Challenging Hierarchical Relationships in American and Egyptian Drama: A Comparative Ecofeminist Reading in Two Representative Plays (Timberlake Wertenbaker's *The Love of the Nightingale* and Salwa Bakr's *Hulm al-Sinin*)

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Abstract:
The current paper attempts a comparative reading of two plays by the Franco-British American playwright, Timberlake Wertenbaker (1951) and the Egyptian woman writer, Salwa Bakr (1949), in the light of critical ecological feminism. These two plays are, seriatim, *The Love of the Nightingale* (1996) and *Hulm al-Sinin* (2002 [*Dream of Years*]), which are set against the concept of 'up-down relationships', propagated by the two leading exponents of patriarchal feminism, Val Plumwood and Karen Warren. Both Plumwood and Warren reflect a concern about such a logic of domination, based on suspect values, dualities and presupposes, whose inevitable result is nothing but the oppression of the natural world. Women, in particular, are the ones who fall prey to the subordination of one group over another, within a single society. That is why ecofeminist advocates always think about, even act on behalf of the environment culturally, ethically, and, of course, naturally, with a view to creating a balanced justice instead of male sovereignty, while preserving the spiritual nature of the social habitat at the same time. In this theoretical framework comes the present comparative reading of the two aforementioned plays, with the aim of understanding the reactions of different cultures towards ideologies regulating relations between men and women, especially in patriarchal societies in the Arab East. How does Wertenbaker address the ecofeminist issue thematically and technically? How does she look at her characters and coordinate relations among them? What is her final vision about male-female relationships? Does Egyptian Bakr agree or disagree with her American counterpart? And how? What are her ways to do that? This is just a set of intersecting, connected questions that the reading at hand will try to answer.

Keywords: Timberlake Wertenbaker, Salwa Bakr, *The Love of the Nightingale*, *Dream of Years*, ecofeminism, Karen Warren, Val Plumwood, hierarchical relationships, oppression.

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التصدي للعلاقات الهرمية في الدراما الأمريكية والمصرية: قراءة نسوية بيئية مقارنة في أنموذجين (مسرحية "عشق طائر العندليب" لتيمبرليك فيرتنبيكر ومسرحية "حلم السنين" لسلوي بكر)

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الملخص باللغة العربية:

تقدم الدراسة الحالية قراءة نقدية مقارنة لمسرحيتي *عشق طائر العندليب* (١٩٩٦) للمؤلفة المسرحية وكاتبة السيناريو الفرانكو أنجلو أمريكية "تيمبرليك فيرتنباكر" (١٩٥١) و*حلم السنين* (٢٠٠٢) للكاتبة المسرحية والروائية والقاصة والناقدة المصرية "سلوي بكر" (١٩٩٤) في ضوء النقد النسوي البيئي، تحديدا تيمة العلاقات الهرمية (Up–down Relationships) التي انبثقت من خلال نقد الإطار الذكوري الاستبدادي للفيلسوفة الأمريكية "كارين وارين" (١٩٤٧–٢٠٢٠) ونقد البناء اللامنطقي للازدواجية الذكورية التي أبدعته المفكرة ورائدة النقد النسائي البيئي الأسترالية "فال بلوموود" (١٩٣٩–٢٠٠٨)، وبتحليل النصين المسرحيين في ظل المخرجات الجمالية لـ "وارين و بلوموود" يتوصل الدارس إلي أربع نتائج مهمة. أولا: النقد البيئي النسوي ما هو إلا نظرية فلسفية عميقة مهدت الطريق لـ "فيرتنباكر" و"بكر" لتوضيح الظلم والاضطهاد الذي حل بالمرأة والبيئة نتيجة الاستراتيجيات الذكورية اللاإنسانية، والمتمثلة في العلاقات الهرمية التي يتبناها النسق الذكوري للسيطرة على الهوية النسائية والبيئية. ثانيا: تنتمي "فيرتنباكر" و"بكر" إلى سياق ثقافي وفكري مختلف جوهريا، إلا أن نتاجهما المسرحي يتمحور حول توضيح الآلية التي يستخدمها النسق الذكوري للهيمنة على المرأة والطبيعة. ثالثا: اعتمدت "فيرتنباكر" على خلق رؤية مسرحية تتمثل في إعادة قراءة الأساطير اليونانية والرومانية تحديدا مأساة "فيلوميلا" لنقد الهيمنة البطريركية، أما "بكر" فقد لجأت إلى إعادة قراءة الإطار الخيالي لـ *ألف ليلة وليلة* تحديدا، شخصية "شهريار" لتؤكد لنا أنه ليس هناك فائز في الصراع الهرمي. وأخيرا: يؤكد لنا التحليل العميق للمسرحتين قيد الدراسة أن "فيرتنباكر" و"بكر" من رواد النقد النسوي البيئي؛ لأنهما قد أمدا الشخصيات الدرامية النسائية بفضاء مسرحي حتى يتسنى لهن محو الآثار السلبية لعلاقات الهيمنة الذكورية المعادية للمرأة والبيئة.

الكلمات الدالة: تيمبرليك فيرتنباكر، سلوى بكر، *عشق طائر العندليب*، *حلم السنين*، النقد البيئي النسوي، كارين وارين، فال بلوموود

Introduction

The current paper attempts a comparative reading of two plays by the prominent Franco-British American playwright, and screenwriter, Timberlake Wertenbaker (1951) and the Egyptian versatile novelist, dramatist, short-story teller and critic, Salwa Bakr (1949), in the light of critical ecological feminism. These two plays are, seriatim, *The Love of the Nightingale* (1996) and *Hulm al-Sinin* (2002 [*Dream of Years*]), which are set against the concept of 'up-down relationships', propagated by the two leading exponents of patriarchal feminism, Val Plumwood (1939-2008), the outstanding ecofeminist Australian philosopher and Karen Warren (1947-2020), the American notable ecofeminist thinker. Both Plumwood and Warren reflect a common concern about the structure of a social fabric in which the logic of domination is based on suspect values, dualities and presupposes. Such a fractured social set-up, according to both thinkers, must be doomed to class exploitation on the one hand and environmental destruction on the other. In either case, there occurs an inevitable oppression of the natural world.

The main objective of this reading is twofold: firstly, to prove that the female characters of the two plays are but innocent victims of a life system where masculinity is predominant, and, secondly, to show that they do their best to resist both the domination and subordination imposed on them. Here, the notion of the 'oppressive conceptual framework' and the 'logical structure of dualism', initiated by Plumwood and Warren, becomes pertinent – not to say significant. Proceeding from two completely different cultural backgrounds, *The Love of the Nightingale* and *Dream of Years* incorporate the same critical speculative assumptions, formulated by Plumwood and Warren, as regards the tactics of the up-down relationships.

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Coined by the French philosopher, Francoise d'Eaubonne (1920-2005), ecofeminism is a philosophical, political theory that examines the particular connections between "the domination of women and the domination of nature" (Plumwood 1986, p. 120). This denotes that ecofeminism is but "a new humanism" that calls for the birth of an egalitarian society devoid of any form of the up-down relationships (Merchant 2022, p. xi). Individuals, in this perspective, should be treated equally and should have the same opportunities and rights, whether they are males or females. Relying on the dictates of feminism and ecology, ecofeminism sets up a critical ideology that vigorously disapproves of the male's burning desire to legalize his oppression of women and nature. To obliterate this oppression, ecofeminists develop a critical agenda via which they contend that women's equal status is conditioned by the liberation of nature. Ecofeminists draw significant parallels between the different "patterns of domination" that befall women and environment (Alonso 2018, p. 216), which still emphasizes the oppressive nature of the up-down relationships.

It is noteworthy that ecofeminism was not a mainstream trend in the arena of literary criticism during the time of Wertenbaker and Bakr. But, both playwrights undertook the exploration and examination of the mechanism of the up-down relationships. Each playwright tended to draw on various theatrical strategies or adopt certain dramatic visions to create similar oppressive aspects. Driven by a burning desire to redress such dualistic relationships, Wertenbaker argues that the theatre should be used neither to "make a revolution" nor to "flatter" the spectators (1997, p. 141). It should function well as an enlightenment tool, stressing that the male dominance causes the female to experience an acute sense of "discomfort" and "uncertainty" (2002, p. 5). Wertenbaker, thus, develops a dramatic vision that reworks "mythic and historical settings" with a view to creating a theatrical space (Bush 2009, p. 267), in

which the theatre becomes but a "cultural skin," not to say an innovative aesthetic "edge", between "the interior world" of imagination and the "exterior" world of realities (Wertenbaker 2002, p. 6).

Theoretically, Wertenbaker devoted her dramatic activity to the creation of "strong-willed female protagonists" (Bush 2009, p. 267), who opt for a wily course of action while reflecting an ability to "redefine themselves" by establishing "self-authored" tactics for achieving an egalitarian society (p. 267). Wertenbaker's plays, therefore, are meant to show how the superior male characters invent an aggressive verbal strategy to force the inferior female characters into a form of total submission. As a defensive mechanism, Wertenbaker provides "alternative linguistic strategies" via which women can obliterate the networks of oppression woven for them by the men. Wertenbaker's "new structures, new languages and new ways of living" challenge the different forms of oppression generated by patriarchy. This predicts not only the death knell of the masculine authority, but also the emergence of "a more hopeful world", resonant with "affiliative links" of rigid stratification between the sexes in a given community (268).

Unlike Wertenbaker, Bakr practically develops a dramatic strategy that reworks the narrative framework of *The Arabian Nights*, to unveil the unjust socioeconomic system imposed by the male, causing the emergence of the up-down relationships. In order to dramatize these relationships, like Wertenbaker, Bakr believes that the female dramatist should originate a new, more effective dramatic language of her own. Interviewed by Caroline Seymour-Jorn, Bakr acknowledges that the very task of the woman playwright is supposed to exceed the traditions of "the masculine language", not merely to reject it (p. 151). She goes on to state that the new feminist movement should set up

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"*Lugha Jadidah* [a new language]", so that the oppressive linguistic strategy invented by patriarchy, articulating the domination afflicting woman and nature, can radically be eliminated. So, Bakr produces a sort of dramatic discourse that is replete with an aesthetic mélange of "classical" and "Egyptian colloquial Arabic" (El-Sadda 2010, p. 141). This artistic device paved the way for Bakr to equip her female characters with a powerful voice, that heralds not only the end of the silence imposed on them, but also the birth of an egalitarian society devoid of the up-down relationships, or rather the oppressive dualistic framework. Perhaps the intended reading of the writers' plays will show that they both technically think with the same logic. The dramatic effort on the part of Wertenbaker and Bakr is geared to the needs of their ultimate project: the alternative ethics of life that hinge on sociopolitical justice between the sexes.

Rationale and Scope of the Study

The prevalence of hierarchical relationships in feminist drama has become a common worldwide phenomenon. Women playwrights almost everywhere are now concerned about the still-existing patriarchal society, in which women are subjected to men's domination. But, besides women, nature —at wide — has also been exposed to a king of exploitation and destruction. This double oppressive experience has given rise to what is termed as 'ecological feminism', known by its short form 'ecofeminism'. The present reading is conducted to generally understand the meaning of ecofeminism, on one hand, and to specifically explore its widespread presence in women playwrights, on another. Of all playwrights, two representative ones are deliberately chosen from totally different cultural backgrounds, so as to suit well the present comparative reading.

Wertenbaker and Bakr, alike, write plays that tend to unfold various "isms of domination", to quote Warren (2000, p. 43). Both seek to explore the underlying interrelationships

among the oppression of "women, other human Others and nonhuman nature" (p. 43). The term 'Others', here, does not simply mean the unjustified domination of women, but also refers to "those subordinate groups," including "the poor," "animals," "plants," and "the land" (p. 1), that are fated to be the innocent victims of the up-down relationships. Both Wertenbaker and Bakr tackle an identical *leitmotif*, latent in showing how the silence, and the subordination inflicted on women and nature by the up-down relationships, bring on an endless cycle of violence. To lay bare this violence and suggest, in the meantime, how to challenge it, on the part of those females who are exposed to it, Wertenbaker and Bakr develop each a different dramatic project of her own. Wertenbaker goes as far back as to Greek mythology, to prove that the marginalization of women, and nonhuman Others, is neither the result of the time nor a coincidence. Bakr, in her turn, resorts to *The Arabian Nights* in order to show that women and nonhuman objects are the real victims of repressive socioeconomic structures, formulated by patriarchy. Still, both playwrights, equally —not to say similarly also—create dramatic innovative spaces that reflect the genuine metal, even the authentic nature, of their female protagonists. These suffering females certainly have a burning desire, not only to redefine themselves, but also to resist the restrictive canons and the eternal cycle of oppression, initiated by the up-down relationships.

Apart from the up-down relationships, from whose tyranny women suffer, there are also a discomfiting identity crisis and a prevailing feeling that a female is but an underdog in her community. In order to understand the dimensions of such a crisis and the feelings of frustration and heartbreak, the current reading poses a number of questions to try to answer them. 1) What is ecofeminism? 2) How do Wertenbaker and Bakr dramatize the up-down relationships? 3) What is Plumwood's

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logical structure of dualism? 4) What is Warren's oppressive framework? 5) How are Plumwood's and Warren's speculative thoughts employed in Wertenbaker's *The Love of the Nightingale* and in Bakr's *Dream of Years*? 6) What are the technical similarities and dissimilarities between these two plays?

Wertenbaker's *The Love of the Nightingale*

It was natural for Wertenbaker and Bakr to write their plays, *The Love of the Nightingale* and *Dream of Years*, respectively, within the ecofeminist framework, because they had fallen under the influence of the innovative philosophical notions, propounded by Plumwood and Warren. Constantly changing its settings, *The Love of the Nightingale* is a twenty-one-scene play. Its text, as a whole is a reworking of the Greek myth of Philomela, narrated in Book Six of *Metamorphoses* by the Roman eminent poet, Ovid (43 BC-AD 17/18). Wertenbaker adapts this myth in order to prove that drama can be "a redemptive" instrument (Wertenbaker 2009, p. 5). The deafening silence imposed on women can now be confronted, simply because silence brings on "an endless cycle of violence" between the oppressor and the oppressed (Viator 2015, para. 3). The play opens with the arrival of Tereus, King of Thrace, to Athens to support the Athenians in their war against an enemy. To express his gratitude to Tereus, Pandion, King of Athens, asks the former to marry his own beautiful daughter, Procne, who insists that Philomela, her sister, should live with her in Thrace. Infatuated with the overwhelming femininity of Philomela, Tereus does not only rape her, but also cuts her tongue and imprisons her secretly, so that he can hide the enormity of his sinful act. In her attempt to avenge the master identity responsible for the tragedy that afflicted them, the two sisters cooperate together in killing Itys, Tereus' son. When Tereus seeks revenge for the murder of his only son, the play

ends with a tragic scene in which the oppressor and the oppressed are metamorphosed into three birds.

Bakr's *Dream of Years*

Wertenbaker appears to be genuinely interested in Greek mythology, whereas Bakr seems to be particularly absorbed in the folktales of *The Arabian Nights*. Set in an unknown kingdom, *Dream of Years*, *is* a three-act play in which Bakr reflects upon the cycle of violence caused by patriarchy. The play deals with a nameless *Sultan*, who severely blames his *Vizier*, for bringing him unprofessional astrologers and soothsayers. They all drastically fail in helping him achieve his burning desire for a crown prince. To redress the *Sultan*'s growing anger and frustration, the *Vizier* entreats his majesty to receive an old female oracle and listen to her prophecy. The priestess predicts that the *Sultan* will have a male heir called 'Hulm Al-Sinin' [Dream of Years], if his majesty gets married to a beautiful woman named Burqa al-Hayah [Veil of Modesty] Khatun. However, she warns the *Sultan* that the expected male child will certainly bring on the fatal demise of the *Sultanate*. No sooner does one aspect of the prophecy, regarding the birth of a male successor, becomes a tangible reality than Bakr lays heavy emphasis on the dramatic technique of retrospection. She sets up three retrospective portraits, revealing a conspiracy hatched by the *Vizier* and the fortune-teller to satisfy the *Sultan*'s long-awaited dream of a crown prince. However, the oracle seizes the opportunity and plots the destruction of the *Sultanate*, in order to avenge herself for the death of her seven sons in bloody, unjustified wars fought by the *Sultan*.

Up-down Relationships and Wertenbaker's Dramatic Vision

How women can challenge the up-down relationships inflicted by oppressive masculine powers, within a structure of dualism, is the main dramatic concern in both Wertenbaker's *The Love of*

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the Nightingale and Bakr's *Dream of Years*. Wertenbaker deals with it through a wide variety of dramatis personae on which the interest of the drama depends to a large extent. It entices the audience to give an ear to the marginalized "female voices", whose dilemmatic situation can be interpreted in terms of a "male-dominated world" (Bush 2009, 267). Rather than representing her female models as "passive victims" of androcentrism, Wertenbaker endows them with a dramatic space, which proves them to be active "desiring subjects" (267). In addition, she tends to place heavy emphasis on using "historical and mythic settings", so as to produce a feminist critique of patriarchy. Masterfully, thus, she convinces the spectators to contemplate the problem of "justice and the treatment of women", and nonhuman others in a male-biased society (Freeman 2012, p. 217).

It is Wertenbaker's opinion that the patriarchal structures, existing in a given society, are responsible for the "sadness," "identity crisis" and "the feeling of uncertainty," by which humanity was weighed down (Wertenbaker 2002, pp. 3, 4, 5). To create a "new sense of community" devoid of the illusive assumptions of "gender," "class", and "race", she resorts to the world of mythology (Aston and Reinelt 2000, p. 71). Her employment of the epic creates an opportunity for intensifying her dramatic concern and deepening its effect, besides helping her to bring to the circle of light such "big subjects" (Bush 2013, p. 15). She highlights the ulterior reasons behind the birth of oppression, simply because the aesthetic value of myth is represented by an artist with an exceptional imagination to criticize the relationships of domination. This paved the way for Wertenbaker to incorporate the power of myth into a play, with a view to creating a rational drama, in which she calls upon the audience to seek alternative solutions for the subjugation of women and nature.

Up-down Relationships and Bakr's Dramatic Vision

The delineation of characters from the perspective of up-down relationships seems to be as much a key feature in Wertenbaker's as it is of Bakr's dramatic art. In this context, Bakr tends to masterfully present an "alternative protean image of social and gender relations", that dismantles the network of oppression invented by androcentric value (El-Sadda 2010, 127). Opposite to Wertenbaker, who manipulates the oppression of women and nature through mythical background, Bakr, going a step further, employs a magical-realistic perspective, by reworking folktales from *The Arabian Nights*. Apart from giving her an opportunity to challenge patriarchy, that collection of fairy tales helps her to depict the female protagonists as "tougher and more survivable" than the male ones who enjoyed a limitless support by patriarchal society (El-Enany 2006, p. 385).

Unequivocally, then, the folkloric tradition was behind Bakr's ecofeminist dramatic vision, which opened room for "modes of description and narration" (Seymour-Jorn 2002, p. 173). These potential modes enhanced the quality of her presentation of the underside structure of dualism afflicting women and nature. This is how the originality of Baker's dramatic art crystallizes the negative consequences of the Up-Down relationships. Her dramaturgy proceeds from engineering an aesthetic initiative for unfolding the logic of hierarchy, by whose standards women and nature are but "victims and agents" of harsh subjugation formed by inequitable relationships, or rather "an androcentric gender system" (p. 173). It is Bakr's use of the folklore tradition, within the ecofeminist framework, which invites the spectators to revolt against the up-down relationships, naturalizing the exploitation of women and nature.

While Wertenbaker insisted that women and nature were the victims of the male's abusive power, Bakr argued that both

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man and woman/nature, alike, were made scapegoats for an oppressive sociopolitical system. According to this different, Bakrian ecofeminist argument, what befalls humans and other Others flows from the same "repressive political regime and unjust social order" (El-Enany 2006, p. 377). Still, the male, under certain socioeconomic conditions engineers a sense of value-hierarchical thinking to establish a form of dominance over the female and nature. Bakr creates a wide variety of feminine, dramatic characters who rebel against the masculine oppressive framework. Such protagonists adopt semi-extreme "courses of action," that proves them to possess a higher set of values of "malleability, adaptability, and sheer survivability," against the logic of hierarchy (p. 377).

In order that the female protagonists of *The Love of the Nightingale* and *Dream of Years* can redress the imbalance caused by the up-down standards, they are endowed by their creators, Wertenbaker and Baker, with the intrinsic favoured traits of rationality and adaptability. This enhances the tempo of achievement on the part of both playwrights, in their effort to create a skillful, twofold objective: a) to yield a feminist scheme that mocks the logical structures of dualism, and b) to prove that gender lens is the best cunning tactics possible, for removing the oppressive framework. In this connection, the patriarchal system is responsible for the misery and disappointment of women (and nature), and even makes women/nature feel the futility of their existence.

Ecofeminism: Theory and Practice

It is important, at this stage, to come closer to Plumwood's logical structure of dualism as well as to Warren's oppressive framework, which basically formed the features of the 'Eco-Feministic' movement. Ecofeminism, as this paper argues, is but a philosophical paradigm via which the critics can redress the fake dualisms of "male/female" and "human/nature," to reflect upon "the corresponding structures" of marginalizing the

other (Plumwood 1986, p. 137). It is an aesthetic school that explains how the oppressive conceptual framework, and logical structure of dualism, brought out the up-down relationships, sometimes observed within societies. To fully examine these relationships, the critics, as Warren remarks, should be aware of the eight key features that ecofeminist ethics has.

1) Ecofeminism is "a theory-in-process" (Warren 2000, p. 98); it has an endless agenda in that it tackles "some generalizations" that reflect a variety of conflicting voices whose significance has no place outside specific "ethical situations" (p. 99). 2) Ecofeminism has no social or behavioral interpretation of women's oppression. Rather, it offers a critical practice that unfolds the reasons behind "anti-sexist" and "anti-classist" domination of women (p. 99). 3) Ecofeminism is "a contextualized ethic" that yields a "narrative" frame that reflects how the masculine model formulates a set of oppressive ideologies to put the theme of the subordination of "humans and nonhuman animals and nature" into a dreadful practice (Warren 2000, p. 99). 4) Ecofeminism produces "an inclusivist ethic" (p. 99), in which the critics can skillfully combine the oppression of "women and other Others," to create larger humanistic units that remove the split between "nature" and "culture." Ecofeminism, here, maintains that all elements of existence are but "ecological selves" that rightfully belong to the same "ecological community" (p. 100). 5). Ecofeminism never attempts to depict "an objective point of view" because it holds that objectivity is an illusion. Instead, it suggests that the artist should pick up "a better bias" (p. 100) to centralize the voices of the marginalized excluded by the male patriarchy. 6) Ecofeminist ethic tends to concentrate on the representation of underplayed themes, i.e. "love, friendship, and appropriate trust" (p. 100), which all stand behind the birth of the up-down relationships. 7) Ecofeminism invites the reader to deem it possible that the human reality can

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be better analyzed in terms of "networks," not to say webs of "historical and concrete relationships" (p. 101). 8) Ecofeminism aims to rebut the strategy of the absolute "superiority" of the male over the female, by establishing a middle ground that blends humans with nonhumans. In this way, ecofeminism can help the environment to restore peace and purity, as well as to eliminate all 'isms' of domination.

Plumwood's Critique of the Logical Structure of Dualism

Plumwood decries the concept of "logical structure of dualism" as being the root cause behind the up-down relationships (1993, p. 2). She outlines five fundamental features that govern the logical structure of such up-down relationships. 1) "Backgrounding," or rather "denial" as a defining compound characteristic of dualism, simply because it enables the male dominator to assert his position as a supreme master. This master deliberately monopolizes the inessential female other to accomplish the common good and stability for both of them. However, the master identity negates "the other's contribution" to human progress by misleading that other to strongly hold that it is an inessential partner in the making of civilization (p. 48).

2) The inferiority complex as a psychological condition transferred to the other. The logical structure of dualism rests greatly on the tactic of "radical exclusion" that brings on the "hyperseparation" of women/nature (Plumwood 1993, p. 49). It is a "maximum separation" designed by the master model for magnifying the physical differences that distinguish him from the shared qualities with the inessential other. This patriarchal minimization indicates that dualism creates "two hyperseparated orders of being" (p. 51): higher order of the male and lower order of the female/nature.

3) The degradation of the other, as a policy governed by the patriarchal act of "incorporation," is but a wily device composed by the master identity, to confirm that the male-female dualism can be best examined in terms of the power of

relationships. That power can certainly obtain a supreme authority by presupposing that while women/nature represent the "underside" structures of dualism, men stand for "upperside" aspect dualism. That is why the 'up' conceives the 'down' as an "incidental" subject, that is always identified with "negation," or rather the lack of "the virtues of center" (Plumwood 1993, p. 52).

4) The negation of the existence of the 'downs' as the feature of the male dualism inherent in instrumentalism (objectification)" (Plumwood 1993, p. 53). It is a patriarchal strategy in which women/nature are represented in terms of "a network of purposes" that can be best explained in relation to the master's agenda. To accomplish this agenda, the male objectifies the lower side of dualism as a shapeless aimless identity whose interests can be realized through "the master's ends" (p. 53). 5) The instrumentalism to be imposed on the 'other' as a patriarchal, oppressive tactic is inherent in "homogenisation or stereotyping." While the dominated class should be represented as totally homogenous group of submissive others, the masters should be depicted as the center of initiatives that are completely different from the underside part of dualism. The ups claim that they are the sole representers of "stereotypes of superiority", which entails that women/nature are "surplus" to the master's hidden agenda of domination (p. 53).

Warren's Critique of Oppressive Conceptual Framework

Warren is regarded as one of a few critics who look upon ecofeminism as a "philosophical position" (Rosendo & Kuhnen 2019, p. 2). Her view of the subordination of women and other non-human Others stems from what she calls "an oppressive conceptual framework" (Warren 2000, p. 46). It is but a dominant ideology that involves a set of basic "beliefs, values, attitudes, and assumptions," revealing how a hegemonic

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character makes the other feel inferior. That framework stands for the "conceptual analysis," or rather "argumentative proof," utilized by patriarchy to legalize the oppression of women and nature as inessential others (p. 46). The power of this oppressive framework can be related to five key defining characteristics, that give rise to the alleged superiority of man over woman and nature.

1) The oppressive framework adopts a "value-hierarchical thinking" that classifies human existence in terms of the metaphor of "up-down" structures (Warren 2000, p. 46). This metaphor divides humans and nonhumans into two conflicting teams: "higher" and "lower." While the males describe themselves as the ideal representatives of the higher values, women and nature are forced to falsely believe that they are the architypes of lower-down values that should be controlled by the higher authority of man. 2) The same oppressive framework brings on "oppositional value dualisms" that portray existence in terms of heterogenous contrasting "disjuncts," whose relationship depends greatly on "exclusion" not "inclusion." This explains why one element in this dualism is associated with "higher value" and rationality, while another is represented in terms of "lower value" and irrationality (p. 46).

3) Patriarchy fosters a concept of dominance as "power-over" power which brings into prominence a hierarchy of authority (Warren 2000, p. 47). In it, the male stands for the "power of the ups", that should exercise hegemony over the power of the "downs"/the female (p. 47). That is to say, the masculine model invents the ideology of power-over-power so that it can force women into receiving an overwhelming subjugation as the eternal law of life. 4) The oppressive conceptual framework puts the theory of "domination" into practice by contending that the privilege of power is an intrinsic feature of the "ups," not the "downs" (p. 47). However, the cunning tactics of patriarchy endows the female with a

diminishing sense of power, in order to maintain "dominant-subordinate up-down relationships," that actually enforce the hegemony of the ups as an oppressive conceptual ideology that can never be beaten.

5) The male's oppressive framework tends to license "a logic of domination" (Warren 2000, p. 47). Not only does this logic enhance the male's effort to justify the subordination of women and nature, but it also compels the female into giving a formal approval to their humiliation and degradation. This abject domination eggs on the females to assert that there is no need for resistance, mainly because they are fated to be 'downs', that ought to accept the exploitation of the natural-born 'ups'/the males. Such is the up-down relationships engineered by patriarchy to instill frustration into women, by convincing them that the 'ups'/the males have "favored" skills, viz. "reason," "mind" and "rationality," that the 'downs'/the females certainly lack.

Discussion

Up-down Relationships in *The Love of the Nightingale*

As already mentioned, Wertenbaker was infatuated by Greek mythology, especially the myth of Philomela recorded by Ovid in his *Metamorphoses*. This mythic background drove Wertenbaker, as observed by Warren, to accomplish one of the prominent ethics of ecofeminism, inherent in making "nature a feminist issue and human oppression . . . an environmental issue" (2000, p. 98). The reciprocal relationship provided Wertenbaker with "a critical lens of gender analysis" (p. 97), to rework the myth of Philomela. In her off-shoot of the myth, she indicates that the male oppressive framework results in the domination of women and nature, simply because they are but other Others that ought to be subjugated. She skillfully transforms the narrative myth into a genuine dramatic portrayal

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to achieve a dual objective: to outline how the master identity exemplified by Tereus wields the strategy of the up-down relationships to force articulate women/ Philomela into a deafening, and to explain how the female model represented by Philomela can challenge the dreadful mutilation imposed on humans and nonhumans, even when they are deprived of the merit of speech.

In her dramatization of the dynamics of the up-down relationships inflicted by patriarchy, Wertenbaker places emphasis on the classical technical device of 'chorus'. She creates two forms of chorus: male and female, a technique that enables her to represent two distinctive voices, that successfully clarify "the insidious nature of power structures", via which man legalizes violent behavior against humans and nonhumans (Massie 2017, p. 58). That is why the play deals with the male chorus describing a horrible scene of war between two unnamed fighters who scold each other with gendered offensive words, as if femininity were a stigma. While the first soldier rebukes the second by describing him as the son of "a lame hyena", the latter accuses the former of being the "son of a bleeding whore" (1996, p. 307). Since this quarrel ends with the death of the second fighter, the male chorus declares openly that Athens is the wasteland of unjustified wars that destroy all aspects of life. Although war is a destructive act that caused anarchy "shrouded in silence," it becomes the main topic of normal discussions in Athens. Silence is a clear sign of the people's acceptance of violence as a pivotal law of existence made by man, not gods. Such is the major dilemma that sublimates the dramatic structure of the play. To maintain this structure, the male chorus insists that humans and nonhuman objects fell into dreadful ruins of rampage caused by the male abuse of power:

> Male Chorus: We begin here because no life ever has been untouched by war. Everyone loves to discuss war. . .. Wars make death acceptable. The

> gods are less cruel if it is man's fault. Perhaps, but this is not our story. War is the inevitable background, the ruins in the distance establishing place and perspective. (Wertenbaker 1996, p. 292)

The male chorus's comment on the opening scene, in terms of "war," "death" and "silence", drives one to conceptualize the logical structure of dualism. This structure, to borrow Plumwood's words, depicts human existence embodied through Athens as a battlefield between two separated parts: "superior and inferior" (1993, p. 46). If the latter attempts to alter the mechanism of that dualism, they ought to experience war and death, or rather silence. No sooner is the war of Athens ended than the inferior position of women as a subsumed other, not to say as the icon of the Down, is best illustrated. Because Tereus stands by Athens to win the war, King Pandion asks him to take what he wants from Athens with a deep sense of gratitude. Although the King asks Tereus to stay permanently in Athens, the latter declares that he has to leave as there are some troubles in Thrace, his home country. However, Tereus proposes to Procne indirectly by implying that he seeks to bring the civilized culture of Athens back to his homeland. The King offers to send some tutors to Thrace to flourish its culture. Still, Tereus refuses this offer insisting that women are the best holders of culture, not philosophers. At this point, the King gets the message and accepts to hold a royal marriage between Tereus and Procne without consulting the bride by declaring that "She's yours, Tereus. Procne." When Procne attempts to oppose this agreement, the King quickly reminds her that from now onwards Tereus will be her husband whom she ought to obey his orders blindly:

> King Pandion: She's yours, Tereus. Procne –
>
> Procne: But, Father –

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> King Pandion: Your husband.
>
> Procne: Mother –
>
> Queen: What can I say?
>
> King Pandion: I am only sad you will live so far away. . ..
>
> Tereus (*to Procne*): I will love and respect you. (Wertenbaker 1996, p. 296)

The indirect way in which Tereus proposes to Procne and his declaration that "culture was kept by the women" (Wertenbaker 1996, p. 295) bring into prominence what Plumwood calls "backgrounding" (1993, p. 48). It is a complex feature of the logical structure of the up-down relationships wielded by Tereus to accomplish a twofold objective: to make use of Procne to fulfil his own agenda and to deny the importance of Procne's contribution, or rather her reality as an independent being. Since Procne has no will to refuse this marriage, she is treated as a chattel, not to say "an object of a diplomatic exchange" between Athens and Thrace (Philpott 83). This inferior position of Procne can be related back to the oppressive androcentric framework via which men, viz Pandion and Tereus, exercise the power of higher values over women, namely Procne and Philomela, by leaving them no options but to welcome being a clause in a political agreement.

The dehumanization of the male figures reaches the fore when the male chorus informs the audience that after five years of marriage Tereus and Procne have a child boy called Itys. Overwhelmed by a strong feeling of loneliness and alienation, Procne asks Tereus to bring her Philomela. Upon this request, Tereus visits Athens anew where he convinces Pandion of the necessity of Philomela's existence in company with Procne. The more Philomela sails to Thrace, the more her beauty besots Tereus: while "Philomela wonders at the beauty of the sea. . ., Tereus wonders at Philomela's beauty" (Wertenbaker 1996, p.

307). For all Tereus' pure lust, Philomela enjoys the power of the open spaces which prove that she is not only female figure capable of utilizing that space to defend her identity whatever the grave dangers encroaching her, but also the spokesperson for the marginalization that befalls women and animals. This is best presented when the ship reaches "Mount Athos" (p. 307). It is a monumental harsh mountain covered with fire.

When Philomela asks the captain to stop by this Mount where she can climb it, the former warns her of visiting this horrible place, not for its ugliness, but for the fact that it is crowded with "wild men." These men show a dogged determination on killing "all women" and "female animals" because they firmly hold the belief that women and female animals are the root cause for the evils that spread over the earth. Astonished by such an oppressive creed, she asks the Captain whether or not he supports those cannibals. Even though the Captain does not give a definite answer, she accuses him of being one of them. To confirm his point of view, the Captain explains how women are a vivid symbol of beauty, not vicious morality. The metaphysical conversation between the Captain and Philomela is interrupted by the appearance of Tereus, who feels jealous of the growing intimacy between the Captain and Philomela. The more Tereus attempts to express his desire for Philomela, the less the latter responds to his pursuit. To avoid Tereus, she talks about her excitement for seeing Procne after five years of separation:

> Philomela: Why don't we anchor there, Captain, and climb the mountain? Captain You wouldn't want to go there, Miss. . . .
>
> Captain: No, but wild men live there, very wild. They kill all women, even female animals are not allowed on that mountain. . .. Captain: They

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> worship male gods. They believe all harm in the world comes from women. (Wertenbaker 1996, p. 307)

The Mount Athos is truly an example of the "open spaces" (Ponti 20), made available by Wertenbaker in the world of *The Love of the Nightingale*. It ensures Philomela an undefeated dramatic power, that can enable her to resist what Plumwood calls the "hyperseparation", created by patriarchy (1993, p. 49). From an incidental subject, Philomela transmutes, thus, to a speculative ecofeminist philosopher, who can, according to Warren, prove that the masculine oppressive framework engineers "institutional structures, strategies, and processes" (2000, p. 54). In the process, women female animals, and inanimate objects in nature at wide are coerced into experiencing dreadful states of exploitation and exclusion from the law of existence. This unjust existence, or rather nonexistence, operates on maintaining the power of Tereus and wild men as the team of the "ups," while simultaneously enforcing the subordination of Philomela and nonhuman creatures, for being mere representatives of the lower values of the "downs" (p. 55).

When, however, the down/Philomela attempts to resist the authority of the up/Tereus, the latter resorts to gross physical and psychological violation. To dramatize this violation, Wertenbaker develops a few dramatic situations, through which she hammers home the concept of 'masterful identity'. It is an identity bent, beyond any doubt, on utilizing violence and deception as a tactic strategy, for imposing it on women to receive the ideology of the up-down relationships with open arms, even though unwillingly.

Tereus orders his soldiers to camp on a desolate beach to implement his evil plan against Philomela. On the beach, Philomela ignores Tereus' seduction, on purpose, by pretending to collect some flowers for Procne. She does not know why

Tereus chases her wherever she goes. The more he tries to attract her attention, the less careful she becomes. She undercuts his speech by taking about the charm of the flowers she picks up for Procne. She insists on turning a deaf ear to Tereus's hot courtship, by asserting that Procne loves deeply the "wild thyme" and "xorta." Philomela's ignorance of Tereus forces him to voice falsely that there is no need for the flowers, simply because "Procne is dead." Such is the first instance of violation perpetuated by Tereus, in order to satisfy his desire for Philomela. No sooner does Philomela receive the news of Procne's death than she bitterly screams out of her heart for the loss of her only sister. Seizes upon this emotional opportunity, Tereus hugs Philomela tightly, as if consoling her:

> Philomela: And here is some wild thyme, and that is xorta. Procne loves its bitter taste.
>
> Tereus: Philomela.
>
> Philomela: What is this plant, Niobe? Smell it. It's salty, I've never seen it before. Procne will know. (Wertenbaker 1996, p. 325)

Philomela's negligence of Tereus's advances, in addition to the growing intimacy between her and the Captain, give rise to another dramatic situation, where Tereus resorts to violence again in his effort to achieve his wild desire. Philomela tells the Captain that she admires his character from the very beginning of the journey, because he proves himself to be a king of elements who can order the winds. She implores him to take her away from this horrible place where Tereus' wandering eyes and nervous soul frighten her. Rather than immediately responding to her request, the Captain suggests to consult Tereus, which she completely refuses. It is better for them both to depend on the power of love. When Philomela invites the Captain to touch her breast and feel her heartbeats, Tereus interrupts the romantic

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moment, accusing the Captain of being a "Traitor!" Seeking revenge, he kills the Captain and charges Philomela of being a defenseless young girl, whose "genitals" ought to be cut off:

> Captain: We will ask Tereus.
>
> Philomela: We will ask the gods within us. Love … Captain … your power …
>
> Philomela: Not mine … Between us, above us.
>
> *She takes his hand and puts it on her breast. Tereus enters.*
>
> Tereus : Traitor! Traitor! Traitor!
>
> *He kills the Captain.* (Wertenbaker 1996, p. 325)

Tereus's fake news of Procne's death first, and the killing of the Captain second, are not merely violent patriarchal tactics but are direct echoes of "instrumentalism", to use Plumwood's term (1993, p. 53). It is one of the major hallmarks of the oppressive framework via which the lower side of the up-down relationships, as represented by Philomela and the Captain have no choices left, but to relinquish "their own interests for those of the master or center," not to say the power of Tereus. Since Philomela stands for the unjustified oppression befalling humans and nonhumans, she becomes a small part of "a network of purposes" that can be identified, in relation to Tereus's burning lust and material needs. This network refers to the process of "objectification," in terms of which the male dominator conceives the female and other Others as if they were inanimate objects without higher ends of their own. This inferior conception of women and nonhumans urges the master identity/Tereus to contend that they deserve to be marginalized and excluded from existence, because they have no initiatives for supporting the oppressive framework. In this regard, Tereus becomes a "dualizing master self", that has a divine license to dominate and abuse the other, mainly because that

other/Philomela and the Captain have no "center of desires or needs" (p. 53).

Tereus's dualizing master-self paved the way for yet another dramatic situation in which he approves of "physical coercion," as a device for satisfying his sexual desire for Philomela (Philpott 1992, p. 91). This impending violence endows Philomela with a strong sense of foreboding. Besieged by Tereus and his spies, she has nothing to do but to implore Procne and the gods for help. No sooner does Tereus inquire about what she is doing than she asks him to leave her alone. Instead of obeying her, he reminds her of the play of *Hippolytus* they had watched together in Athens before, asserting that he is the "Phaedra" who falls in an illegal love relationship with his stepsister. Philomela bitterly opposes his offer because it is "against the law." To quash this opposition, Tereus confirms that the power of gods is mightier than that of law. He supports this thesis by stating that the chorus once told him that he was fated to be in love with Philomela. Tereus's frustration and anger reach the climax when she informs him that she does neither "love" nor "want" him. The more Tereus attempts to seduce her, the more she describes his advances as "frivolous," entreating him to let her mourn for Procne. Having thus realized that Philomela will never surrender to him willingly, Tereus seizes upon her vehemently, never waiting for her to give consent to copulate with him. That is why he brutally rapes her:

> Tereus: Love me.
>
> Philomela: No.
>
> Tereus: Then my love will be for both. I will love you and love myself for you. Philomela, I will have you.
>
> Philomela: Tereus, wait. . .. Let me mourn

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> Tereus: The god is out. . .. Your darkness and your sadness make you all the more beautiful. (Wertenbaker 1996, pp. 323-333)

The rationale behind Tereus's violence and insistence on portraying his desire for Philomela as a divine order can be explained in terms of power misuse. But one should differentiate between two forms of power: "the power of the ups over the downs" and "power-over power" (Warren 2000, p. 46). While the former power stands for the male pursuit to establish dominance over the female figures and nonhuman creatures, the latter refers to the aggressive power of "rapists" (p. 46), not to say Tereus, over their victims as represented through Philomela. The concept of power-over power is a patriarchal maneuver, wielded skillfully by Tereus, with the purpose of asserting his position as a center for the power of the ups. Since this power is maintained by the authority of gods, the ups/ Tereus has no options, but to egg on the downs/Philomela to experience the dreadful pains of psychological and physical domination, represented through Tereus's dogged determination to satisfy his pure lust for Philomela. The strategy of power-over power supplies Tereus with necessary tactics to falsely play the role of gods, who confirm that the ups are created to dominate and marginalize the downs whatever (or wherever) they are.

Crowned with the godlike ideology of power-over power, Tereus insists on blending the truth with falsity. He tells Procne that Philomela was drowned at the darkness of the sea, while he imprisons her in a secret place, misbelieving that she will be his mistress. Rather than blaming himself for physically assaulting Philomela, Tereus accuses her of being the root cause of that tragedy. His fake accusation spurs her to certify that it is better for her not to feel existence. Tereus's immoral action makes her body and spirit drip severe psychological pains. She faces him saying: "it was your own act. It was you. I caused nothing" (Wertenbaker 1996, p. 341). She also describes him as an

unfledged liar, upon discovering that Procne was not dead. To launch a heavy criticism against Tereus, she produces a multiplicity of interrogative speech acts that rotate around disclosing the dirty morality of Tereus. When he makes no comment, she rebukes him severely asserting that he is nothing but "cowardly," violent, "shriveled," "ridiculous," and a shapeless character. The more Philomela yields cumulative interrogative points, the more Tereus orders her to stop; otherwise, he will keep her silent forever. She provokes him more, when she says that he is not a political leader but merely a "scarecrow", replete with "embarrassed lust." Insisting on exposing his vicious aspects to the Thracians, he vehemently cuts out her tongue, leaving her in a "pool of blood":

> Philomela: . . . Procne is not dead. I can smell her on you. *Pause.* You. You lied. And you. What did you tell your wife, my sister, Procne, what did you tell her? Did you tell her you violated her sister, the sister she gave into your trust? Did you tell her what a coward you are and that you could not, cannot bear to look at me? Did you tell her that despite my fear, your violence, when I saw you in your nakedness I couldn't help laughing because you were so shrivelled, so ridiculous and it is not the way it is on the statues? (Wertenbaker 1996, p. 341)

A semiotic analysis of Philomela's dialogue with Tereus may possibly indicate that she, for the first time, utilizes the closed space of prison to exercise power over her dominator. That is why she depends on the interrogative form in addressing Tereus: "What did you tell your wife?" "Did you tell her you violated her sister?" "Did you tell her what a coward you are?" The iteration of these speech acts transforms Philomela into a

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powerful voice, that seeks to redress the imbalance brought on by the Tereus up-down tactics. Instead of giving a definite answer to the questions put to him, Tereus employs the imperative locution along with declarative statements: "Quiet, woman," "I warn you" and "I will keep you quiet" (Wertenbaker 1996, p. 342). Failing to compete with Philomela in terms of the verbal game, Tereus is left with one choice: to chop off Philomela's tongue. Her eloquent speech may, after all, cause him a real scandal, of being a treacherous leader. The brutal silencing of Philomela forever enhances Wertenbaker's endeavour to carry out a twofold critical objective: a) to dramatize "the enforced silence" caused by patriarchy (Wu 2023, p. 66), and b) to criticize the logical structure of dualism which, according to Plumwood, sustains the false notion that the female "hyperseparation," as women and other Others are the spokespersons for an "inferior" order of being (1993, p. 49).

Nevertheless, Wertenbaker equally uses the brutal silencing of Philomela for another dramatic necessity. That is to prove that "silence leads to violence" (qtd. in Bush 2009, p. 114). This necessity is justified by Tereus's demand that the soldiers let Philomela get out of confinement to be lost in the crowded and noisy festival of *Bacchus*, the Greco-Roman god of intoxication and liberty. Philomela seizes this opportunity to regain her voice and let Tereus's crimes become clear, through the physical expression of puppet dolls. She employs the puppet play to depict the fierce conflict between a female doll and a male crowned one, that attempts to rape her. To dress this enactment in a realistic garment, Philomela represents an accurate brutal imitation of the cutting of the female doll's tongue. Though the audience, including Procne, laughs heartily at the rape scene, it lapses into a deafening silence after watching the mutilation act. The show reaches its tragic climax when a servant enters, carrying a third doll that seems to be a queen. The doll queen weeps and searches eagerly for the raped mutilated puppet/Philomela. Not only does puppet-dolls show

inspire Procne to associate the tragedy of the silent doll with that of Philomela, but it also helps her to identify her lost sister, whom Tereus declared to be have been drowned:

> *Philomela then stages a very brutal illustration of the cutting of the female doll's tongue. Blood cloth on the floor. The crowd is very silent. Niobe still. Then the Servant comes inside the circle, holding a third doll, a queen. At that moment, Procne also appears in the front of the crowd's circle. She has been watching. The Procne doll weeps. The two female dolls embrace. Procne approaches Philomela, looks at her and takes her away.* (Wertenbaker 1996, p. 349)

Through Philomela's puppet play, Wertenbaker manages to end *The Love of the Nightingale* with a master scene, reminiscent of the bloody finale of the tragic masterpieces of Elizabethan drama. In this scene, Wertenbaker explicitly states that the enforced silence will inevitably bring on an endless "cycle of violence" (Roth 2022, p. 56). No sooner do the two sisters reunite than they set out to remove the seeds of oppression and the illogical structure of the up-down relationships caused by Tereus's violation and illusive tactics. To achieve a sense of poetic justice, in line with the Aristotelian vision, they both decide to kill Itys: while Procne holds him firmly, Philomela puts him to the sword. When Tereus discovers the corpse of Itys, he plans to kill the two sisters. His attempt to seek revenge is skillfully interrupted by a creative dramatic device of 'metamorphosis' in which the three main characters change into birds. Tereus becomes "a hoopoe", while Philomela is transformed into "a nightingale" and Procne into "a swallow" (Wertenbaker 1996, p. 359).

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The smooth, creative metamorphosis of the three characters into birds is a highly significant dramatic device, through which Wertenbaker brings the dead Itys to life. He can now rejoin the three birds with a view to reconsidering philosophically the tragedy that afflicts them. The Philomela nightingale entreats Itys to ask her some questions in order to enjoy her beautiful songs. He, thus, asks her whether she prefers being a nightingale or being Philomela. Although she does not like birds, she prefers being a nightingale, because it provides her with an ecstasy to resist the absurd bloodshed imposed on the character of the Philomela woman. When Philomela was a human being, she was weighed down with a shadow of oppression that raised a set of unanswerable questions:

> Philomela: I like the nights and my voice in the night. I like the spring. Otherwise, no, not much, I never liked birds, but we were all so angry the bloodshed would have gone on forever. So it was better to become a nightingale. You see the world differently.
>
> Itys: Do you like being a nightingale more than being Philomela? (Wertenbaker 1996, p. 360)

But the amazing metamorphosis of the three characters into birds lends Wertenbaker a hand to encapsulate the ecofeminist aesthetics, through proving that nature is authentically a feminist issue. She has made it clear that the oppressive androcentric framework, manipulated by Tereus, adopts violence, deception and brutal silencing, as proper tools to stress the up-down relationships. In the meantime, she has been careful to provide women and other Others, represented by Philomela, with what Warren called "*power-against* power" (2000, p. 200). Equipped with this, the downs can rebel against the oppressive power of the 'ups'. To dramatize this feminist revolution, Wertenbaker produces open and closed spaces, in terms of which, Philomela bravely challenges not only

domination and subordination, but also the dreadful mutilation imposed by Tereus's dualizing, master self. Since the cooperation between Procne and Philomela enables the latter to regain her lost voice, Wertenbaker addresses the audience to take into account the importance of consolidation, together with an eye to cultivating a moral future devoid of any devastating patriarchy.

Up-Down Relationships in *Hulm al-Sinin* [*Dream of Years*]

Just as Wertenbaker's reworks the myth of Philomela, with all its associations, in *The Love of the Nightingale*, Bakr reconsiders in *Dream of Years* the magic-realistic influence of the narrative frame of *The Arabian Nights*. By using mythic and folkloric material, both playwrights address the oppressive framework, the structure of dualism and the cause of the up-down relationships. Both lay emphasis on establishing a reciprocal relationship between the domination of women and nonhuman other, relying on gender analysis. Wertenbaker convinced that a male-gender-biased domination dehumanizes humans and other nonhuman Others alike. Bakr, contrary to this, believes that the androcentric mentality brings on repressive unjust sociopolitical order, that subjugates not only women and nature, but also the master identity itself.

Unlike *The Love of the Nightingale*, *Dream of Years* does not make use of the theatre technique of chorus, but uses the device of 'retrospection' instead. The reason behind this is that Bakr purposes to show how the unjust socioeconomic order, manipulated by the masculine model, yields the up-down relationships befalling not only women and other Others, but also men themselves. To hammer home this vision, Bakr provides the play with a nameless '*Sultan*', who is barren and yet dreams of having a son to take the throne after him. laments his *Vizier* bitterly for failing to help him to have a male heir to

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the throne. He rebukes his '*Vizier*' for failing to bring him knowledgeable fortune-tellers. Baffled by the medical impostors brought, the *Sultan* gets the feeling that his dream of having a male successor is but a delusive mirage. The sorcerers recommended by the *Vizier* had strange requests: "black cock with a white spot", "white mutilated sheep", "black orphan goat", and "a blind hen" (Bakr 2002, p. 10 [trans. is mine]).

It is true that the *Sultan* has power over the sky, the land, and the rivers, but he feels anxious and depressed, and is afraid of dying without having any offspring. This inability on his part makes him reconsider his position as a godlike figure. Firmly believing that he belongs to gods, the *Sultan* launches criticism against the fate that prevents him from fulfilling his desire. He, thus, describes excessively himself as "the dominant absolute ruler", "the retainer", "the expander", "the humiliator", "the King of Kings", "the sharp hawk", and "the master of humanity." In spite of all these hyperbole adjectives that go beyond description of humankind, the *Sultan* is incapable of having an heir for his *Sultanate*. Extending from the yellow river of China to the borders of the sea of darkness, the *Sultanate* has not come out of peaceful actions. Rather, it is the outcome of a truly radical violence, wars and bloody conspiracies, plotted by the *Sultan* to impose humiliation and marginalization over humans and nonhumans. Such a *Sultanate* unfortunately has no legitimate crown prince:

> The *Sultan*: . . . Listen carefully, *Vizier*, the deeper I think of the boundless high sky covering my limitless empire, the mighty rivers running through my *Sultan*ate, and the greatness of my glorious throne, the more I cannot believe my eyes. Despite being the owner of dominion, the dominant absolute ruler, the retainer, the expander, the humiliator, the king of kings, the sharp hawk and the master of humanity, I am the only person on

> earth who is about to die without issue. I, alas, have no inheritor that can take over authority after my death to immortalize my sovereign monarchy. That monarchy is the outcome of senseless bloodshed, violence and humiliation I exercised over a large number of victims. (Bakr 2002, pp. 10-11 [trans. is mine])

Like Tereus's burning concupiscence which drove him to exercise violence, the *Sultan*'s pressing dream pushes him to violate humans and others, equipping himself with a legal license. He assumes a form of oppressive framework; via which he maintains a keen sense of the up-down relationships. He also develops a structure of dualism that makes him view existence as an entity composed of what Plumwood discerned: "contrasting pairs" (1993, p. 47), in which the 'ups' ought to exploit the 'downs' in order to accomplish their agenda. In line with this, he sacrifices a good number of cocks, goats, sheep and hens to achieve his dream of a male heir, simply because these animals, as Plumwood remarks, are but the inferior "dualized other," that should be functioned to serve the master's needs (p. 47). To assert his powerful position as a master identity, the *Sultan* bestows divine top qualities upon himself, i.e. "the owner of dominion", "the retainer", "the expander", and "the master of humanity". In so doing, he proves that he is not only a representative of the higher side of dualism, but also a dualizing godlike master. As a deity has a divine license to subordinate and dominate humans and nonhumans, mainly because they have no initiatives of their own.

To evade the anger of the dualizing godlike *Sultan*, and ease his heart a little, the *Vizier* brings him a proficient old female oracle. She appears to move steadily with a heavy heart and piercing eyes. To draw the *Sultan*'s attention, she says she

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came from a very distant land, upon dreaming of his majesty three times. Each time, there is a strange voice ordering her to "travel to the *Sultan* to inform him with the good omens that his majesty will be given a new-born child called Hulm al-Sinin" (Bakr 2002, p. 19 [trans. is mine]). Once a grown-up, the child will be the legal successor to the throne. Excited as he becomes, the *Sultan* asks the Oracle to make sure that the expected child will be a he-baby, as he does not like girls. But his negative reaction to girlhood forces the Oracle to mock him deliberately, by repeating in a comic manner his patriarchal statement: "I do not like girls" twice. She addresses the audience directly, not the *Sultan* nor the *Vizier*, stating that men do not like women except when they go to bed with them. It is a carnal appetite via which women are transformed into interesting "pigeons, doves, ducks, oranges and apples," that are served on beds to satisfy men's pure lust. These potent similes are received, by the *Sultan* and the *Vizier*, as a form of heresy that must be condemned:

> The female oracle: (*Imitating sarcastically the accent of the Sultan*) I do not like girls. I do not like girls. (*Then, she points to all the characters on the stage and the audience*.) None of you loves girls either except in one state of affairs (*using her hands to drop a hint*) inherent in going to bed with them. You adore women there when beds are transmuted into a sexy fine dining table and girls into attractive pigeons, doves, ducks, oranges and apples that can be served to satisfy your pure lust as well as help you reach climax stimulating your morality. (Bakr 2002, p. 19 [trans. is mine]).

The Oracle's similes, used in reference to women, are but innovative rhetorical dramatic images. They are deliberately employed by Bakr to bring forward the key-slogan of ecofeminist criticism: nature is truthfully "a feminist issue." This assessment maintains the creed that women and nature are but

the essential others, "who/that have been unjustifiably exploited and dominated" by the male oppressive strategy of up-down relationships, manipulated by the *Sultan* (Warren 2000, p. 1). To exercise dominance over women/nature, the *Sultan*, to quote Plumwood, resorts to the androcentric device of 'backgrounding'. He seeks to make use of women to have a crown prince, and at the same time demonstrates his best to deny his total dependency upon them, as if he were a complete being that can give birth to a child without a woman. This explains why he insists on treating women as animals and plants, or rather as "the background," that can support his "foreground" — the burning desire for a male heir (1993, p. 48).

Obviously, the female oracle resists the male ideology of backgrounding by mimicking the *Sultan*'s statement: "I do not like girls." Like Wertenbaker's Procne and Philomela, Bakr's female figures are mistreated by patriarchy as mere chattels, that need abject domination to be able to exist. Wertenbaker's Tereus and Bakr's *Sultan* are apparently in bad need of women to achieve their identity as master models. Unfortunately, however, they do not only make women feel inferior, but they also foster the hierarchal concept that they are the inessential incomplete other Others, that lack the higher value of intelligence and free will. Without Philomela and young women, Tereus and the *Sultan* will never be able to feel their identity, consisting in the former's burning lust and the latter's dream of years.

The *Vizier* is agitated by the Oracle's defense of women, accusing her of heresy, but the *Sultan* orders him to calm down and listen to the rest of the prophecy. This encourages the lady to go on prophesying that the *Sultan* will have a crown prince, on condition that his majesty marries a young beautiful woman named Burqa al-Hayah [Veil of Modesty], Khatun, whom Allah creates with a mole on her left shoulder and a six-fingered hand.

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If the *Sultan* finds such a woman, he will certainly be given a male successor to the throne, who will be a charming prince, neither short nor tall, but medium-heighted with a silky straight hair. However, the would-be child will suffer from a strange disorder of weeping that may cause his death. To avoid this dreadful fate, the *Sultanate* ought to dedicate its efforts to prevent him from weeping or crying, throughout the different stages of his life, providing him with comfort and pleasure. Realizing that the *Sultan* receives her prophecy with joy, the Oracle warns him that the child will bring devastation and destruction to the whole *Sultanate*. With an anxious heart, the *Sultan* implores the lady to tell him more about the reasons of that ruination. She replies that the magical messenger who the prophecy did not give details. Before leaving the palace, the Oracle confirms that good morality lies in folding the truth, not unfolding it:

> The Female Oracle: . . . But do remember, *Sultan*, . . . the child . . . must live in a blissful atmosphere resonant with pleasure. It is not allowed to him to feel sadness nor distress even for a second. Always consider seriously that the crown prince of your own will cause the inevitable demise of your monarchy one day. I come straight to the point and tell your majesty the truth of the matter authentically without equivocation nor falsification. Not only do I give you the good tidings of a male successor, but I also admonish and warn you of the fatal foreboding awaiting your *Sultanate*. Now, the choice is yours: to accept or refuse my prophecy. (Bakr 2002, p. 24 [trans. is mine])

In contrast to Philomela's reaction to open spaces, the Oracle utilizes the closed space of the palace to resist the oppressive framework. This explains why her context of utterances is replete with what John Searle terms as "directive"

speech acts (1999, p. 27): "But do remember," "Always consider seriously," and "And remember." These locutions are but imperative points, created by the Oracle, to convince the *Sultan* of the genuineness of her prophecy, and to let him, at the same time, ponder over the potential danger awaiting the *Sultanate*. According to Warren, such speech acts are but a form of "*power-toward* power" (2000, p. 200), via which the Oracle is transformed from being a submissive dominated into a dominator, that marvelously employs the power of magic and language to wipe out the tactic of the up-down relationships. The power of language here helps the Oracle to carry out two objectives: a) to produce a critique of the *Sultan*'s logic of domination, suppressing humans and nonhumans from the very, and b) to prove that the oppressive framework and the logical structure of dualism are merely unjust devices, engendered by the *Sultan* to keep the 'ups' up and the 'downs' down.

Unlike Wertenbaker who dramatizes the tragedy of Philomela in terms of a direct-plot line, Bakr draws on the retrospection technique to highlight the fundamental events, stimulating the dramatic crisis of the play. In addition to acting the role of an expected visitor, the Oracle's presence justifies the significance of the prophecy. As Bakr's play progresses, the *Sultan* gets married to Burqa al-Hayah Khatun, who gives birth to a crown price called Hulm al-Sinin (Dream of Years). When the child becomes seven years old, he starts to weep and cry immensely. The weeping of the child obsesses the *Sultan*, as it surely signals the end of his *Sultanate*, according to the prophecy. Investigating the reasons behind that weeping, the *Sultan* discovers that the child-prince needs the full moon to play with it: "No sooner does the boy see the full moon in the night sky than he screams out bitterly stating that I badly need that silver pie" (Bakr 2002, p. 35 [trans. is mine]). The sniveling of the crown prince, along with his impossible craving for the

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moon, make Bakr explore the aesthetic value of retrospection through three dramatic situations.

Firstly, the *Sultan*'s anxiety and fear of the downfall of his *Sultan*ate give rise to a famous guiding soliloquy about the aggressive violations he had committed in the past to strengthen his power. He confesses that he married more than one hundred virgin women to give birth to a male heir. When they fail, he harshly executes each bride after two months. His unjustified violence reaches the extreme when he kills his adult brothers, using a deadly poison to make their death seem natural. Meanwhile, his brothers' unborn children are nipped in their mothers' wombs. This *Sultan*ate is the outcome of a trembling, blood-shedding regime imposed by the *Sultan*, to pave the way for his dream of years:

> The *Sultan*: I am much terrified of the prophecy of that lady which about to become true. If so, I will spend the rest of my life suffering from a severe pain and heartbreak for losing my lifelong dream. It tragically means the loss of my only crown prince, the comfort of my eyes, the expected inheritor whom I fathered after long years of patience, frustration and deprivation. To have a male successor to the throne, I married a hundred virgin brides of the prettiest girls all over the earth, but in vain. Within two months, I executed regularly each bride who keeps menstruating, mainly because she failed to be pregnant with a young child for whom I exercised a violent bloodshed against my brothers even the unborn babies. (Bakr 2002, pp. 36-37 [trans. is mine])

The *Sultan*'s violence against women can be considered a direct inspiration from Shahryar, the hero of *The Arabian Nights*, who not only married a beautiful woman every day, but also ordered her neck to be cut the next day. Besides, the

Sultan's unjustified brutality practiced with women and his brothers is reminiscent of Tereus's killing of the Captain and brutal silencing of Philomela. His violent actions, revealed through his retrospective soliloquy, proceed from the ideology of what Warren called *power-over* power. As already mentioned, this frame of thinking is the propelling force behind Tereus's and the *Sultan*'s exercise of absolute domination and subordination over their female/male victims. Armed with his dualizing master self, the *Sultan* behaves as if he were a Perseus sent by gods to cut off Medusa's head, simply because she does not give birth to a crown prince. Such is the ulterior up-down ideology, in terms of which both Tereus and the *Sultan* put their own powerful evil interests up, while trampling on and crushing women/Philomela's and other Others' destinies.

To save the would-be crown prince from a dreadful fate, the *Sultan* orders the *Vizier* to bring the full moon to the land of the *Sultan*ate by hook or crook. This absurd, impossible order brings forth the second dramatically retrospective situation, of the crucial part played by the *Vizier* in fabricating the prophecy. On his way to carry out the *Sultan*'s demand, the *Vizier* addresses the spectators, stating that it was he who crafted the plot of the female Oracle, to satisfy the *Sultan*'s desire for a male heir. While he formulates the positive frame of the prophecy, the Oracle, picked up by the *Vizier* while leading a campaign against some thieves and bandits, to embellish the depressive details of the ruination of the *Sultanate*. He confesses that he had informed the Oracle with the name and features of Burqa al-Hayah Khatun, whom selected as wife for his majesty, even before the invention of the prophecy. Although he is the 'maker' of that girl, he "sends the criers all over the *Sultan*ate calling upon people to bring at once any slave girl called Burqa al-Hayah, Khatun to the palace" (Bakr 2002, p. 45 [trans. is mine]). In the palace, the officers attempt to identify the qualities

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of the mole and six-fingered hand, aforementioned by the Oracle and predetermined by the *Vizier*.

The more the *Vizier* contemplates the past, the more sophisticated the plot becomes and the deeper its effect on the audience. Since the *Sultan* is sterile and hence impotent, the *Vizier* selects a virile male slave for the expected bride in order to impregnate her. The *Vizier*, as it becomes crystal-clear by now, is the real villain of the play, a Cassio or Iago figure in Shakespearean terms. As an engineer of evil, his villainous retrospective comments reach the peak with the manipulation of the *Rukhkh* story. The *Rukhkh*, as it is known, is a legendary bird that played an effective and influential role in *The Arabian Nights*. The *Vizier* tells the *Sultan* that he is going to visit his close friend, the *Rukhkh*, to ask him to bring the full moon to the crying crown prince. The *Rukhkh*, as the *Vizier* expects, will agree to that request, on condition that the *Sultan* provides a sufficient free space to receive the moon, whose size is bigger than the earth. No sooner does the *Sultan* receive the good news of the *Rukhkh*'s approval than he gives his orders to destroy every building in the *Sultanate*, in preparation for receiving the *Rukhkh* and the moon. As a result, the *Sultan*ate becomes a wasteland devoid of subjects as well as of all aspects of life:

> The *Vizier*: Deceived by my wily plan, the *Sultan*'s eyes shone with intense happiness. He issues royal decrees via which the officers carry out the orders of demolition throughout the kingdom with heavy hearts. His great enthusiasm for destruction motivates me to trick him into believing that I visited the *Rukhkh* anew to entreat it to bring the moon as quick as it can. After that fabricated meeting, I told his majesty that the *Rukhkh* insisted that the *Sultan* should quicken the process of destruction to create a very large space suitable for the landing of the moon peacefully without a high

> risk of failure. What a crafty problematic gimmick that entraps *Sultan* into demonstrating his best to wreak havoc on the *Sultanate*. (Bakr 2002, pp. 50-51 [trans. is mine]).

The *Vizier*'s painful retrospections are interrupted by the arrival of the female Oracle. Her appearance gives rise to the third crucial retrospective dramatic situation, where she explains the reasons behind her embellishment of the prophecy. As soon as she runs into the *Vizier*, he rebukes her severely for causing him the real dilemma of manipulating the destruction of the *Sultanate*. Overwhelmed by that predicament, he threatens to detain her in the horrible imprisonment of *al-Maqshara*. However, the woman ignores his threats, accusing him and the *Sultan* of being high-sound practitioners in the language of violence and power. Thus challenged by the Oracle, the *Vizier* entreats her to tell him why she has modified the structure of the predetermined prophecy, by harping on the plot of the downfall of the *Sultanate*. She replies saying that she is a helpless woman, whose seven youthful sons met their end in bloody wars launched by the *Sultan* in satisfaction for his omnipotence. Not only does the death of her sons make her one of the living dead, but it also makes her prophetic about the destruction of the *Sultanate*:

> The Female Oracle: Listen, poor *Vizier*! Not only am I an unimpeachable eyewitness to the disastrous wars launched by your *Sultan* to fulfil his burning desire for power and subordination, but I am also the innocent victim of these wars. You will never understand that violence and bloodshed of these bitter wars do transform me into a war-torn human being who lives always on the threshold of fatal death. My seven blooming sons, the adornment of

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> my life, die young in your deadly wars! So, what shall I do? Neither do I have high hopes nor dreams in life except wandering aimlessly around the destruction of your kingdom. (Bakr 2002, p. 56 [trans. is mine]).

In line with Wertenbaker, Bakr employs the open theatrical space of the desert to prove that the old Oracle, like Philomela, is a strong female model that can resist the up-down relationships inflicted by Tereus, the *Vizier* and the *Sultan*. Since the old lady never fears the pains of prison nor humiliation, she utilizes the open space to challenge the radical exclusion/hyperseparation inflicted on her existence by the master identity of the *Sultan* and his *Vizier*. To resist that patriarchal separation, the Oracle invents the destruction of the *Sultan*ate to avenge herself on the *Sultan* for the death of her seven sons in his disastrous wars. She also launches a sharp criticism against the repressive sociopolitical system initiated by the *Sultan*, a system dehumanizes people by transforming them into cannibals that devour mice and quench their thirst with dead blood. The manipulation of the *Sultan*ate's ruination, along with the criticism of the socio-political agenda of the *Sultan*ate can be considered, in Warren's terms, a marvelous form of "power-against power" (2000, p. 200). It is a distinctive device of resistance via which the down/Oracle stands out against the ups/*Sultan* and *Vizier* from a perspective of cunning tactics, not oppressive up-down strategies. Women have the favoured trait of skillful rationality that drives them to dominate their dominators, whoever or whatever they are.

Through the *Sultan*'s inconsiderate decision to obliterate the features of his *Sultanate*, including even its main fortress, Bakr ends *Dream of Years* with a master scene. The *Sultanate* becomes a wasteland of anarchy, silence and horror: the royal court, the soldiers, and farmers abandon their homeland to find another place to dwell in. Turning a blind eye to the devastation

surrounding him, the *Sultan* declares that the *Rukhkh* will certainly arrive with the full moon, and the glorious days will return sooner rather than later. His great expectation is, however, interrupted by the sound of war drums. Mistaking this for the sound of the fluttering *Rukhkh*'s wings, the *Sultan* is shocked to realize that it was the beat of drumming heralding the arrival of a vast strong army, about to attack the vanishing *Sultanate*. The louder the sound, the more Hulm al-Sinin wails. Such an extremely frustrating situation makes the *Sultan* go mad. He asks the *Vizier* to find a way to silence the screaming prince, so that the *Sultanate* is not completely destroyed. But his voice fades with the loud music and the military beats. Unheard by none, the *Sultan*'s voice vanishes gradually, as the stage plunges into total darkness with the only candle lighting the palace snuffed out:

> *The Vizier looks out of the window of the palace, turning carelessly his back on the Sultan. The child's constant weeping is transformed into a piercing scream of pain mingled tragically with the whistle of the high wind and the desperate calls of the Sultan. Accidentally, an exciting music is played in complete harmony with the beats of the approaching soldiers. The softer the music becomes, the louder is the sound of the beats and the whistle of the wind that shakes the window of the palace.* (Bakr 2002, pp. 77-8 [trans. is mine])

Just as in *The Arabian Nights*, the *Sultan*, like Shahryar, fosters the up-down relationships to fulfil his burning desire for a crown prince. When he fails, he kills one-hundred brides, all his brothers, cocks, goats, sheep and hens to maintain his power as a dualizing master self. However, Bakr, in line with Wertenbaker, provides the old female Oracle with open and closed spaces to prove that women can not only resist, but also

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defeat the oppressor and confuse his calculations. Like Philomela's puppet dolls, the Oracle inserts, into the prophecy formulated by the *Vizier*, the crucial notion that the expected crown prince will bring on the downfall of the kingdom. The consequences of that insertion are best illustrated when the *Vizier*, by the end, carelessly turns his back to the *Sultan*. The wave of darkness drowning the stage, in the grand finale, is but a semiotic image indicating that the *Sultan* himself becomes a victim, like women and animals, of the very repressive sociopolitical ideology originally invented by him.

Conclusion

The above was a comparative reading of an American play, Timberlake Wertenbaker's *The Love of the Nightingale,* and an Egyptian one, Salwa Bakr's *Hulm al-Sinin* [*Dream of Years*], in the light of ecological feminism, represented particularly in the concept of the up-down relationships developed by Val Plumwood and Karen Warren. As a philosophical theory concerned about the exploration of the hidden interconnections between the domination of the female identity and that of nature, ecofeminism has equally influenced both Wertenbaker and Bakr, but caused different reactions. Wertenbaker is sympathetic to women because they suffer from what is known in psychology as an 'inferiority complex, But Bakr is against men and what they display, the 'superiority complex', based on the predetermined battle between what is above and what is below.

Though coming from two different cultures, Wertenbaker and Bakr deal with the turbulent, up-down relationships between men and women, with great enthusiasm but from different points of view. Wertenbaker develops a mythic setting to produce a feminist critique of patriarchy. Bakr, in her turn, employs a dramatic vision that reworks folktales to show that man himself and woman/nature are alike the innocent victims of the up-down relationships initiated by the master model. Even though Wertenbaker and Bakr use the oppressive consequences of the

up-down relationships as their central concern in *The Love of the Nightingale* and *Dream of Years,* each adopts a dramatic structure of her own. Wertenbaker uses the dramatic technique of chorus as well as a direct plotline, to adapt the Greek myth of Philomela. But Bakr depends on the retrospection technique and adopts a dramatic structure inspired by the folktales of *The Arabian Nights*, i.e. Shahrazad's tales to Shahryar and the story of the *Rukhkh*.

Moreover, Wertenbaker's innovative metamorphosis of the three characters into birds vis-à-vis Bakr's final stage directions lend one a hand to sum up that both playwrights dedicate their theatrical project to encapsulate the ecofeminist aesthetics. They both dramatize how the Up-Down strategy is unjustly manipulated by Tereus and the sultan to enforce deafening silence and humiliation on Philomele and the oracle woman. However, Wertenbaker and Bakr make determined innovative efforts to supply their female protagonists with wily tactics of resistance inherent in the ideology of *power-against* power and *power-toward* power via which the Downs/Philomele and the Oracle woman can easily remove what Plumwood called the "blind spots" (1993, p. 194) created by power of the Ups. Such a remarkable dramatic achievement denotes that ecofeminist critics and scholars of comparative literature should enlarge deeply upon the dramatic analogies between Western and Eastern theater, or rather the significant contributions made by Arab women playwrights.

Endnote:

Translations from Arabic are all mine.

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