

THE EARLY PERIOD OF CREATIVITY OF ASIA DJEBAR

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Abstract. The approach of modern Algerian writers is based on a conscious relationship with the text, and for most of them, based on reality and an autobiographical project, which is often consistent with it, it goes beyond them. Assia Jabar, the first French-language writer to join the French Academy in 2005. Assia Jabar's work often begins with the individual, even with an autobiographical, to spark collective themes. She repeatedly depicted the situation of her generation, encountering the values of two society and two cultures. In this article, we mainly focus on the first period of Assia Djebbar's work.

Key words: Assia Djebbar, French-language writer, *Bonjour Tristesse*, *La Soif*, *Françoise Sagan*, autobiographical novel.

Assia Djebbar, whose real name is Fatma-Zohra Imalhayen, a world-famous contemporary writer, takes her first steps in literature at a certain time: the end of the fifties. Assia Jabar delivered several autobiographical elements throughout his entire writing career: individual elements intersecting without contradicting each other, but enlightening one another. It is possible to recreate in some way fragments of echoes and resonances, moments of intense life, marked by gaps in the route, which, as it seemed, can still be traced under the friendly attention of the father. Assia Jabar is one of the Algerian writers of the fiftieth generation who had constant text production, even if there was a period of silence during the 70s. Writing that evolves and becomes more accurate. In her career, we can indicate the stages of the history of the writers' factory, as she herself said. It describes various positions (stages of construction by the author who rethinks his individual history, who reconstructs the social trajectory and develops aesthetics, etc.).

The first four books of Assia Djebbar are of particular interest to us because of their publication at a time when Algeria and France are becoming rivals. The War of Independence took on a tragic scale from 1956 and did not end until 1962, the publication date of **Les Enfants du Nouveau Monde (Children of the New World)**, the third part of this romantic cycle. This factor influences the writing of her novels and explains some of the aesthetic trajectories that the novelist undertakes. Her works are a single whole: thematic and stylistic continuity takes shape, each of which represents a draft of the Jabar novel on its own scale and at the same time forms a heterogeneous whole: each book diverges from another or does not coincide with another. The figure of the writer gradually manifests itself in her works, declaring her originality, listening to herself, but, nevertheless, she does not oppose the external remarks of journalistic or more intellectual criticism of her time. From the very beginning, we were struck by several scientifically critical contemporary articles based on

his early works. No more than five researchers work or worked on this first cycle, the rest, very numerous, have studied Djébar only since 1980, the dates of the great return of Assia Djébar to the literary scene with the “great” book in a new way: **Femmes d'Alger dans leur appartement** (“**Algerian women in their apartment**”).

In 1957, with his first novel **La Soif**, Assia Djébar, almost instinctively, find the pace of his writing - a return to himself, a murmur and monologue, which can sometimes explode with cries of joy or cries of unhappiness - and, if not the topic itself, the tone of what she says: on the side of women. This novel, surrounded by a scandal at its exit and masked by the secret of its difficult access, arouses curiosity, which can now be satiated and shared. As soon as **La Soif** was published, there was a resemblance to the novel by Françoise Sagan, with great success in 1954, **Bonjour Tristesse**. Two young writers are published with the same publisher, **Julliard**, and some reading notes go so far as Assia Djébar called the “**Muslim Sagan**”.

At first glance, **La Soif (Thirst)** for Assia Djébar seems to be built in the same way as Françoise Sagan’s novel **Bonjour Tristesse**. Indeed, we find the same narrative scheme, the scope of the novel is identical. The initial situation of the two novels is largely similar. In each of the embryos, and in a broader sense in the first chapters that play the role of the exhibition scene, the representation of the scene, period, protagonist and some minor characters is very close.

The main character of **Bonjour Tristesse** is a young girl, **Cecile**, barely seventeen years old at the time of the events, and the heroine of Assia Djébar, **Nadia**, at the age of twenty. Both are storytellers. The narrative is retrospective, that is, the narrator immediately after the opening of the novel returns to his young years and, more precisely, recalls how this or that summer passed. Some elements are found in each of the first chapters, giving a strange feeling that Roman, **thirst**, borrowed some of the themes from the novel “**Bonjour Tristesse**”. However, these two young writers have a very distinct style.

Françoise Sagan, Bonjour Tristesse - Sur ce sentiment inconnu dont l’ennui, la douceur m’obsèdent, j’hésite à apposer le nom, le beau nom grave de tristesse. C’est un sentiment si complet, si égoïste que j’en ai presque honte alors que la tristesse m’a toujours parue honorable. Je ne la connaissais pas, elle, mais l’ennui, le regret, plus rarement le remords. Aujourd’hui quelque chose se replie sur moi comme une soie, énervante et douce, et me sépare des autres.

Cet été-là, j’avais dix-sept ans et j’étais parfaitement heureuse. Les «autres» étaient mon père et Elsa, sa maîtresse. Il me faut tout de suite expliquer cette situation qui peut paraître fausse. [...] [Mon père] avait loué, sur la Méditerranée, une grande villa blanche, isolée, ravissante, dont nous rêvions depuis les premières chaleurs de juin. [5, p11-12]

On this unknown feeling whose boredom, sweetness obsess me, I hesitate to affix the name, the beautiful serious name of sadness. It is such a complete feeling, so selfish that I am almost ashamed of it, when sadness has always seemed honorable to me. I did not know her,

but boredom, regret, more rarely remorse. Today something folds over me like a silk, irritating and soft, and separates me from the others.

That summer I was seventeen and I was perfectly happy. The "others" were my father and Elsa, his mistress. I must immediately explain this situation which may seem false. [...] [My father] had rented, on the Mediterranean, a large white villa, isolated, lovely, which we had dreamed of since the first heat of June. [5, p11-12]

Assia Djébar, La Soif - Cet été-là je retrouvais avec une indifférence morne, à la fois le soleil éclatant de M***, et les estivants habituels, agglutinés par paquets et par familles nombreuses, pour parader dans le bruit, la chaleur et la nudité. [...] Quant à moi je ne faisais que sommeiller sur le sable chaud, le matin, et dans mon lit moite à l'heure des siestes.

[...] L'été aurait pu continuer ainsi, comme une sphère vide, comme ma vie, plein seulement de l'ivresse abrutissante de la chaleur et du bleu cruel de la mer. Il avait suffi de l'ardeur muette du regard de Jedla pour que tout brusquement, et mes heures de sommeil dans le sable chaud, et mes fuites dans les chemins d'été, pour que tout, soudainement, fût troué. Je sus alors que j'en avais fini avec l'ennui, avec la solitude. [1. p.18]

Assia Djébar, La Soif - That summer I found with dismal indifference, at the same time the bright sun of M***, and the usual summer visitors, agglutinated in bundles and by large families, to parade in the noise, the heat and nudity. [...] As for me, I was only sleeping on the hot sand in the morning and in my moist bed at nap time.

[...] Summer could have continued like this, like an empty sphere, like my life, full only of the breathless intoxication of the heat and the cruel blue of the sea. It had been enough for the silent ardor of Jedla's gaze so that all of a sudden, and my hours of sleep in the hot sand, and my escape on the summer roads, so that everything, suddenly, was ripped. I knew then that I was done with boredom, with loneliness. [1. p.18]

There are real similarities between the two beginnings of the novel, even if these two characters do not have the same relationship to the world: Cecile is **"happy"**, and Nadia is already **"indifferent"** to everything that surrounds her. She is already tired and disappointed by the existence. In two novels, the action takes place on the shores of the Mediterranean during the summer, and each of the storytellers gives us the opportunity to read this retrospective story as a significant episode in her life, as a recognition.

The presence of the sea, the pleasures of water and the sun are topics that regularly become the subject of lengthy descriptions in these novels. Françoise Sagan, like Assia Djébar, tries to show the intense heat of the southern summer in his novel. Like Albert Camus, in their novels, these two authors put the heavy and cruel sun in the center of the plot.

Although the environment of the two girls is different, the relationship with the father may be related in some way. Indeed, even if the father's figure is not present in **La Soif**, nevertheless, it is described in the first chapter in closer terms:

Françoise Sagan, Bonjour Tristesse - C'était un homme léger, habile en affaires, toujours curieux et vite lassé, et qui plaisait aux femmes. Je n'eus aucun mal à l'aimer, et tendrement, car il était bon, généreux, gai, et plein d'affection pour moi. [5. p. 12]

Françoise Sagan, Bonjour Tristesse - He was a light man, skilful in business, always curious and quickly bored, and who liked women. I had no trouble loving him, and tenderly, because he was kind, generous, cheerful, and affectionate to me. [5. p. 12]

Assia Djébar, La Soif - Mon père, que ses affaires et sa cure avaient appelé en France, m'avait quittée à regret. Il avait pris mon ennui pour du désespoir parce que, deux mois auparavant, j'avais rompu mes fiançailles, sans raison apparente. J'eus un sourire indulgent. Il aurait pu voir que je n'avais ni les impatiences, ni les trépignements des chagrins d'amour— même pas les larmes. Mais je pardonnais tout à son aveuglement inquiet. Je ne recevais de tendresse que de lui, une tendresse d'homme, chaude, qui me baignait comme une fièvre. [1. p.18]

Assia Djébar, La Soif - My father, whom his business and his treatment had called for in France, had left me with regret. He had taken my boredom for despair because, two months ago, I had broken my engagement, for no apparent reason. I had an indulgent smile. He could have seen that I had neither the impatience nor the stamping of sorrows of love - not even tears. But I forgave everything for his worried blindness. I received tenderness only from him, a tenderness of man, warm, which bathed me like a fever. [1. p.18]

The destructive element is the same in **Bonjour Tristesse** and **La Soif**. The meeting with the woman upset the everyday life of each of the heroines. The character of Anna, the lovers of father Cecil, and the character of Jedle, Nadia's former childhood friend, provoke a small cruel and perverse game in which Nadia and Cecil play a dangerous role, as well as manipulation and seduction.

From the first pages of these novels an introspective tone is given. The narrative focuses on how the narrator feels. Cecile says that she did not experience “sadness”, “**but boredom, regret, and less often remorse**”. While Nadia has already experienced this: «**Je trouvais je ne sais quel gout amer a ce mois de juillet, et a cette plage epanouie comme une femme. Je n'aimais pourtant pas la tristesse, ni le vague a l'ame. Et je venais d'avoir vingt ans...** » [1, p. 11]

In a sense, we could see on the figure of Cecil the embryonic stage of the character of Nadia. Younger, more carefree and still untouched by the torment of life, she is who Nadia could be three years before she felt a sense of sadness. Indeed, there is a very strong connection between the two heroines in terms of their behavior. They both have a strong taste for money, sports cars, and cigarettes. They love to seduce men as well as women, and have fun, shocking and provoking others. Nadia provokes her devout Muslim, walking in front of him, dressed in his pants, and smoking a cigarette:

J'avais beau les ignorer, j'étais une des leurs. Je le savais, et mon beau-frère aussi, lui qui jetait un regard oblique sur mes pantalons, qui devinait dans le noir le feu rouge de mes cigarettes.[1, p. 17.]

Her attitude testifies to the desire for emancipation and freedom. She rejects tradition. In a sense, Cecile endorses these modern and revolutionary ideas about the liberation of women, although it remains more accessible to her because she is Western, while Nadia is Muslim by father and French by mother.

But it is precisely in their ability to spread their tendencies towards destructive and destabilizing shocks, in which each of them stands out, the rapprochement between two young women is most noticeable. These two novels can be called an educational novel, because they portray two characters who gradually change emotionally and psychologically throughout the story. Whether it is Cecile or Nadia, both discover the pleasures of the flesh, the desire and the promise of love. Passing through trials: death of a loved one, failure in love, everyone learns the consequences of their actions at their own expense. These stories somehow emphasize the transition from an era of carelessness to an era of reason.

Since the character of Nadia is in many respects similar to the character of Cecile, we can say that "**Bonjour Tristesse**" had a significant influence on the writing of "**La Soif**", even if, however, it is most likely, in fact, it is more of a type of novels in fashion. The moment of writing "**La Soif**". The fifties actually marked in France the beginning of the revolution of women and their emancipation, which would explain why some works of this time, written by women, put young people at the center of their intrigue, revealing their romantic relationship. Assia Djébar and Françoise Sagan have their own way of portraying the main monologue of their protagonist, using certain literary methods to explain the duality of a single voice. It's nice to see that Cecile and Nadia broke up during the story and know about it. A critical comparison between the two novels, therefore, is not unfounded. There is a high probability that Assia Djébar was inspired by **Bonjour Tristesse** to write **La Soif**.

The romantic plot of **La Soif** is more complex than the plot of **Bonjour Tristesse**. The relations between his characters are much more ambiguous and reflect a certain maturity compared to those depicted by Françoise Sagan. In addition, the plot takes place in Algeria, and not in France, as it was in **Bonjour Tristesse**. Although some of the clues in this novel testify to this difference in culture, the plot of **La Soif** unfolds in a bourgeois environment in which customs and traditions seem to have less impact than other social circles that Nadia's personality crisis explains.

Assia Djébar initiates topics regarding a Muslim woman who will be at the center of discussions after the liberation of Algeria [9, p.177-186]. But what is most surprising in this novel is that, although Nadia has preserved Muslim traditions and was brought up freely, she still feels the need to marry, become attached to a man, to make him a "**master**".

Thus, what really distinguishes the work of Assia Djébar from the work of Françoise Sagan would be this attractiveness for complexity and focus on the dual culture and language

issues that arise in this early novel. Despite the fact that this first work, in comparison with the subsequent ones, refers to a sober and concise style, as Jean Drew noted, it contains problems that will subsequently develop and intensify. Nothing stays light and carefree in Assia Djébar; all contribute to reflection and commitment, although perhaps criticism of the time. Assia Djébar, of course, read “**Bonjour Tristesse**” when she wrote “**La Soif**”, especially since at that time she lived in France, where she studied letters. The first novel by Françoise Sagan was then very successful [10, p.10]. However, she does not claim this novel as a source of inspiration, which makes **Bonjour Tristesse** a kind of literary counter-model. Even after writing, much later, a work that resumes her early novels and gives comments on each of them, she never designated any particular work as causing her a desire to write. Nevertheless, she said that she was very noticeable as a reader by some authors.

The end of each of these two works is significant for this quest. Indeed, on the last pages we do not know whether the protagonist has learned from his actions. At least we get the impression that the heroines learned about their deeds, but since the book does not close completely, the possibility that it will all start over should not be overlooked. In **La Soif**, Nadia seems to understand at the last moment that she did not marry Hassin for the wrong reasons and will not be able to erase her guilt before the death of the Jedle. Her marriage seems doomed.

Assia Djébar borrowed from this topic several topics that she later developed and created on her own. **La Soif** raises some of these issues, but this influence is less and less noticeable for his other novels; The style of Assia Djébar gradually appears, their works have only the Mediterranean side, a warm and heavy atmosphere and a pronounced taste for laziness and fatigue. Assia Djébar does not depart from the rule. Her first novels are based on modern and past literature. It is with this that, in a paradoxical way, trying to create originality, the future author seeks to acquire some lightness both in style and in the processing of his favorite topics. She also listens to the comments and advice of her colleagues and critics, perhaps trying to meet the expectations of readers, French, but also Algerian, with a third and then fourth book.

Just emphasizing the kinship between “**La Soif**” and “**Bonjour Tristesse**” by Françoise Sagan means accepting an ideological discourse, denying the personal contribution made to this book. Today we cannot agree with this view of this work. Assia Djébar shows us how the “**novelty**” of continuity is born as a reflection of these novels. Themes, stylistic processes do not actually change, they evolve from novel to novel, are updated, no matter what the critical technique says, but also the personality of the author at a certain time. The study of the first romantic cycle of Assia Djébar also allowed us to consider the appearance of French-language female literature.

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