

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.63332/joph.v5i5.1372>

The Male Virility vs. the Hegemonic Lady of the Bed: A Critical Study of the Iraqi Hanun Majeed's Novel the Kingdom of the Happiest Home

Ali Madhlum Hussein¹, Alaa Abdulhussein Hashim², Abdul-Settar Abdul-Latif Mal-Allah³, Hamid Hammood Hamid⁴, Ahmed Hatim Ibadi⁵, Zahraa Mohammed Hasan⁶

Abstract

This research tackles the Novel The Kingdom of the Happiest Home by the Iraqi novelist Hanun Majeed. It explores the implications of male virility and masculinity as a means to gain erotic pleasure and physical satisfaction versus the power of the female body. The research reveals what the novelist states in the introduction to his novel concerning the concept of Eros as being a duality of the lustful female and the sensuality of the virile male. Moreover, the research attempts to highlight the bearings of the lascivious corporeality and wantonness of the male as juxtaposed to the Iraqi realities and mishaps Iraqis suffered for a period covering the barren years of the Economic Blockade till the launch of the relentless 2003 war. The research shows how the novel excavates both rational and irrational dimensions rife in Iraqi society as far as Erotic satisfaction (for males and females) is concerned. This is because the novel unveils the body as a force and a will that transcends the ethical system in Iraq, which was corrupted by political power and its burdens on the economic will. The research stresses how the novel depicts how far the same corrupted ethics impose a state of exclusion and marginalization of the female. In addition, it ponders on the involved characters as cast in the novel: the characters which bear double meanings- they, on the one hand, are tethered to the past through memory, and on the other hand, they live and exist in the present through their kinetic actions and body movements. Also, the research makes it clear how the novel presents Iraq as a taut and frozen state that was falling, under the Economic Blockade and Sanctions, to the recesses of a fathomless abyss that has its own constraining obstacles and irrational effects, in all dimensions, on Iraqis' kinetic actions and body movements; sexual practices, of course, are included. Hence, the research is divided into seven Sections and a Conclusion, ending with a list of the references used. The Sections are: 1. Introduction 2. Eroticism 3. The Novel The Kingdom of the Happiest Home 4. Aphorismatic Stimulation 5. Masculinity: An Epitome of Courage and Sexual Prowess 6. The Sacred and the Profane Dionysian 7. The Body as an Ontology of Strength.

Keywords: Eroticism, Dionysian, Profane, Revelry, Debauchery, Aphorismatic, Euphoria, Virility, Sacred Apollonian, Profane Dionysian.

Introduction

Modern and postmodern critiques cannot surpass the dimension of eroticism in Arabic narrative and its role in shaping its narrative worlds and characters that have reflected a visible and iconic reality embodied in the world of the body. The concept of eroticism does not stray far from what human thought has embodied in terms of content, attempting to subject everything to dualities

¹ College of Arts, Almaaqaq University/ Basra-Iraq, Email: afialshuraifi4@gmail.com, (Corresponding Author)

² College of Arts, Almaaqaq University/ Basra-Iraq

³ College of Arts, Almaaqaq University/ Basra-Iraq.

⁴ College of Arts, Almaaqaq University/ Basra-Iraq.

⁵ College of Arts, Almaaqaq University/ Basra-Iraq.

⁶ College of Arts, Almaaqaq University/ Basra-Iraq.



between creatures and concepts, creating new binaries like male and female. However, the feminine dimension and its connotations have been attempted to be tamed and dominated by male hegemony in different historical stages. Thus, man was a presence, and woman was an absence. Perhaps the act of erotic pleasure and its satisfaction are embodied in the power of the male and transformed it. As such, the research will approach in the Iraqi novel *The Kingdom of the Happiest Home* [*Mamlakat Al-Bayt Assa'id*] by the Iraqi novelist Hanun Majeed. But before the research in question delves into the recesses of this topic, it is needed here to provide a summary of the novel itself. And then, the sections will follow immediately.

The novel: *The Kingdom of the Happy Home* by Hanoun Majeed was published in the Jordanian capital. It consists of twenty-four chapters and covers two hundred and four medium-sized pages. In the title of this novel, there are many references to social and political matters, including the fact that this Queen is originally a woman from a low social level, and she shouldn't be a Queen unless the current political situation qualifies such characters to occupy such a position. Then she was happy at a time when the economic blockade was stamping the social reality with its harsh black mark, which made the honorable woman a needy woman selling her clothes, her wedding trousseau, and after her husband sold much of what he owned of books, furniture, and belongings. This reality made the low woman throw her money to Abu Laith from her high balcony to pick it up while it is in the air or while she is on the ground from different places. These reversed standards turned the slave into a king and the king into a slave, and such a situation is unfair and should come to its inevitable end, as the novel expressed .

In this novel, Hanoun Majeed's literary masterpiece, he presents to us a comprehensive, cosmic vision, about a country held by a dictator who led it into three devastating wars, and devastating sieges of the human structure and ambitions. It emerged as pure rubble from those wars, and thus, its national and human essence was emptied. This is embodied in the characters of the Queen, Abu Laith, Saleh, the lawyer, and Maryam. The recipient feels that these are the specimens of the war, no matter what they say or claim, and no matter how much effort they make, in an attempt to compensate for the consequences of the war on them. They are considered nothing more than marginal creatures, like Abu Laith's relationship with Maryam, the teenage girl, the queen's daughter, and Saleh, who is confident of himself, is equal in War, or a lover of the queen, or a lawyer who now has nothing but the ability to talk about war and freedom, just to pass the time.

The events of the novel "*The Kingdom of the Happy Home*," the theme of which is war, take place on both sides of the main street in the Al-Shabab neighborhood, which separates the owner of the bookstore and the grocery store. Abu Laith on one side, and the Queen's balcony overlooking the other side on the other side. On the first side, the narrator recalls the events of the Iran War and the Kuwait War, in the words of its contributors, Abu Laith, the grocery store owner opposite the Queen's apartment, as we said, next to the Afaq Library, and he is an electrical engineer, and Shaker, the teacher who assumed the name Saleh, and Abu Laith's friend on the war front, and the one who fled from... The war went to Lebanon, and he returned to Baghdad later, to work as a taxi driver. He meets the queen in the market near the library before his life and the queen's life are upended at the same time. He enters a gentleman's contract with her, not to turn her into another woman, and to spend a night with her in her apartment. He is assassinated by an unknown party, which leads to his death, but suspicion turns to some party, as well as the lawyer. All of them suffered psychological and physical damage in the war. The three of them used to meet at Abu Laith's grocery store, to drink and ruminate on war talk and other things, every day until ten in the evening.

On the other side, there is a woman called the Queen, and she is considered the main character. With her lives, her young daughter, Maryam, a school student who was not desecrated by her mother's brothel, and remained immune and innocent until her death, when she ascended to heaven, or as the narrator described her, Maryam flies. The Queen used to throw parties on red nights as if she had not lived through wartime, and she would receive into her brothels anyone who wanted to take his mistress or prostitute to participate in those nights, and even Saleh, who fled the furnace of war and its disasters, fell into the traps of the Queen, who preferred him over all men. It seems that Abu Laith's livelihood depends a lot on the Queen's shopping by bringing a basket from the balcony to the sidewalk. The task is carried out by the girl Maryam, whom Abu Laith is attached to and takes care of, despite the large age difference.

It seems that the street separating the two banks is intended to symbolize that there are two different worlds, the world of brothels and the world of war debris, both of which are the product of a regime that plunged its people into the bait of wars.

"The novel's characters, including the queen and her daughter Maryam, are crisis-ridden, frustrated characters, eroded by war and economic blockades. Some of them were defeated by war and adversity, and some of them resisted their interactions and repercussions. Some of them found justification to create a glimmer of a dream to resume life again, such as Abu Laith's relationship with Maryam and Saleh's relationship with the queen. He tried to compensate for or escape from the reality of the remnants of war and its secretions, which are no different from the fiery furnace of war of which they were victims. It is a reality that cannot be resisted by escaping to another reality, to justify its existence, such as falling in love with a teenage girl, as happened to Abu Laith with Maryam and Saleh. With the queen who runs the prostitution.

Modern and postmodern blogs cannot surpass the dimension of eroticism in Arabic narrative and its role in shaping its narrative worlds and characters that have reflected a visible and iconic reality embodied in the world of the body; and it appears that the one that presented images of the absence of arbitrary reference for the signifier to embody the cultural signified within the limits and space of reality. The concept of eroticism does not stray far from what human thought has embodied in terms of content, attempting to subject everything to dualities between creatures and concepts, creating new binaries like male and female. However, the feminine dimension and its connotations have been attempted to be tamed and dominated by male hegemony in different historical stages. Thus, man was a presence, and woman was an absence. Perhaps the act of erotic pleasure and its satisfaction is embodied in the power of the male and transformed it. This is represented in the random and chaotic act that defied the system of harmony and compatibility that criticism will approach in the narrative blog "*The Kingdom of the Happy Home*."

Eroticism

Undoubtedly, since the sin of eating the apple and the forced separation of Adam and Eve, humanity has faced the dilemma of coping with the inevitability of separation and searching for ways to achieve unity and harmony between males and females. This quest has been fueled by the process of distancing from the inherent unity in nature and the realization that humans consist of duality, and in that duality lies the essence of separation and difference between the two genders, male and female (see Fromm, 1956: 28-30). However, humanity has presented various solutions for the union between the male and female, such as through the establishment of sexual satisfaction or either spiritual and physical love, promiscuity, or the institution of marriage. These solutions have given rise to the selfishness born from the desire to possess women, who have been stereotyped with masculinity and male ethics. "Though having sex with someone can

give the illusion of unity without love. This act will leave the participants just as many strangers to each other as before, and can induce feelings of shame or hatred for the other” (Majeed, 42)

Archaeological research suggests that human society went through two distinct social systems. In one society, there was a Matriarchal System in which women dominated, settling alongside their children while men went out hunting and gathering. In this society, there was no traditional concept of marriage, and the female-centric community worshiped deities known as female figures like Ishtar and Asherah. In contrast, there was the Patriarchal System in which the society was ruled by the masculine mentality and orientation, characterized by harshness and ruggedness, as primitive societies were nomadic and pastoral worshipping male deities. After the pastoral phase, societies encroached upon the agricultural phase in which there occurred a form of hybridization between male and female deities. Ishtar with Tammuz (July), giving rise to a state of sanctification accompanied by rituals of offerings and sacrifice. These rituals manifested in celebrations involving communal nudity and sexual acts, which stimulated the Earth and Nature for fertility, abundance, and life, according to ancient beliefs. In this context, sexuality and eroticism were sources of pleasure, delight, and vitality, even in the face of death (see Alqumani, 1999, 112-21; El Saadawi, 1980: 19-23).

Perhaps the rituals performed in some primitive tribes when one of their members died involved a period of sexual abstinence and celibacy that lasted for forty days as a mourning period. Afterward, purification from the impurity of death was achieved by seeking symbols of life through rituals, communal celebrations, and erotic acts in naked forests or open spaces to undergo purification (Caillois, 2001: 170,207). This tattered image does not stray far from the Greek celebrations of Dionysus (known as Bacchus to the Romans), the god of wine and pleasure, characterized by revelry, pleasure, and debauchery in his earthly form (Al-Majidy, 2018: 286-7). It evolved into an erotic culture and contrasted with the more reserved Latin Greek culture, seen as the art of existence for the Greeks, transforming life and sexuality into an artistic production with aesthetic values and stylistic standards. The art of Eros is a technique of self and pleasure, strongly linked to the axes of experience in various realistic relationships: the body's relationship with women, young men, and homosexuals, aligning with health issues and beyond, the game of life and death, its relationship with the other sex, and the role of the wife as a distinctive partner in the family institution and the connection it creates. One's relationship with one's own gender (homosexual marriage) also plays a part, with the issue of choosing partners and the challenge of compatibility between sexual roles, seen contrary to nature.

The Kingdom of the Happiest Home

The novel *The Kingdom of the Happiest Home* does not deviate from the erotic dualism that violates the principles of structure, order, and authority, rejecting the laws and legitimacy of marriage. It aims to be a Dionysian way of challenging and rejecting a socio-political cultural authority that attempted to control society through the idea of economic blockade and the creation of a new way of life that goes beyond the superficial aspect of reality embodied in stability and stillness. The underlying dimension was filled with resistance and rebellion. The novel is about a place or temple where men and women explore Dionysian freedom. Its revelry, and rituals involving wine and physical pleasure, violate the values and traditions that Iraq witnessed in the 1990s. This house portrays that period with all its political and social dimensions. The characters of this novel carry dual meanings, connected to the past through memory, while also existing in the present and the Iraqi reality .

However, the erotic structure of the novel reveals the art of existence and the truth of humanity, apart from the wisdom of sexual relationships and their spiritual conditions that allow access to wisdom in Socratic philosophy, an ideal that Socrates claimed as a requirement for sexual relationships or spiritual love, exposed by the Iraqi reality in the 1990s. The character of the Queen, who had her own kingdom, embodies physical pleasure and the practice of the art of physical existence with its rituals influenced by the Dionysian spirit, involving wine, women, dance, and erotic actions. The novel exposes these rituals, as narrated by the storyteller:

The dinner courses continued to accumulate on Mariam's and her mother's hands until the table was filled with them. The Queen gestured to Mariam, asking if she wanted to sleep or have dinner in her room with the door closed. The hands intertwined with love for the first time, but it quickly turned into chaos due to the variety of food and desire for it, which the Queen saw as an expression of admiration for her food. As she sat down, the queen swayed. She felt the effect of what she had consumed before dinner had taken over her. They marveled as she was the one who had prepared the food with such precision, now experiencing something resembling a strong dizziness

(Majeed: 19)

However, the process of setting and arranging the food items, along with the collective rituals that manifest through it, creates a sense of harmony among the attendees in this place. The moment the queen admires the setting of the food and subjected it to a chronological arrangement, a kind of ritualistic order is established, preserving the harmonious atmosphere that the Queen wanted to create for the body lovers. And perhaps, as Foucault stated, indulgence in pleasures is directly linked to the presence of food. There is an intimate relationship between the pursuit of sexual pleasure and the presence of food and wine, as the triangle of abstinence, control over excessive indulgence in wine, love, and food intertwines. As philosophers and religious scholars attempted to address the issue of moderation in the context of nutrition, food, love, and wine within the framework of ethics, they recognized a connection between the pleasure of the table and the bed. Therefore, it is found that philosophers observed that excess in food, wine, and sexual activity during celebrations could disrupt human well-being. Consequently, they have formulated teachings and advice aimed at describing the appropriate amount of engaging in sexual relations, its connection to food, and how to experience pleasure without disruption (Foucault: 38).

The experimental elements that provide the desired intimacy, as well as the elements of violence and sexual freedom can be uncovered in this novel and its happy kingdom. The strategies that form the threshold of success in the use of pleasures are represented by the strategies of need, time, and personal situation. The need for sexual gratification is preceded by a process of craving for it through the sensuous play of food and dance. To experience pleasure, a passionate desire must precede it, and its amplifications occur through various contributions, in addition to the strategy of timing, which is one of the most important and precise aspects of the art of using pleasures. It is crucial for the timing to be in the evening and night, as these times provide an

element of secrecy and help avoid openness, which can diminish the elements of excitement, fear, and free play. It allows for distancing oneself from the authority of the rational mind and the watchful censor. Wine and dance embody the presence of irrationality and the dominance of sensual bodily power. Another strategy in the art of using pleasure is related to the individual and their level of readiness and ability for erotic action, which achieves a holistic existence that disrupts harmony and balance, creating a rhythm that tames the mind in favor of desire (Foucault: 40-45). This is what the Queen tried to accomplish:

As the hands ceased their engagement with the food, she cast an examining gaze upon her guests. They were all ensnared by the intoxication of satiety and pleasure of the meal, after having been consumed by the bodily ecstasy they had suppressed just a moment ago. The doors to her three chambers had closed, and she pondered what lay beyond this, or what came after this? She took a bite and slightly raised the volume of the song, then exclaimed, "Yousef, Mariam, come here to clear the food and move the table to the side." She commanded that everyone should dance. The Queen's request was not a difficult one, and she found an immediate response, especially from a slender man who appeared to be skilled in the art of dance. He sprang up ahead of everyone, eager to showcase his talent and fulfill the Queen's request. Oh... His mistress released her voice while responding to his call and revealed a talent no less than his own. The other four rose in her wake. The Queen's delight stirred her desire to harmonize with the dancing of the first two talented (Majeed: 20).

The element of desire and overpowering pleasure seeps into the souls and bodies of the dancers after the Queen's rituals have spurred the theme on. The process of subjecting the body to sexual violence, where pleasure is mixed with pain, portrays the dominance of erotic desire and its watery, lustful vocalization of moans and pain. The state of equilibrium between the act and its practice, and its satisfaction between the act and the power: "What surprised everyone was that he led her back into the room they had just left and closed the door behind them. After that, a faint moan, torn by the heat of pleasure as if emerging from a deep hole within the earth, began to be heard by everyone. The Queen felt no hesitation in saying, "How great the beauty of this woman is." (Majeed: 21)

There is no doubt that the erotic rituals and the impure actions revealed in this novel and its tabooed worlds represent a reflection of awareness of the unconscious or irrational prohibitions in society. Extreme asceticism, permanent chastity, and economic and physical austerity are rational ethics that society has tried to uphold. However, the violation of the sacred reflects its rejection of the dominance of power in all its forms, in addition to its attempt in this narrative to reveal the idea in society. Perhaps the shadows of the economic blockade on Iraq in the 1990s and its effects, which caused a moral and ethical upheaval in Iraqi society, are related to moral and material austerity, elevating the value of non-material matters and the standards of living over other issues, such as moral values. Economic prohibition was accompanied by the

dominance of a dictatorial and arbitrary political power that tamed the spirit of the Iraqi people. The physical relationship and indulgence in pleasures represent a meaning of freedom and rebellion as they retain control and domination over sanctities of power, liberating personalities and establishing a kingdom free from all subservience to power through forming a new relationship with the body that takes a form of rebellion and complete self-sovereignty, which creates a sense of existence through lust.

Aphorismatic Stimulation

The meanings and connotations that Aphrodisiacs can evoke constitute an aesthetic technique carrying a sense of freedom. One can trace it back to Aphrodite, who represented the Greek goddess of love and beauty, inspiring a fusion of various concepts in Greek philosophy, such as desire, actions, sensations, images, instincts, and social inclinations. This prompted Foucault to adopt the plural form "Aphorismatics" to signify these actions and meanings. The conceptual ability of Aphorismatic ontology emerges through the experience that links aphrodisiacs with the associated pleasure. The seduction exercised by pleasure and the force of desire impelled towards it constitute a robust unity with the practice of aphrodisiacs itself. Later, dismantling this group, at least in part, will become one of the fundamental characteristics of the ethics of desire and the concept of sexuality.

Therefore, the sexual encounter, preceded by Bacchic rituals, constituted the dynamics of sexual action and its role in shaping an existential art that addresses human ontological deficiency. The experience of aphrodisiacs, as a robust unity of dynamic practices involving actions, movements, and touches, works towards affirming one's true or primal self. Hanoun Majid's novel highlights the sovereignty of sexual temptation over the Queen and her surrender to unrestrained desire. It portrays a suggestive interplay between sexual need and psychological craving, as the Queen experiences a sense of isolation and emotional anticipation. Perhaps the vitality of physical pleasure and its material gratification failed to tame the human soul, leaving it isolated and yearning for connection. Monotony, deathliness, and routinely imposed stillness on her life, so she sought to convince herself by seeking a stranger who could ignite both her physical and emotional desires that had dwindled over time. "And perhaps the Queen's quest for a stranger to restore her strength may shed light on her connection to the divine reminiscing what was practiced by the women in Sumerian and Babylonian times who sexually devoted themselves to the gods as a form of sacred ritual, seeking a sense of tranquility and cosmic harmony" (Al-Saadawi, 1974: 190, 193). After the Queen's sexual desire was rejected by the lovers who were around her, she found that their rejection was a kind of cowardice and fear in men: "The Queen staggered and let her hand drop. She thought about spitting in the face of (the loving man) and telling him, 'You are a coward, and any man who rejects me is a coward. All men are cowards. But she held herself back, and when one of them volunteered, she strongly refused, turned off the TV, and dismissed everyone'" (Majeed, 29).

Her rejection and expulsion of everyone was like a new turning point she desired, seeking a new life in it, a kind of stability, but far from the legitimate authority of marriage. She decided to seek a lover with whom she could exercise her freedom and sexual seduction freely: "Since that night, the Queen made a new decision ... to bring in a man, whether as a husband or a lover who would eat, drink, and respond to her every call whenever her voice delighted him, or she was intoxicated with the ecstasy of wine" (Majeed, 29).

Therefore, the new choice formed the new pivot for the act of Euphoria, after it used an economic dimension in the Queen's reign, it now became an existential dimension focused on freedom and

the gratification of bodily desires, with its discourse centered on pleasure and enjoyment. If the experience of the Euphoric needs to be dissected through physical lovemaking, it is realized that the eruption of the body is a source that does not undermine the restraints in the Queen's case, especially after the entry of Saleh and the transformation she tamed were factors in the search for unity or the common origin that combines masculinity and femininity:

Despite her frenzy, the Queen remained silent, allowing the television to run on its own. She returned her attention to the rooms behind the chaos of emotions and looked at what was happening within her from behind the walls. The image was spinning as she was spinning with it. There were no images better than this image, and there was no happiness in all of them except what was rare and impossible. Her passion flaring now is not based on the size of her body or the extent of her desire but on the size of herself. This self that was only content with having something captivating or precious, and all this impossible. It was her desire now for her guests to leave so she could see in their Eyes, their exhausted sexual desires, their gleaming happiness, and their cold, harmonious bodies, as well as their regular, recurring commitments as if they held an eternal paradise between their fingers
(Majeed, 27).

This excerpt contains erotic semiotics operating through the suggestive use of sound and its role in arousing lustful desire and pleasure in the Queen. She found herself being tested by the internal reflection of her femininity and sexual desires, which manifested as a mirrored image on the surface of her existence. Within her lies the quest for the estrangement and solitude that she felt through the agitation of the body, which placed her in a state of existential deprivation and nothingness. Hence, her search for the stranger or the other to create with him her physical and existential dimension afterward.

For the Queen, authenticity or originality resides in the physical space with the other, which was based on the oneness of the One and its manifestation in a conceptual and existential presence. This original presence was only available in the presence of a virtuous character Salih, who framed this presence and the Queen's existential experience through sexual ecstasy that was formed on the first night when Salih entered the Queen's kingdom. In the ecstasy of wine and the pleasure of revelation, the presence of truth and the physical exchange began: "The street is open, and light pours from the distant great dome. There is a sensory artificial moon hanging at a low point in the sky, and two soldiers appear hurriedly from the side street ... poor souls, as for the battle or the war" (Majeed,41).

The embodied expressions related to the language of the body in the above excerpt, as well as the text preceding it, reinforce the obsession with negation and annulment to create the presence of the One or the oneness when the Queen transitions from nothingness to existence. The singular presence through which the Queen worked to negate and annul herself, was established through the sensual physical exchange between her lover or lovers as the origin from which

everything springs. The possibilities of meaning, presence, and reality declared themselves in the oneness of unity and existence through the lust for physical exchange. In the ecstasy of the body, the moment of origin was formed from which existence and oneness derive their meaning and presence, and their reality. As they engage in the presence of the body, it becomes a moment of origin, a state of connection and separation. The existential gaps, through which the origin disappeared and a kind of oneness with the other occurred, are shattered by the effectiveness of stripping, tearing, and mutual physical violence, in which the icon and the singular existence are revealed. "This happens through forgetting and the disappearance of two origins: the self and the other (Nail, 2006: 146-48)" establishing a state of dissolution. In this physical exchange, it is found that the self-enamored with the Queen constantly leans towards an intimate type with Salih manifesting in the revealing nudity that provides a complete opportunity for all forms of chaos, recklessness, debauchery, transforming the presence of Salih into the Queen's sole sensual existence.

Masculinity: An Epitome of Courage and Sexual Prowess

Copulation, desire, and pleasure embody the core of the aphoristic experience in its elements, which are naturally distinguished by their strong interconnection with each other. However, this strong connection is what will shape the ontology of deficiency and desire as in Greek philosophy, carrying the concept of life and death ... (Foucault, 1967. Trans. by Robert Hurley: 31-39). "An ontology of deficiency and desire; it was not that of a nature setting the standard for acts; it was an ontology of a force that linked together acts, pleasures, and desires. It was this dynamic relationship that constituted what might be called the texture of the ethical experience of the aphrodisia" (Ibid.,43).

In Greek thought, the philosophical concept combined and merged the pleasure of wine, food, and erotic love within the context of natural philosophy, intertwining sexual desire with nature in ancient rituals and worship. This presented a robust embodiment that made courage in wars and sexual prowess the measure of Greek manhood and heroism, distorted by the philosophy of Socrates and the scientific spirit.

Undoubtedly, it is an intriguing moment to connect Greek philosophy around manliness with bravery in war and sexual potency, as the value of the presence of the personality of Shakir-Saleh operates based on an ancient memory that used to carry the name, Shakir, embodying meanings of manhood and bravery in war as a fierce and valiant fighter. For example, Abu Layth's memory revealed this, the owner of the grocery store located in front of the Queen's house:

Abu Layth laughs bitterly ... He laughs at the things that memory and reminiscence carries when one slips into another and may reveal the veil of darkness. Otherwise, how does Shakir, the brave cart driver, remember?

Shakir was one of those men whose life was endowed with nerves that knew no trembling, inclined towards heroism even if it was in the realm of pastime.

(Majeed: 47)

Abu Laith's memory encapsulates meanings of heroism, bravery, and strength that shaped Shakir's character in the past. Referring to Shakir invokes a semiotic depth summoning the significance of gratitude, patience, and dedication with conviction. The valor associated with

Shakir's name and his actions during the war carries a dimension that encompasses love for the homeland and its sanctity within Shakir.

It is necessary to note the turning point found in Abu Laith's image of Shakir, linked to his name that was changed to Saleh. This change could be interpreted as a symbol of righteousness, piety, commitment, and all other meanings that his actions violate, alongside his physical, chaotic, and whimsical experience with the Queen. Moral rectitude might represent physical and virile righteousness, as the new condition represents a sort of fantasy within the present reality and the living conditions of Saleh during the siege, which violated the sanctity of authenticity and ethics, presenting the meanings of selfishness, greed, and opportunism as a cultural semiotic sign for society.

The decisive shift between Shakir's ethos as an old valorous warrior, devoted to a sacred duty in love and defense of his homeland, on the one hand; and on the other hand, the new Saleh, committed to a virile sexual prowess and lustful infatuation with the Queen, portraying himself as an expression of a psychologically defeated soldier, diminished in a state of nihilism, chaos, loss, and false freedom. From a combatant in battle to a taxi driver serving the Queen who discovers how the other Platonic ideals have shattered her. Through Saleh's virility, she attempts to overcome her nihilism forming a way to unite with him by involving physical exchange. His external features carry an element of allure and connection between her body and his own, as revealed by the narrator: "A prominent dark-skinned man with mysterious features" (Majeed: 47). The physical strength expressed by the body reveals a virility in the lustful physical exchange that transcends the bravery exhibited in battles fought. The Queen's acknowledgment of his virility elevated him to the throne of this kingdom, causing a radical upheaval in her life: "At noon, (the Queen and Saleh) awoke.

You have proven yourself a virile man.

And you, a lady of the bed, a majesty's companion" (Majeed: 43).

The symbolic value that the Queen's acknowledgment of Saleh as virile, knowing how to lead the battle on the bed, suggests connotations far beyond physical exchange and the strength of virility. It produces separate functions from movement or physical pleasure. It is a condemnation of the state in which Shakir-Saleh found himself. The sense of psychological breakdown and frustration stems from being a brave warrior in battles that ended in a terrible loss, particularly in the Gulf War I, which humiliated the Iraqi soldiers and, consequently, the Iraqi populace, degrading their pride and masculinity through the defeat and the subsequent fabrications and lies that compromised the dignity of the defeated army. The defeat in the battle caused a psychological collapse within Saleh, transforming him into another immoral actor. Saleh attempted to record a false victory by setting his military uniform on the bed, reinstating a kind of collapse of virility associated with bravery. Thus, the virility of Shaker-Saleh formed a reversal role that culminated in his sudden murder by unknown hands.

The Sacred Apollonian and the Profane Dionysian

Undoubtedly, a close reading may detect a duality in interpreting the Iraqi scene running deep in the tissue of the structure of the novel- *The Kingdom of the Happiest Home* especially during the years of economic siege. The movement of characters revolves around two contrasting and conflicting dimensions: the sacred Apollonian and the profane Dionysian. But before the research delves deeper into the novel, let us spot some light on what is meant by these two terms: Apollonian and Dionysian- which both derived from Nietzsche.

Nietzsche depicted his heroes in a conflict that has existed since ancient Greek philosophy, where the struggle persisted between Apollo, the god of love representing conformity, harmony, organization, and ideal spirit according to ancient Greeks, juxtaposed against Dionysus, the god of wine, sex, rebellion, freedom, and chaos. Nietzsche attempted to divide these divine myths into symbols: the symbol of ancient Greek civilization was Apollo, embodying order and harmony, and the symbol of chaos and rebellion was Dionysus against conventions. He praised the chaotic hero, criticizing the scientific, Socratic spirit that stifled the original spirit that believed in the will to power (Nietzsche, 1996: 37-95). The novel's overall scene and its vision of the world reveal the sensational and animalistic side of humans, exposing rebellion and physical freedom that adopt the concept of presence. Absence formed the profound structure of the narrative blogger's perspective and narrative focal points. Dionysian characters like the Queen, Saleh, Abu Laith, and the strangers among the lovers of physicality, rebellion, and freedom tried to shape their destinies and identities in harmony with their vital will in creating a reality that operates on the presence of the profane, the depth of the Queen's sin lay in attempting to diminish her existence from mere hedonistic play, consisting an ascent that aided her transformation from non-existence to existence. Meanwhile, (Shakir Saleh's) acknowledgment of the Queen's body value and their sensual exchange through the idea of complementing existential lack between them to form a unity that transcends the boundaries of conventional marital authority. An institution for the profane, which is actually a negative state for social existence and its higher values, as the difference between the physical demands of the lovers, the Queen and Shakir-Saleh, is a quest for happiness. However, the Dionysian paradox between bodily freedom and its existence, and social annihilation, has turned the social system or the mind that tried to sideline and exclude the irrational or non-rational. Yet, the difference between civil erotic existence and sacred social existence has turned into a struggle of desires and wishes between Shakir-Saleh and the Queen. Each of their demands collided between possibility and realization, as what every human being seeks and what they can achieve renders them existentially lacking. They desire their existence to be complete and capable; in other words, to both, thus making them someone else. The profane unveils the fragility of human emotions and the fundamental possibility of internal and external conflicts. Of course, both tabooed sex and love are not evil in themselves, but they represent, according to the novel, a fall for humanity into the realm of non-rational, surpassing social and religious sanctities and taboos. Therefore, the relationship between Shakir-Saleh and the Queen, although seemingly indicating a form of complementarity, is essentially a quest and a value through which they attempt to compensate for the existential lack plaguing present Saleh and absent Shakir, present Queen and absent Queen. The actions of human downfall, the triviality of life, and its meaninglessness for both constitute the fate of life or the new Iraqi condition:

- **The Queen.**

She responded to Saleh when he asked her about her name as he was returning with her from the market.

- **True, but every queen has a name.**

- **The Queen ... that's my name, and I haven't known any other name since I was born.**

- **The honor was obtained.**

- **And what is your name?**

- **Saleh.**

- Yes.

– We were honored.

(Majeed: 33)

The issue of the profane and its relationship to human downfall becomes apparent when it transforms into a form of commitment. With the murder of Shakir-Saleh, life comes to an end, and the kingdom of the Queen collapses, posing a problem of physical purification thereafter, a decision to conquer death and existence through suicide. Perhaps suicide, according to Sartre's existential understanding, is an attempt to liberate humans from this gaze or the objective and material surveillance of humanity. In Sartre's philosophy, society and others are seen as hell, and through this, Sartre attempted to let humans be free in decision-making, away from the domination of the community. As humans are a mass of emotions or sentiments with no utility, their existence brings them anxiety, nausea, pessimism, triviality, and meaningless life. Therefore, the solution for existentialist philosophers was the suicide of humanity (see Sartre: 315-406) which manifests true existence through the act of making a decision based on defining time, moment, and manner:

With the force of a scorching bullet, she glared sharply at the owner of the bookstore and addressed him, “And you, the secretive owner of the bookstore, hiding your intense desire for women who come to you offering what you want. No one eavesdrops behind the door, and no one spies from above. The door to paradise is open for whoever wishes.

She scaled the fence of its balcony, just as Sally had done before. Her head spun, her body swayed right and left, right and left, until she felt the ground more worthy for her body than this nauseating sway in the void, so she threw herself there ... There, her blood mingled where Saleh's blood had flowed before, joining it in a broad line until the end of the pavement, beside which lay Saleh's car with its front door open and dust-covered

(Majeed: 239).

The conquest of existence and death through physical purification was met with another cleansing practiced by Abu Layth, the owner of the grocery store opposite the Queen's house. Abu Layth carried a luminous memory associated with war and a bodily memory. He was being a victim of war with a stiff leg that didn't move. Abu Layth's surveillance of the Queen's house stemmed from the understanding that life was linked to the house's movements and what he could gain monetarily when the Queen shopped from him. Additionally, he attempted to get closer to the young girl, Mariam, showing affection towards her, and revealing his love for this little girl. The depravity practiced by Abu Layth is evident in the mental representation submerged in illusion and the fear of its manifestation. His purification from this imagined defilement comes through feeling the pain, which is the due price for breaking the norm.

Between yesterday and today, Abu Layth acknowledges the immense difference. His sorrow is painful, and his despair is overwhelming. However, the image of Mariam descending upon him from the ruins of his dark solitude will restore his vigor and faith in life. We are defined not by what we believe but by what we do and achieve. What we have done, willy-nilly, is simply a part of life's course. That's how I am and how you are ... So, do not be

(Majeed: 53).

The symbolism of Mariam's name and her confident presence in this world constitutes an interpretive dimension linked to the purity and sanctity of the Virgin Mary. The author's intention in Mariam's presence cannot be innocent but rather suggests symbolic violence embodying a world of harmony and spirituality lacking in Iraqi society. The gentle presentation of the strategy behind the name Mariam is nothing but an imagination of innocence representing human life before the fall into sin. The essence of innocence lies in the purity that contradicts the reality of evil. The evil sensed in this novel takes various forms, embodying a deep reflection on human weakness, as referenced in the Christian View of the Fall of Adam and Eve. It represents vulnerability to temptation and allure. Mariam's positioning and actions in this novel generate various relationships with Abu Layth and Saleh-Shakir and her mother, linked to an iconic triangle embodying the seductive, provocative, and intimate within the delineation of the two clear entities in Abu Layth and the symbolic individuality of the Electra Complex, through which Mariam enters a psychological conflict in Saleh-Shakir's universe: both her mother's lover and, simultaneously, a paternal figure attempting to fill the absence left by her father. His presence initiates Mariam's falling in love and her sensing it through glances and touches, the presence of his body, and the inception of her longing to quench her thirst through Saleh-Shakir. The conscious and subconscious, along with the repressed emotions, contributed to Mariam's inner or nomological pain and self-reproach. The intersection between bodily desires and corrupted lust, coupled with the longing for the absent father figure embodied by Saleh-Shakir, spurred her emotions, causing her to live a constant obsession with carnal anxiety that made her feel her existence intensely as the body attempted to overpower and possess the spirit. However, the sudden death of Saleh-Shakir laden with spiritual depth created a sort of Orphic experience and philosophy that integrated the spiritual and earthly realms together. Eventually, the spiritual or virtuous aspect triumphed over sin. Mariam's fantastical ascension into the sky marks the end of an era and the beginning of a new one, with Mariam making her body a symbol of redemption, crucifixion, and a call to human conscience:

The first time she wakes up at dawn and challenges her mother's will, standing at this formidable street at such an hour in response to a strange and profound call urging her to venture into the universe. For the first time, she sees the light emerging like particles of pure, pristine crystals. Here and there, a bird crosses the stillness of the universe, an early soldier is startled by a wrong phone call or an emergency car speeds through the street dimly lit by darkness. Her unique

(Majeed: 234).

So, the spiritual Sufi symbol indicated by the flight of Mariam's bird is, in fact, a condemnation of the innocent act in the face of this sullied reality in which she found herself present existentially, thrown at it accusatively.

VII. The Body as an Ontology of Strength.

The relationships individuals establish with the external world and amongst themselves turn elements such as soft power, cunning, and deceit into tools that tame masculinity through desire and lust. The illegitimate relationships formed in *The Kingdom of the Happiest Home*, even if deemed unethical by society, represent a rejection of social taboos and laws that restrict sexual freedom, and subsequently, human freedom. So, it is perceived that the element of power, the will to live, which embodies animality and the triviality of a reality claiming legitimacy and illegitimacy, led the Queen to ask Shakir-Saleh that their contract or bond embodies the illegitimacy and freedom of the relationship, which fundamentally represents rebellion and a strong will in defying the reality that disappointed her:

**In the room where the door was bolted, and after exchanging wine glasses,
the Queen declared her desire for Salih. Salih confided his plan to the Queen
- Marry me with ceremonies and no betrayal.**

– If I take you, my lover, there will be no constraints nor guests.

**The strong man embodies the sagacity of outstanding men, with a firm grip of
his fingers, concealing enigmas entwined on his face, and self-imposed restraints
that set him apart among men you have known**

(Majeed: 35).

The excerpt above is not without indications of the Nietzschean hero, attributed to Nietzsche, as for him the man Salih-Shakir who challenged the conventions and the taboos. He possessed physical strength and health; the symbolism of strength intertwined with the composure that surrounded it, an action indicative of heroism and courage. The strong hero, rejecting social norms and being sexually virile, must inevitably possess the courage of a warrior. The Queen found in Salih the highest form of man, with all his masculinity and strength in war; his courage knows no limits in his rebellious spirit:

**There are no limits to courage, for me to say this one is brave and that one is
braver. Perhaps, in fairness, we should acknowledge the bravery of the truly
courageous opponent. I have seen with my own eyes and participated in battles
with the naked weapon, the courage displayed was pure and unequivocal. I
witnessed a soldier, his arm covered in blood from a sharp stab wound yet did
not retreat or surrender. Instead, he continued to fight his opponent until he
subdued him with a thrust that pierced his heart (Majeed:84).**

The experience of wars, their tribulations, and the psychological and physical realities have forged a strong individual undaunted by death. So, Shakir-Saleh's heroism was refined in the crucible of the toughest men. The repeated wars in Iraq formed a model of heroism through endurance, patience, courage, and facing death head-on. All of these sculpted the character of Shaker-Saleh, who the Queen discovered as the missing virtue in her world of pleasure, deceit, and hypocrisy. The men who visited the Queen lacked the nobility and bravery of Skaer-Saleh. His courage influenced her past and distant memory when she betrayed her only brother. The wound of her brother's honor was inflected when she fled with her lover, and the obsession with honor became linked to innocence. It is as if the Queen deceives herself through self-flagellation and self-accountability:

The questions of manhood and challenging situations undoubtedly captivate as well as alleviate her grievances from men whose battles and misery she witnessed with her own eyes. Whether on the battlefields or on the way to her heart, she saw their blood flow, mustaches quiver, and heads fall – none of which happened because of her. In her eyes, they are all cowardly, base, and dishonorable. As for the battles of wars and the men of war, they mean nothing to her except for her only brother whom she had betrayed the day she fled with her first lover, who stood away

(Majeed, 84).

Perhaps the dynamics of expressing the willpower of strength are not limited to the heroic aspect in wars. Still, the art of physical expression also plays a crucial role in preserving the essence of strength:

From the equations that occupied Mariam's mind, the equation of this man and woman together stand out. They are two friends who frequently visit her mother's apartment. The woman is beautiful, while the man, despite the mechanical touch in his demeanor is neat and complete in his attire. She has a milky-white complexion, her hair flowing backward, cascading down her neck to the middle of her back. He is dark-skinned with thick, curly hair, and his articulate hybrid tongue is fluent. Remarkably, she is completely speechless, yet the astonishing thing about them is their ability to communicate through gestures quickly and effortlessly, akin to the understanding between those who are unable to speak

(Majeed, 18).

The sensual harmony catalyzes the unveiling of a bodily sign language that has evolved into a lasting connection between a deaf persona and the mechanical man, taking on an ontological dimension for non-verbal communication. Through gestures, the other is visually tested in terms

of being an agent, free, and aware, creating in her physical world a self-empowered presence without intermediaries. In the presence of sensual bodily action, social taboos disappear. However, the events in the realm of the Queen and the sensuous nature of her kingdom follow the undulations of the body and its role in existence, preceding essence. The element of change in the Queen's character takes on a capricious nature, condemning ethical actions. Her bohemian refuge suggests that she has turned her home into a world of pleasure. And what her memory conceals is that she is a woman who escaped her past with her lover, who left her to her fate in the alleys and mazes of Baghdad, where human wolves gnaw at her body. The old reality encapsulated in her memory contradicts her current reality as she has become the Queen of pleasures that erased everything beautiful, and her old name has settled in the depths of oblivion. The culmination of sexual desire, the absence of reason, and indifference gave rise to a whimsical unconcerned existential character, making sexual pleasure a staircase to her delights. Her lover, condemned as illegitimate, manifested as the Queen's paramour, met a tragic end, marked by his murder. Perhaps this conclusion carries numerous social, cultural, and cognitive dimensions.

Conclusion

The novel *Kingdom of the Happiest Home* is linked to the duality of the sacred and the profane, or the Apollonian and the Dionysian worlds, and its principles associated with reason and order established for a new Iraqi reality during the economic blockade. The profane and its erotic rituals, along with the role of physical desire in shaping the Iraqi human existence, represented a bodily pleasure that was commodified culturally, economically, and consumptively. It manifested the irrational and hedonistic reality, where referencing or alluding to it touched upon modesty and moral integrity. Thus, the honor of battle and the protection of homelands crumbled and eroded when the concepts of manhood and heroism collapsed, revealing the ideological masks of the political and social system in Iraqi society. The Gnostic and spiritual dimensions of principles and human ethics dissolved and merged in the face of the power of sexual desire and physical sexual exchange. The body transformed into a center establishing both legitimate and illegitimate relationships with the other and the social surrounding. The roles exchanged between restricted and dictatorially controlled authority and marginalized, verbally, and culturally absent authority. The pleasure of the body and its sexual desire is a whimsical existence that emerged from the realm of feminine pleasures and their social, cultural, and political symbols, which were compulsorily absent under the pretext of preserving honor while the masculine authoritative presence was met with a restrained existence of a soft authority, evoking Dionysian rituals symbolized by primitive celebrations. The bestiality of prostitution and copulation outside the legitimate institution was combated by society, adhering to the rationality of the legal system throughout history, aiming to establish a kind of separation between eros and civilization. The exchange of roles between a restricted and repressive dictatorial authority, and a marginalized and absent authority rhetorically and culturally, is what has led to the above. The sexual pleasure of the body and its desires is a random existence that originated from the womb of feminine pleasures and their social, cultural, and political symbols that were forcibly absent under the pretext of preserving honor and male ownership. The ruling and its masculine authoritative presence are countered by the absence of a suppressed power embodying softness that invoked Dionysian rituals through primitive celebrations. The society, following the rationality of the legal system throughout history, fought against the bestiality of prostitution and copulation outside the legitimate institution to practice a kind of separation between Eros and Civilization. The evolution of humanity or civilization required taming every

free act, as sexual pleasure in contemporary and closed society is seen as rebellion and rejection of the law and political system. The discourse of war and the love of Eros in this narrative reveals a violation of structural elements, rejecting the laws of marriage and its legitimacy. It seeks to embody a Dionysian way as a violation and rejection of cultural, social, and political authority that attempted to control society through the idea of economic blockade, forming a new way of life beyond the apparent dimension of reality characterized by stagnation and stability. The underlying dimension, however, was filled with rejection and rebellion, as the realm of the happy home became a place or temple of desires where men and women experience Dionysian freedom associated with revelry and its rituals involving wine and bodily pleasure. It seems that the violations of the values and traditions, with all their political and social dimensions, which Iraqis witnessed in the nineties were depicted in this Home, which is narrated in the novel. The characters in this novel carry double meanings, tethered to the past through memory, and existing in the present reality through bodily practices. The present Iraq is taut, leading to the end of an abyss, freezing, and constraining the movement of the Iraqi body in all its dimensions. Thus, the revolutionary concepts of politics were exposed by their sexual revolution and bodily implications, where the past and memory of the characters in this novel are linked to the memory of the Queen, which encapsulates the sacred undetermined by Eros and the anarchic act of freedom. The memory of Saleh-Shakir scatters between heroism and protecting Iraq's honor, presenting a tainted present that uses masculinity as a framework for transient and ultimate pleasure. Therefore, the spirits of Platonic pleasures were obscured and extinguished in favor of the happiness of the body. The conflict revealed in the gaps and voids of this narrative work became a struggle between love and duty, existence and non-existence, presence, and absence, rational and irrational, profane and sacred, harmony and chaos, suppressed and unbridled, and finally Eros and civilization.

Thus, the political revolutionary concepts were exposed by the characters' sexual revolution and bodily implications, where the past and memory of the same characters in this novel are linked to the memory of the Queen, which encapsulates the sacred undetermined by Eros and the lawless act of freedom. The memory of Saleh-Shakir scatters between heroism and concern for Iraq's honor, presenting a tainted *present* that uses masculinity as a framework for transient and ultimate pleasure.

Observing the Iraqi situation through simulation of the sinister and irresponsible aspects adds a tragic dimension to what is happening during the UNSC Economic Blockade imposed on Iraq during the nineties of the 20th century. The corruption of all ethical and social values asseverates and juxtapose with the political collapse and corruption of the governing regime.

References

- Al-Majidi, Khazaal.(2004). The Greek Beliefs [Almua'taqadaat al'ighriqia], Jordan: Dar Asshrouk for Publishing & Distribution.
- Alqumani, Sayd. (1999). The Legend and Heritage [Alostoura wal Alturath], Cairo: Dar Sina for Publishing, Hindawi Incorporation.
- El-saadawi, Nawal. (1980). The Female is the Original. Publisher: Arab Foundation for Studies & publishing.
- Caillois, Roger. (2001). Man and the Sacred. Translated into English by Meyer Barash. Urbana & Chicago: University of Illinois Press.
- Foucault, Michel. (1985). The Use of Pleasure. Translated from French by Robert Hurly, Volume 2 of 'The History of Sexuality'. A Division of Random House, Inc. Vintage Books, New York.

- Fromm, Erich. (1956). *The Art of Loving: An Enquiry into the Nature of Love*. Edited by Ruth Nanda Anshen. Publishers Harper & Brothers.
- Majeed, Hanoun. (2011). *The Kingdom of the Happiest Home* [Mamlakat Al-Bayt Assa'id], Published by Fadaat Publishing, Distribution & Printing House in Jordan.
- Nail, Husam. (2006). *Text Archive, A Lesson in Lost Insight* [Arsheef Alnas, Darsun fil baseera Aldha'ah]. Syria: Dar Alhiwaar.
- Nietzsche, Friedrich. (1996). *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks*. Translated by Marianne Cowan. Publisher: Gateway Editions.
- Sartre, Jean-Paul. (1956). *Being and Nothingness*. Routledge: New York, HarperCollins Publishers, 1956, Erich Fromm.