



Journal of Arts & Humanities

The Representation of Women in Youssef Ziedan's *Azazeel*: A Feminist Study

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ABSTRACT

This study is a feminist exploration of Ziedan's *Azazeel* that unmasks the patriarchal ideology, the limitations faced by women because of the male gaze, women's other-ing stereotypes, and the societal codes that define women's roles in the Arab world, in general, and Egypt, in particular. Ziedan gives special attention to the interrogation of patriarchy, transgression of gender boundaries, and objectification of women, thereby highlighting the crisis of women in his society. He complicates this perception by presenting women figures (Octavia, Martha and Hypatia) as angelic, heroic, enlightening, and admirable in their pursuit of independence and freedom. The distinct voices/acts of these women are especially significant in terms of their particular contributions to chaffing, demystifying, and disturbing the patriarchal dominant certainties of their society.

Keywords: Patriarchy, gender stereotypes, male gaze, patriarchal religion.

Available Online: 28th March, 2016.

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1.0 Introduction

Youssef Ziedan's *Azazeel* (2009) is an interesting and provocative dramatization of the dynamics of gender by which women's identity is constructed in the Egyptian patriarchal culture. Ziedan gives special attention to the interrogation of patriarchy, transgression of gender boundaries, and

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objectification of women, thereby highlighting the crisis of women in his society. Octavia, Hypatia, and Martha appear as victims of patriarchal ideology, and independent, strong willed, and outspoken individuals who in many ways defy patriarchal societal expectations. While it is possible for Octavia and Hypatia's death to be seen as punishment for their defiance of a patriarchal structure, Ziedan complicates this perception by presenting these characters as angelic, heroic, enlightening, and admirable in their pursuit of independence and freedom. These women's tendency to challenge patriarchy forms the focal point and undeniably the very foundation of the entire work. This study is a feminist exploration of Ziedan's *Azazeel* that unmasks the patriarchal ideology, the limitations faced by women because of the male gaze, women's other-ing stereotypes, and the societal codes that define women's roles in the Arab world, in general, and Egypt, in particular.

Approaching the novel through the lens of feminist theory and criticism allows for a deeper understanding of women characters, prompts an exploration into their dilemma together with their agency, and brings a new interest in the feminist aspects/issues *Azazeel* communicates. Until recently, most literature about the novel is either short critical reviews or a very few critical pieces addressing issues other than those of women. In her review of the book, Maya Jaggi comments on *Azazeel* as an important voice against the abuse of religion to justify violence and discrimination among people. To her, such abuse of religion is tied up with Cyril who "sees himself amid sedition in a holy war against Jews (whom he casts out of the city), heretics, pagans, and idolaters" (Jaggi, 2012). Similarly, Peter Clark reviews the book, arguing that "the absurdity of religious beliefs that spill over into violence," and enact "hierarchy in Egypt" is the most important message the novel tries to convey (Clark, 2013). On the other hand, For Tom Little, the novel is a precise fictional description of the conditions of the monk Hypa, who "finds himself torn between his faith and the temptations of the flesh" (Little). He asserts Hypa's "weaknesses push him to confess . . . and his need to be truthful with himself and explore his failings make him a likeable, but perhaps frustrating, narrator" (Little).

As for the studies that dealt with *Azazeel*, this article is, to the best of my knowledge, the third one done on the novel. The first paper, "*Azazeel* and the Politics of Historical Fiction in Egypt" (Mahmood, 2013) by Saba Mahmood, discusses the novel as an exemplary of freedom of thought that aims at "eliding substantive disagreements about religion," and reconsidering "religion as a human invention" to enhance violence among people (Mahmood, 2013). The second article, "The Problematics of Identity Erasure in Youssef Ziedan's *Azazeel*" (2016) by Abu Baker, examines the problematics of Hypa's identity that is constantly rethought and reshaped and his desire for erasing it due to its labeling and limiting effects that clash with individual happiness. Abu Baker observes the interrelation between tradition, religion, and identity. A large part of his argument focuses on the necessity of re-considering identity as "an absolute metaphysical essence and an irrefutably inherited tradition" as an important step toward independence and individuality (Baker, 41). This article initially sheds light on the central dictates that have been created by patriarchy to define women, then moves to focus on the problematics of internalizing such mandates, and the vulnerability of them to demystification/deconstruction by women's agency.

2.0 Patriarchy and the codes of defining/labeling women

The novel revolves around the journey of self-discovery that Hypa, an Egyptian monk, goes through. Having witnessed as a child the brutal murder of his pagan father by Christian fanatics, Hypa, following his uncle's advice, leaves Naga Hamadi and becomes a monk. As a Christian monk, Hypa tends to contrast the purity of Virgin Mary and thinks of her as a surrogate mother for the mother, whom he supposed to have betrayed his father and married one of his murderers. He clearly contrasts the Madonna and the Whore models of women. Hypa's mother and Octavia represent the latter while Virgin Mary, Hypatia, and Martha represent the former.

Hypa's initial consciousness of enacting such a dichotomy and labeling of women is related to patriarchal order, agencies, and its performative discourse. Patriarchy, as Alsop, Fitzsimon and Lenons

put it, is “an ideological and psychological structure. That is women’s position [is] a consequence of the ideas that were current about women and men, and actual men’s and women’s internalization of these ideas” (Alsop, Fitzsimons & Lennon, 2002, 72). Within the patriarchal world of Hypa, a female is essentially constructed to fill the societal roles that are assigned to her. Her failure/refusal to conform to society’s expectations involves categorizing her into the good/bad dichotomy. The patriarchal Egyptian culture, for example, insists that a good virtuous wife is the one who suppresses her desires, will, and needs for the good of the husband and family. As El Saadawi writes, “in the Arab world . . . the duties of a wife and mother in serving her children, family and husband still remain sacred in the eyes of society, since they are the duties she has been born to fulfill”(El Saadawi, 1997, 220). A wife whose aspirations fall outside these “sacred” duties even after her husband’s death is labeled as bad and looked upon with contempt.

Because Hypa’s mother does not conform to society’s expectations of her as a devoted mother/wife, Hypa refuses to tolerate her second marriage, and insists on categorizing her into the bad mother model. He looks at her as impure, and hates being her son: “I would have liked to go back to being a child in the old, with a mother other than the one I had” (283). To Hypa, Mother defies the patriarchal supervision and therefore becomes a subject of his intense hatred and disdain: “Should not the Lord have given me a mother as immaculate as the Virgin” (42). These terms are conducive to the archetypal male-made notion about the Madonna image of mother and to Hypa’s belief in it. Mary’s choice of surrendering her self, personal interests, desires, and absolute devotion to the Son is appropriated by patriarchy to become an essential role model for every woman, a heavy-handed measure against women’s freedom and a natural law for more indoctrination against their agency. Within the patriarchal discourse, the Virgin Mary is connected to the perfect chastity and the most feminine virtues. As Gilbert and Gubar indicate, patriarchy’s “great teacher of purity was the Virgin Mary, a mother goddess who perfectly fitted the female role” (Gilbert & Gubar, 1979, 814); and in their reflection on the meaning of purity in the patriarchal context, they add that women’s “‘purity’ signifies they are, of course, *self-less*, with all the moral and psychological implications that the word suggests” (815, italics in original). The distinction between the patriarchal moral excellence of the Virgin Mary and the violation of such merit by Hypa’s mother underlines Hypa’s resentment and anger against her. Hypa’s patriarchal sensibility suggests that he angrily objects to his mother’s freedom, especially as she refuses to be bound by the constraints of society’s decorum. Her pursuit of agency via marriage labels as treacherous. Hypa cannot forget his “mother’s startled appearance” as he informs her that he “knew she had betrayed [his] father to her relatives” (50). Thus, he must rid himself of this ‘deviant’ mother. He runs away and “never saw her again” when “she . . . married one of those relatives” (50). In fact, Hypa’s mother is not the only woman to find herself a subject of male’s anger/ hatred for her stand against decorum; Pharisee’s mother is in the spotlight as well, as explained below.

Like Hypa, Pharisee develops a masculine hostility against his mother when she decides to marry after his father’s death. He initially gets angry at her decision for the second marriage. “[W]hen his uncle married his mother . . . , Pharisee left their world” (181), and becomes so misogynist that “he could not abide any female, even if she were a dump animal” (181). Although dehumanization and humiliation are alluded to as natural conventions of defining women in Pharisee’s sexist world, he seems to reflect debates on perpetuating betrayal and adversity as other inherited qualities of their identification. He sees women as “the cause of every misfortune” (181). According to him, in his town, monasteries and churches “are spared all . . . betrayals” because “they do not have women in them” (182). While Pharisee’s gaze objectifies women and constructs them as treacherous and burdensome, he invites males to see them that way. The exchange between Pharisee and Hypa functions to be an invitation of his sexist view against women. In response to Hypa’s question, “[A]re all women unfaithful?”, Pharisee argues:

‘Yes, definitely. The only man who could be sure that his wife was faithful was our ancestor Adam because his wife had no other man with whom to betray him, either in her bed or in imagination. Yet she still betrayed him with Azazel the accursed and allied herself with Azazel against Adam.’ (182)

The structure of this bias against woman, as the quotation suggests, is derived from religion, or, to be more accurate, the patriarchal use of religion. Frankenberg asserts that “religion needs to shed . . . its gender bias . . . Not only is much of its content sexist and patriarchal, but its understanding of religion is parochially defined and monoculturally impaired” (Frankenberg, 1998, 175). The patriarchal understanding of Eden Tale substantiates woman as the archetypal image of treachery. Pharisee takes advantage of its sexist religious discourse to make his statement about the inherent treachery of women seem authentic to Hypa. The Eden Tale is invoked as a source of authority and legitimacy to “naturally other” woman and place her outside the good nature of Self. Under patriarchal religion, woman is presented in fundamental othering fixed terms that become a socially created truth; she is inherently false and in league with the devil.

The force of religion continues to be very much active in enacting a social system of domination against women. In a patriarchal society, religion is a powerful tool for eradicating women’s potential of power. “The complex interaction between patriarchy [and] the dominant religion” writes Dzuhayatin, “seems to be the stumbling block preventing women from acquiring access to basic rights” (Dzuhayatin, 2006,161). Ziedan underlines some aspects of such an injustice as he makes the structured patriarchal religious discourse on women so sweeping that they cannot speak against its stereotypical perspective, or othering mechanisms. Although the two mother figures place themselves outside the patriarchal religious modes, they are incontestably othered, marginalized, and, then, silenced. None of them appears to disapprove their othering label in such a discourse, but readers of the novel do get the sense of the two mother figures’ existence as present-absent entities. Ziedan purposely deprives Hypa’s mother and Pharisee’s of a voice to counter-argue their otherness in order to intensify the overempowering impact of the sexist religious discourse on silencing women. Their representation as mere receptive muted objects to male’s authoritative discourse signifies their total helplessness.

3.0 The problematics of preoccupation with gender stereotypes

Patriarchy, however, is not a simple artificial structure of gender power, but is insidiously created as a natural system of thought to normalize the hierarchy of sexes. The secret power of this system of domination comes from its ability to convince people of stereotypes about women, and create its pillars on a dualistic system of thought, whereby women are reduced to homogenous others. Given the general state of male dominance, women become a subject to his fantasy, objectification, and gender bias through a frame of dualistic thought. According to Beauvoir, Patriarchy is structured on the male/female binary, where female is essentially associated with other, inferiority, irrationality, sensuality, immorality, and evil. “[S]ince the coming of patriarchy,” writes Beauvoir, “life in man’s eyes has taken on a dual aspect” (Beauvoir, 2010, 163), where woman is viewed as an “Other” on whom male can freely project all the negative attributes he desires or hates. She argues:

She [Woman] is the carnal embodiment of all moral values and their opposites, from good to bad; she is the stuff of action and its obstacle, man’s grasp on the world and his failure; as such she is the source of all man’s reflections on his existence and all expression he can give of it . . . she is wholly the *Other*. (Beauvoir, 2010, 213)

The male’s fantasy and bias are explicitly bound up as fundamental norms of stereotyping women. These subjective measures are more than simply contributors to male’s beliefs about women; they function as normative rules not only to stereotypically identify women’s nature, account for their behavior, decide their gender role in a society, but also to determine interaction with them. As Stangor and Schaller put it, “the power of consensual stereotypes . . . influences normative behaviors. Once group stereotypes exist in a culture, expected patterns of behavior for those group members follow, and these expectations determine both responses to group members and the behavior of the group members themselves” (Stangor & Schaller, 13). Gender stereotypes influence how the male interacts with women. They provide an essential cognitive image for the development of definite behaviors/actions. Being stereotyped, a woman becomes a known other, who is objectified to have certain characteristics, and, then, treated in a certain way.

Trapped in the patriarchal stereotypes of associating women with inconsistency, Hypa becomes hampered in his effort to make progress in life. His love and desire for marrying Octavia is destroyed by his obsession with her possible infidelity. He becomes ambivalent toward her. Part of him wishes to marry Octavia: "A part of me wanted her, and loved her . . . Octavia was clever, honest, and desirable" (77). But, preoccupied by the stereotype of women's natural inconsistency hinders him. With a hint of anxiety, he insists: "I suddenly felt that . . . she was worth staying with for the rest of my life . . . But who can be sure she won't betray me. . . [S]he could turn against me as women always turn against their husbands, for women are fickle by nature" (87). The masculine consciousness determines Octavia to be problematic to Hypa. He views her as a source of apprehension, and a high potential of deviant expected behaviors.

While the stereotype of women's treachery refrains Hypa from marrying Octavia, another dominant gender stereotype operates to grotesquely exaggerate such avoidance, turning the novel to be a reflection on the hostility and anxiety of Arab patriarchy about female sexuality. Arab patriarchy views female as a ruinous attraction, sexually energetic being, untamable, and a threat to male morality. "In Arab tradition," writes Ghoussoub, "woman is *fitnah*— a term signifying at once beauty and turmoil: a terrestrial Eve . . . who continues to tempt man with her charms or her disorder . . . [a] sexually active being" (Ghoussoub, 2005, 30-31). Hypa's troubled love relationship with Octavia represents such concerns felt by Arab patriarchal culture about what has been regarded as typical sexual characteristics of female. Hypa appears to be anxious and hostile to Octavia's deep love, and courtship with him. He draws her as the femme fatale fit for destruction. Octavia is the voluptuous loathsome creature, whose fatal sexual charms are a threat to Hypa's morality, and a source of anarchy against which he finds himself powerless to stand. "Octavia" is a woman of "such effusive love, enough to drown the world" (96), "the slave of her desires . . . She had taken me out into a sea of sins, and how was I going to save myself from drowning?" (96). Hypa amplifies Octavia's sensuality by constantly referring to her irresistible acts of seduction. She walks "flirtatiously" (61), "like a trail of incense smoke . . . to seduce me [Hypa]" (60), cunningly keeps him aroused by "the aromatic breath of her sighs" (63) and "fulfilling her wish, without allowing me [him] to fulfill mine [his]" (68). The emphasis on Octavia's fatal attraction is repeated over and over again throughout the novel. Octavia's enticements continuously erode Hypa's will to resist her and reduce him to a passive submissive role.

In her company, Hypa has no choice, he can only give in to her seduction: "I tried to be serious in the hope that she comply with my request, but her high spirits overwhelmed me and I found I had no choice but to submit as she pulled me toward the bed" (89). Octavia is constructed by Hypa's male gaze. No matter how she sincerely loves him, he does not initially falter to have her come to personify sensuality, immorality, and destruction. The three days he spends with her in the Sicilian Master's house, represent the seduction and temptation of Eve to Adam. With her, he experiences all the forbidden pleasures that caused Adam to fall from paradise as he claims. He explains, "I was Adam when he was about to leave the Garden of Eden because he was about to enter Paradise and eat again from the tree. Driven by this forbidden lust, replete with magical allure, I was about to take her right then and there" (63). He adds, "I cannot write down the rest of what happened between us on that first night, our night. It was full of the forbidden pleasures which brought Adam out of Paradise" (69). He wonders if "God expel[led] Adam from Paradise because he disobeyed His order, or because, when he discovered secretly Eve's femininity, he understands his own masculinity and how he was different from God, although God had created him in His image" (69). The question raised by Hypa here highlights the awareness of sexual identity as the potential cause of the Great Fall.

This sexual awareness encapsulates Hypa's problem with women. In short, Hypa's internal conflict is caused by his awareness of his sexuality which is awakened by Octavia. It greatly contradicts with his religious identity as a monk. Hence, he wishes to castrate himself to become immune to the charms of women so that he "could relax forever" and "become like the angels" (103). The linking of contamination and women's temptation remains a space wherein male hostilities and anxieties about women could be enacted. Mernissi asserts that the theory of female sexuality in Arab patriarchy is

problematic as it “cast[s] the woman as the hunter and the man as the passive victim” (33). Arab patriarchy, she continues to argue, regards the female’s “sexual power as the most destructive element in the . . . social order . . . [and] synonymous with the satanic” (33). Octavia, then, exists as a deterrent and a threat to Hypa’s religious and moral progress. Such a view is also manifest in Kipling’s *Kim* in which the lama laments, “even those who would follow the Way are thrust aside by idle women” (308) and regards “children and marriage” as a “block” for “enlightenment” (79). Kim also complains, “How can a man follow the Way or the Great Game when he is eternally pestered by women?” (366). Further, Mahbub Ali warns Kim that because of women “all plans come to ruin and we lie out in dawning with our throats cut” (252). Such a negative view of women clearly reveals a sexist view that renders women as silly and trivial and men as playing the important roles in life.

4.0 Debunking patriarchy and the empowerment of women

Azazeel appears excitingly unpredictable; its rule is not to promote one voice/ideology over another. Patriarchy, gendered dichotomy, and patriarchal religion are all open for negotiation and, then, deconstruction. It presents us with characters remarkably characterized by evolution, activity, and progress that steer them toward disturbing dominant certainties of their society. In fact, the novel which identifies itself with dynamic characters, and refuses to be bound by endorsing certainties is perfectly feminist. Rose explains: “The novel of the certainties, firm characters in a firm setting, plot solidity in the hands of an omniscient narrator, the novel which relied for its impact on moral certainties . . . was [is] masculine” (Rose, 1978,100). Ziedan’s novel is far from being a textual mould to produce/impose a certain thought. He is aware of the fact that if he writes his literary work according to an imposed rigid certainty, it will artistically die. Characters of certainty live in a fossilized world and hence inevitably fail to obtain life, activity, or any a sense of progress through their interaction with other characters or the development of actions, whereas Ziedan’s characters derive their life from the author’s thought and live in a world, where absolute values evaporate, multiculturalism, polarity, and unlimited freedom are embraced.

Therefore, Ziedan brilliantly makes of his novel a double voiced narrative where andro-voice and gyno-voice are juxtaposed in a way that demolishes the patriarchal certainties about women. The voice of woman frequently exists in dialogue with that of the male; functioning as a confrontation of the patriarchal conventions. Such a dialogic element is evident through the library scene, directed at challenging the male’s belief about woman’s inferior intellectuality. “Patriarchy,” in Tyson’s terms, “promotes the belief that women are innately inferior to men” (Tyson, 2006, 85). Here, Octavia appears as a deconstructionist of the patriarchal heretics, contrary to, the stereotypical image of a woman as intellectually inferior. She is the one who guides Hypa to what is supposed to be a Male’s domain i.e. the Library as a symbol of enlightenment, knowledge, awareness and consciousness. In other words, the attributes of the Male according to the archetypal symbol of the Yang-yin which assigns the male (Yang) with “light, activity, the conscious mind” and assigns the female (Yin) with “darkness, passivity, the unconscious” (Guerin, 1779, 159). This meeting between Hypa and Octavia turns out to be a debate that debunks the aforementioned stereotypes about women.

Though Hypa lives with her in a state of guilt-stained bliss, he is shocked with another attribute of Octavia that is intellectual rather than physical. He finds out that Octavia is a well-read woman who knows about Aristotle, Galen, and Hippocrates to the extent that he gets shocked by her awareness of such prominent figures in medicine and philosophy. He states, “you are familiar with the learning of the ancients” (81) and later, “Octavia, you do know a lot” (82). Hypa is shocked to know that Octavia is well read – a deviation from the ignorant lusty whore stereotype he is accustomed to. The most interesting dialogues between the two are the ones about Aristotle. Octavia’s view of Aristotle as “retarded” (81) is of great interest as she deconstructs the power and authority of the famous philosopher who labeled women as “inferior” and considered it “not appropriate in a female character to be manly, or clever” and hence, unworthy of being tragic heroes (Daiches, 1969,36, my italics).

Octavia mocks Aristotle “with a chuckle” and Hypa is “startled” by “the way she made fun of the great philosopher” and angrily protests, “Aristotle is the teacher of the ancient world and the first person to give mankind the principles of thought and the science of logic” (81). Octavia counters his argument by undermining Aristotle’s contribution to human knowledge. She argues, “Ha, so before him mankind didn’t know logic and the principles of thought?” She adds, “I don’t like him because in his books he says many foolish things, and claims that women and slaves share the same nature, different from the nature of free men. Retarded!” (81). Octavia’s answer back to such a masculine philosopher is, in fact, a necessity of women’s agency.

For women’s acquisition of power, Irigaray urges them to challenge and reverse the male’s position of mastering the patriarchal philosophical discourse that “sets forth the law for all others” (Irigaray, 1977,74), including, of course, women. Similarly, Rich promotes the importance of women’s re-visiting of classical texts that contributed to shaping their way of thinking: “Re-vision—the act of looking back, of seeing with fresh eyes, of entering an old text from a new critical direction . . . is an act of survival . . . is more than a search for identity: it is part of our refusal of . . . how we have been led to imagine ourselves” (Rich, 1972,33). To Octavia, Aristotle’s view about women and slaves is a merely narrow-minded dichotomous sickening view as it is founded on a baseless sexism which renders him simply a retard. What strikes in Octavia’s counter argument about Aristotle is that she skillfully snaps the male gaze from Hypa to herself. Hypa completely fails to respond to her brilliant comments: “I didn’t know how to answer her” (82). Obviously, the strength of her surprising comments stole away his intellectual thunder.

Hypa’s apparent shock at Octavia’s education betrays the stereotypical image of the woman as ignorant. What Hypa comes to know is that the Sicilian Master has dedicated himself to the education of Octavia. In fact, Octavia’s Christian neighbor criticizes the Sicilian for reading to Octavia and compares Octavia’s education to someone who “is giving the snake poison to drink” (82) to make it even more venomous. The neighbor’s remark is about the empowerment of women which he firmly stands against. The remark also invokes Michele Foucault’s association between Knowledge and Power. He claims, “power and knowledge directly imply one another” (Foucault, 1977, 27). Hence, in order to keep the woman under the dominance of the male authority, she needs to remain ignorant and not empowered by knowledge.

Octavia embarks on deconstructing the foundations of the empowering agencies of patriarchy, namely, the institutionalized religion. According to Octavia, much of women’s subjugation is enacted through male-made religion, whereby women are reduced to live in a world in which virtually all their meaning is defined by sexist metaphysical tradition. Ranshaw asserts: “The structure of domination and subordination that typically define . . . gender relations has found its ‘beginning’ and ‘end’ in . . . Judaeo-Christian logos . . . [T]he hierarchically structured categories like man and woman, self and other . . . find their ultimate authority in the Genesis” (Ranshaw, 2009,76). Accordingly, Octavia positions herself against the Church as a hopelessly patriarchal institution that operates to obscure people’s minds. She rejects it and its misogynist Archbishop, Cyril, outright: “[T]he Christians went to the Church of the Wheat Seed to hear the sermon of . . . the head of that Church which had turned the world dark” (88). Octavia’s grasp of sexism as the paradigm of women’s oppression within the history of religion causes her to reject as well the Old Testament for sustaining and encouraging the discriminatory and sexist treatment of women: “Ha, the Old Testament. That’s a wonderful book, always mocking the ancient Egyptians and making allegations about their women” (95). Octavia’s critical view of the sexist content of the Old Testament raises doubts about how woman is constructed by the religious male gaze, causing it to be questioned and undermined.

Octavia’s view further prompts an exploration into women’s agency, which is currently denied to her in a patriarchal religious context. Nevertheless, Octavia manages to turn the tables and make Hypa, the monk, uncertain about the content of the “Pentateuch” (95). This debate further obscures the masculine interpretation of the Biblical narrative of the Garden of Eden, Original Sin, and The Great Fall

to the point of making the so-called gendered gaze role reversed. Despite Hypa's innate feeling that the apple is the forbidden fruit that led to the fall of Adam from Paradise and his strong objection to eating it, he still fails to hold on to his refusal to eat it and accepts the apple from Octavia's hand and takes a bite as well following her trivialization of the whole story.

More to the point, Octavia asserts that she "hate[s]" Christian people (87) as "they are like locusts. They eat everything that is ripe in the city, and make life gloomy and cruel" (88). To her, fanatics of the Church of St. Mark in Alexandria have turned her world into a dark bitter one. For harboring such ideas, for having challenged and mocked the dominant patriarchal religious ideology, and for trying to rescue Hypatia, the great mathematician and philosopher of her time, Octavia pays the ultimate price, i.e. the capital punishment. She is brutally murdered by a blow on her head with "a hefty piece of wood studded with nails" (127) by one of the religious mob. The head harbors the mind and is symbolic of ideology, enlightenment, and knowledge. Octavia's fatal wound is dealt at her head who dared to harbor thoughts that counter the dominant ideology. In addition, Hypa does not realize initially that it was Octavia who was murdered by the mob. To him, she was just a woman who rushes to the aid of Hypatia. Only after he draws near to her does he receive the shocking realization that it is actually Octavia who was murdered by the Christian extremists. This sudden realization echoes Shirley Jackson's "The Lottery", in which the person to be killed in the lottery remains unknown. However, because Tessie Hutchinson criticizes and challenges the concept of the lottery, saying all the time that is isn't/wasn't "fair" (Kennedy, 1995,252,53,54), she is the one who is chosen to be stoned, because she is the one who is most dangerous to the stability of the dominant system of power. The same thing happens to Octavia; she turns from an obscure woman into the Octavia who dared defy and trivialize the dominant Christian ideology and therefore chosen to be the one who is murdered.

Like Octavia, Hypatia is brutally murdered by the same mob. Being a freethinker, a scientist and a philosopher, and posing a direct threat to the authority of Cyril, the Archbishop of Alexandrian Church of St. Mark, he labels her a witch who has taken control using her magic, not her wits, of authoritative people in the city, like "the governor of the city, Orestes" (108). He wages a religious war against her and sends his fanatics to skin and burn her alive to make her an example for others who dare to oppose his authority. To Hypa, Hypatia is similar to Jesus Christ "combining grace with majesty" (108-9). He wonders, "From what luminous element was this woman created?" (109). Her representation contradicts the aforementioned stereotypical image of women who stand for darkness.

Further, being a scientist and a liberal intellectual make her in sharp contrast with the stereotypical image of the woman as ignorant to the extent that she becomes incomprehensible to the misogynist Cyril, in particular, and to the Male, in general. As Irigaray puts it, when a woman speaks her own mind, "she' sets off in all directions leaving 'him' [the male] unable to discern the coherence of any meaning. Hers are contradictory words, somewhat mad from the standpoint of reason, inaudible for whoever listens to them with ready-made grids, with a fully elaborated code in hand" (Irigaray, 1977, 29). Hypatia's specialized lectures on "calculating unknown numerical values" (109), her exceptional skills to illustrate philosophical debates, together with her rhetoric of "Phrases from basic philosophy" (109) make her a unique genius, exceptionally surpassing the Male's horizon. Hypa acknowledges that he grasped from her what he failed to understand from Male philosophers: "I understood from what she said things I had never understood from other philosophy teachers" (110). The "mastery position" (Irigaray, 1977, 74), in Irigaray terms, of knowledge and intellectual superiority is no longer assignable to the Male. Here, it is obviously occupied by Hypatia.

Hypa wonders, "if it was the god Khnum who shapes men's bodies, then from what fine clay did he shape her [Hypatia], and with what heavenly essence did he mould her?" (109). Hypa's remarks suggest that women were probably created by a different god since "the god Khnum ... shapes men's bodies" only. So, if Khnum created her, then he must have used different materials to create and mould her. The underlying ideology in this comment is that women are genetically different from men, in other words, men are from Mars and women are from Venus. Indeed, Hypa is so infatuated by Hypatia's

superior image that he thinks of becoming “a disciple of Hypatia for the rest of [his] life, or a servant who walks behind her” (110). Hypatia’s knowledge makes him decide to surrender his masculine/genetic supposed superiority to the supposedly genetically inferior female called Hypatia. Hypa is shocked also to see that when “Hypatia came into the vast hall and everyone stood up for her, *including the men*” (108, my italics). When she “prepared to speak ... everyone fell silent, as silent as the statues in the long Avenue of Rams in Thebes” (108). The comparison of people to statues generates an image of Hypatia as divine.

Further, Hypatia’s belief in the freedom of faith is another sign of her opposition to patriarchy and its religious institution. She considers that celebration of freedom of faith and multiculturalism are steps forward in civilization. Thus, she pushes the governor to go against “the pope’s desire to expel the Jews completely from Alexandria” (121) – an action that renders her a “devil” (121) that needs to be exorcised. Hypatia’s extraordinary intellectual gifts are all undermined and devalued by Bishop Cyril who claims that Hypatia’s power stems from her magic: “[S]he operated by magic and made astronomical instruments for astrologers and charlatans. They said many things, none of them reassuring” (121). This negative publicity aims to assassinate the character of Hypatia before actually assassinating her physically. The Church of Alexandria celebrates only one ideology in which there is no room for a polarity of faith. In contrast, Hypatia’s enlightening thought is inclusive as suggested by her Pythagorean theories through which she makes Hypa realize that “all beings emanate from the rhythms of a single system” (110). The single system which harmonizes the world according to Hypatia, completely contradicts the dualistic system enacted by patriarchy and its agencies.

Hypa’s infatuation and admiration of the intellect and divine beauty of Hypatia, makes him feel like Peter who “denied Jesus the Messiah three times in one night”. He reflects, “I denied Hypatia in the face of her killers ... because I was afraid” (160). In fact, the murder of Hypatia causes Hypa to baptize himself as “Hypa”. “I gave myself a new name, the name I am still known by – Hypa – which is just the first half of her name” (134). Consequently, Hypa creates himself anew from Hypatia’s name/ashes thus becoming a metaphorical reversed recreation of Adam from Eve. The death of Hypatia gives him the wings he needs to fly from Alexandria and find a more peaceful monastery in Aleppo and causes him later to abandon the church. Hypa rises from the ashes of Hypatia as if she is the Phoenix that sets him free.

The last outstanding seductive female character in the novel is that of Martha. Her seduction is not only due to her body, but also to her independence, divine beauty, and artistic talent. Martha exists outside the society’s paradigms of patriarchal essentialism. Her autonomy and passion for living outside the realms of submission and silence splendidly distinguishes her from the conformist females. Although she was too young, Martha breaks with her husband who brutally victimizes her by sexual violence and bodily abuses. Martha is a young wife deflowered by her abusive husband’s finger, “Suddenly he slipped his finger inside me and I started to bleed. I screamed, jumped out and ran towards the door” (263), bodily violated, “he would play with my breasts with the toes of his right foot, until he fell asleep” (263-64), and repeatedly beaten till she loses “consciousness” (263). She, as well, contrasts such an abusive husband’s mobility; he socializes with friends and conducts his business, while she is imprisoned at home alone. He forbids her “to leave the house. He would go away on business for weeks and came back to find his plaything awaiting him” (263). Martha’s response to her oppressive circumstances diligently presents an admirable rendering of a woman who protests against her oppression for freedom. Although Martha does not have “any relatives or any patron” (235), she rebels against the abusive husband by running away from his house, and, then, forces him to divorce her. This resistance guides her into maturity with conviction of remaining independent.

Therefore, Martha chooses to redirect the energy, which would have been consumed by domestic violence, and invests it in developing her artistic talent to live as an independent subject: “[S]o I went to this aunt of mine in her old house in Aleppo and spent the last three years there. I learnt to sing there” (265). She, then, revises patriarchy’s supposed view of woman as a submissive and fragile

object. She evidences willingness to assert her identity as a subject— a matter that places her in the unique position of a heroine. Contrary to the archetypal image of woman's brain as fallow, she interacts with Hypa with confidence and independent forthright opinions. When Hypa turns down her proposal of marriage: "In the Gospel according to Mathew, it says: 'Anyone who marries a divorced woman commits adultery'" (279), she boldly replies: "'Commits adultery? So what did we do in the cottage yesterday? Did not we commit adultery there?'"(279). Martha's frank disregard for Hypa's God-given role of women in society allows her not only to maintain straightforwardness and defiance of patriarchal religious ideology but also to gain status with the Male as a decision maker. Her prompt decision to leave Hypa to make a living by singing suggests the power of woman who can seek her autonomy with or without marriage. Another remark of Martha's response is Hypa's revelation of his powerlessness and silence to it. He describes his reaction: "Martha slipped away from my side, as the soul slips out of an emaciated body weakened by chronic ailments . . . My legs were numb and I almost collapsed to the ground when I tried to stand" (279). What we see here, then, is a physically paralyzed and completely silenced Hypa. The erasure of his power and voice by Martha's answer strips him of his former powerful position as a male subject.

Martha is an exceptionally beautiful woman, who creates a disturbing articulation of the patriarchal view of woman's beauty. Her glamour offers an alternative perspective to the traditional patriarchal discourse on woman's beauty as *fitnah* (i.e. a ruinous attraction). One of the most attractive aspects of Martha is her possession of heavenly and angelic beauty. Hypa feels that she is a superior being to him for her beautiful voice and divinely splendor. He admires her: "Martha was a miracle of divine beauty" (235), she is as "beautiful as an image of the virgin, but she also had a bold expression most disconcerting to someone like me" (235). Martha's beauty embodies all that is sublime, majestic, and blissful. His attraction to her beauty leaves him tranquil and joyous: "I . . . saw her . . . like a houri who had come down on to earth wrapped in heavenly light to bring us peace" (242). Healing and restoration of the desire for life are common associations with Martha's personality. The first moment Hypa sees Martha, she effectively becomes synonymous with panacea for him. Unaware that the reason for Hypa's sudden change of appearance is Martha, the abbot comments: "Hypa the monk has found the elixir of life" (230). Even Martha's physical appearance fascinates Hypa and evokes his poetic passion: "Her hair was imprisoned under headdress, longing to be free, and when it framed her face she was evidence of the divine genius in creating mankind" (236). He wonders what "beauty was hidden under her head covering! What a look I saw in her eyes! . . . [H]er beauty so awed me that I was about to faint" (236). Hypa stirs romantic notions about the beautiful and handsome Martha. She appears to be more angelic, idealistic, and catalyst for life than a beautiful sexual object or an agent of the Male's moral and spiritual destruction. Ziedan's dramatization of Hypa's attitude toward Martha appears to be a dramatic effort to show that woman is more beautiful, magnificent, and wonderful than patriarchy would like to admit.

Another quality of Hypa's admiration for Martha is her artistic talent. As a singer, she commands the hearts of those who listen to her angelic voice. Hypa feels as if he is soaring into the sky when he hears her voice: "What a radiant voice I heard, descending serenely from the folds in the clouds . . . I can feel her magical voice take me out of myself to a place beyond all things" (226). Martha's talent of singing is clearly a spiritual need for Hypa. "When Martha was absorbed in singing . . . Her singing . . . on me like a drug, first numbing the surface of my body, then seeping deep inside me. Her voice transported me to a distant and infinite horizon . . . until I lost all sense of who I was" (243-44). Martha's voice helps his spirit soar higher, it meanwhile transports and carries him to another realm away from his painful reality.

5.0 Conclusion

In conclusion, Ziedan's *Azazeel* remains a remarkable contribution to the treatment of woman. It represents a concise picture of the masculine hierarchical society which still tends to rule in Egypt, where women are labeled, stereotyped, abused, and objectified. "Writing," to Ziedan, "raises within us storms we have stifled . . . [A]nd brings to mind the most atrocious happenings" (36). It is normal,

then, that the novel is consciously permeated by the crisis and the harsh patriarchal dictates surrounding the construction of female identity. Through Hypa's account and substantiation of the performative patriarchal (religious) discourse and othering gender stereotypes, Ziedan does not so much unearth pervasive facts regarding the oppressive patriarchy within the Egyptian society as draw attention to the artificiality of such an ideology/ its agencies, and the vulnerability of it/ them to deconstruction. His creation of Hypatia, Octavia, and Martha is especially significant in terms of their particular contributions to chaffing and disturbing the patriarchal dominant certainties of their society. The distinct voices/acts of these women are juxtaposed with those of the Males, so that the discovery of these women's truth becomes a process of demystifying the patriarchal heretics. The stereotypical notions of woman as silent, intellectually inferior, a sexual object, a deterrent to the Male's spirituality/morality are questioned, and, then, undermined by these women. Since literature becomes a space of resistance against the various forms of oppression, one can safely argue that Ziedan, through his dramatization of patriarchal oppression in his society and women's resistance against it, substantiates the notion of reformist cultural responsibility and moral obligation the intellectual needs to take on to free women from the absolutes of Male tradition. The sacrifices involved in these women's pursuits of freedom from patriarchy include reincarnations that imply the Egyptian women's need for rebellion and revolution against the patriarchal dictates exerted on them.

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