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Interfigural and intertextual relationships between TayebSalih's Season of Migration ToThe North and William Shakespeare's Othello

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Abstract:

TayebSalih's character, Mustafa Sa'eed refers to Shakespeare's Othello saying 'I am Othello'. 'Like Othello', 'I am not Othello'. This declaration to look like and differ from Othello creates a literary interfigural and intertextual link between Mustafa Sa'eed and Othello. This link indeed goes further to include Hasna, Mustafa Sa'eed's widow and Desdemona, Othello's white wife. Thus, this article will highlight the interfigural and intertextual relationship between TayebSalih's and William Shakespeare's characters to defend the idea that such a literary relationship implies the persistence in the twentieth century of the institution of Otherness that oppresses the Black, the African and the woman who find ease only in death.

Keywords: Otherness, intertextuality, interfigurality, *Othello*, *Season of Migration To The North*

Introduction:

The literary accidental and deliberate imitations that happen at the level of characters, settings or styles between literary texts and genres can tease the critic's mind to explore the reasons and implications of these imitations. Such a case is found between TayebSalih's *Season of Migration To The North* and William Shakespeare's *Othello*. Indeed, in *Season of Migration To The North*, at the beginning of his journey in Great Britain, Mustafa Sa'eed refers directly to Othello by identifying himself with him and dissociating himself from him nearly at its end.

TayebSalih's Mustafa Sa'eed's association to and dissociation from Othello may nourish a study of its motives and purposes. This article then will highlight the mechanism of these association and dissociation and enlarge it to other female characters such as Desdemona, Hasna, Emilia and Mabrouka in order to uncover similarities and/or dissimilarities from an intertextual and interfigural scope.

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I-Intertextuality and interfigurality :A definition:

Intertextuality has many definitions. Generally speaking, intertextuality refers to the relationships of allusion, citation, or borrowing among texts. The word intertextuality was used for the first time by Julia Kristeva in *Sêmêiotikè* in 1969. In "The Bounded Text," she elaborates her idea of the text as 'a permutation of texts' (Kristeva.36). Indeed, intertextuality happens when and where 'several utterances, taken from other texts intersect and neutralize one another' (Kristeva. 37). The intertext inserted by the writer and identified by the reader, who uses it as a tool to analyse and criticize a text, shapes the relationship between the author(s)/text(s)/readers.

Interfigurality happens when:

A literary figure is extricated from its original fictional context and inserted into a new fictional context...We speak of 're-used figures' in order to indicate that if an author takes over a figure from a work by another author into his work, he absorbs it into the formal and ideological structure of his own product, putting it to his own uses, which may range from parody to satire, to a fundamental re-evaluation or re-exploration of the figure concerned[...]A special type of interfigurality ...manifests itself in fictional character's imitation of, or identification with, a character from another literary work(Muller,107.)

Interfigurality is a process of the incarnation of a figure of a literary text of another figure from another text so as to establish relationships between the two figures such as similarities, imitation and parody. We will encompass intertextuality and interfigurality between *Season Of Migration To The North* and William Shakespeare's *Othello*.

2-Interfigurality between Mustafa Sa'eed and Othello:

Put in this perspective, the two figures are a reminiscence of Shakespeare's Othello and Desdemona. Indeed, between TayebSalih's Season of Migration to the North and Shakespeare's *Othello*, a link of interfigurality can be established. The two texts share some ideas primarily about the problematization of cultural clashes between different individuals, different from race or gender point of view.

Both Mustafa Sa'eed and Othello are black and African. Both are described by the white physically and similar terms. Othello is only a 'old black ram'(p.26), and Mustafa Sa'eed is 'a black ugly face'. This is due to the fact that the Western tradition from the sixteen century (and before) till the nineteenth century (and after) has been portraying Black African people as wicked beings. This means that the orientalist hegemonic representation of the African is an indissoluble and never-ending machinery; it classifies him as the 'Other' so as to make him an object of domestication and subjugation.

Indeed, their presence in the west is not contested because both Othello and Mustafa Sa'eed are instrumentalized. They are appropriated. Othello is a competent military leader

who is glorified since he defends the Venetian society against the enemy; consequently, he is elevated to the status of 'the brave Moor' (Shakespeare.26) 'valiant Othello' (Shakespeare.43), 'great captain' (Shakespeare.35). Likewise, Mustafa Sa'eed is welcomed by the British society because of his brilliance. Like Othello, he is professionally powerful. Endowed with an academic prowess, he becomes a lecturer and a writer on various subjects like the theories of Keynes and Tawney. In some way, he is also appropriated. As long as he serves the British society, he 'is a noble person whose mind was able to absorb Western civilization' (p.33). In fact, he re-enacts Othello's figure and deed; i.e. 'like Othello' (p.38), he penetrates the British society and owns a high rank professionally; furthermore he is 'the first Sudanese to marry an Englishwoman [...] the first to marry a European of any kind' (p.55). In sum, both Othello and Mustafa Sa'eed are skilful, and as long as they serve the white society, they are accepted but without going beyond the confines set for them.

However, both go beyond them. They dare approach the white woman. In an attempt to 'embark upon a real and symbolic journey from otherness to sameness' (Rolls), Othello marries Desdemona. He eagerly attempts to re-inscribe himself as the same as a white man in the Venetian culture. Nonetheless, this culture has already inscribed him as an Other and appropriates him for the sake of its interests.

For his part, Mustafa Sa'eed, different to some extent from Othello (Mustafa Sa'eed himself says that he is not Othello. See Shakespeare.p.38), imposes a certain sameness on the British man. Like the British man, he is a 'colonizer, an intruder' (p.94). He comes 'as an invader into [their] very homes: a drop of the poison which [they] have injected into the veins of history' (p.95). Consequently, he does not target the white man's land but the white women. For him 'the city [is] transformed into an extraordinary woman with her symbols and mysterious calls, towards whom [he drives his] camels' (p.95). This means whenever he wrecks a woman, he destroys part of the city.

Nonetheless, Mustafa Sa'eed's concrete sameness does not save him from the ordeal of otherness. The women he meets fix him back in otherness from the first time they see the colour of his skin. He then becomes an object of discourse identified as a devilish ugly face. The British women resemble Iago, Brabantio and Emilia who describe the brave black general as 'a black ram' (Shakespeare.2), 'thick-lipped' (Shakespeare.25) and 'lusty Moor' (Shakespeare.42)

Furthermore, both Othello and Mustafa Sa'eed are completely rejected and annihilated. Iago takes charge of the former's destruction and Jean Morris the latter's. Iago, eagerly stirring up the Venetian cultural prejudice thinks that Othello and Desdemona's marriage is a 'frail vow betwixt an erring barbarian and a supersubtle Venetian' (Shakespeare.45), and Desdemona 'will find the error of her choice' (Shakespeare.45). Such a marriage is sacrilegious. Consequently, he feeds Othello with an argument that Desdemona could not love him because of their racial differences, hence a credibility of her betrayal. Othello succumbs to Iago's bigotry. He strangles Desdemona and commits suicide. The end of the story brings to the fore the reality that the Venetian societal position of 'the Moor', and the status of a 'Moor' is not that of respect, dignity and sameness; it is one of exclusion, inferiority and otherness.

Mustafa Sa'eed's destruction is performed by Jean Morris, Iago's parallel. This woman protects the British cultural order and its precepts. If the previous women succumb to him, Jean Morris makes Mustafa Sa'eed succumb to her; he yearns for the occasion to speak to her. She speaks to him when she chooses. All that she says are insults. It is with her that he feels inferior. So, he decides to 'possess' by the bond of marriage to kill this prejudice that belittles him. For her, this marriage is an occasion to reinforce her superiority; therefore, she denies him his rights since he is not like a white husband. She insists on being the superior; he insists on being a man, equal to the white. Unable to reach a compromise, he regretfully kills her. However unlike Othello, he does not commit suicide and prefers confronting the British judicial authority. The latter puts him in jail for seven years after which he willingly returns to his native land in an attempt to purify himself.

There he feels the fertile natural sameness with the villagers. His farming the land and marriage to one of their daughters, Hasna, is an attempt to 'relocate' himself and 're-integrate' into society. With his people he 'is always ready to give of his labour and his means in glad times and sad' (p.7). But after his death, his wife suffers from another type of otherness. In fact, Hasna, like Desdemona, suffers from men's relegating women to subordinate position in the village.

3-Intertextuality between Hasna and Desdemona:

Mustafa Sa'eed's and Hasna's deaths can remind the reader of Othello and Desdemona. Indeed, one of the concerns evoked in Season of Migration to the North is the image and the position attributed to African women. In her society, Hasna has no choice but to marry the man her community chooses for her, Wad Rayyes. Hasna keeps on refusing, but in vain. Though she is forced to marry him, she manages not to let him approach her for two weeks. When Wad Rayyes forces himself upon her, she kills and commits suicide.

Hasna's misfortune comes from the fact that women are subjected to what Carol Hansen calls the masculine code. The masculine code is:

Chiefly concerned with the ostensible protection of a young woman by her father or other male guardian, who dictates the choice of her husband as well as her general manner of life [...] In a sense man -first as a father, then as fiancé or husband-appears to serve as the representative of God in this context, for he is supposedly all powerful and capable of wreaking his wrath and revenge upon her, should she disobey his commands (Hansen.11)

The masculine code implies that a woman is an object that belongs to a man. It names the man 'masculine' (instead of male) and the woman feminine (instead of female) since it refers to socio-cultural structures (Saladin.6). It indeed reinforces the idea of male domination. Male domination is an offshoot of cultural domination; its legitimacy is derived from the cultural structure based on patriarchy that gives a woman an inferior status to man's and only a sexual frame of existence.

This very code dominates to a great extent the narrator's village. Wad Rayyes believes that a woman is a man's possession and states openly that 'women belong to men, and a man's a man even he is decrepit' (p.99). Hasna's social structure allows her no right to refuse to get married, and is forced to accept a new husband. Wad Rayyes insists that he will 'marry no one but she [...] she'll accept [him] whether she likes it or not [...] she should thank God she's found a husband like [him]'(p.97). The stress is laid on the cynical nature of the patriarchal system which provides that 'the men are guardians of the women' (p.98) and take decisions for them.

Indeed, it is Hasna's father and her brothers, Hasna's guardians, that Wad Rayyes asks for permission to marry her, her father 'agree[s]and so [do] her brothers'(p.98).Alone, Hasna cannot resist the whole society, 'anyway if the woman's father and brothers are agreeable no one can do without indeed'(p.91),nor even the narrator who loves her. His inability to help her, i.e. to save his love is made more complex by the fact that Hasna's disaster takes place at the moment when he is reconstructing his ties with his country. The narrator's inability to help her means that he chooses society, with all its structures and setbacks rather than his love for the young widow. This might translate an obedience to the patriarchal order; (it may also relate to a loyalty to an admired friend, and a refusal to take over his wife even after his death).In fact, the widow will not have a new sexual partner. In many ways, she appears like a rebel in her society, who altogether refuses to be an object of any man's sexual drives, be it in wedlock. Her final act of killing Wad Rayyes and committing suicide reveals TayebSalih's resentment for the oppression and an intention to support women's cause.

By killing Wad Rayyes, Hasna both refuses the status of traditional Sudanese women and takes revenge from her society through Wad Rayyes. In addition, by committing suicide, she chooses not to wait for the verdict of this society; i.e. to be punished by its judicial system or according to its rituals. Her suicide signifies an impossible existence within a society which keeps living in traditional oppressive values ; 'the novel uncovers the disease of the North but also the brutality of tradition in the village'(Friedman.16).The disease of the North and tradition victimizes Mustafa Sa'eed and Hasna whose 'liberation' is only in death.

What happens to Desdemona constitutes forTayebSalih an intertext to deal with African women's mishaps. Desdemona and Hasnaare pictured as devils and sources of danger. Women for men in the Venetian and Sudanese societies are:

pictures out of doors
 Bells in your parlors, wild-cats in your kitchens
 devils being offendedPlayers in your housewifery,
 and housewives' in your beds

(Act III,Scene1)(Shakespeare.41)

The implicit message is that both cultural orders teach men to mistrust and control women.

According to this cultural order, Desdemona and Hasna perform a 'downright violnece'(p.38), the former by the way she is married to Othello, the latter by refusing Wad Rayyes's demand of marriage. Desdemona disregards her father's permission. She denies her father the right that the cultural order confers on him in choosing or granting allowance to accept Othello as a son-in-law. Instead alone, she chooses the man whom she wants to marry. Thereupon, she totally ignores the masculine code, tears away the gender barriers of the White patriarchal cultural order and acts as an individual, an independent individual. Thus, she becomes an 'Other' who threatens the male authority .

Iago grasps this threat and draws the conclusion that she shouldbe destroyed, otherwise the Venetian cultural order will be destroyed; subsequently, he instigates the men who are presumed to have a control on Desdemona. He complains first to her father .Brabantio, unable to believe his daughter's 'gross revolt'(Shakespeare.39), explains it in terms of Othello's witchcraft. Iago's second addressee is her husband, Othello. The latter under Iago's manipulation, relinquishes the idea of Desdemona's faithfulness and thinks that 'she deceived her father marrying [him]'(Shakespeare.124). His afterthoughts result in cursing marriage. He embraces the Venetian code about women and behaves like a masculine Venetian. He kills Desdemona or 'else she'll betray more men'(Shakespeare.100) .As a result, the cultural order gets rid of the 'dangerous' Desdemona.

Hasna suffers from the same misconceptions. African women remain an object, as a consequence men are expected to behave in a way that backs up the men's domination. Owing to the fact that the masculine code views them as 'devils' and makes of them men's properties, Hasna has no word in her marriage affair. The code provides that she should obey the men who decide for her .But Hasna, like Desdemona, rejects this code.

Yet, Hasna's reactions are gradual ;not radical like Desdemona's. She asks a man's help, the narrator's. The latter accepts thinking that 'the world's changed' (p.102) and that marrying a woman without her consent belongs to the 'things that no longer fit in with our life in this age' (p.99). He makes efforts to dissuade Wad Rayyes from marrying her butin vain. The male villagers 'think only in terms of power' (p.122) and believe that women are men's possessions. So, there is no way out for Hasna but to marry Wad Rayyes. In face of her determination, Hasna's father beats her and decides that 'she marry him whether she liked it or not' (p.122).he would never accept to be made 'a laughing-stock by people saying his daughterwouldn't listen to him' (p.122). His attitude is an allegiance to the masculine code. Hasna, vanquished, gets married to the man this code ascribes to her. But her determination to refuse any sexual intercourse with Wad Rayyes leads her to stab him 'more than ten times and plunges the knife into her heart'(p.128). Her action is a shock for the villagers who cannot understand that it is a rejection and a rebellion against male domination. One woman shares with her this revolt. Mabrouka, Wad Rayyes's first wife, wishes god's blessings to be upon Hasna and considers her husband's death as a 'good riddance' (p.128). Like, Emilia who sympathizes with Desdemona, she approves of Hasna's deed. In expressing her happiness by 'trilling cries of joy'(p.128), she evinces opposition to the code which glorifies man's presence in woman's life.

Conclusion:

On the whole, between Mustafa Sa'eed and Othello, one can build interfigural relationships. The two are venerated as they serve the western society but without going beyond the confines set for them; hence their appropriation. Once they disobey and go out of the frame drawn for them by the white superior man, they become demonized and consequently objectified to be destroyed as a guise of punishment.

Furthermore, between Hasna and Desdemona essentially, one can put their similarities and dissimilarities in a frame of intertextuality. Hasna like Desdemona attempts to free herself from the gender barriers imposed on her by the father, her husband and the villagers. In fact, the three are duplications of Iago. They work for the perpetuation of the masculine code disregarding the fact that the situation in the postcolonial era has changed. But unlike Desdemona who is killed by her husband who has doubted that she had a love affair with Cassio, Hasna chooses and decides to kill the other representative of the masculine code, notably Wad Rayyes, and commits suicide. The latter has no meaning but a rejection of the masculine code and its verdict against a woman who has already put her individuality above the social expectations that in fact stifle the woman and erase her right to choose.

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