



DOI: 10.1515/rjes-2018-0009

THE SADOMASOCHISM IN AWWAD'S LIFE AND WRITING: THE FIRST WORLD WAR TRAUMA

LATTEE WISAM

West University of Timișoara

Abstract: *The paper focuses on the Sado-masochism of the Lebanese novelist, poet and diplomat Tawfiq Yusuf Awwad, due to the horrible childhood which has shaped his character. When the First World War broke out he was three years old, and when the terrible famine killed two-thirds of the people of Mount Lebanon in 1916 he witnessed these scenes of death, I attempt to investigate how such scenes affected on his life and depicted in his early writings.*

Keywords: *Childhood, Famine, Masochism, Sadism, the First World War*

1. Introduction

Tawfiq Yusuf Awwad was born in the village of Bharsaf in the Matn district of Mount Lebanon, on 8 November 1911, the second of seven children. His early childhood was spent under the Ottoman occupation of Lebanon and although his own family was fairly comfortably off, he witnessed the catastrophic effects of the famine in Mount Lebanon during the later years of the first world war- and experience that was to leave a lasting impression on him and which is reflected in particular in his early writings.

It was with the full-length novel *Al-Raghif* (The Loaf 1939) that Awwad was to consolidate his reputation; it was an immediate success and was quickly recognized as a landmark in the literary expression of Arab nationalism. It was inspired by the Arab resistance to the Turks during the First World War. This period had proved a particularly difficult one for the Lebanese, who had been subject to oppressive measures from the Ottoman authorities under the military governor Jamal Pasha, and who had suffered a disastrous famine in which up to one fifth of the population of Mount Lebanon, mainly Christian.

2. The Impact of War

Awwad's horrible childhood has shaped his character. He was born in 1911. When the First World War broke out he was three years old, and when the terrible famine killed two-thirds of the people of Mount Lebanon in 1916 he witnessed scenes of death, as hungry people ate cats, dogs, horses, and donkeys. He states: "I have seen with my own eyes dozens of hungry people on the roads, and canals, they swell then die, including my peers who I was playing with, I came after days looking for them in their homes I found them grim corpses on the thresholds". (*My Transl.* Awwad 1987:690). A child needs tranquility and security to grow up in a healthy way, if he/she is shocked by scenes of death, especially if they involve his peers, his/ her development may be affected and

the child might tend to react to this through excessive violence, or through negative pessimism and inferiority complexes, or other such psychological and negative phenomena. Therefore, Awwad tells us about one of the heroes of the novel *Al-Raghif*, little Tom, who represents the writer himself. While walking on the road he stopped when he saw a load of dead people carried by two men who were municipal workers. What the writer saw was a shock for a child and this experience did not abandon his memory for the next five years: "It was under the arch a motionless woman, shrunk in the corner with tatters full of the lice, and an infant is on her chest stuck on her dead breast" (Awwad 1980:690). Maybe this dead woman represented the image of his mother and it is possible that he compared himself to that child who was still suckling from his mother's breast. Children often fall themselves to the outside world, and they see other women often be in the place of their own mothers, as well as they see themselves in the place of other children, something we observe in depth while telling them fairy-tales, they quickly imitate the heroes of the story. So, the scene probably related to the mother's image, the source of tenderness and grace.

It so happened, that one of the men started kicking the woman with his foot to see if she is alive. These municipal workers decided that the child would die too, so they throw him above his mother on the load. Tom (the writer) looks at them and hears their conversation and when they turn to him, he kicks his legs to the wind, shouting: "I'm not dead! Not dead!" (*My Transl.* Awwad 1980:691). Perhaps the shock of death for a child parallels the shock of castration. Whatever it is, the feelings of horror have fully seized him, and these feelings need to vent or modify, otherwise it is going to turn into real madness. What happened to Awwad is that the horror has turned to violent sadism, enjoying torturing the weak because Awwad himself was a weak, full-weakness when he was shocked by the first and the most dangerous shock. He states: "I was a child; I have no doubt now that something has grown in, and suddenly, in that terrible moment. I have new harsh concrete nails surged in my soul, they were the blue nails in which I caught the pen later and began writing" (*My Transl.* Awwad 1987:691). Therefore, we can see that Awwad's heroes in his stories and novels are always crushing and being crushed, a sadist and masochist

Awwad refused to share the faith of the child who was thrown on the load, while he is still alive. He wants to live and does not want to die, but for him the life must be equal to the violence, in order to safeguard the self from collapsing. The child's mother suffered a heinous death, did she not? What prevents Awwad's mother to share a similar death? What prevents Awwad from facing hunger, pain and madness?

Awwad's childhood was compelling and oppressed. In school, the teacher was a cruel man who did not hesitate to hit, although, he repeated a simple sentence "the window is made of wood," this failed teacher planted horror in the hearts of students inasmuch that when Awwad met him after the war, this woke up the forces of hatred inside him, and he would beat him to avenge for his wounded childhood: "God witnesses that in order to spell out and read this sentence correctly, I got dozens of bastinado from a cruel teacher I have seen his face repeatedly after the war, therefore, there was indignation waking up inside me against him and I would like to hit him on the head by that window but preferred it to be made of iron rather than wood" (*My Transl.* Ibid:692). It is not enough that Awwad suffered the famine and the horrors of the Ottoman occupation, this teacher increased the pain, instead of showing compassion for the traumatized and scared students as a result of this war. Where does all this violence go? Awwad is not a mystic to transcend his instincts, and therefore he tends to torture the animal to escape from inferiority.

3. The Sadistic Tendencies

It is a terrible game as Awwad calls it, that he was the leader of his comrades leading a stray dog “to the execution yard” (*My Transl.* Ibid:698). He was tying the innocent animal to a tree trunk and everybody assailed it with beating rods, “I am the initiator and the beat and each one takes his turn” (*My Transl.* 698). This means that there is a repressed energy of violence that Awwad is trying to discharge, so he pours it out on the poor dog, but no wonder, because he himself is the weak victim reminded of the weakness he holds inside and the sadistic child within is trying to prove to himself that he is not weak like this dog, and therefore acting in a macho manner that would enhance the cruelty, and justify the reckless violence. Here, clemency has no value, but perhaps, it is regarded as one of the factors of “the weak”, while “the mighty” enjoy beating, they feel the sense of superiority and arrogance towards the victim. Awwad depicts the dog as if seen by a normal child who would feel disgusted. But Awwad was not a normal child, therefore, he would be under the control of sadistic and violent tendencies. He sates, talking about the dog: “The blood drippes from its jaws and these red white pens on the back and abdomen meet each other and cut each other in length and width, the dog flops and howls upside down it is wallowing in a pool of blood now. It stretches out but without resistance. Extending its tongue and loosing it and gasping with obedience” (*My Transl.* 698). Psychological studies show that the child likes to play with animals, Awwad could have a dog, to love and caress but the sadism led him to this brutal torture, because the sadistic says: “I am the torturer, rather than be tortured”. (*My Transl.* Hanafi 1992:529) As Dr. Hanafi comments on this phenomenon by saying: “The fear of torture makes the sadist torture others, he would be the doer who tortures and not the object, in this way, he feels stronger to compensate for his feeling of inferiority” (*My Transl.* Ibid:529). There is no doubt that the sadistic character has a kind of infantilism or lack of growth. If Awwad did not suffer this terrible anxiety caused by circumstances of the war, he would not torture the dog until death. And more than that it was a pleasure for him to cut off the tongue of the animal, as he was not satisfied with rods poured on that weak body: “What is this elongated tongue? The leader pulls his knife and walks confidently, cuts off the tongue and throws it in the valley” (*My Transl.* Awwad 1987:698). Therefore, this child suffers from terrible anxiety and enormous psychological stress that make him decide to cut the tongue of the dog which is something repellent among kids and adults at the same time. Consequently, the true sadistic nature can be seen in this statement: “the pleasure is mine and the pain is yours” (*My Transl.* Hanafi 1992:532). Awwad relaxes psychologically when he harms the poor dog, he does so with full “confidence” and this does not even cloud his conscience.

The contempt of the abuser has reached the maximum because sadism is nothing but despising the other and an expression of self-contempt, it is an unconscious refusal that the sadistic is a helpless victim. It is hardly surprising that Awwad imitates religious ceremonies, mocks the cursed dog even at its funeral: “But his fellow will not join him only after the requiem because the boy knows the principles of religion, following the cassocks and monks of the village and their movements and a lot of prayers in Syriac language. Then he bends in front of the victim. before kicking it to the bottom of the valley” (*My Transl.* Awwad 1987: 698). He is praying for the victim and bends in front of it, but suddenly throws into the bottom of the valley. Here is the peak contempt as religious ceremonies are only an expression of the virtual respect, but in fact, it is a metaphor for the intensity of contempt. This poor dog was not treated with any sort of kindness neither in his life (during the torture party), nor in his death. Is this the trauma of the horror of death, which seized Awwad when he saw the deceased mother and her little child stuck on her breast? So, there is no wonder that transforms suffering into torture and weaknesses into violence and innocence into a brutal behavior.

Perhaps torturing the donkey enters into the sadism scope, which renounces and cancels the other. Awwad's grandfather has a donkey which is different from the rest of donkeys by its ears that are always raised just like victory signs, and with eyes which radiate joy. This is what infuriates Awwad because he bears malice against the signs of life and loves everything associated with death. So he takes the obelisk or rod and begins stabbing the animal in the scruff of his neck as a kind of demented pleasure that gives the feeling of unmatched ecstasy when it turns the other into a powerless and helpless victim: "I stabbed the donkey in the scruff of his neck, on the right and then leaped and on the left so it flew. This made me filled with desire to rotate the stab from everywhere with the same sadistic pleasure- the same in which I have felt when stabbed the dog by rods." (My Transl. Ibid: 699) Fromm points out that the sadist is a helpless person who suffers from a feeling that bases on exposure to the threat from the outside world. (Fromm 1994:147). Moreover, sadism is the other face of Masochism (Ibid:145), therefore, if the writer was not tormented by anxiety and ready to succumb to the great power, he would not torture the donkey. It is interesting here that Awwad got retribution unlike in the torturing scene of the dog: "then the donkey went around two times and raised its body into the space and threw me two meters away on a stone up on my head. I lost consciousness and the neighbors gathered, my grandfather rushed anxiously. When he saw blood coming from both the head of his grandson and the neck of his donkey, he understood everything and got confused" (My Transl. Awwad 1987:699). Awwad commented on this incident saying: "a revenge has taken on me by the donkey on behalf of the dog, its impact is still in my head till this day, I remember and feel it" (My Transl. Ibid:699). This punishment has ongoing impact on the writer who still remembers it despite his aging process, he recalls with rare honesty his violent experiences in childhood, a time of controversy for the master and the victim.

When Awwad won Saddam Hussein's award he refused to meet the journalists for many days showing his contempt in spite of the fact that he worked in journalism for a long time. Another time he expelled a student fan who had faced great hardship to reach Bahrasaf Awwad's village and the reason for his actions is clear: to show self-tyranny on what he calls the "weak". This arrogance mixed with contempt for others justify to Awwad his hatred against compassion, which is a humanist sympathy quasi-instinctive for the normal people: "I am one of the enemies of compassion since my early age and he is an ignorant or an adulator who regards it as an alternative to justice"(My Transl. Ibid:731). If Awwad was right when he attacked the charities, he scorched in his hatred for the poor who are the victims of a corrupt social system and we should note that Awwad was also poor at some point in his life: "my curse was tougher on the poor who have impairments or normal. Isn't the weakness of the mind a deformity? Aren't the bloats inside uglier than outside?" (Ibid: 731-731). Awwad forgot that there are honest poor who are psychologically healthy and that there are villainous rich or middle class tainted by psychiatric disabilities and vice versa. Social status is not a standard for differentiation, and then the talk would reach towards racism and sadism at the same time. Fromm states in this regard, talking about the sadistic Nazi: loving the strong and hating the poor, this is what constitutes the features of Almazhukip – the sadistic explains a great deal of Hitler's works and his politics.(Fromm 1994:168) In fact, showing satisfaction for someone else's poverty (if they have impairments or are unhealthy) does not reflect a sound character as much as it reveals devastating sadistic desires, and such signs we have seen in the torture of the dog and the donkey.

4. The Glorification of Power and Ferocity:

Awwad as a poet prefaced his poem with an introduction in which he states: "there were rivers of bitterness flowing inside me, storms of anger were blowing between my ribs, not on the unjust social system only, but also on the whole universe". (My Transl. Awwad 1987:32) We might find contradictions in this paragraph and rush to ask a few questions: If the social system is unjust, what is the guilt of the poor? Is it correct to generalize in this regard? Note that psychological

studies indicate that generalization is one of the attributes of neurotic persons. Then the anger is focused on the universe “as it is” and perhaps we deluded that the writer wishes to reform the universe, but in the poem we find that he wants to destroy it, or rather, to eliminate the weak and supports the strong, not to forget that he was poor, weak, helpless and unable to furnish his home at that time, he could not even buy a hilum. So why does not he begin demolishing himself first? Let us hear him say, addressing the storm and inviting it to destroy his house, but not his entity as a human: “Come in (the storm) break the windows of my house and fill, and then turn off my lamp” (*My Transl. Ibid: 733*). It is not faith in violence as a stuck defensive force, but it is blind faith in reckless violence, as if he loves violence for violence itself. Therefore, he would like to eliminate the weak people, as is the ideology of Nazism:

There is nothing wrong in plucking out all the weak and puny as well as the spoiler
It is the worldly life that was and remains as it was in ancient times that belongs to the healthy strong people
Simply injustice and justice are the languages of vulnerable eloquent people
If you follow the norm of the universe, there is nothing permissible and non-permissible. (*My Transl. Ibid:733*)

There is nothing wrong in eliminating the weak physically and mentally, financially and socially, there is no guilt in eliminating the oppressed people who demand for freedom and liberation from the French Mandate authority, because the strength is the only criterion. If so, this world is only a forest which has a law of oppression that the strong who “honored” it with cruelty and love of harm. The words like justice and injustice are only the expressions of the weak that defend their rights by these terms. On the other hand the strong do not know the meaning of those words. Their religion is to deviate from all religions and their value to abandon all values, because the norm of the universe requires that the strong eat the weak, and the strong shall not elude and does not use flashy words, but attacks the prey directly devouring and torturing it. There is nothing good or evil, or permissible or no-permissible, but say that everything is permissible for the blind force. Awwad has forgotten that the strong was once the weakest, the most coward and most villainous of people.(Tanoos 2009:139) Because he has the armed technological capabilities this allows him to subject the people who are seen inferior. This is due to the fact that he has forgotten that he is weak, helpless and poor, and his faith in the philosophy of force is against his interest. Nevertheless, he would like to be a part of the great fierce force that is a destructive cosmic storm that destroys the universe and returns it to the first nebula:

I would be an atom that flies and satisfies with the aspirations of its flying swarm
Throw me with a scattered hair, dusty, free of each restrained constraint
And if you intend something put me in the conquest and intrepid team. (*My Transl. Awwad 1987:736*)

In these lines the poet wishes to be an atom in the heart of the big evil storm. So he asks it to throw him, a semi-primitive being, scatter haired, dusty and free of ethical constraints, and goes forward in everything important, that everything related to demolition, destruction and returning the universe to its first instinctive chaos. The poet’s wish to be an atom in this storm is a reflection of the masochistic aspirations to be a follower of force characterized by tyranny, and from which derive superiority and arrogance which compensate for feelings of inferiority as there is no excessive violence unless it is issued by a deep inferiority. Fromm states, speaking about the sadistic Nazi that, he has talked a lot about the sadistic side of Hitler’s ideology. However, as we have seen in our search for authoritarian personality, there masochistic side also beside the sadistic side. There

is a desire to succumb to the power more dominance than him, and the desire to annihilate self beside the desire to have the power on helpless beings. (Fromm 1994:197)

Thus we see in the poem a kind of sadistic cruelty that not only kills the weak, but intends to demolish the universe itself, and besides that seeing the masochist succumb to superpower is a storm or chaos instinct which proves to us that Awwad is a sadist -masochist writer.

One of Awwad's primitive aspects is the glorification of "the Gaucho" in Argentina:

A wonderful picture which of the rest of the remains of the gaucho dynasty the king of Pamba, the mainland of Argentina. He had been living at the time with the Bedouin spending his day behind horses and thousands of cows roaming freely in that land, away from the community, renouncing civilization, and at night he homes to a hut of mud and straw in which he resides alone. (*My Transl.* Awwad 1987:757-756)

It is clear to us that this "wonderful image" is a return to nomadism while moving away from the community shows humanized instincts and giving up on civilization. There is no wonder when the gaucho released his instincts like a storm that Awwad talked about in the poem mentioned, and these instincts do not recognize urbanization, nor abide by any constraints because it is the total chaos and the law of the universal forest: "If he needs women he would raid the nearest village and kidnap one, and set off on his horse" (*My Transl.* Ibid: 757). There is no dignity for the human being nor respect for the rights. What is dictated by unrestrained instincts is only dignity and the rights. I am convinced that if mankind had followed this chaos over the covenants, it would have become extinct a long time ago. Man does not become a human being unless he suppresses his instincts and sublimates them. But if he was swept away by fancies he would be a disaster to himself and to the community. Awwad would not admire the gaucho, if his character did not involve sadistic connotations. This man was fascinated by blind force, while some people do not worship a heartless idol called strength, but they admire certain conditions stipulated by customs, traditions, and religions. Finally, ethics is not something superfluous or accidental. On the contrary, there are lawful and unlawful rational prohibitions, which characterize the normal man. The boob and sadistic criminal does not care at all about prohibition, for him words such as permissible and non-permissible are the languages of the vulnerable. It is clear that the worship instincts must be destroyed by these instincts someday.

There are sadistic signs when Awwad enjoys the sport, "Corrida" or killing the bulls in Spain. Through this behavior, we know that the pleasure of murdering the bull represents the image of the beautiful high life. The people desire the purity of his blood in the reproduction even if the bull's appearance in the arena was an example of a combination of strength and beauty which provokes Awwad, so he would like to eliminate this example:

But the extravaganza, the whole extravaganza is in the descent of the stallion to the arena. the tyranny in the magnificence of its body, the determination in its amphitheatric muscles, the beauty of the consistency of its organs, and youths in the effervescence of its blood, and the challenge in the sight of its eyes, as if it is the life in all its joy, astonishment and inspiration. (*My Transl.* Ibid: 777).

This "life" precisely gives Awwad's pleasure in eliminating it, especially the crooked horns of the bull reminds him of the mustache of chivalry and gallantry (Ibid: 777) as if he kills a human symbol or the symbol of life itself. Perhaps the animal represents the alternative to the Father in the words of our writer: "Suddenly, standing with his back to the honor platform, raising his tail before the great men's faces!" "I'm great," he says, "I am the president! I'm the king" (*My Transl.* Ibid: 777) Psychological studies have indicated that the king and the great president are alternatives for a

strong and great father, and maybe they are a symbol of a healthy and beautiful life. Awwad remembers the scene of torturing the dog and compares the two scenes: "With this difference that the village boy had cut the tongue of the dog and threw it in the valley, and here, the triumphant hero had cut from the stallion its ears, and raised them as an offer to the persons who he liked from the audience or kept them to himself as a souvenir." (*My Transl. Ibid: 777-78*).

However, the cut of the tongue or cut off the ears signify castrating the opponent, if the sadist did not suffer a castration anxiety he would not do this heinous deed. Sadism is a reflection of what occurs in the self when vileness and shame reach the masochism himself.

It is interesting that Awwad philosophizes the Spanish sport "Corrida" since it goes beyond the pleasure of killing a stallion in order to transform it into a spiritual art. Awwad quotes Ernest Hemingway's own opinion and adopted it saying that: "the matador (bullfighter) should have a real meaning of honor and glory. In other words, he should love to murder, tasting the spiritual pleasure in the murder. The murder was and remains one of the greatest pleasures for many nations" (*My Transl. Ibid: 778*). It should be noted that Hemingway was suffering from severe depression that ended his life with suicide, for no doubt that the crazy ideas which controlled him were the cause of his misery. By saying that the murder is "a spiritual pleasure," it is an attempt to give a spiritual or religious status to villainous, barbaric and brutal work.

5. Conclusion

Awwad gives us an example of war long term consequences which does not end with war; the psychological victims (the sadomasochists) most of them turn into killing machine after war while they were civilian or soldiers. Anybody who enjoys killing whether the slain an animal or a human being is a sadistic man who has weak self-confidence despite the shown aspects of tyranny. He (sadist) suffers inferiority or perhaps a spiritual and psychological vacuum. So we see him resorts to killing "life" to fulfill his tendency to love death or Necrophilia as it is called in psychological studies. Actually, there are people who delight in killing; they are sadists as the Mongols who built pyramids of human skulls in Baghdad. What a contrast between a man who suppresses his instincts and sublimates them, then refrains from eating animals -represented not exclusively - and a man as Genghis Khan and Hulagu who caused disasters to humanity. The man who controls himself is more respectable than the one who releases his brutal instincts. Moreover, humanity will not move forward one step unless it gets rid of spitefulness and love of murder and hatred of the livings. Biophilia or the love of life must win and if this trend is defeated the world would return to the first nebula, to Awwad's storm which does not keep nor leave anything alive. It is not far until the strong will fight with each other after killing the weak, and then nobody will remain to narrate (Tanoos 1994:49).

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Note on the author

Lateef Wisam HAMID is a PhD student in the English Department, West University of Timisoara, Romania. He holds a Master's Degree in English and Foreign Languages University, India. He has attended four conferences in different study fields. He taught English at secondary school for six years and was a lecturer at Al-Maarif University College, Iraq, for two years.