

Love between Destiny and Causality; Temporary, and Permanent Impasse: Comparison between Aboulela's *The Translator*, and Khadra's *What the Day Owes the Night*

Hassiba Alloune

(Department of English Literature, University of Jordan, Amman, Jordan)

ABSTRACT: This comparison between Leila Aboulela's *The Translator* and Yasmina Khadra's *What the Day Owes the Night* is on the love story between Sammar and Rae, and between Younes (Jonas) and Emilie. The main comparison is going to be between Jones' way of life, attitudes, and the problems that he faced which aggravated his issues. Therefore, he lost the taste of life that forced him to end his love story before it has ever begun. Ultimately he ended up with regret, due to his *entourage* and weak faith. Meanwhile, Sammar's life turned upside down, after she had gone from a happy bride and mother, to a sorrowful widow with a child. After her husband's death, her position as a widow, and her love story with a non-Muslim aggravated her issues. Her love was based on selfishness; once her attention went from a husband-hunter to a woman who believes in faith, her love story succeeded and ended with a happy marriage.

Key words: Love, Faith, Separation, Marriage.

Date of Submission: 27-12-2019

Date of Acceptance: 10-01-2020

I. INTRODUCTION

The comparison on hand between Khadra's *What the Day Owes the Night* 2008 and Aboulela's *The Translator* 1999 is based on the love story between Jonas and Emilie, Sammar and Rae. These four characters share similarities, as they are distinguished by a number of differences. Sammar can stand for Jonas, both experienced hardships; as she can stand for Emilie, both were divorced, and in love with outsiders from their race and religion. They both stooped to make their lovers marry them, the first for the sake of love and restarting her life, the second for love only. And so, Rae can represent Jonas, both were loved and asked for marriage, as they both refused that marriage; the first ended up by converting to Islam to marry Sammar, while the second ended up barren, paying for the mistake he had committed at seventeen (adultery). Sammar and Jonas meet and contrast, they differ in faith; Sammar seems more religious than Jonas is. Actually, this is what made her win Rae's heart and gloriously marry him. Nevertheless, Jonas grew up among non-Muslims, which easily made him respond to his temptations and sin with Madame Cazenave; his love could not be reached, to end with marriage, it would become incest. Other similarities discussed in the coming lines like love between a Muslim and a Christian, hardships (Sammar/Jonas), breaking differences (Sammar/Emilie), impossible marriage (Rae was not a Muslim/ Jonas sinned with his lover's mother), context of immigration and war, plus alienation abroad, within one's community, accepting destiny with no shift (Sammar/Jonas), as they both lacked affection. Further, strong/weak faith, and love between a temporary and a permanent impasse (converting to Islam, incest) and confession. Both Sammar and Emilie lost their husbands as they both asked their lovers for marriage. Both novels end with reconciliation (Sammar, Rae and Jonas, Jean-Christophe, and Emilie). In Khadra's interview with BBC, he sees, "Without women, paradise is just a white nightmare" i.e. the paradise refers to men in need of women who are love. Aboulela makes religion, a pure love, in her "Halal Fiction", "The love story becomes the prism through which the reader conceives Islam (...)" (Abu Amrieh, Al-Awan, p. 348). Both have quite similar answers about Islam, Muslims, and the West, in their interview at Dubai festival 2017.

II. BODY

Khadra in *What the Day Owes the Night* constructs a complicated love story between a young Algerian, Muslim man and a French Christian lady. In fact, their relationship has ended before it has ever started due to a number of reasons that entangled their love. Younes¹ or Jonas together with his family encountered very hard conditions, they were forced to leave their land and move away on a search of a better situation in the city

¹Younes is the real name of the protagonist. Whereas, he is called Jonas by his adaptive mother, and by all foreigners.

of Oran. As a matter of fact, Jonas the young boy shared his parents' wretchedness, especially in the context of war -heart of struggle, "This was not life; we merely existed." (Khadra, p. 4). Aboulela also creates a complex love story between a Sudanese Muslim woman and a Scottish non-Muslim man. Similarly to Jonas', Sammar passed by several hardships that truly entangled her life, chiefly after she became a widow with a son. Thus her personal life seems to lose its privacy, because she had to keep on, her mother in law Mahasen on every single decision she had to take, "I want to get married again, I need a focus in my life," and her aunt's reply was, *Your son is your focus.*" (Aboulela, p. 28). Moreover, she had to live in a durable sorrow, by exceeding "Sharia's mourning" just in order to satisfy the people surrounding her, "I am so glad you seem to have got rid of this ridiculous idea of getting married again- when you see Amir, how lovable he is, you will not have the hard heart to be so selfish and bring him a stepfather(...)" (Ibid, p. 84). The right of getting married has become an exercise of selfishness in the others' eyes; it is no more a personal affair yet a public one with harsh interferences which made Sammar feel guilty. What seriously aggravated her situation is the person whom she chose to share her life with, a Christian or probably an Atheist; she herself did not know what he really was. In spite the fact that, love appears to be blind breaking the barriers and the differences (nationality, race, religion) both Sammar/Emilie but Sammar is unable to cross out Sharia's rules that a Muslim woman is not allowed to marry a non-Muslim, until he converts to Islam,

'Are you going to marry someone who's not a Muslim?'

'Of course not, that would be against the sharia.'

'So what's the point then of running off to see him in hospital?'' (Aboulela, p. 89)

Emilie and Jonas' case was similar, Emilie succeeded in breaking the differences too, but what aggravated the situation for these young lovers was Jonas' adultery with Emilie's mother that goes against sharia in Islam and Christianity -incest. Religion in both love stories seems to conduct their destiny in whether to marry or not. There is also causality, if adultery was not committed but Jonas and Madame Cazenave, his love and marriage to Emilie could have happened because,

That was ten years ago, in this very pharmacy. I don't know if you remember, but I've never forgotten it. It was raining that morning, my gloves were soaking wet. I'd come for my injection; I used to come every Wednesday. You had just come home from school. I remember the color of your school bag with studded straps, the jacket you were wearing, the fact that the laces of your brown shoes were united. You told me you were thirteen. We talked about the Caribbean. While your mother was giving my injection in the back room, you passed a rose between the pages of my geography book.' (...) Suddenly I remembered her face at the picnic when I told her I worked in a pharmacy. She was right. We had met before, a long time ago. (Khadra, p. 241)

Sammar was accused by her mother in law of being the reason of the death of her son, this twisted Sammar's life and created a doubled sense of her guilt, can she be happy after being the reason of her groom's death between herself and her people at a large scale?. Sammar's hardships were toggling between an immigrant context and between her own community; while Jonas' was standing between his traditional conservative community and the modern colonial context.

On the other side, things went upside down for Jonas and his family the moment they left their land they equally left their traditional way of life, and so faith became weak for the second generation - Jonas. In short, Jonas left behind him the life he was supposed to live as a poor, Algerian, starting a new one among new people. Jonas as Sammar they both had to stick to their imposed destiny to survive their sorrows and their hardships without shifting, but accepting their destinies as they were imposed on them; in the sense that Jonas had to bear the life that his father and ancestors lived (poverty, ignorance etc.) and Sammar had to continue her life as a widow. None of them had the right to think of changing towards a better situation, "I know- Arab boys aren't supposed to go to school, they're supposed to work in the fields, look after the livestock. But I can send him to school, I can turn him to an educated man..." (Ibid, p. 33-34). This what raised Jonas' father's anger and piercingly turned him to a determined conservative man preserving his son's traditional life in the heart of the urban city of Oran. In Oran Jones and his family faced hard times (poverty, father's madness) this distanced Jonas parents from him. As a result, he never or probably seldom experienced what love or affection were, except authority with his father who seldom spoke or smiled, and his obedient mother who never shows any emotions, "You do believe me, son don't you?"

'Yes, Papa.'

'Look at me in the eye and tell me you believe me' (Khadra, p. 35).

Sammar on one hand seems to lack affection too, of her fellows, family, son and her husband in particular, especially living abroad among strangers as black and woman experiencing alienation twice, "Sammar felt like a helpless immigrant who didn't know any English." (Aboulela, p. 13). Meeting Rae as a foreigner with dark features probably provided her with a kind of affection that later on transformed to love. On the other hand, alienation in Jonas' own country, among his own family (parents); due to poverty, kept this parents away from him occupying themselves only with how to earn money, and how to survive. This is not a least occupation, but it blinded them from their duty towards their children, their ignorance and their traditional way

of life kept them away from modern, beneficial way of thinking, where parents befriend their children, and educate them; instead of keeping them distant and drawing for them a somber portrait of the father exactly as Jonas' father. As a result, this child was prevented from love and affection; unlike with his adoptive family where he was welcomed by Germaine with love, kindness, and attachment (that he lacked with his own mother). As a matter of fact, Jonas needed love, i.e. from his childhood any girl, he met, quickly developed a kind of feeling exactly as it was the case for Lucette. Then Emilie, this exactly as Sammar's prior feeling towards Rae as a widow and a helpless foreigner,

And then there was Emilie. The first time I saw her, she was sitting on the porch outside the pharmacy, toying with the laces of her boots. She was a pretty girl with timorous coal black eyes. I could have mistaken her for an angel were it not that her face, so white it looked like marble, bore the unmistakable sign of some terrible illness. (Khadra, p. 114).

After, Emilie the girl of nine years old never came back to the pharmacy for health reasons, Jonas the boy of thirteen quickly forgot about her and met Isabelle; both thought they might be able to look like adult lovers, "My first kiss, I owe to Isabelle" (Ibid. p. 117). However, this attraction soon disappeared due to Younes' origins. This can be echoed in *The Translator* when Sammar felt a kind of an emotional isolation, as a divorced and a black woman dreaming of marrying a Scottish man, "I am not beautiful enough" (Aboulela, p. 125). Later on, Jonas, the young man of seventeenth, things went quite serious for him, it was no longer a childish seduction, yet a bodily contact with the wrong person, it was Emilie's mother, "This was my first experience of being a man, my first taste of sexual discovery, and I was intoxicated by it." (Khadra, p. 165). Now, Jonas' gloomy life seems to really trigger, by committing adultery with Madame Cazenave, the sin will be doubled and probably never forgiven if he ever had a relationship with her daughter Emilie. And so it is incest, and his mistake can neither be forgiven, nor forgotten, at worst it forever turned his life to a barren, lonely, single and solitary man,

You are a Muslim- a good Muslim from what I have heard- and I am Catholic. A long time ago, in a moment of weakness, we gave in to temptation. May the Lord forgive us. It was a fleeting mistake. But there is one sin that He will never absolve or pardon- incest. (Ibid, p. 218)

Unlike Sammar, her strong faith prevented her from committing any unforgivable mistake with Rae, although she was truly in love with, "He left his desk and came to sit with her, leaned to kiss her but she moved her head away." (Aboulela, p. 119). Hence, refusing to marry him; unless he turns to be a Muslim is an example of the strong faith that kept her away from sinning. Indeed her strong faith guided her towards the right path; this quote by J. M. Coetzee echoes this, "story of love and faith all the more moving for the restraint with which it is written." (*Minaret*, flyleaf) (Hassan, p. 191) For Jonas few minutes of pleasure turned his whole life to a hellish one; even if Madame Cazenave did not matter about an incestuous relationship between Emilie and Jonas, Jonas himself seemed to be ashamed of it, "Simon, Jonas, this is Emilie, Madame Cazenave's daughter." It was as if someone had thrown a bucket of cold water over me." (Khadra, p. 205).

Emilie appears to suit every young man, most particularly Jonas, yet this admiration was featured with an impasse, because Emilie was Jean-Christophe's girl-friend and Madame Cazenave's daughter, later on Simon's wife. Never the less, Emilie was found of Jonas instead of Jean-Christophe or Simon, basically this is what twice entangled the situation. This latter, in any occasion reveals admiration for Jonas, which made him live in a discomfort, "Under the table, I felt Emilie's hand slide along my thigh. My drink went down the wrong way and I almost passed out, gasping and choking as the others thumped me on the back." (Ibid, p. 215). Jonas loves Emilie, yet he had no right to be with her, he had to avoid her looks, and gestures. In short, Jonas had to always remember the oath he owes to Madame Cazenave, which made him doubly suffer by remembering his adultery that is the reason of his impossible love. Basically this reveals to readers that he was not a fully religious man or at least as Sammar who could resist Rae; above all he was living, studying among Christian, Jews and foreigners from different nationalities, his adoptive mother was also Christian. Every single detail in this novel shows that Jonas was absorbed by the French way of life, even his parents (the source of tradition and faith) disappeared (although he always remembered, and looked for his relatives). As a result, the path towards a sin such as adultery was easy. This single mistake distanced him from the love of his life Emilie and made him pass by hard times and psychological unrest (like Sammar who was hurt after she was refused by Rae), it was a long-term and an eternal mistake that could neither be solved nor forgotten. As a matter of fact, he could neither marry Emilie, nor confess to her, what was the reason that kept him away from her, remained unexplained. She has always been his love since childhood, yet destiny separates them, "Why did you turn me away? If there was someone else, I might have understood. But you never married..." (Ibid, p. 310).

Khadra and Aboulela create a web of connection between the characters with an alike experience for both lovers, as it is going to be clarified. To explain, Jonas can stand for Sammar as he can stand for Rae. Thus, Emilie can represent both Sammar and Rae. Actually, the similarities between these characters prove that; Rae refused to convert to Islam for the sake of marrying Sammar, he rather chose to convert with a complete satisfaction, while Jonas refused any relationship with Emilie because of his prior affair with her mother and her love relation with his best friend whom he cannot betray. Furthermore, Sammar run after Rae to marry her, she

did her best to make him convinced with her way of thinking that of saying Shahada just for the sake of breaking the barrier that prevent them from marriage, of course in front of her people, "Come marriage time, it's by the way I'm Muslim and my parents will not let you marry me until you convert (...). Just say the *shahadah*" (Aboulela, p. 89). Sammar in this case can stand for Emilie instead of Jonas because she was the one who asked Rae for marriage as Emilie did with Jonas. Sammar's intention was marriage, as a selfish woman and husband-hunter, she aimed to get rid of her gloomy situation and to start a new life. Her quest was not welcomed in the way she was expecting it to be by Rae, in the contrary this latter refused her in a way that made her hate and distance herself from him, believing that there was no chance between them to be together, "It occurred to her now that she had come here to his office to ask him to marry her and he had not said yes. He had not said yes, and yet here she still sat, clinging. She had no pride." (Ibid, p. 124). Exactly as Emilie who several times tried to win Jonas' heart, yet she failed. Jonas stands for Rae, but differs from him in the way that he could not explain to Emilie the reason he avoids her; contrary to that, Rae told Sammar that he could not convert to Islam if not convinced. Jonas felt disabled and paralyzed to confess to Emilie the truth that could make her abhor her mother and him for ever. Emilie is like Sammar, she was the one who ran after Jonas,

'I want you to know...that I love you'

I felt the room crumbled around me.

Emilie did not flinch. She stared at me with her big black eyes, her fingers still clutching her handkerchief.

'Please, mademoiselle, go home.' (Khadra, p. 240)

Sammar and Emilie are widows, the death of the husband for the first is equal to sorrow, but the second is the end of a weighty burden of an imposed marriage. Hence, her only sorrow was about Jonas' refusal to love her or to justify to her for which reason he kept distance from her. In fact, Rae seems to share the situation of separation with his companion, yet for him it is a divorce, i.e. a self-imposed choice of separation, unlike death that is part and parcel of destiny.

Emilie's love towards Jonas was above all the differences of race, and religion, she wanted to marry him out of love. Unlike Sammar who wanted to remarry, to restart again mis-fortune life-her first marriage. Emilie's pure intention was ended up always with rejection due to the reasons mentioned above. From this one might see the role of destiny, Jonas and Emilie had several timely chances to meet and face each others, but the destiny seemed to separate them each time before they unified together. In the contrary to Sammar who was always separated from Rae, yet destiny finally unified them together. Although her selfishness was one of the reasons that separated her from Rae, but once she cleaned up her intentions towards him, i.e. making him convert to Islam for his sake, not only for the sake of marriage, her wish of marrying him started gradually to realize (most importantly, by converting to Islam). For Emilie and Jonas, things went quite differently especially after she married Simon, and after she was widowed. Destiny went against Emilie, when she was doing her best to make him love her he distanced himself. Then playing against Jonas the moment he stepped to confess his love, Emilie rejected him. Reconciliation by the end of both novels, in *The Translator* by the marriage of Sammar and Rae, while in Khadra's novel it is doubled, i.e. Jonas reconciled with Jean-Christophe after years of separation, when he thought that Emilie betrayed him with him. The second and most important reconciliation is with Emilie after her death in her letter, "*Forgive me as I have forgiven you.*" (Khadra, p. 387).

III. CONCLUSION

To conclude, Khadra might not have read Aboulela, but his novel echoes *The Translator* with great deal of similarities. Thereby, the reader might notice that the four lovers can stand for each others whether in their sufferings, their current situation, or the way they wanted to reach their love. Samar and Rae were fortunate to end their love story with marriage; however, Jonas and Emilie, each time they met, they encountered reasons that separated them. Finally, love is dealt with by both authors in a complex context whether at microscopic level (family) or macroscopic lever (community and country). Thus, faith played a role in succeeding or entangling love stories; therefore, shaping one's destiny for ever. Faith is one's reference in the context of chaos (war, abroad) and is a beginning of Muslim's success as for Sammar, Jonas by the end of the novel and after the death of Emilie found a sole refuge in reaching her soul by reciting Coran at her tomb. Jonas might not be an exemplary Muslim, but he at least was not a hypocrite and he paid for his sin by not breaking the oath till the end of his life; while Sammar, as a religious woman she showed selfishness thinking only of marrying and being happy, not thinking of Rae's converting if fully convinced or not.

REFERENCES

- [1]. Aboulela, Leila. *The Translator*. Edinburgh: Polygon, 1999.
- [2]. Al Adwan, Amer and Awad, Yousef. "Translating Islam in Diaspora: Leila Aboulela's *The Translator*". *Jordan Journal of Applied Science "Humanities Series"*, Volume 15, Issue 2, 2013.
- [3]. Awad, Yousef. *The Arab Atlantic: Resistance, Diaspora, and Trans-cultural Dialogue in the Works of Arab British and Arab American Women Writers*. Lambert Academic Publishing, 2012.

- [4]. Hassan, Wail. S. *Immigrant Narratives Orientalism and Cultural Translation in Arab American and Arab British Literature*. Oxford University Press. United State of America. 2011.
- [5]. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p02sjs6z>
- [6]. Khadra, Yasmina. *What the Day Owes the Night*. Trans. Wynne, Frank. Great Britain: William Heinemann Vintage, 2010.
- [7]. Maan Jalal. maan@khaleejtimes.com/Dubai. Filed on March 11, 2017 | Last updated on March 12, 2017 at 10.16 am. Retrieved from <https://www.khaleejtimes.com/lifestyle/art-culture/islam-in-fiction>.

HassibaAlloune. "Love between Destiny and Causality; Temporary, and Permanent Impasse: Comparison between Aboulela's *The Translator*, and Khadra's *What the Day Owes the Night*." *IOSR Journal of Humanities and Social Science (IOSR-JHSS)*, 25(1), 2020, pp. 79-83.