

Exploring the Bogy's Significance in Waciny Laredj's Novel "The Female Mirage"

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Received date: 06.01.2025; Accepted date: 15.03.2025;
Publication date: 29.04.2025, doi:10.56334/sei/8.3.29

Abstract

In "Female Mirage," Waciny Laredj tells the story of a female protagonist navigating societal pressures, motherhood, and artistic ambition while yearning for freedom. Trapped in an unwanted marriage, her journey is filled with pain and hope, ultimately sacrificing her life for creativity. The novel, spanning 549 pages, is rich with sexual imagery, focusing on the body as a catalyst for unfolding events. Laredj explores the body's physicality and tensions through narrative and introspection, starting with the protagonist in repose. He intertwines themes of seduction and artistic rebellion against terrorism, using the body and sensual dialogue to counter extremist ideologies. His female protagonists embody rebellion, challenging conservative values and celebrating life over death. Despite criticism, Laredj's works, like "Our Lady of the Maqam," advocate for the will to live amidst terrorism, giving voice to those silenced by violence. "Female Mirage" emphasises the body's centrality and the duality of man and woman, blending sensuality with emotional depth to reflect human connection and desire.

Key words: Female Mirage, Waciny Laredj, Freedom, Female Body, Sexual imagery.

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Citation. Karima N., Belkacem M. (2025). Exploring the Bogy's Significance in Waciny Laredj's Novel "The Female Mirage". *Science, Education and Innovations in the Context of Modern Problems*, 8(3), 504-510. doi: 10.56352/sei/8.3.29. <https://imcra-az.org/archive/358-science-education-and-innovations-in-the-context-of-modern-problems-issue-3-volviii-2025.html>

The presentation: In the novel *Female Mirage*, the author weaves a poignant tale of love, wandering, dispersion, and loss through the life of a female protagonist entangled in the labyrinth of existence. She is compelled to don various masks, some authentic and others deceitful, to conceal herself from the relentless pressures of society. Caught in the role of a married woman—a role she internally rejects—she struggles to balance the demands of motherhood with her artistic pursuits. Ultimately, she seeks the elusive freedom, a role denied to her by the harsh realities of social norms and psychological burdens.

The frequencies of the body in the novel:

Trapped in a marriage to a man she never wished to wed, she navigates the novel's events with a heart heavy with pain and a spirit yearning for hope. Her quest leaves her bereft, having lost both the lives she tried to lead and falling short of her aspirations. In the end, she sacrifices her existence for the sake of literature and creativity, ensuring that the expressive power of words remains the eternal lifeline of the artist. Thus, the writer immortalizes her through a project where the word endures as the sole instrument of the creator's life.

Under this opening falls a tapestry of pictures and scenes woven across 549 pages, where the novel brims with sexual imagery. The body emerges as the catalyst for the unfolding events, with the narrative springing from its physicality, allowing connotations to burgeon and narrative potential to flourish. The body becomes the lens through which the narrative scrutinizes its themes, steering the direction of its exploration, and it is from the body that all associated tensions—be they descriptive, narrative, reflective, or introspective—are derived. Thus, the body stands at the heart of the narrative, the fulcrum of description, the essence of memory, anticipation, and inspiration. It also serves as the crucible of language, birthing a novel structure realized only in the interplay of the "tremors," "gestures," and "groans" it generates. This is acutely felt in certain scenes where language forsakes its conventional structure to be adorned with one that interweaves the verbal and the physical, compelling the reader to interpret the verbal through the framework established by the physical.¹

The novel begins with a moment of repose, the protagonist reclining on a reed chair, suspended between the realms of sleep and wakefulness. This stillness forms the bedrock of speech, gestures, actions, and the legitimacy of storytelling. « I stretched out on the reed chair with all my height. I closed my eyes slightly to recall my interrupted breath. I groped my body and the place I was. I couldn't avoid his words and magic. Silence now stretches on the serenity of things like a dead shadow.»²

This stillness marks the genesis of the narrative journey, a tension within the body's repose—a moment of release from duty, shedding the chains of utility in pursuit of sleep, sex, or drink. Here, the narrative's movement and its unfolding forms are measured from this initial point.

Narrative, ever a shift from ordinary temporality, seeks to establish a new temporal order that frames the forthcoming experiences. The moment of relaxation heralds a return to a fertile stillness, brimming with the potential for new actions or the cessation of old ones. Stillness is the wellspring from which all actions, past and future, originate.

To return the body to this moment of stillness is to define the state from which action will emerge. This initial orientation explores the narrative's nature and description, positioning the body as the central character through whom the novel's entire world is delineated.

At the outset, the narrative boldly declares its intentions, delineating the dimensions and functions of the body. It presents a singular possibility for realization and analysis: to abolish the functional dimension and redefine the body first as an entity unto itself (relaxed) and second as a vessel for boundless sexual experimentation. The essence of this initial "state of relaxation" is shaped by the narrator's subsequent discourse, positioning it within the continuum of states of relaxation described throughout the text. Here, the body returns to a state of stillness, laden with desires and illusions of pleasure, rendered through formulations rich with semantic and referential ambiguities.

The narrative's constant axis is the duality of woman/man, the origin and starting point of every structure. No scene, event, or incident can be conceived outside the framework provided by this duality. Within these parameters, the body is described, its actions narrated, and the scenarios resulting from the fusion of two bodies are detailed within the horizon of a "unification of action" seen through a masculine eye that perceives only its own image in these actions. This eye sees, feels, internalizes, anticipates, and recalls events.

Whether it is the narrator's eye or Leila's, their perspectives often merge, as Leila frequently becomes the narrator, and the narrator often immerses himself in an emotional discourse that embodies his fusion with her. The narrative and descriptive scenes are thus presented through the lens of masculine feelings, binding their perspectives inseparably.

Thus, we delve into these narrative passages, many of which vividly depict sexually explicit scenes. The narrative journey, whether led by Sino or Leila, unveils the story's world without breaching the laws of the universe. However, the world gains nuance when viewed through Sino's masculine eye or Leila's feminine perspective.

The novel radiates a unique energy, prompting many to adopt it as a medium for discourse and communication. As Abdul Rahman Munif suggests, novels allow us "to say things we cannot say in our ordinary speeches."³ Waciny Laredj exemplifies this in *The Female Mirage*, where the narrative serves as an expressive tool, conveying messages through the characters within the text. This approach presents a feminine image of the world, brimming with the essence of femininity. The narrator, hidden behind "she," conjures an imaginary realm that resonates with our collective conscience and memory, reflecting the myriad images we hold of the world and our place within

it. All actions and their accompanying descriptions crystallize from a masculine awareness.⁴

The narrator's voice, inherently masculine, shapes our reading of events, influenced by Sino's perception of reality or dream, past or present, illusion or truth. The burden of narration shifts to Leila, who recounts the nuances of the sexual act. The narrative does not explore the body's full potential but focuses on specific instances. To relive these events, they are woven into a sensationalist discourse.

Each character's position in the sexual dynamics is manifest within the scenes, whether through direct descriptions of the act, introspections on past encounters, or projections of future ones. This detailed portrayal enriches the narrative, inviting readers to experience the depth and complexity of the characters' interactions and perceptions.

The desire to interpret human action through the sensual exigencies of the body elevates the body to the foremost narrative material, the genesis from which all subjects emerge⁵. Engaging with the body from this perspective directs us towards treating textual units as components of a seductive discourse, particularly in its erotic dimension. This scene transcends narrative linearity, which typically constructs a story by accumulating minor facts. Instead, it represents a momentary pause within the broader narrative movement, allowing the creation of a parallel narrative fueled by the illusions of words and structures that exude gender and pleasure.⁶

When the narrative halts, the descriptive mechanism diverges from linear progression, transforming these facts into richly detailed descriptions. Here, description becomes an integral narrative element, merging seamlessly with the narrative flow. By describing the sexual process, a new dimension infiltrates the text, detached from the original premises of the narrative.⁷

Narrative traditionally serves to satisfy a need, restore order, or answer a question. Pleasure, in contrast, exists for its own sake, standing in opposition to action. Consequently, the narrative pauses at the emergence of pleasure, for pleasure paralyzes movement, allowing no action beyond its own fulfillment.

The sexual act, a recurring waypoint in the narrative journey, consistently diverges from the linear narrative that otherwise prevails. Here, the masculine gaze reasserts itself, shaping this projected world through masculine imagination and dreams, informed by cultural paradigms that define both masculine and feminine behaviors. This duality draws on our preconceptions of masculinity and femininity.

The narrative text offers multiple glimpses of the sexual act, flanked by nebulous moments of language and action. These moments introduce the reader to the realm of the sexual act, yet within these combined units, seduction remains inherently feminine. The man, preoccupied with thought, is not the seducer but the one who delights in seduction, whose allure lies in his power—the power of creativity. Conversely, the woman's temptation resides solely in her body.

To unveil this seductive energy, language embarks on a journey that fragments the body,

presenting it as a collection of regions. Each region plays a distinct role in the quest for ultimate pleasure. While the narrative acknowledges the entirety of the masculine body, it zooms in on the female form: the woman possesses breasts, legs, and eyes imbued with estrus and tenderness. The curves of her chest and waist accentuate her agility, whereas a man's allure is confined to his virility.

Yet, this language does not grant the body a voice to articulate what excites the other. While the masculine voice proclaims its lust and pleasure through language and dream, the narration of the woman's body is reduced to groans and gestures, offering no elaborate details and leaving the reader's imagination free to wander.

Feminine seduction becomes self-aware only in the presence of the other, channeling its energy into creativity. This seduction and its ensuing actions can be examined through textual facts that reflect the masculine world, holding a distinct position within the cultural hierarchy of the time, and through specific depictions of femininity in the narrative. These depictions bestow upon women a series of traits and situations that define a unique feminine archetype.

From this perspective, the presence of the body in creative writing remains contentious, often met with confrontation and rejection. This is what the novelist Waciny Laredj referred to as the "Guardians of Intentions" in his renowned work *The Tragedy of the Seventh Night after the Thousand*,⁸ which revived the sensual atmosphere of *One Thousand and One Nights*.

In his bold quest to portray temptation under the banner of "Art for Art's Sake," Waciny Laredj rebelled against the tide of terrorism with narratives steeped in sensuality. His texts from the 1990s, beginning with his hexagonal series *Texts of the Ordeal* and culminating in his later works, deftly adapted body language and crafted dialogues with terrorists who sought to impose their ideology under the guise of Islam. Wasini chose as his protagonists women who were irresistibly seductive, beautiful, and rebelliously defiant of the conservative values of their society. Within this framework, sexual scenes and intimate encounters with his characters were meticulously crafted.

In a candid dialogue, Wasini revealed that he intentionally employed this method, viewing it as a form of resistance through creative writing against terrorism, or what he termed the "guardians of intentions." He stated, "To combat nihilism and confront daily death, I published my first novel addressing the era of terrorism in Algeria, *Our Lady of the Maqam*, in 1995. Through this work, I sought to champion life over death and destruction."

Our Lady of the Maqam faced criticism at the time, with detractors questioning the appropriateness of featuring a ballerina amidst the pervasive death caused by terrorism in Algeria. Wasini's response was resolute: he aimed to celebrate the will to live as an enduring value of love within us, despite the surrounding devastation. Writing, for him, became a symbolic act of conquering death, particularly by giving voice to those silenced by violence. In novels such as *Guardian of the Shadows*, *Mirrors of the Blind*, *Our Lady of the Maqam*, and *Memory of Water*, he

lent his human voice to the voices of the slain, perpetuating their existence and underscoring the moral continuity of the writer through his texts.

Despite the tragic loss of numerous writers, intellectuals, and creators to terrorist attacks, their works endure as testaments to their creativity. The terrorists failed to destroy the cultural legacy, leaving behind a resilient and undiminished cultural product.⁹

In the same vein, and contemporaneously, Waciny Laredj delved into the intricate human relationships between the protagonists of his novel *The Female Mirage*. This narrative celebrates the value of love, interspersed with numerous sexual interludes that underscore the centrality of the body. The heroine poignantly encapsulates this theme, expressing the foundation of her bond with Sino: "What is the solution to continue with you with my body? Can you prove to me that you love me otherwise?" Throughout the novel, Laredj consistently emphasizes this motif.

"Where are the silk handkerchiefs with which you dried your chest, then buried them deep in my heart, pressing them to my nose so that the scent of your body would linger? Whenever it brushed against your face... I sought you in the smell of your sweat that awakened all my senses, even those long dormant. Some senses die from forgetting... When I stretched out on the bed, I was enveloped in astonishment, scarcely able to believe you were here, in my arms. Your eyes in mine, my face against yours, my chest against your chest, our hearts intertwined, my lips on the embers of your lips, my tongue at the tip of your tongue, our pulses and sweat mingling. For the first time, I realized I could love you with open eyes, fearing any shiver escaping from me.

Where did you come from with all this splendor? Where did you acquire this astonishing power over all my senses? I no longer recognize myself.

My love... Do not stop. I want to reclaim the twenty years stolen from me today. I seek vengeance on all my past disappointments, on men who traversed my body without truly knowing it, lingering at the brink without understanding its magic. I desire you as I have longed for and imagined you. Do not stop.

Everything about you summoned me with a shiver and the language of magic. Unafraid, I felt, as I buried my head between your breasts, my body within yours, at the end of the night, that we had avenged a hundred years of hidden panic... Perhaps centuries of silence, lies, and rancor." In *The Female Mirage*, Waciny Laredj masterfully intertwines sensuality and emotional depth, creating a narrative that explores the profound and multifaceted nature of human connection¹⁰.

Conclusion : The Role of Desire in the Human Experience

Because life in the novel mirrors life in reality, it is inconceivable to discuss the diaries of the characters without delving into the invisible or hidden aspects of human relationships. To omit the dimension of desire is to ignore a fundamental aspect of the soul, body, and existence. Sex is an integral part of life's natural tapestry, and to write about life is to inevitably write about sex. Thus, when the writer explores the relationship between man and woman, it seamlessly aligns with the exploration of humanity itself.¹¹

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“Science, Education and Innovations in the context of modern problems” Journal

ISSN (p-e): 2790-0169 / 2790-0177

DOI-10.56334/sei/8.3.25



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