

Psychoanalytic Criticism of Character in the Novel "Nightmares of Beirut" Based on Karen Horney's Psychological Theory

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Introduction

Ghada Al-Samman, one of the prominent and innovative figures in Arabic literature, posits that a writer's style reflects both societal transformations and their psychological state. In her novel *Beirut Nightmares*, the author's emotions and inner conflicts are vividly embodied in the narrative's characters. Through these characters, Al-Samman seeks to portray a diverse array of personality types. Employing a descriptive-analytical approach, this study conducts an in-depth analysis of the characters in *Beirut Nightmares* through the lens of Karen Horney's psychoanalytic theory, a distinguished German psychologist. Horney emphasizes the pivotal role of culture and environment in shaping personality. The neurotic characters in the novel grapple with psychological disturbances stemming from their specific environmental conditions and cultural norms, which can be examined within Horney's theoretical framework. This research aims to analyze the novel's characters based on Horney's three personality types—namely, the compliant, the withdrawn, and the aggressive—while exploring their defense mechanisms for adapting to their social environment. The findings reveal that among the five main characters in the novel, only Youssef exhibits a healthy and normal personality type, whereas the others fall within the neurotic and unhealthy types described by Horney. Influenced by environmental and cultural traumas, these characters suffer from fundamental anxiety, leading to unhealthy and tension-laden interpersonal relationships.

Methodology

This study is designed with an interdisciplinary nature, and its information has been collected through library methods. The aim of this research is to analyze and examine the characters in the novel *Nightmares of Beirut* by Ghada al-Samman from the perspective of Karen Horney's psychoanalytic theory, utilizing a descriptive-analytical approach focused on the text. In this regard, Horney's three neurotic personality trends—namely, the compliant personality, the aggressive personality, and the detached personality—have been applied to the main characters of the novel. Through the analysis of

selected samples from the text, Ghada al-Samman's intention in creating neurotic characters has been explored. The necessity of this research stems from the prominent importance of contemporary Arab literature, particularly the novel *Nightmares of Beirut*. Ghada al-Samman has skillfully depicted conflicts and challenges in this work that clearly represent the roots and consequences of the Lebanese Civil War. As an eyewitness to the tumultuous years of the war herself, she has endeavored through the creation of this novel to alleviate her own psychological tensions and achieve inner peace. This approach is profoundly manifested in the novel's characterization, making the analysis of the main characters in this work based on Horney's neuroticism theory even more evident.

Results and Discussion

The analysis of the characters in Ghada Al-Samman's *Nightmares of Beirut* through Karen Horney's neurotic theory reveals that fundamental anxiety, stemming from familial, social, and war-related pressures, drives the characters toward neurotic personality types. The narrator, a woman trapped in the Lebanese Civil War, exhibits a detached personality, retreating into isolation and an idealized self to cope with insecurity, which alienates her from reality and renders her unreliable. Amin, marked by the loss of familial affection and societal pressures, displays a compliant personality, submitting to others' expectations to gain approval and mask feelings of inferiority. Fuad, a former fighter with a wealthy background, embodies an aggressive personality, maintaining control and superiority through wealth and dominance to counter underlying insecurity. In contrast, Yusuf, the narrator's lover, demonstrates a balanced personality, free from neurotic tendencies, and symbolizes sacrifice and idealism. The idealized self plays a key role in most characters (except Yusuf) to compensate for insecurity, reflecting Al-Samman's concerns within the context of the Lebanese crisis.

Conclusion

This study examines the psychological analysis of the characters in Ghada al-Samman's novel *Nightmares of Beirut* through the lens of Karen Horney's psychoanalytic theory, focusing on neurotic needs and personality types. The characters in this work vividly reflect the inner turmoil of the author. With the exception of Youssef, all the characters in the story exhibit neurotic tendencies, clearly mirroring the chaotic political and social conditions of the society in which al-Samman was raised. Drawing on Horney's theory, which views behavior as a result of environmental influences, and considering historical evidence from al-Samman's life during the unrest of the Lebanese Civil War, this study demonstrates that Horney's theory provides a powerful tool for analyzing characterization in realistic novels such as *Nightmares of*

Beirut.

In response to the first question, exploring the novel's characters reveals that each, influenced by their surrounding environment, exhibits neurotic behaviors and resorts to defense mechanisms. The four central characters of the story—namely the narrator, Shadi, Fouad, and Amin—each display distinct neurotic traits. In response to the second question, the idealized self, as an imaginary image created by an individual to overcome feelings of inferiority and insecurity, plays a key role in shaping compensatory behaviors. The narrator, by creating an illusion of value and superiority, becomes alienated from their true self. Amin, relying on family wealth and aristocratic background, attempts to compensate for feelings of inferiority and project a dignified image. Similarly, Fouad, by referencing his revolutionary past, wealth, and antique possessions, seeks to maintain a superior and distinguished image that contrasts with his current reality of old age and wartime conditions. These compensatory mechanisms, while temporarily reinforcing a sense of psychological security, ultimately deepen the gap between the real self and the idealized self, hindering authentic personal growth. In response to the third question, the narrator, with a tendency toward detachment, moves toward self-sufficiency to minimize contact with others; familial rejection and constant criticism have ignited basic anxiety within them. Fouad, with a dominant and resolute personality, driven by fear of losing his possessions (gold), ultimately loses his life. Amin, characterized by compliant traits, directs all his efforts toward pleasing his father, even sacrificing his love for a woman at his father's behest. Meanwhile, Youssef appears as a character with normal behavior but ultimately becomes a victim of his own students.

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