Journal of Human Studies and Social. University Oran2.Vol: 15 .N: 02.
ISSN: 2253-0592 EISSN: 2588-199X / Prefix: 10.46315

The Honor Paradigm and the Paternal Struggle in Zulekha Saudi's Play 'Gallantry and Treachery': A Pragmatic Analysis

براديغم الشرف وصراع الأبوة في مسرحية "شهامة وغدر" لزليخا سعودي – مقاربة تداولية

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DOI : 10.46315/1714-015-002-053
Received: 01/ 08/ 2025 Accepted: 23/ 10/ 2025 Published : 10/ 06/ 2026

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Abstract:

This article examines the Algerian play Chivalry and Betrayal by writer Zlikha Al-Saoudi as a literary text that engages with cultural and authoritative structures through a dramatic representation of the conflict between the female self and the patriarchal system. The analysis focuses on the rhetorical discourse of the character "Nabila" and her relationships with both her father and the Qur'an teacher, who represent religious and social patriarchal authority in the Algerian context.

The study adopts a dual approach that combines rhetoric and pragmatic discourse analysis to uncover the discursive strategies employed by Nabila in negotiating with structures of authority, such as insinuation, rebellion, and compliance. It also seeks to deconstruct the dynamics of interaction between characters from a pragmatic perspective that highlights the social and cultural dimensions shaping and directing the discourse. This reading reveals how theatrical discourse reproduces gendered power, exposing the tension between language and authority within a space where moral, religious, and social values intersect.

Keywords: the honor; the paternal struggle; theartical speech; gallanntry and treachery; zuleikha Saudi.

الملخص :

يتناول هذا المقال المسرحية الجزائرية "شهامة وغدر" للكاتبة زليخة السعودي بوصفها نصًا أدبيًا يحاور البنى الثقافية والسلطوية من خلال تمثيل درامي للصراع بين الذات الأنثوية والمنظومة الأبوية. يركّز البحث على تحليل الخطاب البلاغي لشخصية "نبيلة" وعلاقتها بكل من والدها ومعلم القرآن، بوصفهما تمثيلين لسلطة البطرياركيا الدينية والاجتماعية في السياق الجزائري.

تعتمد الدراسة مقاربة مزدوجة تجمع بين البلاغة والتحليل التداولي، للكشف عن الاستراتيجيات الخطابية التي توظفها "نبيلة" في التفاوض مع الأطر السلطوية، مثل التلميح، التمرد، والامتثال. كما تسعى إلى تفكيك دينامية التفاعل بين الشخصيات من منظور تداولي يُبرز الأبعاد الاجتماعية والثقافية التي تُشكّل الخطاب وتوجّهه.

تبرز هذه القراءة كيف يُعيد الخطاب المسرحي إنتاج السلطة الجندرية، ويكشف عن التوتر بين اللغة والسلطة، في فضاء تتقاطع فيه القيم الأخلاقية والدينية والاجتماعية.

كلمات مفتاحية: الشرف؛ صراع الأبوة؛ الخطاب المسرحي؛ شهامة وغدر؛ زوليخا السعودي.

The Honor Paradigm and the Paternal Struggle in Zulekha Saudi's Play 'Gallantry and Treachery': A Pragmatic Analysis

1- Introduction

Zlikha Al-Saoudi's play Chivalry and Betrayal is a dramatic text that re-examines the concepts of honor and patriarchal authority within a complex social context. The transformations that affect the notion of honor—as a paradigm or epistemological model—reflect the intersection of moral values and structures of power. This interplay raises several critical questions: How do values such as protection and virtue become tools of repression? And how is patriarchal authority employed to reinforce social dominance? In response to these questions, this study adopts a pragmatic methodology that seeks to explore...

The often-complex relationship between parents and children occupies a central place in literature, as it explores familial values and the challenges faced by successive generations. Among these challenges are the critical life decisions imposed by the family, which frequently clash with an individual's desire for autonomy. This tension raises essential questions about balancing personal freedom with collective interests.

A telling example of this generational dialogue is the conversation between Ahmed and his daughter Nabila regarding the pilgrimage to Mecca. This exchange typifies conservative family dialogues about values and life choices. It reveals the importance of open and honest communication in building bridges of understanding between generations, while also highlighting the challenges modern families face as traditional values intersect with personal aspirations, particularly in the tension between paternal authority and cultural constraints.

1. A Pragmatic Analysis of the Submissive Female Character

In Arabic literature, women are often portrayed as submissive figures confined by tradition and social restrictions, depicted as subjects to male authority and societal norms. This is clearly manifested in one of the key scenes in the play Chivalry and Betrayal, particularly through the character of Nabila, who perfectly embodies the model of the submissive woman. Nabila experiences a deep internal conflict between obedience to her father and the surrounding social pressures to uphold her honor. This is illustrated in the following dialogue between Nabila and her father:

Ahmed informs his daughter Nabila of the family's plan to perform the pilgrimage to Mecca, leaving her behind to continue her studies. He addresses her:

Ahmed: "Nabila, Nabila, come, come."

Nabila (from afar): "At your command, dear father, I'm on my way."

Nabila arrives and knocks shyly, saying: "Did you call for me, Father?"

Ahmed: "Yes, my daughter. Do you know what I'm going to tell you?"

Nabila: "By God, I know nothing; only God has full knowledge."

Ahmed: "We have decided to perform the holy pilgrimage to Mecca. We may stay there for many years."

Ahmed: "I will lock all the palace doors and leave you with only the key to your room and this small window through which you may pass your tablet to your Qur'an teacher, Ibrahim, for correction. You are not to go out at all."

Nabila: "How could I go out, Father, when you will be taking all the keys with you? I have no desire to go out at all."

Ahmed: "Then go now to your room to memorize your tablet. The day after tomorrow, God willing, we shall depart—perhaps for ten years—to seek forgiveness. We will leave you here to complete your studies, and I hope that in the meantime, you will be the model of a virtuous and pure girl, and that you will safeguard your family's honor as you would your life."

This passage reveals profound social issues through character interaction, illustrating a complex struggle between preserving tradition and yearning for liberation. A pragmatic analysis is necessary here to uncover the implicit meanings within the dialogue and the rhetorical mechanisms used to justify oppressive behaviors in the name of honor.

From this perspective, we propose a breakdown of the dialogue into pragmatic dimensions, as follows:

- **Central Speech Act: "Informing" (Informative Function)**

  Ahmed's declaration represents a pivotal moment in Nabila's life. He employs calm persuasive language to justify the decision, referencing her chastity and maturity. This reflects patriarchal values that seek to isolate and control women. According to John Searle's speech act theory, the primary illocutionary act in this segment is informing, where the speaker conveys a propositional content with varying degrees of commitment to its truth (Searle, 1969). Ahmed's intent is to reaffirm the family's moral authority and traditional values.

This is executed through a pragmatic strategy in which the act of pilgrimage is used as a religiously sanctioned justification, while implicitly serving a controlling purpose—to isolate the girl and protect her from perceived societal threats.

This results in an internal struggle for the daughter. When her father asks her to safeguard the family's honor, she responds:

"Thank you, my kind father. I make a sincere vow to live up to your expectations and more, dear Father."

Although she complies, Nabila's words reveal emotional tension. Her expression "I will live up to your expectations"represents a commissive act, a future-oriented promise that reflects uncertainty (Searle, 1979). Here, the commitment refers not to a present reality but to a future scenario shaped by her father's absence.

Moreover, when her father calls her, Nabila responds with respectful calm:

"Did you call for me, Father?"

She does not question his intentions. Her submissive tone and readiness to obey reflect deep-rooted cultural norms. This type of discourse structure aligns with J.L. Austin's fivefold classification of speech acts, which includes assertives, directives, commissives, expressives, and declarations (Austin, 1962).

This familial exchange also evokes the Qur'anic dialogue between Abraham and Azar, as noted by Nabil Al-Saghir (2020) in his rhetorical analysis of dramatic discourse. Both dialogues reflect a moral and generational tension framed within religious and social values.

This study can be applied using an analytical pragmatic approach, breaking the text into semantic and stylistic units based on Austin's taxonomy, thereby offering a deeper understanding of how meaning is constructed and how it impacts the audience.

The dialogue can be divided into three major communicative units, each defined by specific linguistic and role-based features:

First Unit: The Call and Opening Dialogue:

Ahmed calls Nabila: "Nabila, Nabila, come, come."

Nabila replies from afar: "At your command, dear father, I'm on my way."

The scene opens with strong paternal authority through repeated imperative commands. Nabila responds with compliance, reflecting a clear power imbalance in a traditional, patriarchal family structure.

Second Unit: The Announcement of the Father's Decision

Ahmed: "I will lock all the palace doors and leave you with only the key to your room and this small window..."

Nabila: "How could I go out, Father... I have no desire to go out at all."

This segment shows a shift to a more assertive speech style. Ahmed imposes his will; Nabila responds with rhetorical acceptance, signaling obedience masked as modest resistance.

Third Unit: The Final Order and Directive

Ahmed: "Then go now to your room to memorize your tablet..."

Here, the father concludes the dialogue with an explicit command, reinforcing both his worldly authority and religious legitimacy. The fusion of secular and sacred justification amplifies the perceived righteousness of his command (Al-Saghir, 2020

Honor Paradigm and the Struggle of Fatherhood in Zlikha Saoudi's Play *Chivalry and Betrayal*: A Pragmatic Approach

Introduction:

Zlikha Saoudi's play *Chivalry and Betrayal* is a dramatic text that re-questions the intertwined notions of honor and patriarchal authority within a complex social context. The transformations undergone by the concept of honor, considered here as a *paradigm* (in the Kuhnian epistemological sense), reflect the intricate entanglement between ethical values and systems of domination. This raises key questions: **How do protective values and ideals of virtue become tools of oppression?** And **how is patriarchal authority employed to perpetuate social hegemony?**

To explore these questions, we adopt a **pragmatic-discursive approach**, aimed at analyzing the communicative acts and underlying ideologies shaping interpersonal dynamics in the play (Austin, 1962, p. 94; Searle, 1979, pp. 1–2).

The complex relationship between fathers and children often occupies a central place in literature, revealing family values and the generational conflicts that arise from differing priorities. One of the most challenging aspects of these relationships lies in **life-altering decisions imposed by the family**, often clashing with the individual's desire for autonomy. This tension raises ethical dilemmas surrounding the balance between **personal freedom and collective interest** (Ricoeur, 1990, pp. 127–130).

In this play, the **dialogue between Ahmed and his daughter Nabila**—centered on her staying behind while the family travels for Hajj—becomes a representative moment of **traditional family conversations**, where values, control, and choice are negotiated. The exchange reflects the importance of open dialogue to build understanding between generations, while also highlighting the tension between **paternal authority and the restrictive grip of tradition**.

Paragraph 2 – A Pragmatic Analysis of the Submissive Female Character:

In Arabic literature, the female character is often portrayed as subordinate to tradition and constrained by social norms. She appears as subject to male and communal authority, reflecting deeply rooted patriarchal ideologies. This dynamic is clearly illustrated in one of the dramatic scenes in Chivalry and Betrayal, particularly through the character Nabila, who epitomizes the archetype of

the submissive woman. Nabila experiences a profound inner conflict: the duty of obedience to her father clashes with societal pressure to uphold her family's honor.

In the following excerpt, we witness a conversation between Ahmed and Nabila that highlights this struggle:

Ahmed: "Nabila, Nabila, come here!"

Nabila (from a distance): "At your command, dear father. I'm on my way."

(She enters, shyly knocks, and says:) "Did you call me, father?"

Ahmed: "Yes, my daughter. Do you know what I'm going to tell you?"

Nabila: "No, father, by God, I know nothing. Only God knows."

Ahmed: "We have decided to travel to the Holy City of Mecca to perform the sacred Hajj. We may stay for many years. I will lock all the palace doors and leave you only the key to your room and this small window to hand your tablet to your teacher Ibrahim for correction. You shall not go out or see anyone."

Nabila: "How could I leave, father, when you'll be taking all the keys with you? I have no wish to go outside."

Ahmed: "Now go to your room to study your tablet. The day after tomorrow, we leave by God's will—to the land of forgiveness, inshallah, for ten years or so. We'll leave you here to continue your studies, and I hope you'll remain a pure, honorable girl who safeguards the family's honor as you would your own life" (Saoudi, 2019, pp. 15–16).

This exchange reveals deep social tensions, especially concerning the intersection of female virtue, honor, and isolation. Through this interaction, the play depicts how patriarchal authority cloaks itself in moral and religious rhetoric to justify symbolic and physical confinement (Searle, 1979, p. 32).

From a speech act theory perspective, we identify multiple layers:

- Central Illocutionary Act: The primary act here is informing ("We have decided..."), a representative act aiming to convey a decisive message. According to Searle, such acts are used to represent the speaker's reality to the hearer (Searle, 1979, pp. 12–14).
- Perlocutionary Intent: The father's goal is not merely to inform but to convince and justify—using calm, paternal language that appeals to religious values and familial expectations.
- Strategic Pragmatics: The act is wrapped in a religious rationale (Hajj), which conceals an authoritarian motive: controlling the daughter's movement, speech, and interactions under the guise of virtue (Austin, 1962, pp. 102–104).

Nabila responds with outward obedience, but her words—"I will be what you expect of me, father"—suggest an emotional undertone that reflects the internalization of social expectations and the psychological cost of submission. Her promise indicates a commitment to future action, aligning with Searle's classification of commissive acts, where the speaker commits to a future course (Searle, 1979, p. 61).

When she says: "I will be what you expect of me," she engages in a performative act linked to an uncertain future. The phrase is not a present declaration, but a projection of anticipated virtue—hinged on the condition of being left alone. According to Searle, such commitments imply a moral obligation toward a projected future event (Searle, 1979, p. 62).

Furthermore, Nabila's linguistic style—"Did you call me, father?"—reflects a respectful, submissive tone. She neither resists nor challenges the father's decision, reinforcing the hierarchical nature of communication within the family. The dialogue not only reflects a conservative structure but also embodies a clear power dynamic, where paternal voice dominates, and feminine presence is rendered passive.

This exchange can also be interpreted through the lens of religious allegory, reminiscent of the Qur'anic dialogue between Abraham and Azar, as noted by Nabil Essghair (2020, p. 203). Both conversations express a moral tension within a framework of spiritual obedience and societal expectations. These dimensions closely resemble Austin's fivefold classification of speech acts (Austin, 1962, p. 148).

The play's structure—organized in dialogic sequences—can be divided into three pragmatic units:

1. Opening Directive Act: "Nabila, Nabila, come here." — Demonstrates imperative discourse and the father's dominating presence.

2. Informative Segment: The decision to leave her behind — reveals the expository nature of patriarchal decisions wrapped in moralistic explanations.

3. Closing Command: "Go now to your room..." — a direct order that underscores both the authority and the invocation of divine will to reinforce submission.

Paragraph 3 – The Second Scene: Implied Threat and the Dialectics of Power

After her family departs for Mecca, Nabila is left alone in the palace, only to be exposed to the treacherous gaze of her Qur'an teacher, Ibrahim. She voices her discomfort:

"It has been seven days since my family left. I lack nothing and my life remains peaceful... except for those deceitful looks that my teacher Ibrahim has started to give me every time I pass him the tablet

through the small window for correction. I do not know what the days hide behind those glances. O Allah, protect me with Your mercy and generosity, so that I may honor the promise I made to my father and my family" (Saoudi, 2019, p. 17).

This passage is rich in pragmatic and psychological implications, and reveals multiple dimensions of conflict and symbolic power:

1. **Implicit Threat**

The teacher's silent glances carry an implied threat. There are no overt advances—just a shift in behavior, which introduces a veiled danger. According to Brown and Levinson's politeness theory, such indirect communication strategies often serve to bypass overt face-threatening acts while still conveying power or danger (Brown & Levinson, 1987, pp. 68–70).

2. Language of Vulnerability and Faith

Nabila's response is not confrontation, but rather spiritual retreat. She uses supplicatory language, invoking divine protection: "O Allah, protect me." This blend of fear and inner strength reflects a double-layered response: emotional vulnerability coupled with spiritual resilience (Saoudi, 2019, p. 17).

3.. Ethical and Psychological Conflict

Nabila becomes the site of two moral poles:

- Virtue: Represented by her steadfastness, modesty, and religious faith.
- Vice: Embodied in Ibrahim's manipulative demeanor and growing desire.

The psychological tension is heightened by the claustrophobic setting of the palace—an enclosed space where the teacher's role is both spiritual and, increasingly, threatening.

4. Symbolic Power and Coercion

The teacher, Ibrahim, is not just a man of religion; he becomes a symbol of corrupted moral authority. His approach, marked by coercion disguised as mentorship, aligns with what Paul Ricoeur calls "the perversion of ethical intention", when moral symbols (religion, teaching) are used for self-serving aims (Ricoeur, 1992, p. 315).

This is fully illustrated in the next excerpt:

"The teacher comes to take the tablet himself. His steps draw near, and he begins to whisper: I have started to feel a strong, overwhelming desire toward this girl entrusted to me by her father. This very morning, I shall devise a trap to possess her." (Saoudi, 2019, p. 18).

Here, the predator's inner monologue reveals a clear violation of trust. The spiritual teacher, instead of guarding the girl's honor, schemes to trap her. When he asks her:

"Come out, come out. It is better for you than this prison you're in." (Saoudi, 2019, p. 18)

The command ("come out") cloaks itself in the rhetoric of liberation. Yet, in truth, it is a manipulation—an invitation to moral abandonment disguised as escape.

5. Intertextual and Religious Symbolism

This scene evokes the Qur'anic story of Prophet Joseph (Yusuf) and the attempted seduction by the wife of al-Aziz (Zulaikha), whom he resists. Likewise, Nabila becomes a symbol of virtue, resisting temptation and clinging to her moral compass. She embodies the verse: "Prison is dearer to me than what they invite me to" (Qur'an 12:33).

Nabila replies simply: "I don't want to leave." (Saoudi, 2019, p. 18)

This refusal is both an ethical and a pragmatic act, a direct assertive speech act (Searle, 1979, p. 15), defying the teacher's manipulative command.

6. Betrayal of Sacred Authority

Ibrahim does not represent the Qur'an teacher as per Islamic values. Islamic pedagogy emphasizes trust, humility, and purity of intent. The teacher's actions contradict these principles, revealing instead what Austin terms a "misfire" in performative speech: a betrayal of role and social contract (Austin, 1962, p. 23).

The text thus critiques not religion, but the use of religious identity as a mask for personal exploitation, emphasizing that the real danger lies in conflating sacred tradition with unchecked masculine authority.

7. Ricoeur and the Concept of "The Evil That Should Not Be"

The teacher's behavior aligns with Paul Ricoeur's idea of "evil as the unnecessary"—something that has no rightful place in moral order but nonetheless exists. It is a perversion of the ethical self (Ricoeur, 1986, p. 221).

Here, Ibrahim becomes a metaphor for systemic betrayal: of trust, of religion, and of moral order. The tablet that Nabila passes through the window becomes a symbol of her identity and creativity. When he tries to pull her hand, he is not only breaching a physical barrier but also attempting to drag her out of her moral universe.

Paragraph 4 – From Temptation to Threat: Symbolic Violence and Religious Hypocrisy

After Nabila refuses the teacher's invitation to "freedom," his language escalates from persuasion to explicit threat, exposing his wounded pride and desire for vengeance. He lashes out:

"Fine, fine—despise me all you want, and you'll see! I'll spread scandals about you, and everyone will believe me because I am the man of the Book. I'll send a letter to your parents claiming you've defiled the palace and dishonored the family's name. In fact, I'll go in person and make sure they believe me. I'll be the reason you die soon." (Saoudi, 2019, p. 19)

This passage reveals the shift from symbolic seduction to performative violence—from suggestive speech to threats with social and mortal consequences.

1. Threat as a Speech Act

According to Austin's theory of speech acts, this utterance is a "commissive" and "threatening" act—the speaker commits to taking harmful action (Austin, 1962, p. 150). It reflects a misuse of religious authority, where the teacher weaponizes his role as a religious figure to control and punish a woman who resists.

Here, his threat carries force precisely because of the social capital granted to him as a Qur'an teacher—a symbol of unassailable virtue in patriarchal societies.

2. Nietzsche's Theory of Priestly Resentment

This scene echoes Friedrich Nietzsche's analysis of priestly resentment in The Genealogy of Morals, where he asserts:

"The most poisonous kind of man is the man of resentment—the priest—who, incapable of action, takes revenge by moral condemnation and spiritual coercion" (Nietzsche, 1887/2006, p. 21).

The teacher resembles Nietzsche's "resentful priest"—he does not possess strength or desire fulfilled by mutual respect, so he lashes out with moral weapons: shame, threat, and reputation damage.

- Ressentiment becomes the means by which he attacks those who reject him.
- The threat to "expose" Nabila is not rooted in truth, but in social perception, highlighting the ease with which religious authority is turned into a tool of oppression.

3. Religious Hypocrisy and Moral Inversion

The teacher invokes his status as "the man of the Book," which deepens the irony and tragedy. In Islamic ethics, a Qur'an teacher is entrusted with spiritual guidance, not domination. His abuse of that trust reveals what Ricoeurdescribes as the "double betrayal"—the betrayal of the self as moral agent, and of the sacred narrative he is meant to embody (Ricoeur, 1992, p. 320).

The performative act of sending a letter, or publicly accusing Nabila, is what Searle would identify as a directive with illocutionary force—designed not just to express intent but to cause irreversible social damage (Searle, 1969, p. 63).

4. Cultural Layers: Patriarchy, Religion, and Power

This moment synthesizes key intersections of patriarchal control:

- Gendered violence through threat of public dishonor.
- Religious distortion, where sacred roles serve secular ego.
- Power imbalance, where a single male figure can override a woman's dignity by virtue of his social position.

The metaphorical transition from "inviting her to freedom" to "threatening her life" marks the collapse of dialogue into domination. He no longer seeks to win Nabila's consent—only to punish her resistance.

Paragraph 5 – The Bloody Honor Paradigm: Tragedy of Fraternal Violence

In traditional societies, the patriarchal system shapes the fate of characters through symbolic and real violence. In Chahama wa Ghadar, the theme of "bloody honor" emerges through a toxic mix of emotional manipulation, religious distortion, and filial obedience.

This becomes starkly evident with Salim's return, as he pretends to fulfill a vow to his father:

"Nabila, Nabila, open the door, my sister. It's me, your brother Salim. Don't be afraid" (Saoudi, 2019, p. 21).

1. Discursive Dissonance: False Brotherhood, Hidden Intent

This statement contrasts a tender tone with a hidden, violent purpose. Salim's speech, on the surface, radiates familial love and warmth. Yet the audience already knows his true aim: to murder his sister as a gesture of family honor.

Such discursive contradiction—–between emotional language and concealed aggression—–is what scholars of pragmatics identify as verbal irony with strategic intention (Leech, 1983, p. 145). This performance of care is a rhetorical trap.

Nabila responds with innocent joy: "Oh my dear brother, welcome! Open the door for God's sake. I do not have the keys" (Saoudi, 2019, p. 22).

Her words reflect blind trust, deepening the tragic weight of the scene. She exists in a delusion of familial security, unaware of the betrayal about to unfold.

2. ***From Promise to Crime: Honor as Moral Blackmail***

Salim had previously vowed:

"I gave my father my word—–to search for her everywhere. And if I found her, to kill her, and bring him a bottle of her blood and a piece of her liver" (Saoudi, 2019, p. 23).

This shocking statement embodies what Ricoeur (1992) calls "moral perversion": the distortion of duty into vengeance. Salim is caught in a tragic triangle—–torn between obedience to his father, the illusion of moral responsibility, and the collapse of brotherhood.

This concept echoes Nietzsche's critique of values turned against life. Salim's notion of honor requires him to destroy love and kinship. What is presented as virtue is, in truth, a performance of cruelty masked by duty (Nietzsche, 1887/2006, pp. 33–34).

3. Religious Symbolism as Justification

Salim continues his manipulation:

"I've come to take you with me to Mecca, where we'll live forever. They all miss you terribly. Pack your things. Tomorrow we leave for the holy land" (Saoudi, 2019, p. 24).

Here, Mecca is used symbolically—–not as a place of peace but as a false promise, an illusion masking death. Religion, thus, is instrumentalized, its moral capital co-opted to seduce and deceive.

Such use of religious justification for violence exemplifies what Searle (1969) refers to as perlocutionary manipulation—a speech act designed to provoke not understanding but submission (p. 78).

4. Ritualized Violence and Symbolic Cannibalism

The tragedy reaches its peak when Salim returns with evidence of his "deed":

"Here is a bottle of her blood and a piece of her liver."

The father drinks the blood and chews the liver, saying:

"You have cleansed the shame, my son. You've avenged my wounded honor. May God bless you" (Saoudi, 2019, p. 25).

This scene evokes ritualistic violence, blending mythic vengeance with pathological control. The choice of liver is symbolic—it recalls the Arabic idiom "fildhat kabdi" ("flesh of my liver"), often used to express parental love. Here, that love is grotesquely inverted.

This grotesque imagery recalls ancient revenge myths, like Hind's vengeance on Hamza in early Islamic history, when she chewed his liver after battle. The act here represents the ultimate symbolic consumption of a female body, reduced to the bearer of family honor.

As Paul Ricoeur (1992) observes, such acts mark the limit of moral imagination, where ethical justification fails and violence becomes theology.

Paragraph 6 – Internal Conflict: Conscience vs. the Urge to Kill

The meeting between Salim and Nabila presents an emotionally complex moment where brotherly affection collides with murderous intent. The dialogue unfolds in a context of deceptive calm, as Nabila, confined in the palace, hears Salim's voice:

"Nabila, Nabila, open the door, my sister. It's me, your brother Salim. Don't be afraid" (Saoudi, 2019, p. 26).

Nabila answers from behind the palace gate:

"Oh my dear brother, welcome! Open it for God's sake. I don't have the keys" (Saoudi, 2019, p. 26).

This discursive tension encapsulates Salim's dual identity: the loving brother and the avenger of honor. His words create an illusion of protection, while the audience is already aware of his vow to commit fratricide:

"I swore to my father that I would look for her everywhere. If I found her, I would kill her and bring him a bottle of her blood and a piece of her liver" (Saoudi, 2019, p. 23).

In this contradictory speech, Salim embodies what Austin (1962) describes as a felicitous speech act turned infelicitous—his promise is meant to offer reassurance but conceals the intent to destroy. The pragmatic failure here is not in understanding but in trust betrayed.

"I came to take you with me to Mecca, where we will live forever. Everyone misses you deeply. Prepare your things; tomorrow we leave for the holy land" (Saoudi, 2019, p. 24).

Here, the sacred is manipulated to mask the profane. The journey to Mecca, traditionally a symbol of purification and rebirth, becomes a deceptive promise, an allegorical journey toward death. This conflict between appearance and intention reflects Searle's (1979) classification of deceitful speech acts that weaponize intention (p. 53).

- *Symbolic Reading: The Journey as a Metaphor for Death*

The mention of Mecca operates on two levels:

- At the literal level, it reflects religious and cultural continuity.
- At the symbolic level, it parallels Ricoeur's (1992) concept of "ethical distortion," in which moral values are subverted to serve violence (p. 215).

The tragic irony lies in Salim's internal battle—between the cultural imperative to "cleanse honor" and the basic human bond with his sister. This contradiction culminates in a deadly silence during their journey.

The dramatic tension grows not through action but through what is unsaid, as the silence becomes the true language of betrayal. The path to Mecca thus metaphorizes the path to murder, masked as familial reunion.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study of the first act of Chivalry and Betrayal by Algerian playwright Zlikha Saoudi, through a pragmatic discourse analysis, reveals the intricate intertwinement of speech acts, cultural values, and patriarchal authority.

This dramatic text constitutes a rich space for examining how speech acts function within oppressive cultural frameworks, especially when tied to social concepts like honor, gender, and power.

The analysis highlighted the following key points:

- Honor as a Dominant Value:

Honor is used as a justification for oppressive practices, particularly toward women, revealing the patriarchal logicgoverning familial and social relations. This is evident in Ahmed's and Salim's speech acts that reframe control and violence as moral imperatives (Saoudi, 2019, pp. 13–27; Austin, 1962, pp. 94–107).

- Patriarchal Conflict:

The family space becomes a battlefield rather than a place of safety. Ahmed, the father, and Salim, the son, monopolize power, while Nabila and her mother represent marginalized voices, illustrating the violent dynamic of authoritarian fatherhood (Searle, 1979, pp. 45–65).

- Religion as a Value Framework:

Although religion plays a spiritually significant role, it is often instrumentalized in the play as a tool for legitimizing unjust acts, echoing Ricoeur's view on how "sacred language" may be corrupted by human intentions (Ricoeur, 1992, pp. 211–220).

- Psychological Conflict within Characters:

Through pragmatic analysis, the internal psychological tension among the characters is made visible. The characters oscillate between familial obligations and moral conscience, torn between duty and justice, tradition and personal freedom (Nietzsche, 1887/2007, pp. 33–41).

Ultimately, Chivalry and Betrayal invites the reader to confront the dark undercurrents of patriarchal values and the rhetorical mechanisms through which power is exercised, masked, and perpetuated.

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