



CLASSICAL AND MODERN ARABIC BED LITERATURE: THE SAUDI ARABIAN WOMAN WRITER SEBA- AL- HERZ AS A SAMPLE

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Abstract:

One of the controversial issues, whose red lines literature has crossed, is the issue of Sex, which exists in every human being between males and females. In addition, Sex exists as an abnormal relationship between males and females. The Arabic novel has entered the taboos of Sex and dealt with them from within as an adventure that is still in its beginning stages despite the numerous significant contributions that have appeared in the 20th century. The Saudi Arabian women writers broke the barriers of taboos and dealt with the problems that they confront as women in the Kingdom by employing the themes of sex, body, and other taboo issues. Some critics accused the women writers of being cheap and trying to draw attention to themselves by exploiting daring subjects in order to gain a large number of readers. Actually, the Saudi Arabian novelists have exposed new phenomena about the conservative Saudi Arabian society and broke the stereotypical image of the Saudi conservative woman.

Keywords: Sihaq, lesbianism, tribadism, homosexual, heterosexual, psychopathia sexualis.

1. Introduction

1.1 Sihaq: A Linguistic Term

Lisan al-Arab defines and explains the term from the linguistic point of view. Under the entry of "Sihaq" we read the following definition and information:

Sihaq: (Tribadism / Lesbianism): *Sahaqa*: rub together or pound strongly; *al-Sahq*: soft, smooth rubbing or pounding after pounding. Al-Azhari says: the wind *sahaqat* or *sahakat*: the wind pounded if it scraped or rubbed off the surface of the earth strongly; if you scrape something it is scraped (*insahaka*). *Al-Sahq* is the scar of the camel when it is healed and turns white. *Al-Sahq*: a worn garment. Some grammarians argue that this is a transitive that means: to keep away, e.g. "*ashaqahu Allah Ishaqan*" (May God keep him away); *Insahaqa al-rajul insihaqan* (the man is kept far away from). The Arabs gave proper names to their children like "*Musahiqa*". However, "*Ishaq*" is a foreign name ('Ajami), though its pronunciation sounds like Arabic. *Al-*

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Sihaqa and *Muasahaqa* as a term: what the women do to each other; also, the woman's beloved one is called '*Sahhaq*'.²

Homosexuality, takes place between people of the same sex: it is the 'lust' or 'desire' for someone from the same sex. In other words, the person feels psychological, emotional and instinctive attraction to people of his own sex. This term is commonly used in Western scientific books. The term *Al-Sihaq* (in Arabic) is generally translated into 'Tribadism' or 'Lesbianism'.

Sihaq / Tribadism or 'tribbing', commonly known by its 'scissors position', is a sex act in which a woman rubs her vulva against her partner for sexual stimulation, especially for ample stimulation of the clitoris.

The term *Sihaq* (in Arabic) was given to this phenomenon because the two women 'rub' and 'pound' their vulva 'genitalia' during their bodily intercourse.

The term *tribadism* is derived from the Greek word *τριβάς* (*tribas*), meaning 'a woman who practices unnatural vice with herself or with other women', which derives from the verb *τριβω* (*tribō*), 'rub'. This term was also used during the Roman times to describe any woman who sleeps with another woman for a sexual pleasure. The term has been used till the twentieth century to describe female homosexuality in general.³

1.2 *Sihaq*: A Historical Background

Sihaq is a phenomenon that preceded the people of Prophet Lot. This is confirmed in the literary works, the material objects, and the social values that have been inherited by the peoples of the region. It is confirmed too that homosexuality was not strange to societies that knew and initiated civilizations, and it was not considered an abnormal social behavior to

² Ibn Manzour, Muhammad (1990). *Lisan al-'Arab*. 10th ed. Vol. 10. Beirut: Dar Sader, pp. 152-155.

³ Homosexuality means emotional romantic and sexual attraction between people of the same sex. The term does not necessarily express the sexual behavior of the person and it is not necessary that the person should express his sexual tendencies through actual intercourse. The term 'Homosexuality' consists of the Greek 'homo' (ὁμός) which means 'same' and 'sexuality' which is derived from 'sex'. The first use of the term in a written material was in a German pamphlet in 1869. It was coined by the Austrian journalist Karl-Maria Kertbeny who expressed his attitude towards item 143 of the Prussian Law that prevented practicing homosexual intercourse. In 1879, Gustave Yager used Kertbeny's term in his book *Discovery of the Soul*. In 1886, Richard von Kraft Eping used the two terms Homosexual and Heterosexual in his book *Psychopathia Sexualis*. History tells us that many important personalities were homosexual such as: Socrates, Lord Byron, King Edward the Second. Some scholars like Michel Foucault consider that a risk. For information about Islam's attitude towards 'homosexuality' see: Abd al-Latif, Abd al-Hakim Muhammad (2003). *Jarimat al-Shuzouz al-Jinsi wa 'Uqubatuha fi al-Shari'ah al-Islamiyya wa al-Qanoun*. Naif Arab University for Security Sciences. Riyadh, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. For more information about the subject of Homosexuality; see: Adrian, Room. (1986). *A Dictionary of True Etymologies*. p: 84; Bullough (1990). *Homosexuality/ Heterosexuality: Concepts of sexual orientation*. Oxford University Press. p: 66; Khaled, El-Rouayheb (2005). *Before Homosexuality in the Arab-Islamic World, 1500-1800*. University of Chicago Press. p: 159; Feray, Jean-Claude, Manfred, Herzer (1990). "Homosexual Studies and Politics in the Nineteenth Century: Karl Maria Kertbeny" trans. By Glen W. Peppel, *Journal of Homosexuality*. 19:1.1990, pp. 34-35.; Ellis, Havelock. *Studies in the Psychology of Sex*. vol.1, p: 1-2; Habib, Samar (2012). *Female Homosexuality in the Middle East*. Routledge. p: 18; Foucault, Michel (1986). *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction*. Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group. p: 55; Wenqing, Kang (2009). *Obsession: male same-sex relations in China, 1900-1950*. Hong Kong University. Press. p 2: on: http://www.courts.ca.gov/documents/Amer_Psychological_Assn_Amicus_Curiae_Brief.pdf.; Guardi, Julanda (2014). *Female Homosexuality in Contemporary Arabic Literature*. University of Macerata.

them. On the contrary, it was accompanied by social values, literary works and events, and mythological drama that history does not deny. *The Holy Koran*, for example, deals with homosexuality in the following verse:

" *وَلَوْطًا إِذْ قَالَ لِقَوْمِهِ أَتَأْتُونَ الْفَاحِشَةَ مَا سَبَقَكُمْ بِهَا مِنْ أَحَدٍ مِنَ الْعَالَمِينَ. إِن كُمْ لَتَأْتُونَ الرِّجَالَ شَهْوَةً مِنْ دُونِ النِّسَاءِ بَلْ أَنْتُمْ قَوْمٌ مُّسْرِفُونَ* ". (We also (sent) Lot: He said to his people: "Do ye commit lewdness such as no people in creation (ever) committed before you? "For ye practice your lusts on men in preference to women: ye are indeed a people transgressing beyond bounds.)⁴

This verse was intended to Lot's people, whose story was mentioned in three texts of Abraham's religion with different details. Despite that, homosexuality did not become a phenomenon until Lot's People of Sodom and Gomorrah in Jordan accepted it. The term 'Liwat' in Arabic means 'homosexuality' and it is derived from the name of 'Lot'. The term 'Liwat' in modern Arabic still means 'sexual intercourse' between two males.⁵

The ancient Egyptian society accepted homosexuality as a culture and that is reflected in several testimonies, some of which are mythical as we see in the story of the conflict between Horus, the god of the sun, goodness and justice, and Set, the god of darkness, chaos, desert, storms and foreigners. We also have testimonies in materials or witnesses in cemeteries, papyri and monuments that belong to different ages. *Al-Sihaq* was known among ancient Egyptian women but evidence to that is very little, if not rare. Some archeologists give weight to the argument that there are scenes that show some women that embrace each other and play with female signs and symbols.

Besides, there are intimate scenes between women in the area of 'Tel Amarna'. However, it is not easy to distinguish in this art between faces of women and faces of men because the scenes contain some characters that combine male and female features simultaneously. Nist Neb Tashiro (970 B.C.) says in one of the versions of the *Book of the Dead*: "I have never had sexual intercourse with any woman in the Temple", which implies that society was tolerant and permissive with female homosexuals more than with male homosexuals. The text does not refer to prohibition of homosexuality or contempt to its negative side; it only denies practicing sexual intercourse "in the Temple", which was an arena for some popular celebrations of 'fertility' that witnessed erotic activities among men and women, especially among the Temple Mistresses.

Sihaq was also mentioned in the *Book of Dreams* that belongs to later ages. The book was taken from Carlsberg Papyrus N0. 13, which shows a woman who is blaming another one who "dreamt that she practiced sex with a married woman". Several sources refer to what the Egyptologist Casia Spakoska maintained. She argued that the text "condemned that act of conjugal

⁴ *The Holy Koran*. Surat al-A'raf, Verses 80-81.

⁵ For more information about Liwat (Homosexuality) and the story of Satan's temptation to Lot's people, see: Ben Ibrahim Ahmad al-Hamad (1994). *Al-Fahisha Inda Qawm Lot/ Lewdness among Lot's People*. 1st ed. Al-Riyadh: Dar Ibn Khuzayma, p. 86.

betrayal but did not condemn the act of Sihaq (tribadism) in general, and this implies the probability that Sihaq was accepted, to some extent, in the ancient Egyptian society."⁶

Greek history mentions that the first one who taught people about Lesbianism was the Greek poet Sappho (630-560 B.C.) from the Island of Lesbos in the Aegean Sea. The meaning of the name Sappho is "pure voice". Sappho was extremely beautiful and has artistic and poetic intelligence. She was born on a small village on the Island called Eressos. Her father died when she was nine years old. When she became fifteen, she married and had a daughter, but failed in love with her husband, who became impotent. He failed to satisfy her sexual instinct and she could not suppress her instinct, either. She resented men and turned to beautiful girls who were singing beautiful songs with her, play musical instruments and make love with her. Thus, she practiced 'tribadism' with them till she fell in love with it and became familiar with it and gave up men. At the end of her life, Sappho was involved in the problems of the Island and had to escape to Sicily, where she died and her body was burnt. Her ashes were moved to her village and buried there. Her name was immortalized by inscribing her image on vessels and coins. She left behind her a large number of poems in nine collections that include 120 thousand lines of poetry. Her poetry focused on praising tribadism and its description, and her yearning for it. She also described how she practiced it with her partner Atis. Her poetry was a propaganda for the spread of Sapphoism from Sicily to France⁷.

By the twentieth century, the term "*tribade*", which was used to refer to the woman who practiced that sex act, was supplanted by the terms *Sapphist*, *lesbian*, *invert*, and *homosexual*, as *tribade* had become too archaic to use. The terms *Sapphoism* and *Lesbianism* came into use in French and English in the seventeenth century.

Lesbianism was not limited to Greece but spread to most parts of Europe. Rome, for example, had baths that were prepared for practicing lesbianism between girls and girls in all its kinds and forms. The baths were named after names of famous females in lesbianism such as Afribta, Yasa and Turgina. It was also mentioned that some cities in the Orient such as China and India had many of "Sappho Girls".⁸

Sihaq among the Arabs was described by Abu al-Qassem Hussein bin Muhammad al-Ragheb al-Asbahani, who says that the first who practiced lesbianism were the women of Lot's people noticed that their men started having sexual relations with males and deserting females. When the females had strong sexual desire, they started rubbing their thighs against each other and found pleasure in that. Then they rubbed their buttocks and felt more pleasure. Then they

⁶ Brown, Carolyn Graves (2000). *Dancing for Hathor Women in Ancient Egypt*. Continuum Books, U.K, 2010. P. 66; Redford, Donald B. (2001). *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Ancient Egypt*, Volume.1, Article about "Erotica in Ancient Egypt" By Lise Manniche, Oxford, p. 78; Shaw, Ian & Nicolson Paul (2002). *The British Museum Dictionary of Ancient Egypt*. The American University in Cairo Press. Cairo, p. 45.

⁷ In France, there is a secret association named Sappho's Daughters who practice female homosexuality at Vesna Temple in different parts of France. It includes a lot of beautiful women. Any woman who likes to join the association in order to practice female intercourse has to pass a test by taking of her clothes in front the other members to see her beautiful parts and check the degree of her validity of arousing their lust.

⁸ Lewinson, Richard (1965). *History of Sexual Relations*. Tr. into Arabic by Amin Salameh. Dar al-Fikr. Cairo: p. 112.

rubbed the anus with the anus; the clitoris clashes with the clitoris and the vulva with the vulva and the water runs⁹ from them.

When God destroyed the men and women of Lot's people, there was no more Liwat (homosexuality and lesbianism). The first Arab woman who practiced *Sihag* was Ruqasha bint al-Hassan al-Ymaniya, who fell in love with Hind bint Amer bin Sa'sa'a, the wife of al-Nu'man Ibn al-Munder Ibn Imru's al-Qays from Lakhm tribe, who was nicknamed Abu Qabous. He was one of the most famous kings in Pre-Islam.

One day, Ruqasha bint al-Hassan al-Yamaniya came to visit Hind bint 'Amer bin Sa'sa'a, the wife of al-Nu'man bin al-Munder, King of Hira. Hind welcomed her in her palace. Hind was extremely beautiful and fresh. Ruqasha was attracted by her. Al-Nu'man used to make raids and as a result, he was absent from his wife for a long time. Thus, Hind and Ruqasha slept together on his bed. They fell in love with each other so strongly that they felt like husband and wife. The passion of each one for the other was so strong that when Ruqasha bint al-Hassan died, Hind, al-Nu'man's wife, stayed at her sweethearts grave and lived in the convent that is known by the name of Hind's Convent till she became an old blind woman.

During the Umayyad Caliphate, the desire for sexual intercourse increased and *Sihag* also intensified in the city. It is said that the story of Hubbai al-Madiniya spread everywhere. Hubbai was a lustful woman who lived during the rule of Marwan bin al-Hakam. Hubbai taught the women of the city the 'art of love' and therefore, they called her "Hawa'/ Eve". Hubbai was frequently marrying till the end of her life. She was an example of the woman who has strong sexual lust. The proverb says: "Aglam min Hubbai" (*More lustful than Hubbai!*). Hubbai approached the women of the city and said: "I was told that you developed something called 'Sihag' by which you do away with men." They replied: "This is not our intention, but it is better than pregnancy, which causes a scandal". One of them said:

وصرت إلى السحق خوف الحبل شربت النبيذ لحب الغزل
I drank wine for love of flirtation and chose Sihag for fear of pregnancy

During the Abbasid period, which is called by some researchers in the history of sexuality among the Arabs, as "The Age of Sex". In that period, some people called for 'sexual intercourse' between men (Liwat). Similarly, a new group of women called for *Sihag*. In fact, a strong battle took place between 'Sexual Intercourse' and *Sihag*'. Some women were starting with sexual intercourse' and soon move to *Sihag*. Others left *Sihag* and moved to 'Sexual Intercourse'. Generally, what exists in *Sihag* also exists in sexual intercourse: a female lover and a female beloved. Each one works on her beauty and charm so that she would become appetizing and acceptable.¹⁰

⁹ 'Al-Hun' (in Arabic) is one of the Six Nouns (in Arabic Grammar). The term is used to refer to the woman's sexual organ (farj /vagina). For more information, see: *al-Mu'jam al-Wasit* (2011). 5th ed. Cairo: Maktabat al-Shuruq al-Dawliyya, p. 1040.

¹⁰Al-Assfahani, al-Hussein bin Muhammad (2006). *Muhadherat al-'Udaba' wa Muhawar al-Shu'ara' wa al-Bulagha'*. Beirut: Dar Sader, p. 111.

There is no book about Sex that does not talk about Sihaq. For example, the book *Nuzhat al-Ashab fi Mu'asharat al-Ahbab* by al-Samaw'al bin Yahya bin Abbas al-Maghrebi, devoted Chapter Six to talk about the reason why some people divert the course of sex from its natural course. He also dealt with the reason why some intelligent and wise people prefer the 'youth' to the 'female salve, and the reason why some women prefer Suhq'.¹¹

The book of *Nuzhat al-Albab fi ma la Yujad fi Kitab* by Ahmda bi Yusuf al-Tifashi al-Maghrebi devotes a whole chapter to the subject of Sihaq, called: "*Fi Adab al-Musahaqat wa Nawader Akhbarihin wa Mulah Ash'arihin*"¹². In the book of *Rujou' al-Shaikh ila Sibah*, which was translated by Ibn Kamal Pasha at the request of the Ottoman Sultan Salim the First, there is a chapter with the title of "*al-A'dwiya al-Lati Tutib al-Suhq ila al-Nisa' Hatta Yashtafina bihi 'an Jami' ma Hunna Fihi, wa Ya'khudhna A'layhi al-Hayaman wa al-Junun*".¹³ Writing on sexual subjects flourished in a strange way and became a social necessity. In addition to writing, illustration of pictures and colors were added to the various positions and poses.

It is said that the physician Ibn Masawayhi said: "*I read in the classical books that Sihaq is created when the feeding mother eats celery, watercress, and sweet clover. If she eats a lot and breast-feed the baby, she passes that to the labia of the baby girl, where itching takes place, and the remedy of this sickness is prostitution.*"

They also put down rules and types for Sexual Intercourse and Sihaq. Women classified types of Sihaq as "dafda'i/ like a frog, shira'i/ like a sail, mukhalef/opposite, mu'alef/similar, and istiklab/like a dog, etc. Besides, they put manners for Sihaq in which they described how the two lesbians (Sihaqiyatan) should be. These manners were followed strictly in rich aristocratic classes more than in working lower classes. In low classes, the practices are sometimes banal and hackneyed.

Lesbianism is based on 'al-Zurf/Cutism' and therefore, lesbians call themselves by that name (al-Zurf = the Cute). If we say that someone is 'Zarifa', we mean that she is a 'Sahiqa/Lesbian'. Lesbians fall in love with each other as a man falls in love with a woman, and even more. One of the two is likely to love the other so strongly that she might spend on her partner more as a man spends on his sweetheart and even more. It is said that Ahmad bin Yusuf al-Tifashi, writer of the book *Nuzhat al-Albab*, described an event of 'lesbianism' which he observed by himself saying: "*I observed a lesbian woman who had a lot of money and property. She spent on her beloved one all her gold and silver. When she spent everything and people blamed her a lot, she gave her all her property, which was about five thousand dinars. Lesbians used to put a lot of perfume on their body and hair and take care to wear clean clothes and use the best kinds of food and vessels, and wear the most beautiful available things. Their main position of practicing love was that the lover should be over the beloved, unless the lover is slim and the beloved is fat. In this case, the fat should be over the thin one so that the weight of her side will be more efficient in rubbing. Something is a must in their intercourse is that they should be skilled in coquetry, the quality of breathing and snoring and be perfect*

¹¹ al-Maghrebi, al-Samaw'al bin Yahya bin Abbas (2008). *Nuzhat al-Ashab fi Mu'asharat al-Ahbab*. Ed. By Sayyed Kisrawi Hassan. 1st ed. Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-'Ilmiya.

¹² al-Tifashi al-Maghrebi, Shihab al-Din Ahmad (1992). *Nuzhat al-Albab fima la Yujad fi Kitab*. Ed. By Jamal Jum'ah. London, Cyprus: Riyadh al-Rayyes li al-Kutb wa al-Nashr.

¹³ Ahmad bin Suleiman – Ibn Kamal Pasha. (1891). *Ruju' al-Shaikh ila Sibah fi al-Quwa 'ala al-Bah*. Egypt.

in the art of sweet talking that arouses lust during the intercourse. They used to express that, teach it to each other, learn it from one another, and offer gifts to those who are proficient at it so that they would teach it to those who do not know how to practice it well".¹⁴

2. The Novel *al-Akharun/ The Others*¹⁵ as a Sample

The French writer, Louise Colet, Gustave Flaubert wrote a letter to his mistress saying: "*It seems that the highest and most difficult thing in art is not that it makes us laugh or cry, not that it arouses desire or anger in us ... but that it makes us dream; the beautiful actions really do that*".¹⁶ Here, we do not exaggerate if we say that the novel *al-Akharun/ The Others* cannot arouse dreams – as Gustave demanded in his description of beautiful works in the reader's soul, but it arouses desire and anger, as if it were written for this sake. What Seba al-Herz describes in her novel is nothing but deep penetration in great freedom and deep daring in the narrative fields between the themes of time-mines in the Arab societies that are perfect at keeping the culture of silence.

A number of Arab writers have dealt with the themes of sex and its deviation and its various rites in a lot of their creative works, which put the remote prohibited aspect of sex at the focal point of the lens of literature, and showed its negative motivations that lie behind it and its different results.¹⁷

The novel Al-Akharun/ The Others, is one of the feminist Saudi Arabian novels that highlights the cares of the woman and her sufferings in male-dominated societies and seeks to demolish the past ready-made stereotypical thought, to destroy the stereotypical image of the woman, and premeditated attempt to reveal the hidden in our social life. This novel is classified under the category of 'feminist erotic novel' as it is characterized by its daring eroticism that aspires to glorify the female body. The writer makes the female body the focus on which the narrative is based. She celebrates the body and is engaged in drawing its details and hidden aspects and openly announces its desires, inclinations and whims.

Therefore, the narration centers on sexual practices and love relations, including homosexual relations. The body in the feminist novel is no longer a stereotypical work about the body that the man weaves and sings for. Besides, sex is no more a 'shame' or a clear 'sin'

¹⁴ Al-Munajjid, Salah al-Din (1975). *Al-Haya al-Jinsiyya inda al-'Arab min al-Jahiliyya ila Awakher al-Qarn al-Rabi' al-Hijri. Dar al-Kitab al-Jadid*, p. 98.

¹⁵ Al-Herz, Seba (2006). *Al-Akharun / The Others*. 1st ed., Beirut: Dar al-Saqi. (The name, Seba al-Herz, is a pseudonym for a Saudi Arabian young lady. She got this name as a symbolical penname. From her wonderful novel, we understand that she is a distinguished intelligent gifted young lady. She threw aside all the worn inherited traditions of religious practices, sexual relations, and even politics. She frankly revealed what strange practices that happen behind closed doors in a society that is considered strict and conservative that has no tolerance with anyone or anything that is connected to the woman and her body. The Saudi society is dominated by 100% male culture.

¹⁶ Michel, Winock. (2016). *Flaubert*. Translated by Nicholas Elliott. London: Harvard University Press. P. 94.

¹⁷ For example, the novels: *al-Khubz al-Hafi* by Muhammad Shukri, *Ra'ihat al-Saboun* by Rashid Boujadra, *Rihlat Ghandi al-Saghir* by Elias Houry, *al-Su'al* by Ghaled Halsa, *Tawahin Beirut* by Tawfiq Yusuf Awad, and *Harouda* by Taher Jalloun, etc.,... However, Hanan al-Sheikh's novel *Misk al-Ghazal* differs from the previous novels in that it entered another world of 'sex' by dealing with the subject of female homosexuality (Sihaq) between two women and the problematics of questions about the text that contributes to revealing the bitter reality of society.

that is controlled by moral restrictions and, in this way, the taboo of sex fell from the prohibited trinity in the feminist erotic novel and became an ordinary matter.

The Saudi writer Seba al-Herz raises themes that have literary daring. For example, she talks about the theme of 'Sihaq/Lesbianism' without relying on crude writing. The novel of this study opens closed worlds that are forbidden because it deals with spots that constitute the points of pain in the soul of the suppressed and scared person. This 'mask' writing seems to be intended to conceal the pornographic features of the novel, because this writing indicates that we are in front of a novelistic writing project that defends the right of the poor to seize the justifications of their existence that are threatened by the authority of the despotic wealthy authority. However, this proposition does not fully correspond with the direct sensual pornographic sections that the novel describes in elaboration and seem to be the target of the work originally and the novel leans on this targeting.

This study does not intend to justify the writer's style, but since al-Herz dared to deal with the theme of Lesbianism, I wish she had left a broad space for the heroine as much as she could to express herself in a deeper way about her psychological problem, for instance. However, al-Herz's style can be explained by pointing out that she is connected to conservative societies in the Gulf, but, as a rebellious writer, the moment of writing should impose on her the power to get rid of cultural conditions of her environment and be more loyal to the mission of her writing.

The Writer employs the first person singular narrator, which is an autobiographical technique. In spite of that, we cannot say that the novel is autobiographical because we do not know anything about its writer. Consequently, any approach that is based on the basis of connection between the writer and her heroine might seem, in my view, impossible. Because the female narrator is a Shiite young lady, the reader might wonder if her education is compatible with her age, which also makes the reader wonder and ask the following questions: How much of the narration is made by the narrator and how much is projected by the writer on her narrator/ heroine? Does everything that the narrator says belong to her or belong also to the writer, especially its linguistic and philosophical aspects?

Probably, what makes the reader believe that the words are the heroine's words and not the writer's ones are that the heroine is a university student and has some writing attempts. Actually, she takes part in issuing a magazine, and consequently, it is no wonder that she probably has read about Jean Paul Sartre, Milan Kundera, Patrick Suskind and other writers who have become well-known to the Arab readers.

The questions that rise are: "Who are the 'Others'? Why did the publisher choose the word 'Akharun/ Others' to be printed in 'red' while the name of the author on the cover is in 'black'? Here, it is worthwhile remembering Sartre's statement which says: 'The Others are Hell!' The 'Others' for the heroine are 'Hell', too. She drifted into Sihaq after her companions at the party raped her during the war, and persuaded her that having sex with a member of the party is a part of their struggle and freedom: *"In the course of time, the 'ground floors' of my body were turning into a place of human garbage. When the others become dwelling rotten corpses in me, they refuse to leave and leave me in peace. At night, the situation becomes unbearable; there are screams, noise, accumulation and redefining of the borders of the authority of each one on his private place in my*

space".¹⁸ We also read: "*The Others are always the others; they are my first care and cause of fear; I do not want anyone to touch me, no one,*"¹⁹ except Omar.

She is satisfied with him and with her relationship with him. She starts with him and gives herself to him, as if he were the exception that confirms the rule: "*I love you Omar. I love you a lot. By God of the Heavens I love you... This condition has never happened to me. I have never said it as a girl who is willing to love, a girl who has trust in a man and is amazed by his manliness...*"²⁰ The questions might return after the reader has finished reading the novel.

The 'Others' for the narrator/ heroine are all like that, which confirms Sartre's statement: 'The Others are Hell'. The employment of this statement to introduce the novel is successfully made. Besides, the writer's adoption of this 'statement' is not arbitrarily made. What the 'Others' have made to the narrator has made her a deformed creature who cannot live a normal life. She has become an abnormal sexual person who lives a life that he is not satisfied with.

Critic Alya Shu'aib maintains that this cruelty against the woman made the woman denounce men's guardianship to her. She sees in them the people who steal her body and her freedom. Therefore, she spits them out of her life and moves to live in a more comfortable and pleasant world, which is the world of women. She sees that there are several axes that push the normal woman to the world of lesbianism such as: violence, sexual harassment and rape. She also refers to the existence of emotional or sexual deprivation that is hidden at the bottom of these women towards the woman and not to the man. She says that the woman hates the man because he has become a model of harm and pain. For her, the woman-partner becomes the human and emotional substitute with whom she communicates, loves, and has sexual intercourse.²¹

On reading the first pages of the novel, we might also wonder: Why does she use the word 'Others' to refer to 'men' and not to 'women', especially that this relationship is dominated by the female homosexual nature? Soon the reader discovers that the female narrator's relationships are not limited to women; she also has relationships with males. The word 'Others' includes males and females.

The novel deals mainly with the world of female homosexuality and the life of lesbians in the Saudi society. It is a social phenomenon that is common in all the Arab countries from the Atlantic to the Gulf though at different rates between these countries.²²

¹⁸ Al-Herz (2006), *al-Akharun*, p. 5-6.

¹⁹ Ibid. p. 40.

²⁰ Ibid., p.281.

²¹ Shu'aib, Alya (2001). *Kalam al-Jasad: Dirasa Akhlaqiyya*. Kuwait: Dar Alya li al-Nashr, p. 59.

²² The subject is not new to the Arabic novel, as the homosexual character was present in some of the Arabic novels as a minor secondary character as we see in '*Amarat Ya'qubian* by 'Alaa al-Uswani, *La Sakakin fi Matabihk Hazih al-Madina*, by Khaled Khalifa and *Limbo Beirut*, by Hilal Shouman. It was also present in other novels as a main major character, but without talking about it and its suffering in detail as we see in *Hajar al-Dhihk* by Huda Barakat. Besides there was no sympathy with it. In one case, there was a lot of exaggeration by the writer to deny the accusation that was directed at him of being a homosexual as we see in the novel of *Azizi al-Sayyed Kawabata* by Rashid al-Dha'if.

The focus of the novel is on some Saudi young women in the region of Qatif, who, in their majority, live in extreme condition of cruelty in a strict conservative frozen society that considers the woman from the top of her head to the bottom of her foot as an 'awra' (a defect or a blemish).

In my opinion, the complaint of the writer Seba al-Herz and her courage in her confrontation with the prohibitions and breaking of the 'taboos' lie behind the success of the novel and its popularity. Though the subject of the novel is not new in Arabic literature, *al-Akharun/ the Others* is distinctive in that it is written specifically to talk about the lesbian character and not about anything else. The main purpose is to highlight the details of this character, her sufferings, her dreams and her breakdowns and the manner of her mutual interaction with her environment.

The writer points out the intimate relationship between the two main characters: the narrator, whose name is not mentioned, and 'Dhai', who rapes her. The writer says that her heroine, whose name is not given, is a lesbian young girl who studies at al-Dammam College and belongs to the Shiite faith. She practices writing and gives social services in religious magazines at Hussayniyyat, which are congregation halls for Shi'i commemoration ceremonies of giving condolences. She sometimes has fits of epilepsy: "*every night, my last call before I close my eyes was that my secret will not be revealed, and I will not go under the gallows of 'pity'. I have never felt ashamed of my fit of epilepsy. My sickness constituted a horrible defect in comparison with my physical perfection, but it is a probable human defect; now I feel ashamed of my saliva leaking from the side of my lip... I do not understand how the details of my fit can be a personal shame exactly as the woman who feels ashamed when her underwear is dirtied by the blood of her monthly menstrual cycle.*"²³

The narrator also describes the lesbian relationships between the heroine and her friends in minute details and hidden points with all their sincere feelings, intimate true agitated emotions and the pleasure and ecstasy that they have during the actual practice. She also describes the conflicting thoughts in the self at the same time between the physical sexual desires and the religious thoughts, prohibitions and taboos.

However, the writer shows the heroine's feelings of repent and regret for having these practices: "*I was not surprised at seeing the traces that stain her. Often, Dhai was trying to arouse my anger either at her or my jealousy of her, by displaying short scenes of stormy physical meetings between her and her companions... I am sure she was mixing some lies with some true things, but I clearly noticed the truth of her multi-relations... I requested her: Be for me only! She replied after a long time, so long that I doubted if she heard what I said or if she wanted to reply to it: but I can't.*"²⁴

Besides the university campus at al-Dammam college, al-Hussayniyya became a place of meeting and finding acquaintances. It was the most convenient place for making dates, having frank speeches, and making revelations between the young girls freely and without any obstacles by anyone. The girls could exchange desires, words of love, admiration and infatuation, and agree on intimate meetings, which usually take place inside their closed bedrooms in their private dwelling places, where they used to sleep together on one double bed like a husband and wife with their bodies completely naked. In those situations, they could

²³ Al-Herz (2006), *al-Akharun*, p. 93-95.

²⁴ Ibid. p. 83.

leave their dreams and imagination by directing their fingers to play with their bodies at all sensitive places and directions mutually. They would start with a hot intimate kiss on the lips, and then the kiss moves to the lower parts of the body including the neck and the breasts, and then they would move lower than that to the thighs and the sexual organs between them. To achieve this, they would use all the available facilities through communications by mobiles and through the Internet and the university means of communication which are used to transport the students from and to the University.

Though the writer does not give a specific name to the heroine, we notice that the narrator takes the role of heroin and narrates the events. Consequently, a conflict arises in herself between the beauty of her body and its urgent and exciting physiological needs, on the one hand, and the traditions of her society on the other. The conflict takes place in her mind and thoughts and the strict closed religious thoughts and their taboos and prohibitions, which are subject to the rule of 'allowed' or 'prohibited'. This rule does not give the Saudi woman the lowest of her human rights. The heroine in this case feels confused how to coordinate between her physical and sexual needs that occupy her mind day and night, but cannot satisfy herself, and the traditions of her very strict society, which are wrapped with rules of 'allowed' and 'not allowed'. Actually, there is no window or even an opening to free the overwhelming sexual agitation that overcomes the young girl at certain periods in her natural development in the shadow of this total prohibition of the human rights. Suppression and deprivation have reached their extreme ends and it is impossible to control the woman's physical and psychological needs and evacuate them in logical and subjective and legitimate and not abnormal ways: *"Though I participated in organizing successful programs in the activities at the end of Ramadan, I did not feel that I submitted suitable apology to God nor to myself. I remained drowned in shyness and a feeling that my guilt is dripping from my limbs. I understood in advance that I did that under the motivation of temporary consumption so that I would not meet myself and have conflict with myself".*²⁵

It is clear that the heroine falls under the control of Dhai, who is one of her intimate friends, and with whom she has lesbian practices continually- once in the room of the heroine at her house, and once in Dhai's private room at the house she lives in. Dhai was playing the role of the 'lover' and the heroine was playing the role of the 'beloved'. They could not give up each other since their first meeting at al-Hussayniya after her relationship with Balqis stopped. *"The speech kept silent, Balqis's madness remained with me; her desire to me dried gradually and then died completely... I met you and loved you. I loved you since our first handshake at al-Hussayniya...I have been closing my eyes on you and open them on you... I loved you and you made me forget Balqis and my pain... I loved you more."*²⁶

In a conversation between Dhai and the heroine, we read Dhai's words while she was suffering from strong jealousy about her beloved one (the heroine): *"Do you know I will kill you if you betray me? Did anyone precede me to your body? Answer me? ...There was no one there. Are you happy?"*²⁷ In a long dialogue with herself while she was imagining the heroine, Dhai says: *"Now,*

²⁵ Ibid., p. 15-16.

²⁶ Ibid. p. 146-148.

²⁷ Ibid. p. 49-51.

*and as you are my own possession, I now know that birthmark beside your left breast; I can now touch that red nipple, and kiss that red nipple, and lick that red nipple, and sleep on that red nipple, and after that, I fear that you might get tired of me and leave me."*²⁸

The heroine says about her beloved, Dhai: *"I know now, from the blue color of her cotton shirt, that she is calm, and from her braided hair, that she is cheerful, and from the movement of her fingers on the stitches of my jeans pants, that she is probing a way towards me, and I had to precede her before she arrives there. I unbuttoned one button and left the rest of the mission for Dhai, and what really seemed to take endless time, has already happened, surprising my attention. My flagrant nakedness pushes me to an unprecedented ecstasy, an ecstasy to see myself desired and free of the laws of my body itself"*.²⁹

It is worthwhile mentioning that *"the social studies establish the concept of sharing in lesbian relationship. What encourages and eases the lesbian relationship, as some lesbians believe, is all the positive feminine and aesthetic details psychologically. The woman plays the other woman during the lesbian relationship without occupying her or possessing her as it happens in her relationship with the man. In the lesbian relationship, both bodies remain safe and independent in their overwhelming and overflowing feeling of security and safety due to absence of the probability of losing one's virginity and pregnancy."*³⁰

However, Abd al-A'tti Kiwan's point of view says that the woman's writing is a prostitution-writing. Kiwan does not see any connection between the woman's writing and the world of literature and says: *"the creator here is a woman who writes about herself, about her meeting with the other, about her lust and deprivation, about sexual intercourse and its color; it is a woman who adopts the role of a prostitute or a prostitute who adopts the role of a writer; she interrogates the body and uncovers its vocabulary in a special language"*.³¹ In Evelyn Accad's opinion, these opinions that attack the woman's writing result from the men's fear of women, especially of the woman's sexual activity, and therefore, men resort to the exclusion of the woman and her persecution.³²

This novel observes sadistic relationships such as the one between Dhai and the heroine of the novel: *"I was under her with my two hands tied to the bed post, unable to move the wrist of my left hand... I was afraid to open my eyes... I pulled something from her dresser and blindfolded my eyes... Then she surrounded me with her legs... she was tearing my clothes randomly... I was naked, and she was uncovering me, searching in my body about another smell...; then like someone who has suddenly woken up to see himself walking while he is asleep...then she stood up all of a sudden... she untied my hands and took off my eye band."*³³

Balqis, too, says this about her relationship with the heroine: *"at a critical moment of my lust, she asked me to slap her. I refused; she raised her hand angrily and slapped me...that was the*

²⁸ Ibid. p. 149.

²⁹ Ibid. p. 7.

³⁰ Shu'aib, Alya (2001). *Kalam al-Jasad: Dirasa Akhlaqiyya*, p. 27.

³¹ Abd al-'Atti, Kiwan (2003). *Adab al-Jasad bayn al-Fan wa al-Isfah – Dirasa fi al-Sard al-Nisa'i*. Cairo: Markiz al-Hadhara al-'Arabiyya, p. 57.

³² Evelyn, Accad (1990). *Sexuality and War: Literary Masks of Middle East*. New York University Press. P. 19.

³³ Al-Herz, Seba (2006). *Al-Akharun*, p. 155-157.

desperate beginning. People are addicted to drugs and alcohol... and I got addicted to Balqis's body; in fact, I got addicted to what she was doing to me... I was under her a slave and a goddess".³⁴

In addition, the heroine makes a relationship with her friend Darin because she likes to make variation in her relationships. She describes a certain situation with her in one of her intimate meetings. She says: *"She drew me with my hand to a door that opens onto a small hall in the kitchen and slammed the door behind us. We rushed into a feverish kiss; our hands were moving loosely; our breaths were heaving; I kissed her and kissed her; then I went down to her neck, her chest, her protruding breasts; I was so mad that I doubted who of us asked for the kiss and who granted it; she was obedient and fragile and responds to my madness in a way that smashed my nerves; it was so delicious that I did not raise my lips from hers till she consumed all my store of air, and I was saying intoxicatingly: "Damn you! You drove me crazy!" She laughed and her smile stung me; it pumped in my blood a great desire, with more craziness"³⁵*

The heroine feels the difference between Darin and Dhai. She says:

*"With Darin, I felt that I possess sufficient safety that makes me put my heart on the table beside us, without fear that she will steal it when I am not paying attention to her, not because she could not, nor because she did not want, but because she was aware from the beginning that I was a losing mare in this field, and she saved me the effort of betting on me. With her, I started discovering my body again; she was tempting me slowly; she lighted two candles and whispered to me about scandals that made my body tremble; she was always neutral, if I wanted to involve her as a third party, between me and my body. With her, my body parts have different names, including the secret ones. Our seconds had special expressions, and I discovered that what I considered cheap obscenity that does not suit Darin and her great kindness, is a kind of dirty obscene excitement. Who said that obscenity does not arouse a feeling of elation? Our physical relation was "sex" and not what I used to call by hinting it as "that thing"! "³⁶ She says: *I craved in her for a man who will not come. In return, Darin wished to be that waited for man who would suddenly appear!"**

In his book (2011), critic Abdalla Ibrahim believes the concept of 'sharing' or 'participation' in the lesbian relations versus male superiority that the woman feels in her practice of sexual intercourse with the man. He says: regarding the relationship with the man, it has another feature because the male empties the female of all her feminine energy through his virile dispossession that is based on the idea of 'victory' and 'domination', while female homosexuality is based on the foundation of 'partnership' that is based on the idea of unlimited mutual 'giving' between similar bodies, and there is no monopolization in it because the idea of mutual satisfaction is the motive for the relationship between the lesbians.³⁷

³⁴ Ibid. p. 145-146.

³⁵ Ibid. p. 137.

³⁶ Ibid. p. 178.

³⁷ Ibrahim, Abd Allah (2011). *Al-Sard al-Niswi: al-Thaqafa al-Abawiyya, al-Hawiyya al-'Unthawiyya wa al-Jasad*. Beirut li al-Dirasat wa al-Nashr. P. 131.

This is emphasized by the novel at a different place, where we read about the admission of the inevitability and necessity of keeping away from the man: "*We, women, commit the same mistake since the beginning of life. We abridge all our life in the man, who stamped his name on us; we leave our parents, friendships, certificates of our studies, our dreams and our small and trivial things and engage in worship in the praying niche of a man. In turn, he does not do much. He keeps the motion of his circles and their momentum. They expand more and more and we stay merely a point within that crowdedness. That is really an exaggerated simplicity.*"³⁸

Though the heroine chooses the natural track, and feels satisfied with it, feels disgusted about the deviation and abnormality of the homosexual relationship of a female with a female, feels comfortable with the natural relationship between a female and a male despite its illegitimacy, she falls, through the internet in a love-relationship with 'Omar', who differs from her in his religious faith. From his name, we conclude that he is a Sunni young man but they come closer physically in a moment of sexual craving desire.

The novel ends with twenty-third and twenty-fourth sections. The relationship in twenty-third is deviational: "*Don't you want to hug me? I want. She inserted her hand under my shirt. Why do you torture me? Kiss me before the cigarettes spoil the taste of your mouth. She kissed me and our kiss was extinguished quickly*".³⁹ It was natural in section twenty-four: "*Omar, kiss me now! Why now? I will not ask for it another time. Are you sure? Let us say that if you do not kiss me in three seconds, I will take the kiss by myself.*"⁴⁰

She replies: "*Omar, take me, take all of me, and he took me, took me, not as Dhair took me in all our fighting in bed, neither in that light way that Darin exerted on me, nor in that fear and disgrace of a high heel on my body for years. From time to time, as a result of excess of lust or love, I was about to say: "Do something so that you will not stay outside me. Don't steal your babies from me!"*"⁴¹ The heroine continues her description and says: "*It is strange that I do not miss our bodily action and do not feel that my body yearns to what used to be; what I specifically miss is those little small details that do not draw attention within the intertwinement of the image and its mess. My fingers are on the dimples on her cheeks... her sadness, her gloomy face when she is sad. We missed ourselves asleep, I on my back, and she on her abdomen. Each of us looking at the other; the world is disappearing and empty except of us. I miss her voice, the hoarseness of her voice when she wakes up. I miss her playing with the sleeve of my shirt, when she talked, and I miss her forefinger in my mouth.*"⁴²

In the previous description, we notice the writer's distinctive ability to describe the 'external' and 'internal' scenes, which look wide lively and suggestive paintings in the *first*, but in the *second*, she dives deep in the soul and sometimes in the body. In fact, there an attempt and concentration on redrawing the psychological elements in different images that the writer might feel, despite their quality, they are above his ability to enjoy their good aspects as many images push one another to convey what might sometimes be one condition.

³⁸ Al-Herz, Seba (2006). *Al-Akharun*, p. 53-54.

³⁹ Ibid. p. 261-263.

⁴⁰ Ibid. p. 274-275.

⁴¹ Ibid. p. 284.

⁴² Ibid. p. 160.

I think that the writer Seba al-Herz adopts the method of realistic narration in her novel *al-Akharun/ The Others*. It is a serious novel that is written with an unprecedented artistic and historical awareness in the Saudi novel. She lets her tongue be free and she does not fear the scissors of the censor who is still exerting his authority and domination on the critical mind that cuts the writer's tongue and eradicates it and probably cuts the hands if he is not satisfied with cutting the speech or the words. *The Others* moves on one rail without diverting from it in its recollection of the causes of this relationship and its end. It is like a long novel that is void of foliage and furnishing of other narrative branches. Then, she is satisfied with dominance of Sihaq/ Lesbianism being a taboo area in the novel, but without elaboration from within or deconstructing its organic elements, which makes al-Herz seem to be interested more in revealing a certain social class from the perspective of class condemnation than in the fates of her characters and their circumstances that led them to the bottom. Therefore, we can confidently say that *al-Akharun/ The Others* constitutes one of the pioneering works that deal basically with the subject of female homosexual relationships among women.

In my view, the novel *Al-Akharun* belongs to "the Damned Literature" which is dominated by conditions of psychological confusion, masochistic relations and tragic features that lie behind the deceptive appearances whose suspicious truth is well-understood by girls. However, the writer/ heroine does not give up for a second the art of fiction and its data and dimensions, which confirms that the unknown writer, Seba al-Herz possesses a great talent and deep cultural knowledge. As a narrator, she enters the depths of the characters and digs in her unconscious individual and collective unconsciousness and draws relationships cleverly.

Besides, the writer/ heroine has a lot of knowledge about the Internet culture and modern cinematic musical and literary culture, but she remains a negative character that is close to the 'existential' model who feels of nausea and disgust like Sartre's characters, and dreams about changing the world but realizes her inability to do that. When she finds herself alone, she tries to reprimand herself, not only for following a sick and corrupt life, but in order to torture herself and take revenge on her innocence that had gone away with no return.

Al-Akharun is a tragic novel that has little irony and it draws a dark gloomy life that is established on the margin of life. Though the presence of the man seems to be slight and is limited to two names, the heroine's brother, Hassan, is strongly present through his absence. His ghost does not leave the imagination of the sick sister or her memory, though he has been dead for years.

In addition to the above, the novel constitutes a 'sample' of search for a future that opens onto all the possibilities of the Arab women writers. In this context, it is important that we realize the new reality of all women writers in the Saudi Arabia Kingdom. We should also realize that this reality is represented in the obvious exit of the woman's writing from her traditional types, and it is no more possible to put her back into the bottle in which she was living. The novel of *al-Akharun/ The Others* confirms the truth of statement of researcher Fawziya Abu Khaled that foresees the emergence of a Saudi feminist trend that will aspire to open the isolation of the Saudi woman through creation of a 'feminist empire' versus 'man's

empire'. She also believes that the Saudi woman is on the way to overcome all the obstacles that are imposed on her humanity."⁴³

3. Summary

It is noticed that in the recent decades, literature of the Bed, including lesbianism, is spreading in the Arab library in an intensive way. It can be considered a sign of the dominance of the Neo-liberal thoughts on the Arab socio-linguistic awareness in the current period. The main issue in this literature is not its distinction in its narration or daring description of normal or abnormal sexual intercourse, nor in its description of sexual practice as an expression of social culture and relations, but in its definition of the concept of 'freedom' as an issue of personal freedom, first and foremost.

The man's interest as a male in Saudi Arabian novels during the last decade has entrapped the Saudi Arabian women writers and this interest has probably harmed their experience in novel-writing. It has made some Saudi Arabian women writers think that it is easy to write novels that depend on revealing the hidden at the expense of artistic aesthetics and narrative form and structure of the novel. We see that in several works of women writers, including Raja' al-Sani', who wrote *Banat al-Ryadh* in a daring simplification and without paying enough attention to the artistic aesthetics or the narrative structure of her novel. However, in her novel *al-Akharun/ The Others*, Seba al-Herz, managed to avoid the idea of deeming writing as easy, though she introduced an extremely sensitive subject and daring indicative issues that people keep silent about. Her novel is well-built in both form and content. In my opinion, the man's interest stems from two sources: *first*, the man/ male sees in himself the sponsor of this project as he offers his male care that is able to contain the feminist rebellion and flare; *second*, the man often reads the woman's writing with a stereotypical viewpoint about the women's writings that is imposed by the male vision. Actually, he enters the text to look for the female and not the creative woman who competes with him in their creative existence.

The main point here is that, in her writing about lesbianism, the woman expresses her objection, resistance, and refusal to the man, and that motivates her to create alternative women characters that interact with each other in the sexual game, confirming that she does not need the man anymore.

The novel of *al-Akharun* conveys the truth about what goes on in the closed religiously strict societies and the degree of the negative impact of that strictness on the abnormal deviational practices. The style of novelist Seba al-Herz is characterized by frankness, daring and courage. Her style is also interesting, enjoyable, smooth and simple but inimitable.

The novel of *al-Akarun* is considered one of the most exciting works in the Arab society in general and the Gulf-Saudi society in particular due to the deep and severe criticism that it contains and introduced in total daring, openness, and bravery.

In my view, the novel of *al-Akharun* justifies the right of the writer to be present in the Saudi literary scene. She possesses all the secrets of novelistic writing and its keys. There is no

⁴³ Selim, Miriam (2004). *Al-Mar'ah al-'Arabiyya bayn Rhiqal al-Waqi' wa Tatallu'at al-Taharur*. Beirut: Markiz Dirasat al-Wahda al-'Arabiyya, p. 214-220.

doubt that the writer Seba al-Herz is very lucky or, maybe, she is very brave, and because of her anger, she turned her revelation into a loud cry whose echo reached beyond the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and started to be repeated in all the parts of the Arab countries.

The Saudi writer, Seba al-Herz novel is a call for the end of suppression and terror that is practiced on the individual social and intellectual liberties in general and on women in particular.

To sum up, I believe that the novel of *al-Akharun*, will remain a source of controversy and debate and it will cause a lot of ink to flow more than other novels like Banat al-Riyadh thanks to her courage, first, and its deep treatment of a problem that is considered one of the most difficult, ambiguous and sophisticated problems.

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