



Translation of Paratextual Elements in El-Sa'dawi's *Woman at Point Zero* into English: A Socio-Cultural Perspective

Ahmad Al-Harabsheh

Translation Department, Faculty of Arts, Yarmouk University, Irbid, Jordan
harabsheh77@hotmail.com

Ekrema Shehab*

Department of English Language, Faculty of Humanities, An-Najah National University, Nablus, Palestine
ikrimas@najah.edu

Abstract

This study evaluates the ideological, cultural, and social implications associated with the epitext parts of El-Sa'dawi's *Woman at Point Zero*'s English cover pages through a thorough investigation of these elements. Six cover pages from different editions issued by Zed Books in various years were taken from Google in order to fulfill the objectives of this study. The context of situation and Pierce's model of sign process are utilized as methodological tools for the investigation of epitext elements in order to demonstrate the social, cultural, and pragmatic significance of these cover pages. The study shows that these epitext elements have significance and are related to the novel's plot, characters, theme, and setting. It also demonstrates how the publisher's deliberate manipulation and design choices of the paratextual elements of their cover pages over a 32-year period reveal deep social, ideological, and cultural implications, influencing reader perception and interpretation of the novel's core messages, themes, and its broader cultural context.

Keywords: *Cultural Translation; Epitext; Ideology; Semiotics; Social Implications*

1. Introduction

As stated by [Genette \(1997\)](#), paratext is "what enables a text to become a book and to be offered to its readers and, more generally, to the public" and plays a crucial role in preparing the text to be in the form of a book. A paratext is, in other words, "a text that relates (or mediates) to another text (the main work) in a way that enables the work to be complete and to be offered to its readers" ([Skare, 2020](#), p. 4). In order to draw readers in, paratext uses a variety of devices, such as appetizers, to convey the text. Paratextual elements are "liminal devices and conventions, both within the book (peritext) and outside it (epitext), that mediate the book to the reader: titles and subtitles, pseudonyms, forewords, dedications, epigraphs, prefaces, intertitles, notes, epilogues, and afterwards" ([Genette, 1987](#), p. 18). To ensure its perception, understanding, and presence in the form of a book, these additional aspects that surround the text work to "present" or "make" it present ([Genette & Maclean, 1991](#)). According to [Keen \(2015, p. 40\)](#), each paratext contributes to advertising the text's aims, the author's or publisher's status, and the general expectations that the reader should activate in order to get ready for the reading experience. According to [Genette and Maclean \(1991\)](#), "the paratext is empirically composed of an assorted set of practices and discourses of all sorts and of all ages." These paratextual aspects communicate social, cultural, and pragmatic cues about the author, the subject matter, and the source text. These signals have an illocutionary force, which means that they are utilized deliberately to transfer or convey a certain meaning to the readers. These components can include the images on the book's cover page, acknowledgments, biographical details about the author, and quotes from well-known individuals or organizations about the importance of the work.

Paratextual features, according to [Wu and Shen \(2013, p. 106\)](#), are "useful clues about the conditions under which translations were produced and consumed." These hints may give us fascinating details that will help us better comprehend "the general socio-cultural forces giving shape to translation" (p. 58). The five properties of a paratextual communication are spatial, temporal, substantial, pragmatic, and functional, according to [Genette \(1987, p. 4\)](#). The text's spatial context is its physical location, whereas its temporal context is the time it first appeared. Significant elements in a paratextual message can be "iconic (illustration), material (for instance, everything that comes from the sometimes crucial typographical decisions that go into the creation of a book), or purely factual [that] provides some commentary on the text and influences how the text is received" ([Genette, 1987](#), p. 7).

According to [Genette \(1987, p. 8\)](#), the pragmatics of paratextual elements are "determined by the characteristics of its situation of communication: the nature of the sender and addressee, the sender's level of authority and responsibility, and the illocutionary force of the sender's message." [Genette](#)



(1987) asserts that the author and publisher, who are in charge of the text and paratextual aspects, are both the senders of the message; "a paratextual element can communicate a piece of sheer information" in terms of the message's illocutionary power [Genette \(1987, pp.10–11\)](#) . To put it another way, these aspects were chosen with a specific purpose in mind by the author, or primarily the publisher. In order to grab the reader's interest and compel them to continue reading the literary work, s/he is attempting to convey a subliminal message; the paratext contributes to the book's meaning potential and has the power to influence and even alter how a reader perceives a text ([Hoel et al., 2020](#)).

Thus, our study highlights the importance of paratextual elements, especially cover designs and blurbs, in shaping a reader's perception of a book. By focusing on the translation of these elements, the study emphasizes how seemingly minor details can influence the way a translated work is understood. The analysis of cover page translations across different editions reveals how cultural and social contexts can influence the way a book is presented to a new audience. The study also suggests that publishers might adapt the paratext to better resonate with the target audience's expectations and social climate. Moreover, examining cover designs over a 32-year period allows the study to track how the reception of El-Sa'dawi's novel might have changed. This can reveal shifts in cultural attitudes towards feminism, gender, and social issues addressed in the books.

The use of [Peirce's \(1991\)](#) model of sign process and the concept of "context of situation" suggests the study will consider the interplay between the translated text on the cover, the visual elements, and the broader cultural context in which the translated book is being received.

Overall, this study contributes to a deeper understanding of how translated literature interacts with its target audience. By focusing on paratextual elements, it sheds light on the complex interplay between cultural expectations, authorial intent, and publisher choices in shaping the meaning of a translated work.

To illustrate these implications of the study, the images, graphics, and phrases found on the front and back covers of the English translations of *Woman at Point Zero* by Nawal El-Sa'dawi will be analyzed and discussed. And to decipher the pragmatic meanings implied in these pieces, a thorough investigation of the typographical graphics on the cover page is conducted; semiotics and the context of situation are also used as a theoretical framework to elucidate the practical, cultural, and social ramifications associated with the novel's epitext parts.

2. About the Novel

Woman at Point Zero is a well-known novel by Nawal El-Sa'dawi, an internationally acclaimed Egyptian writer, novelist, and activist for women's rights in Egypt and around the world. El Sa'dawi was a controversial public personality in the Middle East who wrote many books on the subject of women in Islam, devoting special emphasis to the practice of female genital mutilation in her society. Woman at Point Zero, her novel, is based on her interaction with a female prisoner in Cairo's Qanatir Prison and is the first-person account of Firdaus, a murderess who has volunteered to describe her life story from village youth to city prostitute before her execution.

The novel delves into the issues of women and their status in a patriarchal society. It depicts Firdaus's plight after she was sentenced to death for killing a pimp on a Cairo street. The tale describes Firdaus' tragic life; she lived in incredibly hard conditions and environment, and her father and uncle molested her. When she moved to Cairo with her uncle, she expected her life to improve, but it quickly deteriorated. Her uncle sent her to a boarding school in Cairo, where she excelled in her academics and got a secondary school diploma, but she was unable to find work. She was forced to marry an elderly man who mistreated her, so she ran away and met someone who was even worse than her husband. As a result, she was compelled to work as a prostitute to make a livelihood, and she subsequently got wealthy and famous, only to learn that she was a dishonorable lady. As a result, she decided to hunt for a better job and found one as a secretary in a company. Many of the staff attempted to approach her in order to satisfy their sexual needs. After that, she fell in love with a young man at work and felt emotions for the first time, but he betrayed her and married the business manager's daughter, causing her heartbreak. She then went back to being a prostitute until she met a man named Marzouq, who had excellent relationships with the police, physicians, lawyers, and others. He functioned as her pimp, shielded her from any police charges, pocketed the majority of her money, and left litter for her. She decided to leave the prostitution house, but he stopped her and attacked her, prompting her to stab him to death.

Firdaus' brutalization by all the individuals she should have been able to trust horrified her compatriots since it was instantly recognizable. When the novel was published in other countries years later, it startled the world. Firdaus' life had been typical of regular women in Egypt and the Arab world. Her life represents a dismal image of women in Egyptian society being treated as commodities and slaves for males. Firdaus accepted her death sentence since it was the only way for her to be free.

El Sa'dawi's literary works "are consumed by a Western audience in a context saturated by stereotypes of Arab culture, and that this context of reception, to a large extent, ends up rewriting both the writer and her texts



according to scripted first-world narratives about Arab women's oppression" (Amireh, 2000, p. 215).

Zed Publishers is an independent publishing house that was founded in 1977 in London. It is renowned for its commitment to progressive and critical publishing, with a strong focus on social justice, human rights, and global issues. Zed Publishers is dedicated to fostering critical thinking and promoting voices that are often marginalized or underrepresented in mainstream discourse. Their publishing philosophy centers on providing a platform for authors who tackle issues related to social justice, human rights, development studies, and political science.

Zed Books stands out in the publishing industry for its unwavering dedication to social justice, critical thought, and inclusive representation. Through their diverse catalog, they provide a platform for voices that challenge the status quo and contribute to global conversations on equity, justice, and sustainability. Their publications continue to inspire and educate readers around the world, making them a vital force in progressive and academic publishing.

To sell their work (*Woman at Point Zero*) and highlight the critical problems it raises, the Zed publisher quotes *The Guardian* on its front pages (see Appendix I, link 5): "[a] dramatic female revolt against the norms of the Arab world." The publisher intends to draw readers' attention to this novel by portraying it as an epic about an Arab woman who revolts against the severe conventions of Arab civilizations. Scott Pack, *The Friday Project*, a publishing business in London, makes another quotation about this literary gem. The publisher quotes Scott Pack, a publisher and editor who has written multiple award-winning and best-selling books: "... leaves an indelible mark." This is a sad, beautiful, and passionately pertinent narrative of injustice, inequity, and pure bad luck, written with such beauty and brilliance that it ranks alongside the best literature of this or any era." According to the *New York Times*, "the novel is an unforgettable, unmissable book for the new global feminist."

3. Review of the Related Literature

The translation of paratextual elements in literary works is a critical aspect of cross-cultural communication and literary studies. Paratextual elements, as defined by Gerard Genette (1997), include titles, prefaces, cover designs, and other peritextual and epitextual components that surround the main text and influence its reception. In the context of Nawal El-Sa'dawi's "*Woman at Point Zero*", a seminal work that highlights the struggles of women in patriarchal societies, the translation and presentation of these paratextual elements into English are crucial for understanding the socio-cultural and ideological nuances of the novel.

Studies have shown that paratextual elements are not merely decorative but are imbued with cultural and ideological meanings. For instance, [Kovala \(1996\)](#) argues that paratexts can be manipulated to align with the target audience's cultural and ideological expectations. Similarly, [Watson \(2008\)](#) emphasizes that cover designs can reflect the socio-political context of the translation and the intended market. The ideological implications of paratextual elements are particularly relevant in the translation of *Woman at Point Zero*. El-Sa'dawi's novel, which critiques the patriarchal structures in Egyptian society, carries a strong feminist message. The English translations of the book navigate the ideological terrain of both the source and target cultures. Moreover, [Li-Jun Ji et al. \(2023\)](#) delve into how cultural backgrounds influence people's perceptions and inferences based on book cover designs. Their study provides a comprehensive analysis of how visual aesthetics and design elements are interpreted differently across cultures. For example, the study found that Western participants often associated minimalist covers with higher quality and sophistication, whereas Eastern participants tended to value elaborate and colorful designs more positively. Through various experiments and examples, the article illustrates how cultural norms and values shape these interpretations, impacting how individuals from different backgrounds infer the content and quality of books based on their outward appearance. Their study not only sheds light on cultural differences in aesthetic preferences but also has broader implications for cross-cultural marketing and communication strategies.

[Munday \(2008\)](#) highlights that translators and publishers often face ideological challenges when presenting politically charged texts. The cover designs and other paratextual elements can either reinforce or mitigate the ideological messages of the original text. In the case of *Woman at Point Zero*, the different cover designs by Zed Books over a 32-year period reveal shifts in ideological emphasis. For example, earlier editions might focus on the feminist struggle and empowerment, while later editions could highlight broader human rights issues, reflecting changing socio-political contexts.

Cultural implications are another critical aspect of paratextual translation. As [Lefevere \(1992\)](#) points out, cultural factors heavily influence translation practices, including the adaptation of paratextual elements. In translating *Woman at Point Zero*, the cultural differences between Egyptian and Western societies are carefully examined.

[Baker \(2010\)](#) discusses the concept of cultural translation, where translators must consider the cultural connotations of both the source and target texts. This is evident in the different cover designs of *Woman at Point Zero*, which incorporate cultural symbols and motifs that resonate with Western audiences while attempting to remain faithful to the original context. For instance, the use



of specific imagery, such as traditional Egyptian symbols or feminist icons, can influence how the book is perceived culturally.

The social implications of paratextual elements involve how these elements engage with contemporary social issues and the audience's social consciousness. El-Sa'dawi's work addresses social issues such as gender inequality, oppression, and resistance. The translation of these social themes through paratextual elements can enhance or diminish their impact. Hermans (2007) notes that the social context of the target audience influences the reception of translated texts. The cover pages of *Woman at Point Zero* published by Zed Books reflect this interaction. For example, covers from different decades show a progression from depicting the protagonist as a victim to portraying her as a symbol of resistance and resilience. This shift mirrors broader social changes and growing awareness of women's rights issues.

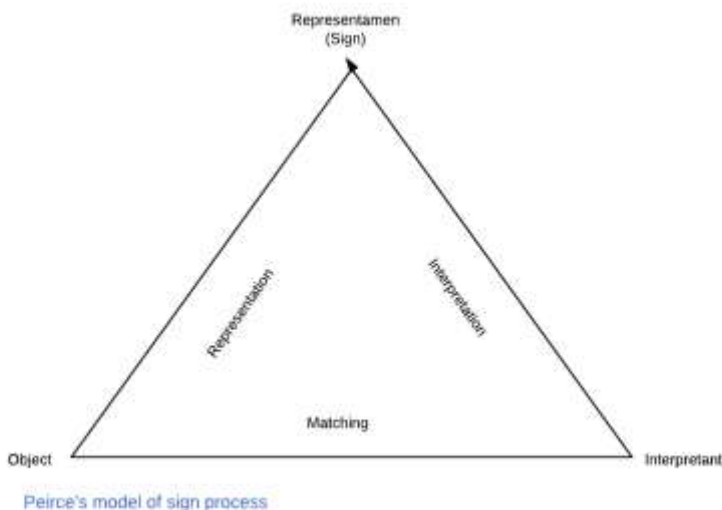
An analysis of the six cover pages from different editions of *Woman at Point Zero* reveals significant changes in how the novel is presented. These changes align with the socio-cultural and ideological shifts over the years. The early editions tend to feature somber, dark tones and images that emphasize the novel's themes of oppression and struggle. In contrast, later editions use brighter colors and empowering imagery, reflecting a shift towards celebrating the protagonist's resilience and the broader feminist movement.

The publisher's deliberate manipulation of these elements underscores the dynamic nature of paratextual translation. It shows how cover designs can be tailored to resonate with contemporary social and cultural issues, thus enhancing the novel's relevance and impact across different contexts (Venuti, 1995). Thus, the translation of paratextual elements in *Woman at Point Zero* from Arabic to English involves complex negotiations of ideological, cultural, and social implications. The cover designs of the different editions by Zed Books over three decades illustrate how paratexts can be strategically used to align the novel with evolving socio-cultural contexts and ideological discourses.

4. Methods and Procedures

The study's data were gathered from the search engine Google. Six different copies of *Woman at Point Zero*'s English cover pages were found. These cover pages' epitext features were analyzed and debated in order to demonstrate their pragmatic and social significance. Using Google to gather six different cover pages of "*Woman at Point Zero*" ensures a broad and diverse set of data. This variety allows for a more comprehensive analysis of how the novel's epitextual elements have evolved over time.

The study used [Peirce's \(1991\)](#) sign process paradigm, as cited in [Queiroz and Aguiar \(2015\)](#). This is a triadic paradigm that shows the relationship between Representamen (the sign), Object (what the sign stands for), and Interpretant (the sense made of the sign). The application of Charles S. Peirce's sign process paradigm is crucial as it provides a structured framework to analyze the semiotic relationships between the signs (cover images), the objects (what these images stand for), and the interpretants (the meanings derived from these images). This triadic approach ensures a thorough examination of how the cover images convey meaning.



Semiotics, according to [Queiroz and Aguiar \(2015, p. 204\)](#), is "a kind of logic: a science of the essential and fundamental nature of all possible varieties of meaning processes." The explanation of a semiosis, according to Peirce's model, includes a complex relationship between three related variables: Sign (signifier, symbol, or form of the sign), Object (what the sign stands for), and Interpretant (signified or the meaning made of the sign). According to Peirce, "the Interpretant is determined by the Object through the mediation of the Sign (I is determined by O through S)" (p.204). To put it another way, sign interpretation is dependent on the logical representation of the sign with the object and the matching of the object with the interpretant.

Peirce saw signs as representations of knowledge and a technique of gaining access to and structuring our world experiences ([Bateman, 2018, p. 3](#)).



The background of the situation is also incorporated into the data analysis, as photos of the cover pages cannot be separated from the context of the novel. Because they are connected and essential to these themes, the interpretation of these images relied greatly on the plot, setting, theme, and character interactions. The inclusion of the novel's plot, setting, themes, and character interactions in the analysis ensures that the cover images are not viewed in isolation but are understood within the broader narrative context. This holistic approach is essential for interpreting the pragmatic and social significance of the cover images.

5. Findings and Discussion

This section delves into the epitexts of the cover photos of *Woman at Point Zero*, which were published by Zed Books in London in 1983, 1985, 2007, (two editions), 2008, and 2015, respectively. The suffering of women in Egyptian society in particular, and the Arab world in general, is a recurring theme throughout these epitexts. The English cover page photographs and texts were published during a 32-year period. The first cover page of the English translation of the novel was released in 1983 by the Zed publisher and the last one was in 2015 by the same publisher. From 1983-2015, the novel was translated into English several times by the same publisher because of its importance as a revolutionary novel against oppression of women in the Egyptian traditional society at the time. The epitexts of the cover pages of the translated versions focus on subjects that are taboo in the Arab World, which makes El-Sa'dawi a prominent controversial writer; everything she writes about women cannot pass unnoticed and is cited to defend their issues which have made El-Sa'sawi the focus of debate in the Arab World for her courage. Ferdaus, the heroine, seems to represent every woman in the Arab World who apparently faces injustice every day simply because she is female.

[Atwood's \(1998\)](#) concept of the "double narrative" in literature emphasizes how paratexts can present a surface narrative while hinting at deeper, often subversive themes. The disintegrating shadow on the cover can be interpreted as a metaphor for the protagonist Ferdaus's life, marked by constant struggle and resistance against oppressive forces. This imagery emphasizes themes of victimhood and defiance, resonating with Western feminist discourses that often highlight the oppression of women in non-Western societies.

To illustrate further, we shall explore all of the cover pages of the novel's English translations below to demonstrate the pragmatic, social, and cultural consequences of the epitexts in these cover pages. For the sake of space and convenience, we will direct readers to Appendix I, where they will discover six links to six separate English cover pages.

To begin, the cover page, below, of the English translation published by Zed Books Ltd in 1983 (see Appendix I, link 1) depicts a young woman from the Pharaohs' era, with desert sand behind her. These epitexts transmit to readers an implicit message that this novel is about an Egyptian woman. The paratext signifies that modern Egyptian women are still oppressed and enslaved as they were in the era of the pharaohs. As women in that era lived a primitive, uncivilized life, the desert in the background shows the miseries of their life, loss and suffering.

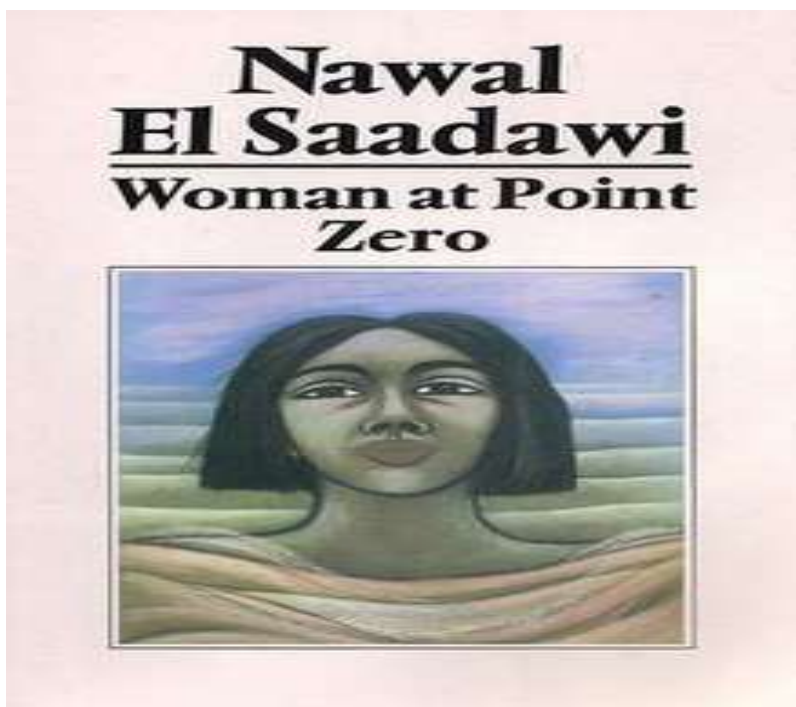


Figure (1): First edition in English published by Zed Books Ltd in 1983

Because the cover page is aimed at a foreign readership, the paratext could potentially imply a woman with African characteristics in order to highlight all injustices against women in the work. Women's pain is universal, and the topics addressed in the story are nearly universal with minor variations. The cover also depicts a woman with short hair, as though the publisher wishes to convey to readers that Ferdaus's short hair bereft her of her femininity, because males in Arab culture admire women with long hair and regard it as a symbol of beauty. Ferdaus appears to be drowned in sand dunes on the cover page (again, see Appendix I, link 1), as if she is drowning, minutes before her death, and



everything she sees is what she will take with her. On her way to heaven, her shoulders are in the dunes, the dunes that follow the blue horizon. The violet color in the background is a metaphor for sunset and the end of Ferdaus' life.

The second cover sheet below (see Appendix I, link 2) is from a 1985 edition issued by Zed Books. This cover differs from the previous one in that the publisher employs symbols rather than images.



Figure (2) published by Zed Books in 1985

The publisher depicts gallows with a sunflower dangling from them. At the bottom of the cover page is a symbol of a mirror, which was historically a symbol of women's mirrors and is now utilized as a feminist slogan. Ferdaus is represented by the sunflower, while the gallows represent the hard social life conditions she faced in her life; harsh societal conditions damage women's innocence and wreck their lives. A woman is innocent, gentle, and beautiful, and men's cruelty leads to her loss and destruction. Ferdaus is a lady who decides to die in order to find the truth, which is the light of the sunflower. Death may appear to us to be the finish, but to Ferdaus, it is the beginning. The gallows on the cover page represent a harsh and unjust male rule that hangs everybody who stares at the light and sues it as criminals. A humorous paradox implied in this paratext is when the judge who battled for Ferdaus' body is the one who sues her for a crime in which he is complicit. Death may be the end, yet Ferdaus, on the cover page, remains balanced and sturdy, like an ideal flower, hanging on the gallows at point zero. Darnton (1982) maintains that the physical and visual aspects of a book are integral to its communicative power. The cover's use of

somber imagery and the stark contrast between light and shadow create an emotional response that sets the tone for the reader before they even begin reading. This semiotic choice not only enhances the thematic depth of the narrative but also frames it within a context of struggle and resistance, aligning with the ideological messages intended by the publisher.

The third graphic below (see Appendix I, link 3) depicts the front and back covers of the second edition published by Zed Books in 2007. The two photos on the cover depict a bright spot in the cell and the prison's cell barrier. The pictures on the cover depict a micro-lighted wall with a macro-dark room that represents the prison. This cover features worn-out layers of bars that hint at a bright area behind them. Ferdaus' life was full with suffocating bars: her patriarchal father's jail, her uncle's prison, and then her husband's prison, culminating in Bayoum's prison, the proprietor of the coffee shop where she finds refuge after fleeing her very elderly husband, who rapes her.

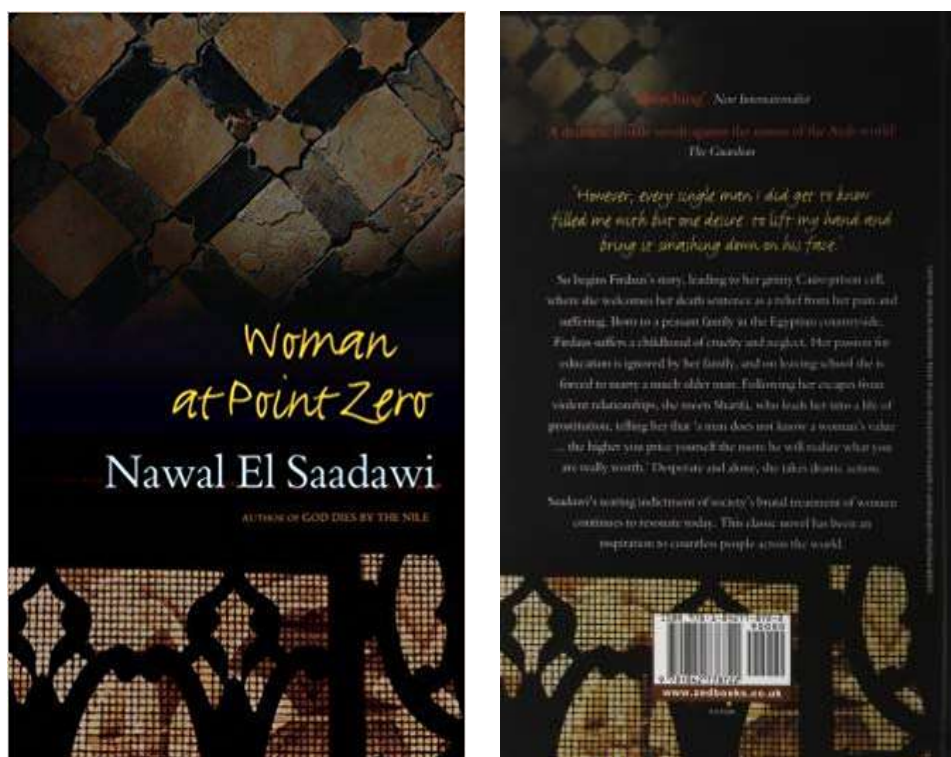


Figure (3): The front and back cover of the 2nd edition published by Zed Books in 2007



Ferdaus ends herself in Cairo's al-Qanatir jail, where she awaits her execution. The cover does not only depict the upper bars, but also adds walls to them. The bars become totally closed and if Ferdaus could remove them, she would discover a wall waiting her; the same wall stands between her and anyone she feels desire and affection towards. Another barrier to which Ferdaus is subjected is the gender barrier. When she falls in love with her female instructor Iqbal, she searches for the pleasure buried behind the circumcision wall that was performed on her when she was a child; when she leaves her school and her instructor Iqbal for good, that wall reappears. It appears to be inside this woman between the bars and the wall at the top of the cover page. She encounters levels of bars and walls that obscure something at the cover's bottom. That makes you feel like you're standing behind those bars, looking at Ferdaus, trying to piece together her story and wondering what will happen next.

The background of the cover page comprises epitexts of various quotations, emphasizing how appealing this work is. The first is "Scorching," a well-known independent journal produced in Oxford, UK, by "New Internationalist." "However, every single man I did get to know filled me with but one desire: to lift my hand and smash it down on his face," says the second quote. Firdaus says this sentence to demonstrate her anger and contempt for males. The phrase has an illocutionary connotation in that it informs the reader about the novel's heroine, Firdaus, who lives in a male-dominated culture that oppresses and humiliates women. The third quotation on the cover page reads as

"so begins Firdaus's story, leading to her grimy Cairo prison cell, where she welcomes her death sentence as a relief from her pain. Born to a peasant family, Firdaus suffers a childhood of cruelty and neglect. Her family ignore her passion for education, and on leaving school, she is forced to marry a much older man. Following her escapes from violent relationships, she meets Sharifa, who leads her into a life of prostitution. Desperate and alone, she takes drastic action."

This remark serves as a brief suspenseful synopsis of the work. The pragmatic meaning of this quotation is to entice the reader to read the entire text. "[El-Ja'dawi's classic novel, searing indictment of society's brutal treatment of women, continues to resonate today and has been an inspiration to countless people around the world," according to the fourth citation on the novel's back cover. The publisher included this quotation to make the novel more intriguing and appealing to readers; it also attempts to advertise the novel by utilizing strong and affectionate language.

The first page of the second edition's cover is seen in the fourth cover image below (see Appendix I, link 4), which was released by Zed Books in 2007. The image of a woman wearing a veil on part of her face makes this cover stand out.

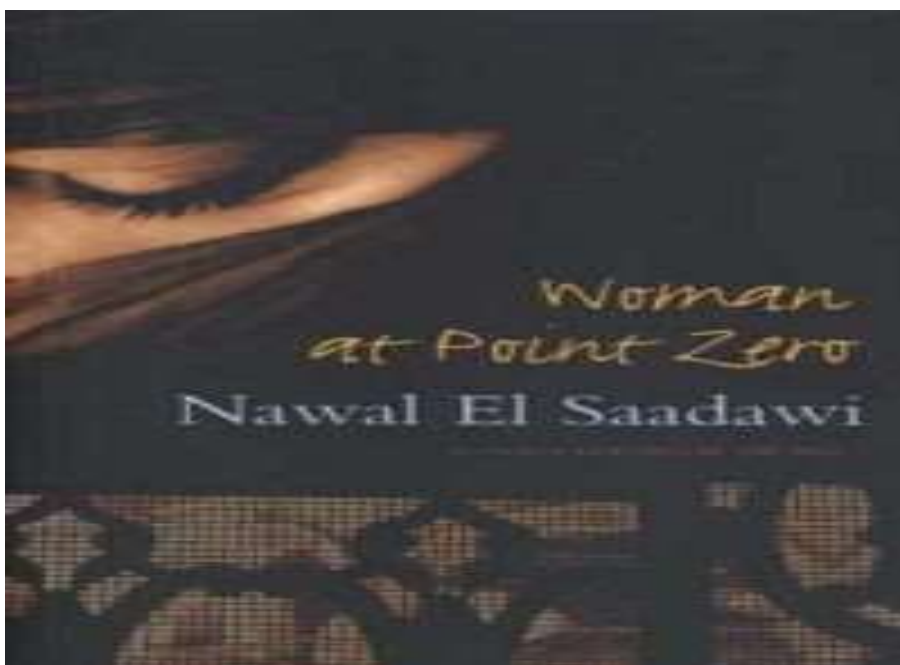


Figure (4): The front cover of the 2nd edition published by Zed Books in 2007

The choice of this photograph, featuring a Muslim woman, is ideologically motivated to highlight the oppression and degradation of Muslim women. The cover aims to draw readers' attention to the connection between Islam, women, and suffering. The author, herself a Muslim, encourages women to remove their hijabs to reveal their beauty. At the bottom of the page, the depiction of a crime committed in a prison cell further emphasizes the publisher's tendency to draw parallels between the prison cell and the veil or hijab, suggesting both can cause suffering for Muslim women in a civilized society. [Gray \(2010\)](#) argues that paratexts which are intentionally used by publishers play a crucial role in shaping audience expectations and interpretations before and after engaging with the primary text. By analyzing various media paratexts, Gray demonstrates how they contribute to the cultural discourse surrounding a text and influence how it is received and understood by different readers.

The front and back covers of the second edition of the book released by Zed Books in 2015 are shown on the fifth cover page (see Appendix I, link 5). The front and back covers of the book both feature a picture of two pumped-up lips, making the cover art appealing and affectionate.

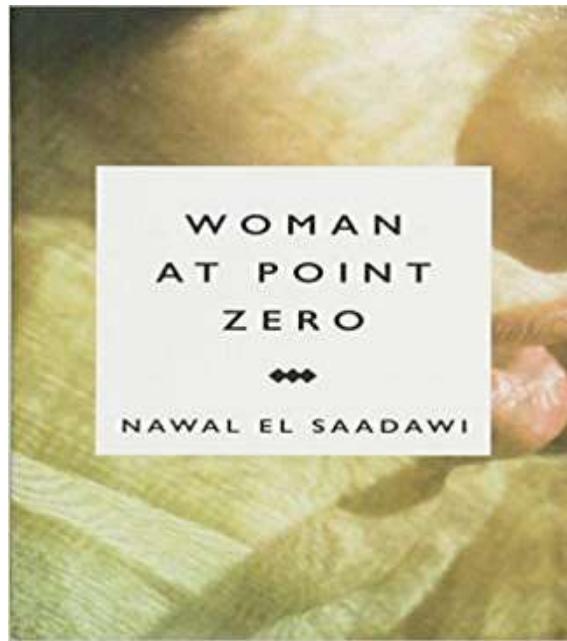


Figure (5): The front and back cover of the 2nd edition published by Zed Books in 2015

Ferdaus's mouth is wide open, ready to speak and tell her tale. These same lips, which she uses to attract others and which are the source of her torment throughout the book, refuse to kiss the husband forced upon her. They are the same lips she uses to share her story with the novel's author, Nawal El Saadawi.

Apparently, this book's cover features a revolutionary author who questions conventions and introduces readers from other countries to topics that may be unfamiliar to them about this region of the world, where women are often persecuted by their own society. The author is Ferdaus' tongue, which will never speak again after being hanged, yet her voice may still be heard today: "I was here one day and I made them hear my story with the same lips that killed me." The quotations put on the back of this cover set it apart. On cover page 5, four of the lines from figure 4 on the back cover are repeated along with some new ones, such as "Nawal El-Sa'dawi writes with directness and passion, transforming the systematic brutalization of peasants and of women into powerful allegory." The renowned newspaper New York Times is the source of this remark. This quotation demonstrates how prominent and significant this novel is and the publisher wants to convey the idea that this book is a significant work that should be read.

Figure 6 below (see Appendix I, link 6) displays an additional cover page for the second edition that Zed Books released in 2015. On the cover, a shadow of a woman who appears to be sporting the hijab—a representation of a Muslim woman—falls apart on a floor and a wall. The street or the frigid cell may be behind these walls.

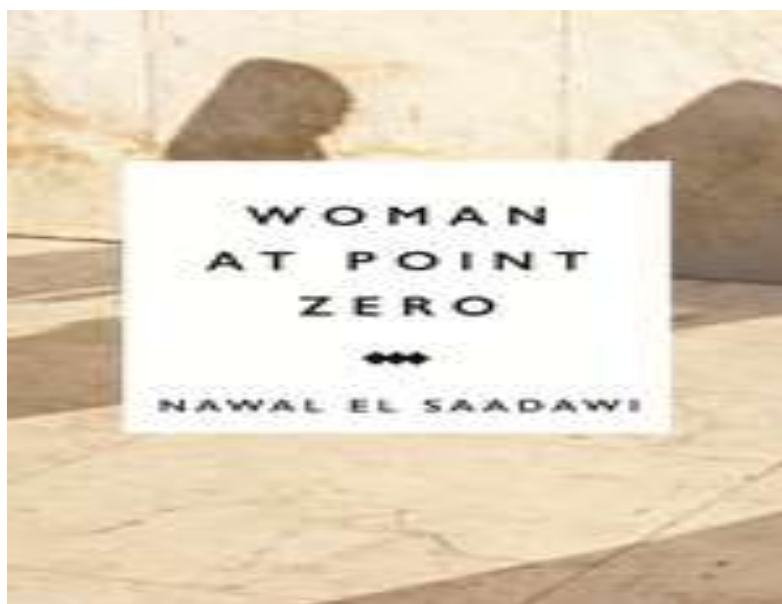


Figure (6): The front cover of the second edition published by Zed Books in 2015

The street emerges as Ferdaus's sole sanctuary from peril, the only avenue to safety. She is led to a cell adjacent to this street, and rather than submitting to her pimp's commands, she opts for confinement within this cell. This decision represents her method of escaping the injustices that have plagued her life. Upon her death, as her shadow dissolves on the gallows, the interplay of shadows and light, solid walls and fractured shadows, and the juxtaposition of endings and beginnings, define the narrative's essence. This analysis supports the findings of how these manipulations reveal deeper socio-cultural implications, focusing particularly on the cover of the 2015 second edition, which features a striking image of a woman in hijab. By drawing on academic resources such as [Mohja Kahf's \(1999\)](#) analysis of Huda Sha'rawi's memoirs and Genette's theory of paratexts, these results highlight the ideological, cultural, and social connotations embedded in cover images and other paratextual components. Recognizing these manipulations allows readers and scholars to approach translated texts with a more critical and informed perspective, ultimately enriching their engagement with global literary works. According to [Kahf](#)



(1999), the reception and marketing of Huda Sha'rawi's memoirs in the U.S. are deeply influenced by Orientalist perspectives. Kahf (1999) argues that publishers often frame Arab women's narratives in a way that emphasizes their oppression and subjugation, thereby appealing to Western readers' expectations of the "exotic" and "oppressed" Eastern woman. This framing serves to reinforce existing stereotypes rather than challenge them. Hermans (2007) emphasizes the importance of understanding paratexts in the context of translation, arguing that they are crucial for interpreting translated texts within their broader cultural and ideological frameworks. The cover of the 2015 edition, with its depiction of a disintegrating shadow, serves as a powerful entry point for exploring the themes of confinement and resistance in El-Sa'dawi's narrative. Recognizing the manipulative potential of such paratexts allows readers to appreciate the complex interplay between the text and its presentation.

6. Conclusion

Paratextual features are crucial in assessing literary masterpieces because they communicate a variety of pragmatic meanings and cultural consequences. Publishers and authors utilize them to convey various messages that represent the book's content in a thrilling and appealing manner.

They also convey veiled ideological messages to professionals while expressing attitudes and opinions regarding the book's substance. Images, introductions, acknowledgements, and quotations from renowned persons are all common paratextual features. As in the instance of *Woman at Point Zero*, these images chosen by publishers are fraught with ideological, cultural, and social connotations. The publisher uses these images to emphasize the novel's fundamental idea: Arab women are subjugated by males in a pitiful patriarchal society; they are stupid, degraded, and used to satisfy men's sexual demands. As a result, readers of literary classics should be aware of the manipulations of paratextual components by publishers and use them as a beginning point for interpreting the literary work. After all, utilizing all paratexts, epitexts, and semiotics of literary work cover pages would aid in conveying ideological and cultural issues intended by authors, publishers, and editors.

References

- Amireh, A. (2000). Framing Nawal El Sa'dawi: Arab feminism in a transnational world. *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 26(1), 215-249.
- Atwood, M. (1998). *The Handmaid's tale*. New York. Anchor Books.
- Baker, M. (2010). *Translation and conflict: A narrative account*. Routledge.

- Bateman, J. (2018). Peircean semiotics and multimodality: Towards a new synthesis. *Multimodal communication*, 7(1), 2017-0021. doi :10.1515/mc-2017-0021.
- Darnton, R. (1982). What is the history of books? *Daedalus*, 111(3), 65-83.
- Eco, U. (1992). *La production des signes*. Paris : Librairie Générale Française.
- Genette, G. (1987). *Paratexts: Thresholds of interpretation* (trans.) by Jane E. Lewin, New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Genette, G. (1997). *Paratexts: Thresholds of interpretation* (Vol. 20). Cambridge University Press.
- Genette, G. and Maclean, M. (1991). Introduction to the paratext. *New Literary History*, 22(2), 261-272.
- Gray, J. (2010). *Show sold separately: Promos, spoilers, and other media paratexts*. New York. New York University Press.
- Hermans, T. (2007). *The Conference of the tongues*. Manchester. St. Jerome Publishing.
- Hoel, T.; Elisabeth B. S. and Schulz-Heidorf, K. (2020). What happens before book reading starts? An analysis of teacher–child behaviours with print and digital books. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 12 November 2020 | <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2020.570652> .
- Kahf, M. (1999). Packaging Huda: Sha'rawi's memoirs in the United States reception environment. In *going global: The transnational reception of third world women writers*. Routledge.
- Keen, S. (2015). *Narrative form: Revised and expanded second edition*. Macmillan: USA
- Kovala, U. (1996). Translations, paratextual mediation, and ideological closure. *Target*, 8(1), 119-147.
- Lefevere, A. (1992). *Translation, rewriting, and the manipulation of literary fame*. New York. Routledge.
- Li-Jun Ji et al. (2023). Judging a book by its cover: Cultural differences in inference of the inner state based on the outward appearance. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 125(1), 82-99.



- Munday, J. (2008). *Introducing translation studies: Theories and applications*. London/New York. Routledge.
- Peirce, C. S. (1991). *Peirce on signs: Writings on semiotic* (J. Hoopes, Ed.). University of North Carolina Press.
- Queiroz, J. and Aguiar, D (2015). C. S. Peirce and intersemiotic translation. In Peter Pericles Trifonas(Ed.). *International handbook of semiotics*(pp.201-217). Toronto, Ontario: Springer.
- Skare, R.(2020). Paratext encyclopedia of knowledge organization. Retrieved from <https://www.isko.org/cyclo/paratext> (14 December 2023).
- Venuti, L. (1995). *The translator's invisibility: A history of translation*. London. Routledge.
- Watson, G. (2008). *The literary text in the digital age*. Michigan. University of Michigan Press.
- Wu, Y.P.and Shen, C.S.(2013). (Ir)reciprocal relation between text and paratext in the translation of Taiwan's concrete poetry: A case study of chen Li. In Pellatt, V. (ed) *Text, extratext, metatext and paratext in translation* (pp.103-121). UK: Cambridge Scholar Publishing

Appendix: Six links to six English cover page images

- Link 1: <https://search.worldcat.org/title/Woman-at-point-zero/oclc/10887569>
- Link 2: <https://archive.org/details/womanatpointzero00saad>
- Link3: <https://www.amazon.com/Woman-at-Point-Zero-Second/dp/1842778722>
- Link4: https://books.google.ps/books/about/Woman_at_Point_Zero.html?id=gn9l5vEpjYUC&redir_esc=y
- Link 5: <https://vishytheknight.wordpress.com/2018/10/21/book-review-woman-at-point-zero-by-nawal-el-saadawi/>
- Link6: <https://www.textbooks.com/Woman-at-Point-Zero-rev-Edition/9781783605941/Nawal-El-Saadawi.php>

This Page is Intentionally Left Blank.