

## "La Répudiation"<sup>(1)</sup>

"I would like our men and women to develop a consciousness of our archaic society where deep-rooted stereotypes exert on us too heavy an impact... I have tried to give evidence of the multiple injustices committed against women."

The above paragraph was quoted from Rachid Boudjedra's comment on his novel, reviewed and analyzed by **Gafaiti Hafid**<sup>(2)</sup> who adds, in the foreword which introduces his study, that Boudjedra's works attack taboos which have been avoided by other writers. He does it directly, breaking and going beyond the dams of convention.

### Mode of Expression

All through the work, it is a man's point of view that dominates. A woman's standpoint is completely excluded. The narrative takes the shape of superposed levels which make it difficult to distinguish the personal attitude of the author from his pure desire to state the facts.

The hero of the novel identifies with the narrator and gives the image of a neurotic character, detached from the self and from reality; in his narrative he makes no distinction between dream and reality, he mixes delirium with sound expression, past with present and temporal with spatial dimensions.

### Central Idea

The story revolves around the domination and alienation of women in a strictly patriarchal society: their economic dependence, insignificant position, the limited space in which they move, their illiteracy, their utter submission to fathers or to husbands, and their almost inexistent sexual life.

In the family of Si Zoubir, the women are subjugated to the laws of a feudal system, represented by the father and his brothers. They are isolated, spied upon and forced to wear the veil. A woman may be repudiated by her husband without reference to any court or judge.

### Women of the Story

1. The mother, whose distinctive trait is passivity, is repudiated by the father. This arouses the revolt and grudge of the son Rachid against both the father and the mother who resignedly accepts her fate and is thus reduced to a state of complete humiliation. "Like a fly caught in a dish of melon jam, she struggles to escape but without success." Her passage from the status of a married woman to that of a repudiated woman completely annihilates her socially and morally. Like an abject slave, she proceeds to arrange her husband's second marriage and indulges in shrieks of merriment at the

wedding. Her resignation, however, is of a short duration. A short time later, she develops a serious disease and at the age of thirty, she ends up in a home for the insane.

2. The stepmother is the instrument which the adolescent son uses to prove his virility and to take revenge on his father. Torn with conflicting emotions such as love and hatred, pity and scorn, he feels incapable of self-realization. The stepmother is reduced to a sexual object. Her only occupation is to attract and bewitch men, including her husband. Rachid looks down on her because, at the age of fifteen, she was sold for money which her parents needed.

3. Compared to other women, Céline, the mistress, seems to be the nearest to Rachid's inner world. In spite of his pride, his doubts and suspicions, he was ready to recognize the communication and affection that bound him to her. Yet certain conflicts opposed them to each other: on the one hand, her desire to conquer his obscurity, to deliver him from his demons and to impose on his delirium a certain rationality and on the other hand, his instability and his refusal to be dominated. Céline represents the mature, westernized woman, more self-conscious, more demanding, more independent and consequently, more problematic than common Algerian women.

### Women, a physical entity

In Boudjedra's novels, women are considered only through their physique: They are flesh; they are sex; they are wombs. Their animality is emphasized. They are demanded and despised, loved and feared. Sexual relations are described as an occasion for affirming male domination.

### A psychoanalytic study

The novel is a psychoanalytic study of a classical oedipian situation. The course of events is dominated by the father, the autocratic and phallographic feudal lord, the charismatic chief of the clan, the rich and omnipotent ruler, who is considered as an ideal and model. The behavior of the son reveals childhood influences which enslave him. He tries to find in the mother a refuge, an ally against the father but she proves to be weak and inefficient. The boy turns to incestual love as a form of vengeance. Women are despised because of their insignificant social position and their helplessness in relation to male domination. Men find in women's feebleness, and in mythical beliefs and superstitions regarding femininity, a reason for justifying their tyrannical behavior. "They are voracious, they are vampires, they are malefic, they should be repressed."

### Weaknesses of the novel

1. Its autobiographic and obsessional character restricts its esthetic and creative value.  
2. It stresses the frailties and defects of women,

*(Continued on page 14)*

(1) "La Répudiation" by Rachid Boudjedra, Algerian novelist, éditions Denoel, Paris, 1969.

(2) Centre de Documentation des Sciences Humaines, (C.D.S.H.), Wahran: Document de Travail, no. 12, 1982.