

The Representation of the Oriental Woman in Sylvia Plath's Poetry: Liberating the Veiled Body in "Purdah" and "Ariel"

Hind Alem

The Department of English Language and Literature, The University of Jordan, Amman, Jordan

Abstract—The present article discusses the representation of Oriental female figures in selected poems of Confessional poet Sylvia Plath, revealing the function of the women's representations and their contribution to the poet's battle against patriarchy. The Orientalist aspect of Plath's works is complex and comprises different layers of meanings. The analysis focuses on the characters of Ariel and the Muslim bride in "Purdah" regarding the notion of modesty through the physical and symbolic object of the veil. Thus, the study raises the question of whether the poet offered Eastern women the same voice of liberation as Westerners or whether her judgment was influenced by Oriental discourse that is prone to stereotypes and a lack of knowledge about other cultures and religions. The study relies on Edward Said's Orientalist discourse, alongside Leila Abu Lughoud's clarification on the position of Oriental women in the Western eye. The analysis also sheds light on concepts such as the "Wild Woman Archetype" to focus on the paradoxes of empowerment and subjugation embodied in the Oriental figures referenced in Plath's poems. The study illustrates, through selected poems, the attitude of Sylvia Plath towards Oriental women and her endeavor to speak out on behalf of women's rights universally, at the risk of dismissing the peculiarities of Oriental culture and religion.

Index Terms—orientalism, Sylvia Plath, poetry, oriental women, patriarchy

I. INTRODUCTION

Sylvia Plath made it her mission to denounce the implacable patriarchal machine aimed at downsizing women. Her works show, without restrictions or taboos, the cliché associated with women as weak, inferior, and mentally unstable. With a sense of complexity and resistance, her writings do not appear as emancipatory as much as they are a dramatic succession of episodes that announces the shattering of myths regarding women in different parts of the world. In this context, one aspect left unattended in her poems is her several allusions to the Eastern side of the globe. In order to debunk the patriarchal discourse and comment on women's position, Plath appropriates Oriental female figures to explore other cultures. The poet's engagement with the Orient balances, as this study demonstrates, between ironic negativity as a manifestation of discontent and feminist positivity as a subversive performance. That is to say, her references to Oriental women underlie an ambivalence of empowerment and condescension due to the lack of actual knowledge about the oriental culture and women's rights there. Uncovering the oriental elements in the poem of Plath's "Purdah" and "Ariel" will awaken criticism from a Postcolonial perspective by looking at the dialogic interaction between the Western "Self" and its Eastern "Other."

II. THE POSITION OF THE ORIENTAL WOMAN THROUGHOUT HISTORY

Western culture has a long history of depicting Muslim women. Scholars refer to it as gendered Orientalism. In both visual and written media, Muslim women are consistently presented as culturally unique, mirror opposites of Western women. In the nineteenth century, Oriental women were typically shown as either slaves in harems or as persecuted victims who were imprisoned, isolated, veiled, and regarded as liabilities, as well as subjects of the gaze of lascivious and violent men, as Nader explains in *Orientalism, Occidentalism and the Control of Women* (1989). In the first records, Christian missionary women pleaded for aid by denouncing the tyranny of their Muslim sisters. Artists, authors, and even early twentieth-century colonial postcard photographers favored the sensual and erotic. In the 19th century, the vast majority of buyers of works of art belonged to the industrial and financial upper middle class. These artists have taken the Oriental woman as their muse portraying her as Lynne Thornton describes *The Orientalist* (1983): "Prisoner of her sedentary way of life, she does not disdain to let her imagination wander without leaving the cozy comfort of her hushed living rooms adorned with prized works that invite you to daydream" (p. 15).

Gerard-Georges Lemaire states in his paper "The Orient in Western Art" (2006) that Orientalist painters offered the escape that the Oriental woman needed, the possibility of dreaming in front of images of minarets, white Casbas, colorful souks, deserts, and oases, but also sultanas recluse with their slaves in intimacy as well as refined and luxurious harems. For the Western upper middle class, Orientalism is synonym with sensuality, the exciting mystery of nudity suggested by light and diaphanous silks. The spectacle of these images of harems gives them somewhat a perverse

sensation of breaking into a forbidden universe where exoticism and eroticism are intimately mixed. At the beginning of the 19th century, artists were no longer content to reinvent a mythical Orient: they traveled and brought back from Spain, Greece, Turkey, or North Africa their vision of the Orient (Lemaire, 2006).

Nowadays, there is a growing concern everywhere in the world to improve the status of women. This concern came in part from the West. Nader explains that Western and non-Western countries have implicit assumption that industrialization and economic progress in the West would benefit third-world women's welfare as well as a common perception that women in Western European and American nations would have stronger relationships with their males than their counterparts in less developed communities (Nader, 1989). These ideas are questionable on many levels. The situation of women is significantly impacted by the advancement of knowledge about the West, as it is this awareness that justifies the oppression of women in many Middle Eastern nations. The ladies are therefore considered as "potential Occidentalists" rather than as Arab women (p. 2), which does not go without arousing a severe identity crisis.

Importantly, Confessional Poetry, the movement dominating the Boston poetic scene in the late 1950s, specifically addressed personal or taboo themes of such, but with a central focus on the writer's personal life. Thereby, *The Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms* summarizes 'Confessional' poetry is a form of autobiographical poem that expresses the poet's issues in a surprisingly blunt tone, such as divorce, abortion, alcoholism, and madness or suicide. Lucidly, through these subjects, Sylvia Plath, a significant figure of this movement, denounces the patriarchal system in a more or less transparent manner in her works. It is, however, conspicuous, in the light of her career, that "the problems" of the poets evoked in this definition are not treated on the personal level but tend towards a universality reinforced by the use of figures, mythological or folkloric.

Christine Baniewicz's article "A Painful Turning: American Confessional Poets on Human Suffering Abroad" (2016) examines the significance of confessional poetry in participating in discourse the self, she writes, "the confessional poet can take a more intimate approach, allowing the reader access to her own emotional and psychological turmoil as she confronts the brutal reality of suffering in a foreign land and struggles to assimilate it" (Baniewicz, 2006, p. 3). In other words, confessional poetry tries to evoke in the reader a sense of empathy for victims of suffering overseas and the poet herself without immediately engaging with political philosophy. Baniewicz describes how Adrienne Rich, a renowned American confessional poet, makes a distinction in her poem "Hunger" from the collection *Dream of a Common Language* between her suffering, her "Western skin, and vision," and her sense of being "torn," and the suffering of the foreign subjects—their huts "not mine," she writes (Baniewicz, 2016). As the poem progresses, however, this distinction is swiftly challenged as similarities and analogies between Western women's anguish and Black women's suffering are explored (mothers, specifically). Rather than assuming an authoritative stance on the issue, Rich adopts a more honest approach by admitting she cannot "fathom" the anguish she describes in her writing. In these words, she also implies that, even though women's grief is unique on both continents, there are thematic commonalities. Rich has raised children and can talk with expertise on the matter while not being a black mother. The poet's approach to predicate her assessment of the pain of malnourished mothers and children in Africa on a common experience is largely responsible for this poem's success in arousing compassion: motherhood (Baniewicz, 2016). Assumingly, Plath represents Oriental women in her poems as a form of empathy and empowerment towards the female kind of all cultures.

In this manner, Chizuko Ueno states in *The Feminine Guise: a Trap of Reverse Orientalism* (1997) that the hegemonic patriarchal discourse is a discourse that rejects the "Other." However, it is also a discourse that cannot endure rejection by the "Other." The American confessional poet, Plath notably, should be particularly mindful of the fact that, as Edward Said writes in *Orientalism: Western Concepts of the Orient* (1995), "a certain freedom of intercourse was always the Westerner's privilege; because he was the stronger culture, he could penetrate, he could wrestle with, he could give shape the mystery" (Said, 1995, p. 43). Said mentions the comparative constraints of such a vision, and the constrained vocabulary of such a privilege. Said's theory backs up this study to see if Plath adheres to these limitations in revising Oriental figures and how knowledgeable she is on the subjects she represents.

Indeed, forty-four years since Edward Said published his theory of "Orientalism" and fifty years since the publishing of Plath's *Ariel*, it remains intellectually fascinating to study the interrelationship between the consumerist iconicity of Sylvia Plath and the countless instances of Orientalism in her writings. Plath's lack of genuine experience with Asian or Asiatic civilizations serves as the basis for her creation of the Orient as the center of romance through the imagery hidden in her love letter to Richard Sassoon dated the 22nd of November 1955: "Persian moon," "Turkish Tables," and "Dark Alladins." Such Orientalist images, along with her singular term of endearment for Sassoon, "Jaundiced Adam," could potentially reinscribe the notion of the Orient as the locus of romance, sensuality, and disease, Yoshida puts it in his article "Esther's Uncanny Doubles: The 'big, smudgy-eyed Chinese woman' and the 'bleached-blond Negress in The Bell Jar'" (2016) as "a collective Eurocentric mental space that opens up after anxiously imagining humanity's fall from the zenith of Western civilization and into the jaundiced crevices of joint disease" (pp.12-13). Whether Plathian Orientalism is examined with sarcastic negativity or feminist optimism as a subversive performance, Plath's Orientalist allusions can transform her iconic position in intriguing ways.

Postcolonial Theory is widely rich in examining the representation of the Orient in Western writings, the subject of women; more particularly, it has generated many theories. It is important to note that, in this context, Orientalism refers to a complex conception of the imagination rather than a factual reality. The term "Orientalism" pertains to a fantastic,

nearly mythical concept used as a literary construct to represent mythology and tradition. It has little to do with the people or the Middle Eastern region itself). A concept like "the Orient" should not be based on direct or personal contact with the area or its people for artistic purposes (Said, 1995).

Sayid Salman, in *A Fundamental Fear: Eurocentrism and the Emergence of Islamism* (1997), points out that Leila Aboulela demonstrates, in one of her interviews, that Western representation of Muslim women as "missing" or "distorted" is inaccurate. It is more convenient to examine the incidence of 'Purdah' in patriarchal Islamic societies. Purdah has two unique definitions. The first is physical, with women covering their faces with a veil or Burqa in public; the second is more complicated, with women living in isolation from both males and the realm of public activity. One might be in Purdah in both directions and yet be in charge of their personal and public activities since the Islamic tradition dictates that women should remain concealed behind masks and net screens. Similarly, Mazloun explains in "Muslim Women in Monica Ali's *Brick Lane* and Leila Aboulela's *Minaret*" (2015) that one need not be in Purdah to be routinely impacted by Purdah culture; this is the perspective of the Postcolonial authors. The novel *Shame* by Salman Rushdie begins with an approaching death that emphasizes the unpleasant qualities of Purdah society. He argues that society must disregard 'Purdah' not just because it oppresses women but also because such oppression has unleashed violence that will destroy civilization. He adds with remorse, "It has humiliated people for too long, and now their wildness has erupted" (Mazloun, 2015, p. 10). In a patriarchal culture, women's pasts have been omitted from the repressed history.

It is worth mentioning that in Plath's poem "Ariel," the name Ariel refers to three things: Sylvia Plath's horse, the name given to Jerusalem in the Old Testament, as well as the androgynous spirit from Shakespeare's play *The Tempest*. Hussein Alhawamdeh elaborates on this point in "The Restoration Muslim Tangerines Caliban and Sycorax in Dryden-Davenant's Adaptation of Shakespeare's *The Tempest*" (2021) viewing that modern scholars, such as Jerry Brotton, analyze Shakespeare's *The Tempest* to reflect England's correspondence with the Kingdom of Morocco—mainly in Algiers. Similarly, Nabil Matar deals with Ariel and Caliban as belonging to Algiers. Alhawamdeh explains that the Restoration Dryden and Davenant transformed the oriental setting in Shakespeare's *The Tempest* from Algiers to Tangier, as reflected in Dryden-Davenant's *The Tempest* or *The Enchanted Island*:

Dryden-Davenant's *The Enchanted Island* eliminates Tunis, Claribel, and the King of Tunis in order to offer Tangier as an alternate North African setting and to flatter a Portuguese rather than Spanish alliance. *The Enchanted Island*'s relocation of the journey from Tunis to Naples, as in Shakespeare, to a new sea route from Portugal to Mantua indicates the Restoration adapters' awareness of the significance of Tangier as an English colony, granted by the Portuguese coast. (p. 126).

Plath's poem is frequently studied by critics who debate Shakespeare's Ariel in order to examine the creative process. Plath could be trying to create an analogy while writing this poem. This part analyzes Ariel as a reference to the imprisoned spirit in Shakespeare's play, showing how Plath revises the character as both female and Oriental to demystify the poet's problematic views on non-Western women.

To further emphasize Plath's representation of Oriental characters, this study relies on the feminist approach, including Leila Abu Lughoud's thoughts in her book *Do Muslim Women Need Saving?* (2013). The book emphasizes the moral battle to liberate Muslim women who are oppressed by their cultures while also demystifying the false Western perceptions of Muslim women. The boundaries that formerly separated conservatives from liberals and sexists from feminists have been erased by their religion, which has taken over society: "How does the proposition that such women live caged in their cultures undergird fantasies of rescue by 'the world community?'" (Abu Lughoud, 2015, p. 26) "What presumptions are being made about the superiority of that to which you are saving her?" (p. 47). These inquiries form the basis of Abu Lughoud's insightful remark on the reductionist portrayals of Islam and Muslim women as helpless victims in the media. According to her, such portrayals hide the history of internal discussion and institutional conflicts for justice. To reverse such biases, Abu-Lughoud advocates for careful examination of the causes of women's suffering, as well as the role that Westerners already play in reinforcing a universal inequality that harm women from different cultures, through government's decisions and capitalism. Another feminist concept applied here is that of The "Wild Woman Archetype" by Clarissa Pinkola Estés in *Women Who Run With the Wolves: Myths and Stories of the Wild Woman Archetype* (1992). According to Estés, the Wild Woman archetype is the foundation of this layer that emanates from the instinctual psyche. Interestingly, the two figures presented in the analyzed poems are shaped under the anthropomorphic body of the lioness, which signals that Plath empowered the persona by transforming her into an ineffable and inimitable force, rich in ideas, images, and particularities that she offers to humanity.

All these considered, this discussion illustrates the representation of the Oriental woman in Sylvia Plath's poems "Purdah" and "Ariel" as a transformative figure who subdues the patriarchal system. It is worth mentioning that analyzing the Oriental presence in Plath's poetry is divided into two parts under the single theme of the Oriental woman and her body. The first part deals with the poem "Purdah," where the subjugated bride is veiled physically, and even her senses and freedom are annihilated. Secondly, in "Ariel," the exact figure seems to have turned into a free-spirited female who rides her horse naked. Hussein A. Alhawamdeh comments in his work "The different representation of postcolonial magic realism in William Shakespeare's *The Tempest* and Franz Kafka's *The Metamorphosis*" (2014) on Shakespeare's Ariel lack of the power of magic realism as a reason behind its submission. Because he is not a magic realist hero like Caliban, Ariel misses the sense of resistance to Prospero's tyranny. He does not transition to the actual

reality like Caliban; rather, his life persists in the land of the imaginary and magical vision (Alhawamdeh, 2014). Plath reforms Ariel into a subversive female character. In this regard, the question of the veil, the body, and modesty of the Oriental/Muslim women are debated thoroughly, leaning on Leila Abu-Lughoud's criticism of the place of the Hijab in Muslim communities and the Western eye.

III. TWO DIMENSIONAL MODELS FOR THE ORIENTAL WOMAN AND HER BODY

The perception of the veil and its meaning for Muslim women will be at the heart of this section. Indeed, Sylvia Plath dealt with an Oriental practice to speak out about the confinement and the objectifying of the female body and its consequences on the quest for women's freedom in all cultures. Not only is the body completely covered, but so are the windows of the house and any other possible opening to the outside world. The closed curtain is what prevents people from seeing outside but also what does not allow them to see inside the house. Thus, what is hidden in a home is nothing more than one's own body. Therefore, would the fear of the voyeur be the same as the fear of the thief? These inquiries are present in Plath's poems "Purdah" and "Ariel," as she depicts two Oriental figures oppositely. While in "Purdah," the persona is covered and confined by religious and patriarchal dominance, the similar creative spirit in "Ariel" appears liberated from the peace of clothing, in a state of nakedness that seems closely linked to the quest for women's freedom.

A. *The Servitude in Purdah*

As early as 1962, Plath dealt with the object of the veil covering the oriental woman in the poem "Purdah," published posthumously in the anthology *Winter Trees* in 1971. Ted Hughes, however, asserts that this specific poem was intended for publication in the collection *Ariel*, a fact that proves as much again the link between the bride and the spirit of *Ariel*. By taking a religious tradition as her subject, the poet also wonders about the role of religion in representing women and their bodies. The poem takes the practice of *Purdah* as a core but carries a more profound connotation about the patriarchal machine that subjugates women. The etymology of the word *Purdah* means "screen," "veil" in Persian, according to the Merriam Webster, which gives the following historical definition:

[...] practice that was inaugurated by Muslims and later adopted by various Hindus, especially in India, involve secluding women from public observation by concealing clothing (including the veil) and high-walled enclosures, screens, and curtains within the home. The practice of *Purdah* is said to have originated in the Persian culture and to have been acquired by the Muslims during the Arab conquest of what is now Iraq in the 7th century CE. (2022)

The poem "Purdah" proves that Plath applied a feminist consciousness to an Oriental character. Popular Western culture sees the veil as rooted in the patriarchal culture of Islam, which according to the West, has aimed to deprive women of their fundamental human rights, such as rights to their bodies, over the centuries. Therefore, for the Occident, Muslim women are viewed as "subjugated" and "Obedient" individuals who ought to be "educated" and "saved," an idea that lurks in Plath's poem "Purdah."

*In Among these silks
Screens, these rustling appurtenances.
I breathe, and the mouth
Veil stirs its curtain
My eye
Veil is
A concatenation of rainbows.
I am his. (Plath, 1981, p. 243)*

In "Purdah," the woman is presented by Plath with irony as a valuable asset. The poem opens with the word 'Jade' followed by a punctuation mark showing a separation. There are two forms of separation in this example; on one side, there is the separation between the exterior and the interior represented by the sheet covering the body, and on the other side, a separation between man and woman evoked by the reference to Adam in the second stanza. The Jade woman, reified in precious stone, is then represented twice as Adam's 'side' (stone of the side/the agonized/side of green Adam, I) in an apparent reference to Eve. In this poem, the poetic *I* is a woman who is about to marry and whose body and face are fully veiled in the practice of *Purdah* (Hijab). Before serving the imprisonment of the whole body, the images of nature are distorted by the veil: the moon is of a "cancerous pallor," the trees become "little polyps bushy" and "little nets" as she becomes aware of the vulnerability of her own body, she no longer saw these elements except through the symptoms of a disease, that is, the dominant patriarchy.

Plath wove this poem using short, sometimes monosyllabic verses, often punctuated with exclamation points and dashes that allow the construction of incantatory nominal phrases, especially in the last two stanzas. In the first line of the eleventh stanza, "Absence, I" means I 'am the absence, as if the lack of the verb came to signify the impossibility of the 'I' to articulate a discourse. Those continuous effects of scarcity, interruption, and repetition invoke urgency and the confinement in which the speaker finds herself. Thus, the poem is not told from the point of the body of the speaker but from its captivity.

Any ritual, any transition from one state to another, is an opportunity to cover the feminine body with a veil_ or to break it. In the marriage ritual, the symbol of the veil coincides with another symbol, that of the name. Indeed, the name of the husband comes, like an opaque veil, covering the woman at the time of marriage, which comes under the concept of the "covered woman" that Betty Friedan recounts in *The Feminine Mystique* (1984): the concept of the "covered woman," which was codified into the law, deferred a woman's identity upon marriage: "to a married woman, her new self is her superior, her companion, her master" (Friedan, 1984, p. 28). She explains that some women chose to keep their own name as a symbolic gesture, afraid to adhere to a life of a married woman whose personality has died. Thus the body no longer forms a body except through clothing. The mouth becomes the "veil of the mouth," and the eyes become the "eye veil." The metaphor "mouth veil" can also designate the (self) censorship of the artist, whose injunction to modesty is not reduced to what she wears but to what she says. In the accumulation of diphthongs, "my eye veil," one hears "I veil," which in a poem that economizes on verbs suggests "I'm" the veil. In addition, the spaces between the stanzas and the enjambment reinforce the idea of difference, which is similar to the trauma experienced by the speaker.

The curtain metaphor closed on the eyes recalls the curtain that closes the window of the house in which the woman is also locked up, like the cages of a prison or a Russian Doll. Moreover, in the penultimate stanza, the poetic 'I' compares its body to a little doll covered in jewels, an envelope from which she predicts that she will free herself: "I shall unloose/from the small jeweled/ doll he guards like a heart". This comparison, which comes to complete a lexical field of value: (Jade, so valuable, priceless, crystals, guards), insists on the market value of the female body. Thus, it is precisely because the female body is seen as precious good that it is hidden under a sheet. The poem suggests that this garment hinders the speaker's freedom of movement until it is eradicated, like the antithesis of the verses "I revolve in my Sheath of possibilities," which testifies to this and does not differ in any way from the safe containing money and jewels. Plath takes a Muslim woman in this poem to claim that religions call for the confinement of the female body.

The feminine body of the speaker gives way to the male body: in the sixth and seventh stanzas, it is through the glow reflected by the Jade-body that the object of the mirror, at the arrival of the groom, becomes plural. The man then becomes the "lord of the mirrors" reigning over his lands or his properties: "it is himself he guides/ in among the silk/screens," these rustling "appurtenances". The word 'screens' is the etymology of the word 'Purdah'; these screens represent several obstacles to the view. Furthermore, the term "appurtenances" implies both the phonemes /pʏ/ of Purdah and the word 'to belong,' of which it is the origin _ "I 'am his," she says later. The polysemy of the word appurtenances, meaning both accessory objects and, from a legal point of view, properties, dependencies of a person, shows the state of servitude and parcel of the female body, which is only an object of financial transaction.

In "Purdah," the erasure of the female body does not only pass through the veil but by the voice. The poem's speaker is both deprived of its freedom of movement, "I revolve in my sheath of possibilities," where the word sheet is heard, a sheet that covers and deprives her of speech. The injunction to interiority goes so far as to make the woman mute. By keeping silent, she disappears from the public space.

*Absence,
I Revolve in my Sheath of impossibles,
Priceless and quiet
Among these parrakeets macaws!
O chatterers, Attendants of the eyelash!
I shall unloose (Plath, 1981, p. 243)*

The repetition of the prophetic verse "I shall unloose" testifies to the urgency of the speaker to free her both from the garment that covers her and the mouth veil that mutes her.

Western feminists appear to believe that Islam oppressed women. They misinterpret religion by claiming that a veil is a political object that degrades women into precious goods hidden under a sheet. The poem suggests that this garment either symbolically or metaphorically hinders women's freedom until it is eradicated. Arab critic Lila Abu Lughoud admits this in her book, *Do Muslim Women Need Saving?* Most people still believe that the values of choice and freedom should define women's rights. Therefore, the West insists that the latter are severely compromised in Muslim communities. Both westerners and secular progressives within the Muslim world share this fixation around the practice of the Hijab, which is an ideal way to express their worries about the oppression of women. It is often thought that women who cover themselves are being forced or capitulating to male pressure, ignoring that women have chosen to wear the veil as a mandatory practice for their religion (Lughoud, 2013).

Purdah is, in fact, an honorable custom that liberates women because it fosters a sense of respect and freedom. Islam has treated women with the utmost care, valued as individual beings, and elevates women's position by requiring that they maintain parity with males in terms of status and rights. Regarding the question of choice and liberty of covering the female body, one may ask the following questions: How can one tell the difference between voluntarily selected clothing and clothing worn out of habit, peer pressure, and fashion?

B. The Empowerment of Ariel

An enigma surrounds the title of the collection Ariel and the poem itself. The polysemy of the name appeals simultaneously to the biblical (Ariel designates the name of the city of Jerusalem in the Old Testament), the name of the spirit in Shakespearean's play *The Tempest*, and the title of the poems by T.S. Eliot on religion and spirituality, but also to her personal life since the horse that Plath rode regularly was called Ariel. Plath was familiar with Shakespeare's play

The Tempest since she referred to it in her diary on the 27th of April 1953. It alludes more specifically to an almost fantasized reading of W.H. Auden from his own commentary-poem entitled "The Sea and the Mirror" subtitled "A Commentary on Shakespeare's *The Tempest*," (2000), Plath states: "Auden tossing his big head back...talking in gravely incisive tone about how Caliban is the natural bestial projection and Ariel the creative imaginative" (pp. 424-425).

This study adopts the Shakespearian angle of analysis since it deals with the representation of the oriental figures in Plath's poems. In order to back up the perception of Ariel as an Oriental figure, the researcher relies on Alhawamdeh's analysis (2014), where he argues that the Restoration Dryden and Davenant transformed the oriental setting in Shakespeare's *The Tempest* from Algiers to Tangier as reflected in Dryden-Davenant's *The Tempest* or *The Enchanted Island*, explaining that the "real hero" in Ariel who is empowered by the end and leads to the happy denouement exploiting repressive circumstances in productive ways. Looking at Ariel as an Oriental figure shows an attempt at empowerment from the poet as a response to the confined persona of Purdah. Ariel is a transformative figure of the bride in "Purdah," who has been liberated from patriarchal oppression.

To further explain, family backgrounds decide the social spheres people are born into. Women are positioned in particular social groups and nations at specific historical junctures. These unique circumstances form aspirations and constrain women's options. To be clear, particular individuals and societies do have more options and freedom of choice than others. This was often the case for males, at least in Britain before World War II, as Virginia Woolf reveals in *A Room of One's Own* (Lughoud, 2013). However, is the relative capacity to choose exclusively determined by gender or by culture? One must reflect on the limitations faced, considering people as agents responsible for their own lives. And beyond that, one must question individuals for whom choice may not be the sole criterion for a life of value as Abu-Lughoud demonstrates in *Veiled Sentiment* (1986). Most religious systems are based on the concept that humans do not have complete control over their lives. Even the ancient Greeks viewed hubris as a terrible fault, defined as excessive pride or the conviction that one might defy the gods. Such questions are vital for considering Muslim women and their rights. Wendy Brown claims in "Regulating Aversion: Tolerance in the Age of Identity and Empire" (2008) that while addressing the bizarre notion that liberal democracies wish to control what Muslim women should wear, secularism has not delivered freedom or equality to women in the West. These beliefs, according to Brown, are founded on the "implicit premise that bare skin and the sexual display is a symbol, if not a guarantee, of women's freedom and equality" (p. 202). Men who attend mosques to become better Muslims and who embrace a new type of veiling as a religious obligation would be perplexed. Brown concludes that the beliefs on Muslim women's relative lack of choice disregard "the amount to which all choice is conditioned by and entangled with power, and the extent to which choice itself is a deficient account of freedom" (p. 203). Suppose the persona is covered and imprisoned in "Purdah," presenting a body. In that case, this is not whole, in the sense of being unequal to that of the husband, to whom she is the subordinate, the speaker in Plath's poem "Ariel" is, on the contrary, a multitude of free female bodies, in constant movement and forming a sorority.

In the penultimate stanza of the poem "Purdah," the persona dreams of being rebellious, shattering this veiled shell in which she is trapped to finally become visible in the last stanza, "The Lioness/the Shriek in the cloak of holes." It is worth noting that none of these metaphors refers to a human body. Moreover, the last metaphor reveals a double paradox, on the one hand, the speaker returns to its textile state (cloak of holes); on the other hand, because their cover garment of dissimulation par excellence cannot possibly veil the body entirely since it is made up of holes. Finally, the metamorphosis into a lioness insists on the anthropomorphic dimension of the poem, beginning with the parrot-men and the peacock-men and then primarily dominated by the lioness in the animal kingdom. The ending also refers to the poem "Ariel," written only two days earlier, on the 27th of October, 1962.

The two poems representing Oriental female figures under the aspect of the anthropomorphic body present a facet of the "Wild Woman Archetype" shaped by Clarissa Pinkola Estés in her work "Women Who Run with the Wolves: Myths and Stories of the Wild Woman Archetype" (1989):

Although she takes different forms in our dreams and creative experiences, she does not belong to the stratum of the mother, the virgin, or the medial woman, nor is she the inner child—neither the queen, the amazon, the clairvoyant. The archetype is present everywhere, yet it cannot be seen in the usual sense of the term. What she reveals about herself in the dark is not necessarily visible in bright light (pp. 52-53).

Simply put, the author refuses to categorize the wild woman as she is multiple and hides, lurking in the shadows, or advances into the light. Estés defines the Wild Woman archetype through the prism of opacity and transparency, which is applied to the personae of "Purdah" and "Ariel," the former one concealed under her opaque coat, the latter naked traveling on horseback as if she had nothing to hide from the outside world. Moreover, "Ariel" opens with the verse "Stasis in darkness." Stasis is associated with darkness. The word stasis mainly has two meanings: in medicine, this word means according to Merriam-Webster "a slowing or stopping of the normal flow of a bodily fluid; it designates more generally a state or a period of stagnation, "a state or a period of stability during which little or no evolutionary change in a lineage occurs" (2022). This word, therefore, has a double meaning in the poem. It refers on one side to the fluid secreted by the body_ and on the other to a state without evolution corresponding to the period preceding the women's liberation movements. Besides, darkness inevitably refers to the allegory of the cave or to the willful ignorance of human beings. However, this state of inertia does not last, and the body begins to move in the second verse.

Ariel is the air spirit in *The Tempest*, whom Plath summons in this poem, transforming it into a female. But this figure is the epitome of paradoxes, both present and absent, covered with a sheet and transparent at the same time, a spirit without a body in the speaker's image, which gradually sheds its skin as an outer cover concealing the essence of its being. In addition, Plath refers to the 11th-century legend of Lady Godiva, wife of Count Leofric of Mercia, who crossed the city fully naked to protest against the high taxes her husband levied on the inhabitants.

*Hauls me through the air—
Thighs, hair;
Flakes from my heels.
White
Godiva, I unpeel—
Dead hands, dead stringencies. (Plath, 1981, p. 239)*

In this legend, the character that stood out is that of Peeping Tom, the only spectator of Godiva- as the inhabitants had been ordered to go home and close the windows so as not to see her naked body. This character, a symbol of the male gaze, has become so popular that it is commonly used in English to refer to a "voyeur". It seems as though Plath wonders through these two poems, and relying on Oriental figures, why is the female body sometimes covered, sometimes uncovered, judged as modest or immodest. Is modesty, therefore, an exclusively feminine virtue?

Toril Moi demonstrates in "Simone de Beauvoir: The Making of an Intellectual Woman" (2009) that the source of a woman's subjectivity is her body. Explaining how De Beauvoir perceives the notion, she states:

For Beauvoir, the body is our medium for having a world in the first place. We perceive the world through the body, and when the world reacts to our body in a more or less ideologically oppressive way, we respond to the world. Our subjectivity is constituted through ongoing, open-ended interaction between ourselves and the world. We constantly make something of what the world makes of us. (p. 391)

According to Moi, the body is possibly the key component that gives the foundation of the individual's subjectivity. Nevertheless, subjectivity cannot be reduced to a single physical characteristic. Subjectivity is thus related to the idea of Otherness. In "Can the Subaltern Speak" (1988), Spivak makes the case that a woman's body is a component of her displacement. Where there is oppression and marginalization, her otherness is replicated. Moi (2009) equates exploring the body with the capacity to engage whereas Spivak relates the oppression of women's bodies with their incapacity to speak. Regaining body control is a central issue in feminist and postcolonial feminist studies.

In *Veiled Sentiment* (1986), Leila Abu Lughoud discusses the issue of modesty and honor regarding women's clothing. She claims that anthropologist Hanna Papanek, who lived and researched in Pakistan in the 1970s, described the burqa as "portable isolation." According to Papanek, many saw it as a liberating breakthrough since it permitted women to leave segregated housing while still upholding the fundamental moral needs of keeping women apart from unrelated males. Abu Lughoud comments: "Since I first encountered her expression 'portable solitude,' I have referred to these enveloping coverings as mobile homes" (p. 13). This veiling denotes membership in a specific community and participation in a moral way of life in which families play a central role in community structure, and the home is associated with the sacredness of women.

Ultimately, Plath transforms and empowers the subaltern in *Purdah*, which could not speak in the confinement of her marriage and culture, into the spirit of Ariel, who travels naked freely, taking control of her body. In the last lines of "Ariel," the speaker's body is transformed, as in "Purdah," in the form of an arrow and a dew.

*And now I
Foam to wheat, a glitter of seas.
The child's cry
Melts in the wall.
And I
Am the arrow,
The dew that flies
Suicidal, at one with the drive
Into the red
Eye, the cauldron of morning. (Plath, 1981, p. 239)*

The image of "an arrow into the future could very well echo that of the arrow of the red eye, the cauldron of the morning"- morning often meaning in Anglo-Saxon countries both morning and tomorrow like *Morgen* in German. These last stanzas have often been commented on as a slide of the persona towards madness. However, it seems that on the contrary, they depict a journey towards clarity, as well as a hold of self-authority: solitary, molting like a serpent, lioness, Godiva, Amazon, Venus, Aphrodite, but also Diana/Artemis, she is the one who shoots the arrows; she is not less than a man.

IV. CONCLUSION

The study investigates the representation of the Oriental characters and their contribution to the Plath's battle against patriarchy by offering possible relations between women of different races, cultures, and religions. Throughout the analyzed poems, the poet confirms that even though each culture has its own form of patriarchal domination, one can

find common denominators as it is presented in "Purdah," where she takes as a motive a traditional oriental practice to more broadly describe the bondage of women. Plath deals with the question of modesty through the physical and symbolic object of the veil, which covers the bride and represents the oppression in "Purdah" to the invisible cloak of the persona in "Ariel". In the first part, the Oriental bride is prone to servitude by the groom. He is an allegory to the patriarchal society coupled with the religious institution, of which the woman is the involuntary wife. The second part reveals Plath's attempt to empower the Oriental bride by showing the concealed body part once covered by the veil, turning the persona of "Ariel" into a liberated "Wild Woman" free from any form of confinement. Therefore, one may argue that the Orientalist aspect of Plath's poems is primarily dominated by the Western Feminist point of view, where religion and culture are discarded. The Muslim veil is, in many cases, a choice that women enjoy the right to have. The study thus validates the explications of Said and Abu-Lughoud that the West shape and molds the Oriental personage, following stereotypes and misconceptions that result from a lack of knowledge on the part of the authors.

REFERENCES

- [1] Abu-Lughoud, L. (2013). *Do Muslim Women Need Saving?* (Reprinted.). Harvard University Press.
- [2] Alhawamdeh, H. A. (2014). The different representation of postcolonial magic realism in William Shakespeare's *The Tempest* and Franz Kafka's *The Metamorphosis*. *British Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences*, 12(1), 1–13.
- [3] Alhawamdeh, H. A. (2021). The restoration Muslim Tangerines Caliban and Sycorax in Dryden Davenant's adaptation of Shakespeare's *The Tempest*. *Critical Survey*, 33(3–4), 121–140. <https://doi.org/10.3167/cs.2021.33030412>
- [4] Baldick, C. (2008). *The Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms*. Oxford Reference. Retrieved August 31, 2022, from <https://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/acref/9780199208272.001.0001/acref-9780199208272>
- [5] Baniewicz, C. (2016). A Painful Turning: American Confessional Poets on Human Suffering Abroad. *Ellipsis: A Journal of Art, Ideas, and Literature*, 43. <https://doi.org/10.46428/ejail.43.05>
- [6] Brown, W. (2008). *Regulating Aversion: Tolerance in the Age of Identity and Empire*. Princeton University Press.
- [7] Estés, C. P. (1996). *Women Who Run with the Wolves: Myths and Stories of the Wild Woman Archetype* (Reissue). Ballantine Books.
- [8] Friedan, B. (1984). *The Feminine Mystique*. (Reissue). Dell/Laurel.
- [9] Lemaire, Gérard-Georges. (2009). *Orientalism: the Orient in Western Art*. H F Ullmann
- [10] Mazloum, S. F. (2015). Displaced' Muslim Women in Monica Ali's Brick Lane and Leila Aboulela's Minaret. *International Journal of Humanities and Cultural Studies*, 2(3), 526–568.
- [11] Merriam-Webster. (n. d.). Purdah/Stasis. In *Merriam-Webster.com dictionary*. Retrieved August 31, 2022, from <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/purdah>
- [12] Moi, T. (2009). *Simone de Beauvoir: The Making of an Intellectual Woman* (2nd ed.). Oxford University Press.
- [13] Nader, L. (1989). Orientalism, Occidentalism and the Control of Women. *Cultural Dynamics*, 2(3), 323–355. <https://doi.org/10.1177/092137408900200304>.
- [14] Said E. W. (1995). *Orientalism: Western Concepts of the Orient*. Penguin Books.
- [15] Sayyid, B. S. (1997). *A Fundamental Fear: Eurocentrism and the Emergence of Islamism*. Zed Books.
- [16] Spivak, G. C. (1988). Can the Subaltern Speak? In C. Nelson & L. Grossberg (Eds.), *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture* (pp. 271–313). University of Illinois Press.
- [17] *The Collected Poems: Edited by Ted Hughes* (1st ed.). (1981). [Http://libgen.rs/]. HARPER & ROW.
- [18] Thornton, L. (2009). *The Orientalists: Painter Travellers Pocket Colour Series*. Acr Edition (ACC).
- [19] Ueno, C. (1997). *In the Feminine Guise*. Amsterdam University Press.
- [20] Yoshida, H. (2016). Esther's Uncanny Doubles: The "big, smudgy-eyed Chinese woman" and the "bleached-blond Negress" in *The Bell Jar*. *Plath Profiles*, 9, 12–15.

Hind Alem is a Ph.D. candidate at the University of Jordan, Faculty of English Language and Literature, Amman, Jordan. She is interested in Orientalism, Mythology, Fairytales, and Children's Literature.