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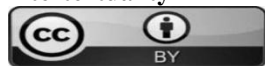
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### Rereading Queen Sheba/Balqis: A Study in Ostriker and Kahf's Selected Poems

#### A B S T R A C T

The article sheds light on the figure of queen Sheba/Balqis and asserts her being a model for intellect and intuitive knowledge; she is one of the most notable females for leadership and wisdom in Jewish and Islamic cultures. The American poets, Alicia Ostriker (1938) and Mohja Kahf (1967) endeavor a feminist rereading of queen Sheba/Balqis' narrative. The parable appeared in the exegeses of the Hebrew Bible then in the Qur'an as well as the stories of prophets. As indubitable religious scriptures, Ostriker the Jewish feminist draws on the Hebrew Bible and Kahf the Islamic feminist adopt the Qur'an to reconstruct their traditional Jewish and Muslim story of queen Sheba/Balqis. The selected poems demonstrate a diversity of themes established on the adaptation and appropriation of the narrative source; yet, the rereading of queen Sheba/Balqis's figure and story in both poems has different aims, manifestations and connotations which appeared to enhance and empower the female's figure and personality. The tale of queen Sheba/Balqis is created on the most prominent occasion of her visit and encounter with Prophet/king Solomon. Queen Sheba/Balqis who had wisdom, led with strength a great kingdom, awarded all the sources of power and greatness: armies, civilization and majestic throne. Through queen Sheba/Balqis, the paper aims to confirm the feminist independence against patriarchy and defend women's rights via acumen. The notion of intertextuality is applied in order to frame the analysis of Ostriker's poem "Sheba's Proverbs" "Sheba's Proverbs" from *The Nakedness of the Fathers: Biblical Visions and Revisions* (1994) and Kahf's "Balqis Makes Solomon Sign a Pre-Nup" from *Hager Poems* (2016).

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## إعادة قراءة الملكة سبأ - بلقيس : دراسة في قصائد مختارة لأوستريكر وقحف

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الملخص:

يسلط البحث الضوء على شخصية الملكة بلقيس/سبأ ليؤكد بأنها نموذجًا للذكاء والفتنة ، فهي واحدة من أبرز النساء في القيادة والحكمة ضمن الثقافتين اليهودية والإسلامية. تسعى الشاعرتان الأمريكيتان، أليشيا أوستريكر (١٩٣٨) ومهجة قحف (١٩٦٧)، إلى إعادة قراءة قصة الملكة بلقيس/سبأ من وجهة نظر نسوية. لقد ظهرت قصة الملكة بلقيس/سبأ أولاً في تفاسير التوراة ثم في القرآن الكريم وقصص الأنبياء. تعتمد أوستريكر الشاعرة النسوية اليهودية، على التوراة ، بينما تستلهم قحف الشاعرة النسوية الإسلامية، قصتها من القرآن، مستندتين على نصوص دينية موثوقة، لإعادة بناء الرواية التقليدية اليهودية والإسلامية عن الملكة بلقيس/سبأ.

تكشف القصائد المختارة عن تنوع في الموضوعات القائمة على تكييف وتوظيف المصادر السردية؛ إلا أن إعادة قراءة شخصية وقصة الملكة بلقيس/سبأ في القصيدتين يهدف إلى تعزيز شخصية المرأة وإبراز قوتها بشكل يختلف بين كل منهما حسب النص الديني. وتستند قصة الملكة بلقيس/سبأ إلى المناسبة الأبرز المتمثلة في زيارتها ولقائها بالنبى/الملك سليمان. كانت الملكة بلقيس/سبأ حاكمة حكيمة وقائدة قوية على مملكة عظيمة، وتمتلك كافة مصادر القوة والعظمة: الجيوش، الحضارة، والعرش المهيّب.

ومن خلال شخصية الملكة بلقيس/سبأ، تهدف الدراسة إلى تأكيد استقلال المرأة في مواجهة النظام الأبوي والدفاع عن حقوق المرأة من خلال الفتنة والذكاء. يتم تطبيق مفهوم التناص لتحليل قصيدة أوستريكر "أمثال بلقيس" من مجموعة عري الآباء: رؤى وتعديلات كتابية (1994) وقصيدة قحف "بلقيس تجبر سليمان على توقيع اتفاق ما قبل الزواج" من مجموعة قصائد هاجر (٢٠١٦).

الكلمات المفتاحية: أليشيا أوستريكر، مهجة قحف، النسوية الإسلامية، النسوية اليهودية، التناص.

*"[M]ost modern interpreters of the [Hebrew Bible] have displayed patriarchal bias. Their commentaries consider women chiefly in their function of supporting men, and the portraits of women's lives are not seriously examined for their inherent significance. Texts concerning women are often misunderstood or ignored". (Jeansonne, 1990, p.1)*

**Introduction:**

The paper highlights queen Sheba/Balqis, she is the most sovereign female who rules over sun-worshipping country and a fanciful historical figure; she is skillfully engaged in political negotiations with Prophet/king Solomon to capture the imagination of successive Jewish and Islamic story-tellers as well as traditionalists. "Sheba" is a Biblical character in 1 Kings and 2 Chronicles, while Islamic exegesis identified her as "Balqis". For Jews and Muslims, queen Sheba/Balqis's parable is mainly constructed on the prominent occasion of her visit and encounter with Prophet/king Solomon.

Each of Ostriker and Kahf try a feminist rereading of queen Sheba/Balqis's narrative. The paper deals with queen Sheba/Balqis from a Jewish feminist viewpoint in Ostriker's "Sheba's Proverbs" from the prose and poetry volume *The Nakedness of the Fathers: Biblical Visions and Revisions* (1994); in which Ostriker comes up to the Hebrew Bible to reread Biblical tales. Likewise, from an Islamic feminist standpoint, Kahf rereads the narrative of

queen Sheba/Balqis in "Balqis Makes Solomon Sign a Pre-Nup" from the Qur'anic-based book of poetry *Hager Poems* (2016).

The narrative of queen Sheba/Balqis is a mixture of different ancient Jewish and Islamic sources. It is initially emerged in the Hebrew Bible 1 Kings and 2 Chronicles, after that in the Qur'an, the chapter of "The Ants". There are resemblances as well as differences in the midst of the story of queen Sheba/Balqis in the two Scriptures. A comparison between Ostriker and Kahf's rereading of queen Sheba/Balqis is set out as the two poets primarily depend on their Jewish and Islamic Scriptures. In the scope of literature, the Hebrew Bible as well as the Qur'an are considered authentic sources of intertextuality, thus Ostriker and Kahf intertext these holy sources to reinterpret the narrative from a feminist perspective. By retelling the Hebrew Bible/Qur'an, Ostriker and Kahf narrate the stories of females surrounded with a very large number of narratives which are significantly masculine. Both poets expand and portray these stories into entirely developed narratives. Relying on traditional Midrash/Hadith to fill in the missing gaps interrelated to women in the Hebrew Bible/Qur'an through creative replying to what seems omitted of the parable.

Within contemporary poetry written by women, female perspective is continued and developed; associations are done between Biblical/Qur'anic female's characters and the poets' individual understanding. Sometimes female characters replace male ones to be the protagonists of the story/poem which vividly urged by Ostriker in *Stealing the Language: The Emergence of Women's Poetry in America* (1986) that women are the thieves of the language of men. Women poets create new poems/languages and histories that tell and confirm their particular experience in the universe; the poets transform their marginal conditions into equality with the languages and histories created by men. These poems are often daring, challenging and greatly seem untraditional (Ostriker, 1986). However, their aim is not to discard the traditional text, it changes as well as reorganizes the gaps in the Biblical/Qur'anic story. So, the female characters are able to appear in all their impediments and consequences as they are both impressive and instructive.

### **Theoretical Framework:**

Intertextuality is employed to delve into the selected poems in this study. Intertextuality has drawn the attention of a number of literary researchers who concerned with the debate of the interrelations among literary texts. Intertextuality consents the reader to compare and construe the literary devices in texts maintaining on their historical and philosophical sides. Since it is familiar for professionals that intertextuality denotes to how the sources are interrelated with others in tenures like title, subject matter, plot, characters, incidents, events ...etc. New sources may offer extra connotations as they are situated side by side with famous symbols from prior source. Intertextuality is not an issue of exploration, yet it pertains to how sources interconnect and undoubtedly hold certain prototypes. In addition, as a theory intertextuality offers a methodical device to search resemblance and diversity amongst texts.

The term of intertextuality is emerged from the writings of Julia Kristeva (1941) in the 1960s; she points out that intertextuality becomes widespread in literary discussions, "Intertextuality is now a common place of most literary debates, and a concept that appears in almost all dictionaries of literary theory" (Kristeva, 2002, p.8). The central idea of Kristeva's

theory, the text is in continuous assimilation and alteration as well as formation and rethinking which is a process of constant recreation. Kristeva points out that "any text is constructed as a mosaic of quotations; any text is the absorption and transformation of another text" (Kristeva, 1986, p.73). The text is not a separated item, yet it is relatively a collection of literary texts.

Thus, intertextuality primarily reforms the understanding of influence and origin in literature. Kristeva points that any text is in fact "a permutation of texts, intertextuality in a space of a given text" where "several utterances, taken from other texts, intersect and neutralize one another". (1980, p.36) She illustrated that apparently original sources are themselves only intertextual conversions reliant on cultural encyclopedia. Intertextuality is characterized as a dialectical literary process between the text and previous text along with other text generations. Therefore, intertextuality constructs a network of diverse literary manuscripts of various writers from different nations, cultures, religions and periods. Literary texts do not present apparent meanings; they represent the dissimilarity in communication over the significance of expressions. Intertextuality is a procedure of multidimensional assimilation of the text into another via the way of rewording the original text. The textual comparisons are intended to expose what in text is actually original and what is a combination of another. Kristeva asserts that throughout the process of intertextuality, the text is regarded as intertextuality within society and history sharing of the similar text as literature (1986). As an analytical approach, intertextuality allows the discovering of similarities and differences among texts, enabling a comparison and interpretation of literary elements while considering their historical and ideological contexts.

In the context of intertextuality, adaptation in recent times achieves a considerable popularity in literature. It is a shape of intertextuality that involves taking from one framework and transforming it into another providing a fresh perspective on the original work. Adaptation may entail additions, deletions and rewritings, while still maintaining awareness of the work's reference to the previous text. Positioned between the original text and the reformed text, adaptation is no longer considered an independent resource to be studied separately; instead it is regarded as a minor and occasionally lesser than prior sources. According to Linda Hutcheon (1947), adaptation involves adjusting, altering and making something appropriate for new utilizing and locality. She asserts that adaptation is both a procedure of construction and a product of reinterpretation. A simple clarification to the concept of adaptation is drawn from Hutcheon when she affirms that adaptation "is repetition, but repetition without replication" (2006, p.7). Adapting explicitly illustrates its connection to an additional text in shape or tenor; in adaptation the source is constructed then established in relation to the preceding one. However, the original text is not considered as superior to its adaptation. As Hutcheon confirms, "adaptation challenges the authority of any notion of priority. Multiple versions exist laterally, not vertically" (2006, p. xiii).

Moreover, Sanders characterized adaptation as "a transpositional practice, casting a specific genre into another generic mode, an act of re-vision in itself" (2016, p.22). Sanders further argues that adaptation is "an amplificatory procedure engaged in addition, expansion, accretion and interpolation" (p.23). Adaptation suggests explanation on the original text, aiming to alter a standpoint from the prior one by giving voice to the silenced and

marginalized. Thus, adaptation involves appreciation to the remarkable text and acknowledging its inventive and interpretive correlation with the adapted text.

According to adaptation the narrative plays a pivotal role in changing one type to a new text. It offers further viewpoint to the significance of the source and its literary association. Adaptation for that reason is characterized as an action or a method of shifting or altering something to correspond with a current situation. Thus, adaptation is perceived as an extensive transportation of a certain text or texts; this transporting can include alteration of genre or modification of shape then the context: narrating a very similar tale from a diverse standpoint to construct various rereading (Sanders, 2016). Adaptation is provided as a method of telling and it is appropriated in each type of writing. It rearranges literary tales, by bearing in mind the associations of culture between the old source and the new one; and clarifies how original cultures could be adapted into novel cultures.

Each element of the story such as themes, characters, points of view and symbols have crucial considerations in adaptation; themes are often viewed as the most adapted. In addition, characters hold significance as they can be found across different genres. They serve as central part in adaptations, captivating the audience's thoughts through identification. Additionally, the narrator of the story is essential guiding the audiences to specific incidents and personas. A storyteller typically portrays, clarifies and comments enabling the audiences to delve and engage effectively into the character's head.

Otherwise, appropriation can retain specific aspects of the novel source without acknowledging its relationship with the preceding work. Both of the performance and effectiveness of adaptation and appropriation are interconnected. There is an obvious difference between adaptation and appropriation "adaptation signals a relationship with an informing source text or original.... [while] appropriation frequently affects a more decisive journey away from the informing text into a wholly new cultural product and domain ...through the movement from one genre to others" (Sanders, 2016, p.35). Appropriation involves employing elements, while reimagining the original text from a new perspective. This approach permits the audience to view the novel text as an essential source upon which to construct and reread. The writers who employ appropriation aim to reassess the source text from which they borrow while creating a new form of material.

Thus, appropriations are predisposed to hold an additional complicated and sometimes implanted relationship to their intertexts than a unique narrative from a famous source would present. Appropriation involves examining the potential in the original texts to reveal how the new text is constructed. Composing appropriation brings into line with the process of intertextuality, investigating how texts interact and how readers respond, which can inform text adaptation. This process may also provide an evaluation to the novel adapted resource. Adaptation and appropriation are examined from a vantage point to distinguish them vigorously and constructing a new cultural innovation, situated together with the texts to present hints, and increases but not robbing these sources (Sanders, 2016, p.53).

According to the perspective of intertextuality, the ideal of individual invention is primarily a divine creation. On this viewpoint, the researcher bases a textual comparison between Hebrew Bible/ Qur'an as a divine creation and the poets' selected poems. Ostriker



"Sheba's Proverbs" from *The Nakedness of the Fathers: Biblical Visions and Revisions* (1994) and Kahf's "Balqis Makes Solomon Sign a Pre-Nup" from *Hager Poems* (2016) are very vivid examples for the application of intertextuality as well as adaptation and appropriation.

### **Rereading Queen Sheba in Ostriker's "Sheba's Proverbs"**

In "Sheba's Proverbs", Ostriker the Jewish feminist seeks equality with men and the inclusion of Jewish women in social institutions and religious life. Jewish feminism emerged as an attempt to protest against the inferiority and subordination of women in the Jewish tradition (Plaskow, 1991). Ostriker offers her readers a feminist rereading of queen Sheba's narrative by relying on the 1 Kings 10-11 and 2 Chronicles 9 of the Hebrew Bible as an original text for her religious and cultural tradition to intertext with Sheba's story. The parable about Sheba in the Hebrew Bible emerges as:

*"When the the queen of Sheba heard about the fame of Solomon and his relation to the name of the LORD, she came to test him with hard questions. Arriving at Jerusalem with a very great caravan—with camels carrying spices large quantities of gold, and precious stones—she came to Solomon and talked with him about all that she had on her mind Solomon answered all her questions; nothing was too hard for the king to explain to her.... But I did not believe these things until I came and saw with my own eyes. Indeed, not even half was told me; in wisdom and wealth you have far exceeded the report I heard. How happy your men must be! How happy your officials, who continually stand before you and hear your wisdom!...King Solomon gave the queen of Sheba all she desired and asked for, besides what he had given her out of his royal bounty. Then she left and returned with her retinue to her own country (1 Kings 10:2-13)".*

In the Jewish tradition Sheba is identified by her land's name which is now identified as Yemen, or the queen of the South who has Arabian roots; she is also known as the queen of Saba. The indication of her being from the South part of Arabia is convincing, since the place was the principal position for the trees of myrrh and frankincense. Queen Sheba was economically prosperous and diplomatically dominant. The narrative draws attention to her wealth and intelligence; her existence in the Hebrew Bible due only to a desire to show Solomon's brilliance and knowledge "she came" as well as indicating to a sexual relationship between Solomon and queen Sheba that she was given what she desired. The Hebrew Bible narrates Sheba's conversion with King Solomon to confirm her being a queen of materialism who adored sex and fortune to underestimate the representation of the prototype of queen woman (Lassner, 1993).

The Hebrew Bible is the oldest text that refers to queen Sheba without naming her or mentioning where she came from; just mentioning her as a queen of a kingdom called Sheba. She governed a kingdom which was the only area for the valuable goods of incense and cicely. She heard the news of King Solomon's wisdom, therefore; queen Sheba sent, a confident advisor, to manage agreements with King Solomon to protect the path of commerce. As the advisor came back he lets her know about Solomon's fortune, authority,

and wisdom. Queen Sheba determined to set off a lengthy and strenuous journey to test Solomon and verify this wisdom wishing for extra insight and wisdom (Muhammad, Jaffar, Fatima, Ahmed & Mukhtar, 2022). She arrived on the back of camels with a caravan of goods, precious stones and vapors which Jerusalem has never seen alike before. References to the goods and precious stones that are "yet to come" indicate that the kingdom ruled by Sheba was rich in these elements and the kingdoms of ancient Yemen were prosperous.

Ostriker's "*Sheba's Proverbs*" are proverbs appeared under the title of "The Wisdom of Solomon" which is of two parts: prose and poetry. King/Prophet Solomon was well-known for presenting his wisdom through proverbs and parables as "a proverb is a short, memorable saying that expresses a truth or gives us a warning such as the Book of Proverbs written by Solomon" (Felder, 1993, p. 454). Ostriker presents her feminist rereading in a thrilling and romantic competing way between two lovers who are King Solomon and queen Sheba contest in joke-telling continued day and night for three days. The initial encounter occurs in the first day; Ostriker portrays Solomon and Sheba as an intoxicated couple existing prosperously in paradise:

*"They have bathed in cream and been rubbed with myrrh. They have been clothed in bright embroidered silk, sleek fur, sheer wool, fine cotton and leather more tender than butter. They adorned themselves in golden and jeweled bracelets, necklaces, rings, noserings, brooches. Their respective crowns rest lightly on their dressed hair. Belladonna causes their eyes to glow".* (1994, p.205)

Each of Sheba and Solomon emerged as counterparts a queen and king "their respective crowns" both are "famous for wisdom"(p.205); both are diplomatic and imperative to contract political issues "Their ambassadors have been in conference, have drawn up papers, have signed papers, have sealed papers" (p.206). The queen of Sheba and King Solomon maintain making love erotically all over the first day then examining each other with riddles. Afterward, in the second day they exchange discussions "Solomon has told Sheba most of his three thousand parables, each of which has a thousand and five interpretations"(p.208); through these proverbs she gains more insight and sharpen her leadership's adroitness. Whereas Sheba translates to Solomon a number of her "country's proverbs", traditionally, proverbs were a way utilized by African people to pass on wisdom and religious beliefs (Felder, 1993). Consequently, Ostriker identified these proverbs as "*Sheba's Proverbs*" (p.209).

In the third day while they are making love and thrilled: "Solomon teaches Sheba the language of animals and the language of demons"(p.211). Solomon tells Sheba how he acquires "understanding heart", "knowledge", "education of passion", "cultivation of sense of guilt" (p.212); however, she is fed up because she is a queen and not interested to be lectured even by a king; thus from a Jewish feminist viewpoint, Ostriker has done "a more straightforward adaptation, reworking the characters and events"(Sanders, 2016, p.38). Lastly, Solomon talks about the construction of the temple of "Divine One"; he has submitted and prayed to the "Holy One who is the God of my fathers" (1994, p.215), then let queen Sheba guess his final riddle. They say goodbye to each other and queen Sheba's procession is waiting in the Red Sea to navigate.

Despite the difference in the original text/ Hebrew Bible, Ostriker portrays queen Sheba as an equivalent to King Solomon. Right from the opening, the title holds a forthright allusion to Ostriker's religious tradition since the name of Sheba is vividly apparent in the title. Instead of the title "Solomon's Proverbs", Ostriker intends to reframe, reinterpret and intertext the Hebrew Bible from a Jewish feminist perspective to be "*Sheba's Proverbs*". In this way, "appropriation may or may not involve a generic shift and it may certainly still require the kinds of 'readings alongside' or comparative approaches that juxtapose (at least) one text against another, which we have begun to delineate as central to the reception of adaptations"(Sanders, 2016, p.35).

Via the process of appropriation, Ostriker voice the voiceless queen of Sheba and allows her to narrate her story in a shape of "Proverbs" like that of Solomon's in the Hebrew Bible. Both of adaptation and appropriation are equal since the clear adaptation respites in the inserted voicing and the appropriative feature located in the vast design of Sheba's story. Jewish feminists shed light on the invisibility of women and on their lack of both voice and agency. For them, voice means the capacity to speak up, to share in discussions relevant to them, while agency is the ability to exercise choice and to take action and practice freedom as well as their counterpart men in the great community.

Thus, the repetition of Sheba's name and her story over the whole poem/prose corresponds with Jewish feminists and confirms that intertextuality enlarges every part from the "operative repetition" of one word till employing the entire source as an "inter-web" of connotations (Gresset, 1985). Although, the noun "Proverbs" is purely restricted to men and particularly to King Solomon in the original text/ Hebrew Bible, Ostriker foregrounds the "Proverbs" to Sheba. By doing so, Ostriker the Jewish feminist criticizes the exclusion of women in patriarchal Scripture which limits kingdom, wisdom and knowledge to Solomon. Jewish feminists demand equal rights and "the intense engagement of women in Jewish creativity. [They] felt left out of Jewish life; it is continuing as women determine they have something to contribute" (Heschel, 1995, p. xxvi).

Ostriker commences her poem/prose by an epigraph from the "Proverbs of Solomon" the original text in which Solomon talks about his wisdom:

*"Wisdom is the principal thing;*

*therefore, get wisdom:*

*and with all thy getting,*

*get understanding.*

*Exalt her, and she shall promote thee:*

*she shall bring thee the honor*

*when thou dost embrace her". (Proverbs 4:7-8)*

The proverb paraphrases as wisdom grants people the potency to understand how God's Word set to every place in life. Wisdom elevates as the most advantageous thing a person can gain in life. It fetches honor and safety. Situating an epigraph from "Proverbs of Solomon" at the beginning of the poem/prose, Ostriker reworks and intertexts the epigraph to be "*Sheba's*



*Proverbs*"; it is as Sanders affirms that in the "reworking of the source text ... to appropriation ... we have a more wholesale redrafting, or indeed recrafting, of the intertext" (2016, p.38). Ostriker scrutinizes the individual scenes that tackle Sheba in Hebrew Bible in the perspective of entirety of references to her as well as the events and incidents relevant to Sheba's story. In Hebrew Bible Sheba's portrait is oversimplified whereas Ostriker sketches her with the purpose of stressing her equality and importance which was absent throughout Jewish tradition.

Consequently, Ostriker deconstructs the linear historical and philosophical explanations that King Solomon is identified of having all wisdom; whereas queen Sheba is the beneficiary of this wisdom. After that, Ostriker reconstructs the female figure of queen Sheba to be parallel to Solomon and attracts the attention to her wisdom and intelligence. Both Sheba and Solomon become similar to each other; queen Sheba is chiefly comparable to King Solomon "his eyes are large and dark, he is famous for wisdom. She is too famous; her eyes are deep and bright. He is graceful. She is more graceful, black and comely". (p.205-206) According to the Hebrew Bible King Solomon acquired great knowledge; however, Ostriker's queen Sheba possessed wisdom to chase further knowledge. Ostriker in "*Sheba's Proverbs*" offers more than forty Proverbs on diverse issues; the Proverbs denoting to the wisdom, strength and intelligence of queen Sheba as an equivalent counterpart to King Solomon:

*"Some people don't have the brain God gave a pigeon*

.....

.....

*A confident man is not afraid from intelligent woman*

*An intelligent woman is unafraid of a confident man.*

*Are you nostalgic for matriarchy? A woman ruler can be crueler".* (1994, p. 209)

Queen Sheba desires getting extra acumen and knowledge; she becomes the archetype for this knowledge model. Ostriker the Jewish feminist rereads queen Sheba as a dynamic character from the commencement to the end through her behaviors. Ostriker demonstrates how queen Sheba argues and exchanges political and philosophical issues with King Solomon to be equal to him like contemporary man.

To sum up, Ostriker's narrative of Sheba in "*Sheba's Proverbs*" is like an exciting and passionate challenge between two equivalent lovers queen Sheba and King Solomon. The original text/ Hebrew Bible presents prophet/king Solomon's sexual power whereas, Ostriker from a Jewish feminist perspective intertext queen Sheba to be parallel to King Solomon. Then, the Biblical narrative asserts that the goal of Sheba's journey is only to learn wisdom; Ostriker affirms the intuitive knowledge of queen Sheba which is the core of her acumen and being comparable to that of prophet/King Solomon.

### **Rereading Queen Balqis in Kahf's "Balqis Makes Solomon Sign a Pre-Nup"**

In her "Balqis Makes Solomon Sign a Pre-Nup", Kahf consorts with the Islamic feminists who create a contemporary Islamic knowledge to reinterpret and reform the religious sciences of Muslim societies for the renewal of Islamic thought and the inclusion of Muslim women in social organizations and religious life. Therefore, Islamic feminism the

Qur'anic based movement as Valentine Moghadam confirms is a "linguistic and theological knowledge to challenge patriarchal interpretations and offer alternative readings in pursuit of women's advancement and in refutation of Western stereotypes"(2004, p.14). On this basis Kahf intertext the story of queen Balqis from Qur'an and Hadith to present a modern feminist rereading. The parable of queen Balqis appeared in the Qur'an, the chapter of "The Ants" which is considered an original text for Kahf's religious and cultural tradition to intertext.

The Qur'anic story of queen Balqis is different from the Hebrew Bible; each of Balqis and Solomon are introduced alike in fortune and wisdom in chapter of "The Ants". She is known by the name of Balqis in the Islamic exegesis; Balqis is an intelligent, self-assured queen who seeks for reality "she is the only queen mentioned in the Qur'an" and "only the Queen of Sheba is identified by her position: that of a sovereign queen – an independent woman with political authority" (Haeri, 2020, p.30). Whereas, Prophet Solomon is "renowned for his wise and skilful administration of justice and ...knowledge and powers" (Stowasser, 1994, p.63); the Qur'anic narrative relayed that the hoopoe reports to Prophet Solomon about the wealthy and flourishing country ruled by a female queen who is a "sovereign ruler pagan, sun-worshipping nation" (p.62). Prophet Solomon sends her a letter with the hoopoe reading: "In the name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful; be not against me, but come in submission to the true religion" (Ali, 2007, p.30-31). In reply, queen Balqis sets out a long journey from her country, Yemen, to Solomon's Jerusalem; her caravans hold various valuable rewards. She enters his palace to scrutinize Prophet Solomon with riddles; he answers them intelligently. Banking on the Qur'an and Hadith as sacred as well as literary framework along with the act of adaptation to change the narrative of Balqis into a poem; the transformation in the original story is appropriate with the new function and situation. Accordingly, Kahf sets forth her feminist rereading of queen Balqis's narrative via "Balqis Makes Solomon Sign a Pre-Nup"; the poem illuminates Balqis's/woman's prenuptial agreement to Solomon/man particularly exposing about Balqis hopes right before she declares Solomon's marriage proposal.

To commence with the title "Balqis Makes Solomon Sign a Pre-Nup", the name of Balqis is appeared in the title of the poem whereas in original text/Qur'an is not mentioned only in Hadith. Utilizing the proper noun of "Balqis" in the title evokes Balqis's story in the Hadith to confirm that she is a queen; it is "the most formal adaptations carry the same title as their source or informing text. Shared titles mobilize complex understandings of similarity and difference and might seem to invite comparative analysis" (Sanders, 2016, P.27). The feminist acumen is involved in Balqis's preference and need as a female "makes" Solomon achieve her requirements of signing a prenuptial "Sign a Pre-Nup" a contract between wife and husband as an agreement done before marriage in Islam to preserve the females' rights. Signing a prenuptial represents Kahf's longing through Balqis to protect all women's properties and voice women's rights against Solomon/patriarchy.

Kahf initiates her poem with an epigraph which is a verse from the Qur'an concerns Prophet Solomon who inherited power and knowledge from his father David that he has been impart an extraordinary knowledge about the language of birds, and offered all types of things which is obviously an exceptional gift. Kahf's epigraph alludes to Solomon's insight and knowledge which will be comparable to Balqis' acumen all over the poem:

*"We have been taught the speech of birds  
and have been given of every  
thing. This is indeed Grace Manifest."*

—Solomon (Quran: The Ants, 27:16)

Different from the Qur'an/original text when Solomon was the only speaker and unlike Ostriker's Sheba who is in an uninterrupted chatting with Solomon. Kahf from the opening lines reverses her original habits and tradition when Balqis starts declaring "I love you" instead of the male/Solomon; so, the technique of "similarity and difference .... have already seen are central to the adaptive process" (Sanders, 2016, p.42). Kahf's Balqis commences every stanza addressing and announcing Solomon utilizing verbs like "love", "come", "shower", "silken", "cherish", "surrounded" and "yields" to depict how Balqis's emotions act to acquire independence. Supplying and demanding emerged in Balqis's employment of these verbs to represent desire and need side by side with maintaining sovereignty.

Kahf instigates her poem with a dramatic monologue the speaker is Balqis/I who from a position of power and sovereignty sets her conditions for marriage to the listener Solomon/you. Lacking dialogue with Solomon/you let Balqis/I to be the sole speaker addressing the silent Solomon. For more richness adaptation and appropriation are "actively creating a new cultural and aesthetic product, one that stands alongside the texts that have provided inspiration, and, in the process, enriches rather than 'robs' them" (Sanders, 2016, p.53). Kahf highlights Balqis's personality and femininity continuously via repeating "I", "my", and "mine" pronouns all over the poem. Kahf employs the first person's standpoint to inform the reader to perceive that the speaker is not a common female figure but a queen who lets Solomon/him recognize how she is intelligent, sovereign and diplomatic woman:

*"I love you,*

*but I won't be*

*signing off*

*my sovereignty"* (Kahf, 2016, p.81).

Like Ostriker, Kahf voices Balqis but being the single persona speaking all over the whole poem. Whereas Ostriker utilizes "I" to confirm queen Sheb's female voice as equivalent as Solomon; Kahf's Balqis is more powerful and authoritative. She has agency with sovereignty, Solomon only listens and agrees. Kahf reinforces the significance of feminist acumen and independence over the canon of patriarchy as she firstly admits "love" to Solomon afterward contradicts with "but" to keep her kingdom.

Balqis is the woman who "come" forward and set the conditions for marriage; the feminine soul is prevailing. She confesses her admiration yet maintains her authority as well as approaching Solomon's love conditionally. The conjunction "but" and the reflexive pronoun "my Self's" are employed to add more superiority and provision to Balqis's discussion with Solomon to achieve independence since being a queen. Here, grammatically the reflexive pronoun "Self's" is used and capitalized when the subject "I"/Balqis and the

object "you"/ Solomon are the same signifying that they are queen and king transcending the scope of the female/male and Self/Other which were previously prevalent:

*"I come to you*

*but keep my throne*

*for my Self's*

*ascent alone"* (2016, p.81)

The 3<sup>rd</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> stanzas commence with "Don't" to refute or invert a previous discussion. Balqis absolutely convincing her assertiveness to promise Solomon would do love him adequately without any purpose to inquire about *"oneness stuff"* causes. Balqis is brazenness, proverbial with her standards to convince Solomon not to rummage around causes to prove his love wishing him to be supporter is sufficient to her:

*"Don't pull that mystic*

*oneness stuff—*

*that I love you*

*is enough".* (2016, p.81)

In the 4<sup>th</sup> stanza queen Balqis reveres Solomon as a king to intertext with the narrative of the Qur'an "a permutation of texts, an intertextuality in a space of a given text, in which several utterances, taken from other texts, intersect and neutralise one another" (Kristeva 1980, p.36). Similar to Ostriker, Balqis replies Solomon's letter and sends gifts before visiting him in Jerusalem: *"I shower you/ with peacock gifts"*. Queen Balqis confirms Solomon with an open phrase *"my silken body—"* that her body is of a virgin female to correspond with *"mine to give"*(p.81); therefore, the pronouns "my" and "mine" assert the female voice.

Once more, via intertextuality Kahf demonstrates how Balqis lives prosperously *"I cherish"* and independently *"living free"*. In contrast to Ostriker's Sheba, Balqis sends presents and responds via *"the hoopoe"* for Solomon to intertext with Qur'an it becomes 'a process ... of playful permutation, which provides the very model for production' (Kristeva, 1986, p.83). Through the figure of queen Balqis, Kahf vividly exposes the wise, intelligent, self- confident women who let Solomon sense the existence of a female queen. Balqis highlights her presence as a queen, and reminding Solomon of her status: *"you've not loved/ a queen before"*; it is Solomon's first time to be engaged with queen. She admits that Solomon has *"Other wives"*(2016, p.81) forwarding the attention and denoting to polygamy in Islam which is totally different from Ostriker's Sheba.

In the last stanza, Kahf portrays afterward proves that all Solomon's possessions in the whole world *"All yields to you"* cannot strike Balqis's love to him/*"golden prince"*. Then, referring to the extraordinary phenomena that he is acquainted with the *"bird speech, ant worlds—"* to intertext with Qur'an when "the appropriative aspect is found in the wider framework story .... and in the related subplot" (Sanders, 2016, p.38). The end of the story Balqis is regarded its essence when Kahf overturns the Quranic/original narrative. Kahf closes the poem confirming the determination of her love to Solomon that all he has in life *"all but this"*(2016, p.81) is imperfect without queen Balqis showing self- confident. To sum

up, Kahf grants Balqis voice and asserts her powerful voice from the start to empower all women who were silent in the original text. Kahf skillfully reshapes Balqis's story to appropriate with what she is intending to express about strong and distinctive female figure.

### Conclusion

The two religions of Islam and Judaism diverse in which part of Sheba/Balqis's encounter with Solomon they highlight. The two stories of Ostriker and Kahf would have to be reconstructed differently in which the future will convert the functioning of all society represented by the female character. A sort of comparison can be made between Ostriker's "*Sheba's Proverbs*" and Kahf's "*Balqis Makes Solomon Sign a Pre-Nup*". Drawing from Islamic and Jewish traditions both Scriptures share similarities and differences in the narrative of Sheba/Balqis, the events related to prophet/king Solomon and queen Sheba/Balqis are recited in the Hebrew Bible 1 Kings and 2 Chronicles and in the chapter of "The Ants" of the Qur'an. On the other hand the story of an unnamed queen emerges in both featured in various parables that underscore moral lessons in the Qur'an while the magnificence of Solomon's court and his renowned wisdom worldwide in the Hebrew Bible. The names of Sheba and Balqis are bestowed to her by the interpreters. Hence, each poet underscores the queen's identity by incorporating her name into the poems' titles; highlighting her role as a female queen asserting the feminist spirit early in the titles of the poems along with the repeated pronouns "I" and "my" which grant voice to queen Sheba/Balqis dissimilar to their religious scriptures.

As a Jewish feminist, Ostriker proves that the queen of Sheba is a female "ruler" who holds equivalent stature to Solomon the king. She is not identified by her marital or sexual relationship with Solomon but rather by her pursuit of wisdom. Revealing and principally highlighting the narrative of Sheba confirming the rational and wise linkage between king/Solomon and queen/Sheba. They engage in philosophical and political discussions like equals, both being depicted as intelligent, confident, and wise. Ostriker portrays the queen as powerful and capable of meeting one of the greatest kings on her own terms. This portrayal is particularly relevant in the modern era, where there is a need for models of powerful, wise, and self-assured women.

Being an Islamic feminist, Kahf presents a prenuptial agreement from the perspective of Muslim women, demonstrating Balqis's willingness to marry Solomon and showcasing female love, wisdom, and independence in defiance of patriarchy. By awarding voice to Balqis and narrating her feminist spirit, Kahf emphasizes the importance of women's significance, asserting that they are not to be overlooked, as they constitute an integral part of society. Thus, she is a source of inspiration and strength not only for the poet but for all women to regain essential and forceful position historically, as well as reshaping their sacred/holy traditions.

Via employing intertextuality to the religious scriptures, the two poets situate the narrative of queen Sheba/Balqis to depict women who have carved out high status for themselves in a male-dominated world. Queen Sheba/Balqis for both poets has a figurative presence and inspiring power for her acumen and sovereignty; she is the cultural icon, for Muslims and Jews.



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