

A Feminist Dialogic Reading of the New  
Woman: Love, Female Desire, and Family  
in *The Virgin and the Gypsy* by D. H.  
Lawrence and in *The Tragedy of Demetrio*  
by Hanna Mina

Cyrine Kortas 

The Higher Institute of languages, Gabes, Tunisia

Received: 03-04-2022 Revised: 29-07-2022 Accepted: 30-07-2022

**Abstract**

This paper explores the depiction of female characters as New Women in a comparative analysis of two selected short stories by two seemingly anti-feminist authors; D. H. Lawrence in England and Hanna Mina in Syria. I argue that these short stories signal the need for a new perspective, analyzing how these two authors challenged the conventional fictional treatment of womanhood and created complex female heroines struggling against restrictive social roles and values. Examining these selected narratives, “The Virgin and the Gypsy” by D. H. Lawrence and in “The Tragedy of Demetrio” by Hanna Mina, sets forth an unexpected area of comparison between English and Arabic literature with a specific interest in the construction of New Woman identity at the turn of the century, namely the fragmented and complex presentations of the heroines’ inner struggle between the traditional female roles and their aspirations for a freer, more fluid identity. A close reading will, therefore, bring out certain similarities in terms of themes and style that call for a Bakhtinian insight into dialogism to account for the fragmented character of the New Woman in both texts.

**Keywords**

New Woman, Dialogism, Feminist Dialogism, Comparative literature

# A Feminist Dialogic Reading of the New Woman: Love, Female Desire, and Family in *The Virgin and the Gypsy* by D. H. Lawrence and in *The Tragedy of Demetrio* by Hanna Mina

Cyrine Kortas

The young women growing out of the early twentieth century announced a growing sense of disillusionment and unhappiness with the idealized notion of the happy home. The latter was perceived as “the acme of human bliss” apart from “the ethos of money and exploitation that prevail[ed in the outside world]” (Baym 27). Turning it into the locus of happiness it was women’s duty as they were trained to “bring comfort and beauty into man’s life” (Welter 57). However, this very place that used to be associated with love, purity, and morality proved to be nothing but “a retreat, a restraint, and a constraint, as it ... [aimed at] absten[ing women] permanently from the world’s affairs” (Baym 50). Due to the successive developments of urbanization, industrialization, scientific and psychoanalytic discoveries, and the amplifying awareness of social and economic inequities, women across the globe grew disillusioned with their false happiness in the house of patriarchy.

Women at the turn of the twentieth century became aware of the double standards of Victorian society, which stretched out into the Arab world with the wave of independence that accentuated their alienation. Those women “discovered, long after making adult commitments that tied them to the destinies of others, that the identities they had assumed since girlhood were bolted to a *man-made foundation* that was not of their own making” (Hancock 60-1; emphasis added). According to Hancock, the oppressive forces imposed on women prevented them from realizing their potential for freedom and agency. Reduced to a shadowy existence, women had to stand by themselves and break free from the imprisoning bars of the patriarchal definition of femininity. They were trusted to write each other stories as they felt that men writers were unable to understand their plight. In the light of the rising dichotomy of male writer versus female writer when faithfully representing the female experience, this article argues that despite the chauvinistic reputation these two authors gained, their writings reflected feminist perceptions in relation to woman’s place and status at the time of the “New Woman”.

## **The Rise of “New Woman”**

Calling for female happiness and self-realization that germinated from their own understanding of themselves, these women were young, enthusiastic and dedicated to the women issue commonly known as the “New Women”. The labeling first appeared at the beginning of the twentieth century to designate a group of educated and ambitious young

women determined to cut with the past and establish their own understanding of themselves. “[W]ith her short haircut and practical dress, her demand for access to higher education, the vote and the right to earn a decent living, her challenge to accepted views of femininity and female sexuality,” the New Woman enlivened the feminist discourse that challenged patriarchy and its systemized and institutionalized subordination of women (Heilmann and Beethan 1). In *The Grounding of Modern Feminism*, Nancy Cott defines 1910 as the year when Feminism entered patriarchy across the globe to disturb its calm waters (22).

The images of the English and Syrian New Woman shared similarities and differences. The emphasis on emancipation, education, and career was what brought these women along. However, when she was perceived as a radical threat who “challenged existing gender relations and the distribution of power,” who acted on their own, rejected “conventional female roles and assert[ed] their right to a career, to a public voice, to visible power . . .” (Rosenberg 166-176) challenging, therefore, the idea of true womanhood and questioning established gender roles when venturing outside of their private sphere, she was viewed as a modern, asexual figure that emerged as an integral part of the reformers’ vision of a new and independent Syria. She was part of a larger social movement. The New Woman in the newly independent Syria emerged as an outcome of the modernization process that started with the rise of a group of Syrian intellectuals influenced by European liberalism and nationalism criticizing the inferior conditions of women. The era announced an encompassing self-consciousness that marked women. Hence, a “comparison across the different nations and cultures [of the Anglophone world] in which the New Woman appeared enables us to identify continuities . . . across time and space” (Heilmann and Beethan 2). The early decades of the Twentieth century announced the rise of a new consciousness among a younger generation of ambitious female artists, writers, and professionals who transformed the traditional views of femininity.

Amidst similar social and cultural context, both Lawrence and Hanna Mina wrote about female characters that were unwilling to live in the shadow of male authority or female ancestors. Though at a first glance both writers seemed to answer the demands of their social milieus; they debunked them from within and expressed their discontent with the traditional positioning of women in their families and in the social and cultural narratives that emphasized their inferiority and unsuitability in the public sphere, asserting that to address the issue of the New Woman was not limited to women writers as even some men writers were aware that advocating any change in their societies necessitated a special focus on the half that had been thrown into oblivion.

### **The Thematic and Stylistic Influence of Lawrence:**

Developing an interest in literary novelty and criticism, the newly independent Syria, on April 17<sup>th</sup>, 1946, encouraged authors by supporting magazines specialized in literary criticism, facilitated publication processes, and enhanced and modernized education, which opened the door for western modern literary genres such as novels, short stories, and essay writing as well as prose poetry to mark the rising literary scene in Syria. Literary schools, trends, and influences as well as theories and approaches found an echo in several Syrian modern works. Among the names that resonated and shaped the Syrian literary scene are D. H. Lawrence and his mystic writing that brought together Modernist concerns and Romantic style, two trends that highly marked Syrian authors such as Hanna Mina<sup>1</sup>. The influence can be traced in the latter’s adoption of Lawrence’s

---

<sup>1</sup> Hanna Mina: (March 9th, 1924 -August 21<sup>st</sup> 2018) a Syrian novelist born in Lattakia, into a poor family yet made his own path toward fame and success. He contributed to the establishment of the Syrian Writers Association and the Union of Arab Writers, and

criticism of the power of society on the individual. This is evident in Mina's short stories that revolve around themes of social, national and humanitarian issues such as women's issues and customs and traditions in a society that aspires to modernization.

To match the concerns with the style, it came as no surprise that Syrian writers indulged themselves in the writing of short stories that had a Romantic heritage: "Short fiction is so bound up with the experience of the sacred and mythic perception, it is no accident that the short story as we know it today got its most important impetus as an art form from the Romantic effort in the early years of the nineteenth century to regain through art what had been lost in religion" (May, 138-140). The new subgenre allowed Syrian authors to reflect on the ongoing political, intellectual, and social struggles of a newly independent country, becoming such an archive of an unofficial history recording the development of the country through the struggle of their characters, such as female characters.

The author Mina begins his short story "The Tragedy of Demetrio" free of any time and space indicator to add a universal dimension to his narrative, asserting that is a story of all time and society. Interestingly, however, the place is evoked through its features not names to accentuate the fate of the characters as flat-shaped and reshaped by the physical dimension of the place in which they interact. This depiction allows the narrator to heighten the characters' consciousness in these confined spaces:

In that afternoon, the lady was reading a book, and her husband treating a bird. I was teaching their son violin. I was called for that and I heartedly accepted. I crossed the hall to the room; and after finishing my course, I crossed the same hall to the door. Bid them farewell and left. Nothing in my mind except the house's furniture, the chimney, the husband, . . . On the following day, I crossed the same hall, the husband in the same place and the wife by the window, I gave my course and left.

(Translation mine, 12)

The narration emphasizes the monotonous repetition of events while accentuating indirectly the upcoming struggle when the characters are to face their desire for each other that will tumble down the stiffening institution of marriage. This explains why Raji'aa is not named at first, but only referred to as "the wife".

In following suit, Lawrence's short story "The Virgin and the Gypsy" opens with a "scandal" that lacks time and space indicators, only to leave room for the reader to grasp the author's attempt to break Victorian rules and morals by emphasizing the suffocating conditions of the house his female characters grow in: "But it was not until the girl finally came home from school that they felt the full weight of Granny's dead old hand on their lives" (7). The lack of time and space indicators in both short stories refers to the authors' common concern: to develop a realist narrative that stages their criticism of the Victorian, early post-independence conservative views.

### **A Bakhtinian Study of "The Virgin and the Gypsy" by D. H. Lawrence and in "The Tragedy of Demetrio" by Hanna Mina**

The realistic dimension of the stories is further accentuated by the various voices that are echoed in the novellas. In a relatively short narrative that extends over a few pages, both authors created worlds that hummed with various characters that reflected contradictory views and attitudes. These views mirror the dominant voice of patriarchy and the struggling and unruly alternatives that fought to be heard. This mosaic

---

is one of the well-known writers of the modern Arabic novel. His novels are known for being classic as well contemporary (Maier, 533).

is meant to assert the authors' concern with the women issue and put forth a feminist agenda that some early critics could not identify. These ravaging voices call for a Bakhtinian study of the selected texts.

### **Bakhtin's Dialogism**

Bakhtin's concept of dialogism helps elaborate the polyphonic nature of the texts under study. Drawing on the idea of a dialogic novel as being "constructed not as the whole of a single consciousness, absorbing other consciousnesses as objects into itself, but as a whole formed by the interaction of several consciousnesses," both "The Virgin and the Gypsy" and "The Tragedy of Demetrio" are texts made up of different points of view on womanhood in a way that reveals the authors' awareness of the presence of a marginal female discourse and its endless attempts to subvert and challenge the dominant, monologic, and monolithic discourses of conservative societies.

In monologism, 'truth', constructed abstractly and systematically from the dominant perspective, is allowed to remove the rights of consciousness. This entails that in a monological novel for instance, characters exist solely to transmit the author's ideology, and the author represents only their own idea, not anyone else's, claiming that such narratives tend to be featureless and flat, marked by a single tone (Bakhtin, 6). Dialogism, in contrast, recognizes the multiplicity of voices, which explains why it is referred to as 'double-voiced' or 'multi-voiced' as each character has their own final word, relating to and interacting with those of the other characters (Bakhtin, 6). Hence, a dialogical work constantly engages with and is informed by different voices and different works that it seeks to alter them, which justifies the bringing together of these two selected works.

Additionally, Bakhtin's distinction between "authoritative" and "internally persuasive" discourses that stand for "rationalized public language" and "marginal and decentralizing voices" that disrupt authoritative discourses respectively helps structure the feminist argument and analytical framework of the paper in hand. According to Bauer, feminist dialogics enables an understanding of critical subjectivity "that shows gender, classes and races in dialogue rather than in opposition" (2). The latter notices that this dialogue is always in process and in flux, and allows the reader to recognize how authoritative ideologies and the persuasive resistance to it come into conflict. It is through the recognition of this conflict that a feminist critic can approach the dialogic, multi-voiced structure of a text producing the dominant discourse and a potential resistance against oppressive conventions; Bauer and McKinstry write "a feminist dialogics produces occasions for the disruption and critique of dominant and oppressive ideologies" (3).

To read the selected texts in the light of Bakhtin's dialogism, special attention is paid to the main themes, are the theme of marriage and its tacit connection to that of death in "The Tragedy of Demetrio" and that of female desire and subversion in "The Virgin and the Gypsy". The two themes are elaborated through the various characters that enlivened the narratives.

### **Marriage and Death in "The Tragedy of Demetrio"**

Although the newly independent Syrian republic provided women with equal rights in the areas of law, education, and political life, it did not change patriarchal morality and ethical code of behaviour. Hence, the New Syrian Woman remained faithfully associated with the role of a dutiful mother and wife. Raji'aa, the female protagonist in "The Tragedy of Demetrio," is trained and expected to become a faithful wife and mother. From the beginning, she was pictured as mothering her father, easing

his solitude in a world of growing materialism and modernization. Being a man of letters, he retreats to his daily discussions with his daughter, teaching her philosophy and art. Once she gets married, the liberal ideas she has developed soon become a threat as they disturb her industrialist husband, who seeks to tame them by gaining control over her body “He loves money and talks about money”. Her growing dreadfulness with their emotionless intimate encounter is stifling her and arguing that control over female sexuality remained a taboo and further limited women’s roles and accentuated that the latter’s legal emancipation should not be confused with social liberation. Women’s freedom in new Syria remained shadowed by their responsibilities endorsed by the project of modernization.

Through Demetrio’s focalization, we get access to Syria’s industrialist class. Raji’aa’s husband, Wassel ElDelji, is an archetypical Westernized industrial representing the stereotype of over-Westernized Syrians who held to the European model and neglected the dangers of excessive aping of social mannerism and industrialism. His desire for wealth is evoked through his insatiable desire to gain control over her body. What attracted him to Raji’aa was her physical beauty as well as the fact that she was the only heir of her father’s fortune. Raji’aa grows frustrated with her husband’s disinterest in knowing her thoughts and wishes, which makes her retreat to a world of fantasies impenetrable by her husband. He remains at the threshold of physicality and materialism. Raji’aa grows aware of the suffocating atmosphere of her married life when she meets Demetrio. He comes to teach her children how to play music, yet he brings with him a melody that unites them and takes them back to a distant time when their love flourished

What may bring both Lawrence and Mina to a common ground is their adeptness in creating multi-voiced narratives where characters participate in the storytelling of their struggles as well as their craft in creating metaphoric characters that help convey their existential messages. In the image of a Laurentian prophet, Mina develops the character of Demetrio whose main role is to initiate Raji’aa into a world of love, passion and desire. The woman her father expected to blossom has to wait for Demetrio’s arrival and their musical exchange of an existential melody that renders their unspoken love an ancient myth of genesis.

Before proceeding further, we have to understand who Demetrio is; he is an Arman refugee who sought shelter in Syria after the Turkish destroyed his hometown and killed his family. A devastated man, Demetrio strived to make himself a reputation as a music teacher. Yet, what further characterizes him is his constant struggle between being a typical critic who doubts society’s dogmatic indoctrinations and a romantic artist who lives in the world of fantasies and melodies. This split in character is materialized in the opening scene with Demetrio standing gazing at his reflection in the mirror, calling him “my twin brother,” confessing the impossibility of falling for a married woman.

Driven by an ancient call, a mystic force, the coming together of these two individuals is meant to make a whole of both of them. It is a call that will permit Raji’aa to reunite with herself, once a prophet-like character interferes, bearing the seeds of change. Being consumed by fire repeating “it can’t, it can’t be” (23) does not assert the impossibility of this love as early critics tended to think reducing Raji’aa to the early vicious circle of emptiness and deadness. Instead, in the light of feminist dialogic reading, we can see that this fire is to purify the characters just as the flood does with both Yvette and the gypsy. It is a purification from the worlds they grow into and an announcement of the beginning of an existential journey, freer from the manacles of dogma, tradition, and gender. After meeting Demetrio, Raji’aa puts an end to her struggle against her husband’s endless attempts to shape her “He was trying to wash my mind, What shall I do” (20). She seems to find an answer in her motherhood and art.

Mina's ideal woman is viewed as being educated and engaged in a professional career, an equal partner to man in the project of reforming society and creating a new way of living. Mina's feminist perspective and search for alternative female models serve a political agenda. Being a communist, the Syrian short story writer created a political allegory out of Raji'aa's love story when allowing her to meet someone who carries humanity's past and faith in men's comradeship. Installing these beliefs in her through music, As Demetrio dies to find peace; Raji'aa is now liberated to endorse this new spirit in future generations, in her own children.

Critical interest in Mina's short story, especially by Arab critics, emphasizes the tragic love story that attests of society's transition into modernity. Readings of this narrative as a piece of nostalgic vision written by a mature and successful author do not offer much insight into the complicated politics of this text. Autobiographical readings of this novel have mostly focused on the rags-to-riches story of Mina's Syria which, in my opinion, fails to capture the reality of his work. For although it is true that Hanna Mina's story, "parallels in its rhythm and details his aesthetic performance" (qtd in. Diilulio, xvi) yet criticism has focussed solely on checking facts and confirming the hardship experienced by Syrians who failed to catch up with the society's pragmatic entrepreneurial culture at the eve of its independence has failed to offer insights into the complex layers of meaning embedded in this narrative. By addressing the deeper, more controversial levels that this novel reaches it is possible to establish this text as one of a handful of novels that fulfilled the mission of the Arab Writers Association by critiquing vehemently newly established traditions, by highlighting and criticizing society's conservative values that still find a way to control the individual.

### **Female Desire and Subversion in "The Virgin and the Gypsy"**

Published in 1930, "The Virgin and the Gypsy" discovers a romantic love story of a young English girl with an attractive, virile gypsy. After the scandal of his wife's run away, the vicar and his daughters, Yvette, the protagonist, and Lucille, the prototype of an independent modern woman, seek refuge in the Saywell house, a house ruled by a blind and selfish grandmother who renders the daughters' life suffocating and colorless. Their dreams as young women are smothered until one day Yvette encounters a gypsy and his family who make her aware of the oppressive domesticity in the vicarage. Thus, the novella sets two opposite worlds that mark the protagonist's journey into maturity and womanhood. While the first is respectable yet oppressive represented by the Saywell household, the second is natural, liberating, and sensual epitomized by the gypsy and his tribe.

This discovery of the self is initiated by a unique encounter that sheds light on the character of the gypsy as a catalyst for the protagonist's quest for self-knowledge and realization. It seems that both Lawrence and Mina trust a non-conformist, outsider character to initiate their female protagonists' existential journeys into womanhood and identity. The portrait of a deracinated male versus a frustrated and vulnerable female, brought together by a sensual connection between them, crosses the boundaries of class and culture to detail Lawrence's belief in "the aetiology of the diseased condition of life" (Moynahan 215). In this respect, Leland defines gypsies as a healing power: "human type of [the] vanishing, direct love of nature, of this mute sense of rural romance and of al fresco life . . . despite their rags and dishonesty". He continues that truly "they are but rags themselves; the last rags of the old romance which connected man with nature" (17). Yet, in the novella, Gypsy figures operate as threatening foreign "others" as they disturb the supposedly calm waters of well-established societies, evoking and/or embodying anxiety and paradoxically powerful objects of desire. Instantly, the gypsy

makes “something [take] fire in her breast” (20) that raises Yvette’s awareness of her body “she was not present in her body, the shell of her body” (38). Once, her body is awakened to the sensual world of the gypsy, Yvette acknowledges that “there is something about me which they don’t see and never would see” (39). This awareness brings her at odds with the social normativity she grew into, calling attention to the instability of norms regarding desire and identity. She comes to understand that her sense of the self does not meet her family and class expectations, expectations that Lawrence judges to be limiting and oppressive.

Following the encounter with the gypsy, the gap between Yvette and her world becomes wider. The narrator asserts that “. . . the dark man will blow the one spark up into fire again, good fire. You will see what good fire” (28). Yvette manages to free herself from the chains of respectability and religiosity her family holds to as her quest brings about “a great glow, a flow of life, like a swift, dangerous sun in the home” (19). Yvette’s ultimate moment of emancipation is evoked through the flood scene. What starts as a moment of a dramatic end to an unfulfilled love proves to be a moment of metamorphosis announcing the collapse of a world of rotten claims and the birth of a new, natural, and sensual world that acknowledges the primacy of the female body. The flood destroys the very house that epitomizes the rigidity of the social milieu Yvette grows in. While the flood preserves Yvette’s life through the gypsy’s physical proximity that initiates her into a world of overwhelming and sweeping tenderness as she connects with the body, it kills the grandmother who deteriorates into an indoor existence. The grandmother grows blind to real joys in life, but Yvette gains moral ascendancy and emotional emancipation. It can be argued that the gypsy’s role is more stimulating than merely initiating the dissolution of Yvette’s chains” the thought of the gypsy had released the life of her limbs, and crystallized in her heart the hate of the rectory; so now she felt potent instead of impotent,” (43) writes Lawrence. The gypsy’s suggestion to get naked can be celebrated as a summon for Yvette to free herself from hampering manacles of respectability and normativity that the grandmother installed in her house.

Though written to evoke different narrative worlds, both novellas meet on a common ground when asserting that the self is not a unified, ethical entity, but rather at odds with accepted social norms. This envisioning of the self as rising from opposition justifies the use of a conformist discourse that is soon challenged by a subversive one. While it is that of music and philosophy in “The Tragedy of Demetrio,” it is that of desire in “The Virgin and the Gypsy”.

### **Breaking the Boundaries of the Authoritative Discourse**

Both novellas examine the struggle of the heroines Raji’aa and Yvette in relation to the theme of marriage and love. As representatives of the New Woman in their corresponding societies, both protagonists challenge patriarchal male characters’ attempts to define and control them in accordance with societal expectations. While Raji’aa denies her husband her body and refuses to share her thoughts and desire with him by reducing to silence, Yvette challenges her society’s expectation of a vicar’s daughter by falling in love with a gypsy. Though considered as an ostensibly passive act, Raji’aa’s silence is revealed in this story as an active act undertaken out of a conscious choice on what to talk about with her husband, and under which circumstances not to share her feelings with him. Yvette also experiences silence as an act of revolt against social conventions and traditions, when she distances herself from her world and befriends the gypsy, answering as such a mystical call.

The female characters confront the social norms and expectations that attempt to maintain them within the boundaries of the authoritative discourse of a patriarchal

society that venerates the institution of marriage. Though Mina does not openly criticize it, Lawrence mocks the institution through the character of the mother Cynthia, by emitting sufficient heat in the character's desire and femaleness and legitimating her quest for freedom. The run-away mother becomes a model for Yvette as she flees the suffocating rigidity of social expectations. In "The Tragedy of Demetrio," Raji'aa returns to the healing powers of music after the death of Demetrio, consummated by the fire of his love, keeping him a cherished memory.

Similarly, Yvette "would keep the gipsy a secret from him," (73) yet she will live by his advice to "Braver in the body" (73). Just like Raji'aa, she comes to know the wisdom of his disappearance as she has to carry the journey alone. It is the very reason that drives both authors to choose to eliminate the male characters which is not as early critics aimed to believe as an answer to social norms and codes of their societies that deny these love affairs but rather to permit the female protagonists to explore by themselves their existential journeys. Lawrence started the tradition with the character of the gamekeeper Mellors in *Lady Chatterley's Lover* who saves the lady from an agonizing existence in a mechanized, lifeless world in the collieries when introducing her to the realm of sensuality, tenderness, and naturalness in the wood. Being a late Romantic, Lawrence believes in the need for a reunion with the natural and trusts the female to carry on the mission. Though Mina may have not been associated with Romanticism, we see traces of a Romantic spirit when leveling a harsh criticism against the modern society that his country became on the eve of its independence and the sweeping spread of capitalist beliefs that unmanned his countrymen. Both authors seek a return to origin to undo the evil of established, modern societies inflicted on individuals, mainly women.

To explore this Romantic spirit, both authors develop short stories that seemingly put forth the struggle of a single character and trace her strive for freedom. Hence, the short story, in both cases, creates a "complete and self-contained" effect, referred to by Poe as "the effect of totality" (73). Such a totality stems from the authors' awareness of the condition of women in their society. They developed encompassing view of the smothering impact of society on the individual: being man or woman, echoing several psychoanalytical theoreticians such as Juliet Mitchell and Julia Kristeva, where men and women alike are subject to cultural and psychological pressures, and play "roles" they acquired during their childhood (33). Through love and music, these female characters manage to subvert these roles and vision an alternative. Still, in the same vein of understanding the authors' choice of a short story, we are to acknowledge their adeptness in enlivening the novellas with various voices. This adept brings the short story from the confining rules of singularity, asserting a potential for experimentation that goes in line with the authors' Romantic heritage.

### **Conclusion:**

This paper examined the depiction of female characters as New Women in a comparative analysis of two short stories: "The Virgin and the Gypsy" by D. H. Lawrence and "The Tragedy of Demetrio" by the Syrian writer Hanna Mina. These short stories can be read as examples of the New Woman Fiction, the study sought to explore and decipher the authors' perception of womanhood and gender stratification within a changing, modern world. The paper brought therefore a new approach to the study of these two short stories not simply by reading them comparatively, but also by applying Mikhail Bakhtin's theory of dialogism along with feminist critical theory. A feminist dialogic reading shed light on the pluralistic female discourse marking these two narratives that belong to two different cultural settings, yet meet in their authors' interest

in understanding the heroines' inner dilemmas and conflicts around the issues of love, desire and sexuality, marriage, and family, emphasizing an unfixed, fragmented, and contradictory female identity. One common message in both stories is that the female character possesses the ability to change her destiny and fulfil her femininity despite the oppression she experiences at the hands of the men around her. In this respect, we can understand Mina and Lawrence's writings as an attempt to counter the prevention of freedom in societies claiming to be modern.

Given that the writing prevailing at the turn of the twentieth century, both in England and Syria, was to great extent ignoring female voice, endeavour, and creativity, Lawrence's and Mina's works can be viewed as extracting female agency and according it unique value and weight. Such awareness and interest stand as an argument against the old belief that only women writers can understand other women's plight and suffering. Both authors develop central female characters that possess equal rights and status to those of man; in the selected stories in which the motif of the woman's oppression is touched upon, she surprises the reader with her resourcefulness when breaking the rules and traditions of class and gender: love and music as tools of resistance. Such similarity would be difficult to trace had Mina opted for a different style or genre. The influence of Lawrence is suggested in his skilfulness in managing the Romantic with the Modern that is echoed in Mina's work some years later. Modern Syrian authors such as Mina benefited from the western experimentation with style and techniques and paved the way for a new modern Arab literature.

The newly independent Syria engaged in a progressive plan to join developed countries driven by the dreams and hopes of those who fought for its emancipation. It depended on young authors to propagate ideas that would modernise society; these ideas were highly inspired by those of the west. It is in this respect that falls the comparison between D. H. Lawrence's and Hanna Mina's New Woman Fiction. Influenced by different backgrounds and experiences, both authors did, however, explore the woman issue. While Lawrence asserted that his female characters are not inferior to man by debunking social and gender prejudices inherited from the Victorian age, Mina highlighted his society's false claims of modernisation by proving the controlling power of traditions and religion exercised over women. The claims of modernity as well as those of equality in both independent Syria and developed England remained unfulfilled. The adept of both authors is shown in the use of the short story to tell these women's journeys into self-realization. This paper has therefore tried to explore this use, proving that there is more to say in relation to the influences of modern English and Arabic literature than meets the eye.

### Works Cited

- Bakhtin, Mikhail. *The Dialogic Imagination*. Ed. Michael Holquist. Trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist. Texas UP, 2008.
- Bauer, Dale M and Susan Jaret Mckinstry, eds. *Feminism, Bakhtin and Dialogic*. New York UP, 1991.
- Baym, Nina. *Woman's Fiction: A Guide to Novels by and about Women in America*. Illinois UP, 1993.
- Cott, Nancy. *The Grounding of Modern Feminism*. Yale UP, 1987.
- Felski, Rita. *The Gender of Modernity*. Harvard: Harvard College, 1995.
- Hancock, Emily. *The Girl Within: Touchstone for Women's Identity*. Dutton, 1989.
- Heilmann, Ann and Margaret Beethan, eds. *New Woman Hybridities: Femininity, feminism and International Consumer Culture. 1880-1930*. London: Routledge, 2004.
- Lawrence, D. H. "The Virgin and the Gypsy". *The Virgin and The Gypsy and Other Stories*. Ed. Keith Carabine. London: Wordsworth Classics, 2004.
- Maier, John. "Fragments of Memory: A Story of a Syrian Family by Hanna Mina". *International Journal of Middle East Studies*. Vol.27. no 4. 533- 536.
- May, Charles E. *The New Short Story Theories*. Athens: Ohio University Press, 1994.
- Mina, Hanna. "The Tragedy of Demetrio". *Dar El Adab*, 2004.
- Moynahan, Julian. *The Deed of Life. The Novels and Tales of D. H. Lawrence*. Princeton UP, 1963.
- Rosenberg, Carroll Smith. *Disorderly Conduct: Visions of order in Victorian America*. Oxford UP, 1985.

### The Author:

#### Cyrine Kortas

The Higher Institute of languages, Gabes, Tunisia

Email: [kortascyrine@gmail.com](mailto:kortascyrine@gmail.com)