sorrow of our country and nation are over.

Mohiuddin: How is it?

Zeinab: If we achieve that great goal.

Mohiuddin: Establishment of the People 's Army?

Zeinab: Yes. (P.40)

Like Shahrazad, Zeinab is concerned about her homeland and nation. Both work hard and are ready to sacrifice their lives for the sake of their country. Zeinab is ready to sacrifice her life. "For my nation and my country. I want to fight here with a hope of being able to show people the mistake they have committed" (p 28). She is not only a brave fighter but also a believer. She is not worried about her life saying "Say: It will not hurt us except what is destined by Allah (God)" (p.76). She enjoys the characteristics of a good leader. "You are much better than me Zeinab for leading the movement" (p.104). She is able to influence those around her. We find through the events that she has a strong and brave character; she is not conquered by anyone, regardless of his status and whatever his strength. She believes that her honor is her land and the care to maintain a decent life within the community. Zeinab, in her own way, declares the birth of a new woman, the future of a liberated humanity, placing women as pioneers of human society. She has preceded the Contemporary women calling for equality with men and their right to lead and make history. She rejects patriarchy because it is a great source of repression. The personality of Zeinab enjoys the broad mindedness and breadth of mind if surrounded by the downtrodden from each side. She has a deep faith in God and she is a rational one who makes a decision only after thinking deeply. She is sensible to make a decision only after a deep reflection.

Zeinab, seen worried about ruling her country by Turks and Mamelukes (p.6), stands for the daughter of Egypt who is concerned with her country future. In this way, she is a symbol of quest for freedom of the East and the search for its independence from all the influences that seek to weaken Egypt. The woman here is no longer passive. She is a heroine who is concerned with her homeland, defense of its issue and her sacrifice for it. Her sacrifice is a message for some men who keep themselves aloof from the issues of their homeland and prefer tranquility. It is a message of warning for those who isolate themselves from community and its issues in remote islands. The

flood when it comes, nobody will be exempted from its fragile selves. Zeinab is not a mere fighter but also a reformer; she is a feminist who calls for reforming the system that eliminates a woman from the view. She says "we must reform this whole system radically so that woman will have her rights equal to men" (p. 63). She intends to enlighten women and "liberate them from servile of Veil and harem(women)abuse" (p. 123). To her Allah never accepts to see Muslim women as maids without dignity and place in their society (p. 123). Through the mouth of Zeinab, Bakathir calls for justice and equality between a man and a woman.

Zubeida: I don't want to be like him. I just want him to respect my feelings.

Zeinab: He will never respect your feelings unless you are like him.

Zubeida: This is an elusive request, Zeinab.

Zeinab: We have to demand it. If it doesn't happen in our generation, in the coming generations. (p.63)

Zeinab finds that the one who "doesn't care about the future, doesn't deserve to live in the present." (p.63). She not only cares about the future of our generation, but also she is also a revolutionary woman who rebels against the norms and hindrance. To her women have to stick to their rights and never surrender "Hold on to your rights and do not worry about his anger" (p.64). She is also a believer. we hear her say: "Say: It will not hurt us except what has been destined" (p.76). She adds "Everything in this world is fleeting, except good deed" (p.106). Bakathir has done his level best to correct the misconception of Islam through interpreting Islam. Zeinab knows Islam and this is one of the characteristics of an educated woman who knows how to defend herself. As she was accused of flaunting and lewdness as her face is unveiled, she replies that "My face is not Awrah (loins) to be covered" (p.120). "But everything in women is Awrah". Bakathir in the mouth of Zeinab replies "This poor understanding of the status of women in Islam is one of the causes of its backwardness...and the predominance of enemies against them (Muslims)"(p.120). Here Bakathir conveys a message for those who distort Islam and misunderstand Islam. He corrects the concept of religion about the role of a woman as Islam has done justice to women. "This is the true Islam before the accumulation of ignorance and superstition" (p.121). Bakathir manages through the character of Zeinab to send a nice message to the men of Islamic and reformative movements that women are determined and willful. If she decides to do something and to run the situation, she will storm all obstacles and difficulties. The playwright plays a role in highlighting the cause of women and in supporting their stolen rights in the patriarchal community. He introduces the image of the fighter who carries the concern of her homeland. Her love for her country is translated into her enrollment in the military to fight the enemies. She believes that fighting enemies is not solely the duty of the army but of the nation. She seeks for her identity and in many occasion, she tries to assert her identity rejecting other people interference in her life. "I will not accept this question from my father. How can I accept it from you?" (p.72). Here awareness of her right is remarkable throughout the play; she is heard advising Zebedia to fight for her right. "hold on to your right and never worry about his anger" (p.64). Then we find that Zeinab is portrayed as a leader, believer, thinker, brave, and a woman of dignity who is worried about her homeland. This means the

playwright changes the inferior and outdated outlook at woman seen as an object of lust, dependence and stupidity.

Cats and Rats(CR) (1962)

It revolves around the problem of a working wife and her preoccupation with her responsibility for her home in order to save money. The husband who refuses her work or asks her to help with the expense of the house is seen greedy. He wants to take advantage of her property. She is unaware of that her main role is to take care of her husband and her children and then work comes. The neglected wife of her home and her children is busy with her work "she doesn't know the house only at the moment of eating at noon and the hour of sleeping at night" (CR,p.9). Her greediness to collect as much money as possible is her sole concern "Her gluttonous to the money... the most important thing in her life is nothing but to collect money and to save it in the bank" (p.9). Bakathir introduces an image of a working woman attacking her for worshipping money and forgetting her holy job and her children. Her criteria for valuing people is money. Her contempt for her husband whose salary is 15 pound per month while her salary is 60 pound and more is clearly observed (P.10). The reason behind the breakdown of marital relationship is that people keep away from the goals of real marriage or spiritual marriage. The concept of marital life is that both are complementary to each other. They have to sacrifice and cooperate in everything "The basis of marital life today is cooperation and solidarity between the spouses in everything and in any case" (p.32). Marriage is not "a commercial affair based on profit and loss" as such view is "responsible in most cases for failure of marital life in our time" (p.85). A good wife is the one that shares her husband in everything financially and spiritually "to mix her money with his money, link her money with his money" (p.85). The duty of the wife towards her husband is that she makes him feel that he is her partner. This is what happens with Samia's aunt who is rational and wise. "She opened a shop for her husband and made him feel that money is his" (p.127). Bakathir has no objection to the work of a woman as long as she is committed to her duties at home. "There is nothing wrong to work and to grow her balance in the bank" (p.85).

The work of women is not new born. The housewives of the prophet's companions, prophets' wives, mothers, and grandmothers worked. But things vary according to the age and develop by developing and changing images of things. The work of women in the past is not the same work in the present era, which made this work pros and cons reflected on the working life woman. This has made the subject controversial in contemporary life. Yet, one of the most important advantages of women's work is to help the husband to bear the endless daily expenses of the home, starting with the rising prices day by day, passing through the education of the children and buying the household items things that the husband cannot bear and cannot afford. We add to the positive aspects of women's work self-affirmation and the realization of a social entity that women become role models for others, especially if their work is beneficial to their society and has not had any negative impact on her family as a mother and wife. A working woman benefits her society and thus paint a good image of Muslim women. The work of women adds a lot to women, and their transactions in work and daily exit and follow-up to their home makes her time valuable, develops her personality and makes her able to be an efficient companion to her

husband. Disadvantages of work has to be avoided and that house, children and husband have to be given priority. This is Bakathir vision about work.

Despite of Samia fault or flaw, she is an honorable wife. She is "an honorable wife... you cannot deny that she is honorable" (p.69). Eventually, Samia realizes her fatal mistake and that marital life is partnership and cooperation. We hear her say, "I will let my balance at the disposal of Adel." (p.128). "He is my husband and father of my children, all that comes back to him from his benefit and goodness goes back to me" (p.128). Here Samia who stands for the women of her time has been able to prove that she is more aware and mature and able to achieve a deep human relationship between her and her husband. Adel who wants to kill her feels for the first time, she is his wife and mother of his children. "Now Samia you are really my wife and mother of my children" (p.130). Bakathir introduces an image of a working wife who sees work as an area for success and benefiting society. She carries a message that a woman has ambitions and she wants to assert herself and serves her community through her work. The working woman must put the house and the family in the priority and then work, provided that she does not neglect her work because it is a second trust. Bakathir vision about a woman is that she "should take care of the original duties of her home and children". He "thought that she also could do the works and jobs that suit her abilities and psychology" (Al-Shami, Sept. 2016, p. 17).

Conclusion

To sum, if women have been a negative model in the eyes of some critics, researchers and writers, Bakathir, the playwright introduces a positive and bright portrayal of a woman in his plays. He provides a positive image of women's models in these tales and attacks those who distort the positive image of women in their works. He portrays women in a way that can have a profound impact on men and cure the bad qualities of men and reform society. Bakathir paints a positive image of women in a patriarchal society which does not recognize the genius women and their ability to excellence and creativity.

In the *Secret of Shahrazad*; the second main character of the play Shahrazad is portrayed as strong, brave, wise, capable, clever, confident, determined, honest, faithful, romantic, eloquent, fluent, cooperative, unselfish, cultured and educated. The secret of Shahrazad is that she manages to satisfy the ego of the king making him feel she is fearful of his ardor and his fame as a lady killer frightens her. She is a Muslim woman with heroic character and leadership qualities. She is a woman of an extensive knowledge of human nature. She succeeds in creating a very humane husband out of her misogynic husband. Since the first moments, Shahrazad has begun to shake the foundations of Shahryar's mind. She wants to get her sex out of the physical and psychological violence she has been subjected throughout the ages. Zeinab in *the Tragedy of Zeinab* is presented as influential, religious, patriotic and determined with leadership qualities. She attacks the misconception of Islam in a courageous way. Though, she encounters many obstacles and hardship, but she never surrenders. Her character reminds us of Sumayyaiah in the novel *Sirat Shoja'a* (the *Biography of a Brave*). Both have been concerned with political, religious and reformative issues. Zeinab who enjoys the broad-mindedness and breadth of mind is patriotic and ready to sacrifice her life. Being educated, she defends her self, clarifying the misconception that

let the Muslim world lags behind. Samia who is introduced as an image of a working wife who sees work as an area for success and benefiting society, stands for the women of her time who are more aware and mature to achieve a deep human relationship between them and their husbands.

In fact, the image of the woman in the plays goes beyond the negative frame developed by many researchers who introduce her as a vivid example of feelings, desires, a body that provokes lust and an element of intrigues and deceit who is not trustworthy. Shahrazad, Samia, and Zeinab are symbols of sacrifice, redemption and altruism. They are ambitious and have noble goal. They represent the image of favor and strength of women. Not only do they assert themselves and serve their community and the whole of humanity but also, they return to women their self-confidence. It can be said that Bakathir is an advocate of women defending them against all the fake accusations that wrong them for ages. All in all, Bakathir's attitude towards woman is based on Islam ideology that has raised the status of women and honored her more than any other religion. Yet, his commitment to Islamic values has been beautifully merged with art.

About the author:

Dr. Redhwan Qasem Ghaleb Rashed is an Ex- chairman of Department of English, Faculty of Languages, Amran university, Yemen. He is currently working at Department of English, faculty of Art, Hail University, Saudi Arabia. <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7786-3707>

References

- Al- Kaoud, H. M. (1992). From the features of the historical novel in Bakathir 's the Red Rebel and the failure of the Crimean project. pp. 335-367.
- Al- Kaoud, H. M. (2010, December). Dream and Prophecy in the Literature of Bakathir: A Study in a Manuscript. (26), pp. 43-112. Retrieved from <http://search.mandumah.com/Record/600711>
- Al khateeb, A. (2009). *Ali Ahmad Bakathir Novels: Reading in vision and formation*. www.Bakatheer.com.
- Ali, M. S. (2004). *The Holy Quran: Arabic Text and English Translation*. (I. I. Limited, Ed., & M. S. Ali, Trans.) UK.
- Al-Shami, I. A. (2016). The Portrayal of Woman in Ali Ahmad Bakathir's Literary Works. *International Journal of Scientific and Research Publications*, 6(5), 304-310. Retrieved July 28, 2018, from <http://www.ijsrp.org/research-paper-0516/ijsrp-p5350.pdf>
- Al Shami, I. . (2016, September). Ali Ahmad Bakathir, the pioneer of Modern Arabic & Islamic Literature: A study of his Literary Vision and Themes. *Journal of reading and knowledge Egypt*, pp. 1-22. Retrieved from <http://search.mandumah.com/Record/751802>
- Al-Zabidi, A. A. (2008, January 29). *Ali Ahmad Bakathir the writer who does justice to woman*. Retrieved July 28, 2018, from <http://nashiri.info/articles/literature-and-art/3631----ae--v15-3631.html>
- Bakathir, A. A. (1970). *Cats and Rats*. Cairo: The Bookshop of Egypt.

- Bakathir, A. A. (1978). *Sirr Shahrazad*. Cairo: The Bookshop of Egypt.
- Bakathir, A. A. (1985). *The Art of Drama from my own Experience* (third ed.). Cairo: Booksop Publication.
- Bakathir, A. A. (1990). *The Tragedy of Zeinab*. Cairo: The Bookshop of Egypt.
- Bakathir, Ali, A. (1943). *Salamat Al-Qas*. Dar Masr for publication.
- Badawi, M.M.(1987). *Modern Arabic Drama in Egypt*. Cambridge: Cambridge university.
- Ismail, I. A. (1981). *Psychological Interpretation of Literature* (fourth ed.). Cairo: Gharib Bookshop.
- Islamweb.net*. (2018, 5 10). Retrieved September Friday, 2018, from <http://library.islamweb.net/media/print.php?id=22240>
- Muhammad, H. A. (n.d.). Retrieved july 28, 2018, from Ali Ahmad Bakathir: http://www.bakatheer.com/moltaqa_details.php?id=375
- Najati, P. (2013). Ali Ahmad Bakathir and the play of the Secret of Shahrazad. Iran. Retrieved july 1, 2018