

The visual and imaginative style in the novel "Women of Casanova" by Wasiny al-Araj: An approach to the formation of cultural narrative discourse

EL ESTILO VISUAL E IMAGINATIVO EN LA NOVELA «LAS MUJERES DE CASANOVA», DE WACINY LAREDJ: UNA APROXIMACIÓN A LA CONFIGURACIÓN DEL DISCURSO NARRATIVO CULTURAL

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Abstract

This critical study examines WacinyLaredj's novel "Casanova's Women," focusing on analyzing the role of the visual and imaginative frameworks in shaping its cultural narrative discourse. The novel begins with a satirical parody of the character Casanova, transforming him into a symbol of patriarchal and economic power within a contemporary Arab context.

The analysis aims to uncover the artistic mechanisms employed by Laredj. The imaginative framework contributes to constructing a narrative balance that meticulously blends the autobiographical dimension with representations of the imaginary, while the visual framework, through its dense description of place and character, acts as a revealing mechanism, illuminating implicit cultural structures and dismantling their hidden layers.

Furthermore, the study demonstrates that the interaction between these two frameworks successfully articulates the unspoken, forming a counter-narrative and cultural discourse that exposes the mechanisms of domination and oppression within society.

Keywords: Casanova's Women, Waciny al-Araj, visual style, imaginative style, cultural criticism.

Resumen

Este estudio crítico examina la novela *Las mujeres de Casanova*, de Waciny Laredj, y analiza el papel de los recursos visuales e imaginativos en la configuración de su discurso narrativo cultural. La novela parte de una parodia satírica del personaje de Casanova, al que transforma en un símbolo del poder patriarcal y económico en el contexto árabe contemporáneo.

El análisis tiene como objetivo desentrañar los mecanismos artísticos empleados por Laredj. Los recursos imaginativos contribuyen a construir un equilibrio narrativo que combina cuidadosamente la dimensión autobiográfica con las representaciones de lo imaginario. Por su parte, los recursos visuales, mediante descripciones densas de los espacios y los personajes, actúan como un mecanismo revelador que pone de manifiesto las estructuras culturales implícitas y desentraña sus capas ocultas.

Asimismo, el estudio muestra que la interacción entre ambos recursos permite expresar lo silenciado y configurar una contranarrativa y un discurso cultural que revelan los mecanismos de dominación y opresión presentes en la sociedad.

Palabras clave: *Las mujeres de Casanova*; Waciny Laredj; estilo visual; estilo imaginativo; crítica cultural.

Introduction:

In the realm of the novel—where narrative intertwines with imagery and memories merge with imagination—Waciny Laredj's **Casanova's Women** (**Nisa' Casanova**) emerges as a space that defies conventional forms of writing. It is not merely the story of an ailing man confronting his past; rather, it is a complex tableau where gazes meet images and the body encounters memory in a silent dance between domination and rebellion. The novel opens onto an intricate cultural discourse, reconstructing the meanings of identity, sexuality, and power through vivid visual scenes and imaginative networks pulsating with pain and resistance. Here, we delve into the visual dimension as a delicate thread connecting every visible moment and every gaze laden with hidden significance. We also examine the imaginative dimension—an unseen depth where events transform into symbols and characters into legend—on a journey exploring how images take shape in the observer's eye and how the text evolves into a cultural system revealing the secrets of an entire society. In this study, we seek not only to describe the novel but to interrogate it and uncover what lies beneath its surface. Through a critical reading, we offer the reader a key to understanding how literature constructs truth from the threads woven into the language of imagery and imagination. Why does Casanova's room transform into a visual scene harboring silent realities? And why does each woman recount her story through images and symbols, as if sketching herself anew? A fundamental question arises here: how do the visual and imaginative dimensions within this narrative fabric constitute a discursive system that reveals underlying cultural patterns? To address this, I favor combining the semiotic approach with cultural criticism, as these methodologies best align with the nature of my inquiry.

At the outset—before embarking on this analytical journey through the novel's pages—we must acknowledge that a novel is far more than mere words woven onto paper; it is a vast world pulsating with emotions, questions, and experiences that resonate with each reader in a unique way. Critical analysis serves as a window through which we peer into the work's depths, seeking to uncover the secrets of its characters and the intricacies of its events, while capturing the vital pulse the author has infused into the narrative. Together, we will delve into the text's inner layers, guided by our curiosity and questions, in search of a moment of understanding and connection with the profound human messages literature conveys. How did it all begin? It started during a rare moment of clarity for Lot/Casanova—a globally renowned tycoon whose far-reaching influence dominated "Manara City." Following a stroke, the protagonist—now a paralyzed figure—confronts the women of his life: Lalla Kebira, Lalla Zina, Lalla Rokina, Lalla Saray, and the maid Mbarka. He asks for their forgiveness before his passing, transforming the encounter into a tragic reckoning that exposes the injustices they suffered at his hands. The novel reaches the peak of its tragedy with the entry of "Capi"—an illegitimate, unacknowledged son who is a victim on multiple fronts. His arrival compels a re-examination of Casanova's moral responsibility—not merely as a historical figure, but as an individual who failed to control the impact of his power over others, particularly Capi himself. In this context, Capi becomes a symbol of the legacy left by power—a wound that never heals—and a mirror reflecting only ugliness, especially at a time when the aging Casanova has grown too frail to confront his own reality.

First: Features of the visual pattern in the novel:

The novel's structure relies on transforming language into vivid scenes that take shape in the reader's mind, akin to visual paintings that sketch the details of the narrative space and reflect the characters' identities. This dense presence of imagery is not haphazard; rather, it is organized within a cohesive structure that guides the reader's perspective and serves the text's central idea. This arrangement of scenes—simultaneously subtle and deliberate—serves as a practical embodiment of the "pattern" (*al-nasaq*). Among the fundamental critical concepts within the realm of cultural criticism—discussed and interpreted by Izz al-Din al-Manasra—is the concept of the "pattern." He views it as "the technical system distinguishing the intertwined structures within a text; it is multifaceted and diverse, potentially repetitive, universal, and indicative of structural levels; it is simultaneously formal, conventional, and innovative." Here, the critic highlights that the pattern is not merely an external form or arrangement of the text, but an internal system that organizes its intertwined structures, lending it both coherence and significance. I believe this demonstrates that the pattern plays an important role in shaping meaning, as it connects the various elements within the text.

Furthermore, one must not overlook the concept of the "system" from the perspective of the French thinker Michel Foucault. He views it as a set of relations that—according to Maurice Blanchot—establish themselves by excluding the "outside," concealing it, coloring it, and transforming it into an "inside," where the inside becomes a folding-back upon a presumed interiority. This opens up a nuanced angle for understanding the system as a mechanism for producing meaning rather than merely an internal arrangement. When invoking Foucault's conception alongside Blanchot's observations, the system reveals itself to be not only what is visible to us but also what it conceals. The fundamental idea is that every epistemic system constructs its legitimacy by controlling what is permitted to enter the "inside" and what must be relegated to the "outside." Yet, this "outside" is not simply abolished; rather, it is reshaped and colored, forced into a new form that aligns with the system's requirements. In this sense, the "inside" is not a pristine space but the result of a series of processes involving erasure and transformation. The "inside" we perceive is, in reality, a folding-back upon itself—concealing what has been excluded in order to appear coherent and harmonious. This explains the functioning of grand discourses: they dominate not only through what they explicitly declare but also through how they reconfigure what remains unspoken. Ultimately, for Foucault and Blanchot, the system is not a closed structure but a space charged with tension—tension between the visible and the excluded, and between what is allowed to take shape and what is forcibly reshaped. The relationship between sensory perception and the word is a dynamic one in literature; contemporary critical discourse has focused heavily on the interplay between vision and speech. For instance, in 1975, Henri Maldiney authored a book titled **Looking, Speaking, and Space** (**Regard, parole, espace**), and Paul Ricoeur also wrote... Ricoeur authored a book titled **The Living Image** (**L'Image vive**), in which he defined the "living image" as a mode of seeing rather than merely a mode of speaking. Meanwhile, Jean-Pierre Richard—who had championed formalism in his early writings—asserted in his 1984 book **Pages, Paysages** (*Pages and Landscapes*) that "every page opens up a landscape." Undoubtedly, these concepts reveal a clear awareness of the image's function in constructing a narrative space; here, the image is not understood merely as a reproduction of what the eye sees or a simple description of a scene, but rather as a narrative force capable of opening up a new world to the reader.

Thus, according to this perspective, a page does not end at the boundaries of the words that compose it; instead, it leads to a landscape that transcends its surface appearance.

When discussing the visual dimension of narrative, we treat the image as more than mere description; here, the image serves as a way of understanding the world, composed of visual details that move within the text and open a gateway to meaning—it is, precisely, the product of visual perception. Color, light, shadow, and the movement of objects in space—these elements converge to shape the writer's vision of a "beautiful, velvety world," allowing the reader to grasp connotations that may not be explicitly stated yet operate in the text's depths; for "meaning lies in the eye of the beholder." Thus, the visual dimension transcends mere form, extending to the cultural, psychological, and social backgrounds evoked by the image. Every reader seeks their own self within the image, reading into it their own history, dreams, and illusions. Furthermore, every perceived phenomenon bears a relationship of resemblance to the object it represents; broadly speaking, the term "image" encompasses any visual representation that shares a perceived similarity or analogous relationship with its subject. In this sense, an image is a mimesis—a representation—of a subject, whether perceived through sight or other senses. This implies that every scene gives expression to a meaning hidden within the reader's mind—a meaning that emerges the moment an encounter occurs between the image and the reader.

1- The Body as a Visual Spectacle: From a Sign of Strength to a Scene of Perishing. The visual dimension in **Casanova's Women** goes beyond a mere display of images; it constitutes a dynamic language that articulates struggles over power and identity. It is worth noting that, within the narrative discourse, the body does not appear merely as an external form with describable features; rather, it can transform into a space where the character's own transformations are embodied. Indeed, the body in question represents a unity of soul and physique—a synthesis of the "body-as-object" and the "body-as-subject," where the psychological and the physical merge.

This visual dimension manifests initially in the portrayal of Casanova's body: it shifts from that of a powerful man—possessing an "octopus-like hand" that dominates "City Lighthouse"—to that of a paralyzed figure following a stroke. It is a body stripped of mobility, yet one that retains its aura of dominance within the memories of the women surrounding him. This visual paradox—juxtaposing a formerly dominant body with an incapacitated one—constructs a complex visual representation of power dynamics. The scenes evolve into dramatic tableaux, almost akin to Expressionist paintings, illuminating the fall of the dominant male and the emergence of the voices of the women around him. In this context, the novel highlights the contradictions between the self and authority through the words of the women themselves. Lalla Kebira remarks: "He was an ambitious, handsome, intelligent, and creative young man—one who knew neither boredom nor submission to loss or disappointment." Upon examining this passage, one observes that Lalla Kebira is not merely recounting a fleeting event; rather, she wields the brush of language to paint a precise, radiant portrait of a figure akin to Lot or Casanova. By describing him as ambitious, intelligent, and handsome, she is effectively crafting a dazzling mental image summoned from the screen of memory. This recalled image—imbued with traits of perfection and strength—does not function within the text as a gratuitous description; instead, it serves as a cultural signifier, a literal reproduction of the cultural archetype of the dominant, invincible male.

Here, Waciny Laredj's mastery in employing this scene becomes evident; he constructs an idealized image in the reader's mind to create a stark contrast with the fragile, broken reality the protagonist inhabits in the present. This juxtaposition—between the radiance of the past and the gloom of the present—points directly to the philosophical essence of the image itself. The image performs a dual function: it affirms that a visual splendor once existed in the past, while simultaneously proclaiming its death and loss in the present.

Lalla Kebira's evocation of these visual traits serves as a subtle device to strip away that masculine aura, revealing it to be nothing more than an illusory authority that has eroded and vanished over time. Thus, this description reflects the idealized image once cultivated around Lot/Casanova—that of the invincible, powerful man—which ultimately becomes a mere memory standing in contradiction to his actual reality. As for Lalla Mbarka, she adds: "You are the wealthy man who lacks nothing, for you have grown accustomed to obtaining whatever you desire through force—and force alone." While the preceding scene with Lalla Kebira relied on an aesthetic veneer that reinforced the image of the legendary hero, Lalla Mbarka's narrative intervention triggers a visual upheaval that turns the perspective upside down. This character—steeped in both deep-seated resentment and keen awareness—does not merely reject that romantic tableau; she tears its canvas to shreds, casting a harsh, shocking spotlight on the dark recesses of Lot/Casanova's character. Through her cutting words, the narrative camera shifts us from a realm of dreamy fantasy to the brutality of material reality. Here, the allure dissolves and the lover's aura fades, bringing the face of the "tyrant" into sharp focus—a face whose features are defined not by physical beauty, but by an arsenal of oppression, domination, and forced possession. This sudden shift in perspective lays bare the mechanisms of power, revealing that the external luster with which culture had surrounded this man was nothing more than a fragile, visible mask concealing a violent, despotic nature. When deconstructing this new image of Lalla Mbarka, we find it grounded in the duality of wealth and power—a duality that reshapes the narrative space into an arena of conflict and alienation rather than one of negotiation. Highlighting the attribute of wealth points directly to the centrality of capital in constructing the masculine landscape; the man here fills the frame not with human virtues, but with a material weight that reduces others—especially women—to mere objects or possessions to be acquired. This material objectification denies the woman the ability to position herself as an active subject—or even to exist as a female subject living her life alongside a man—relegating her instead to the margins. Yet, Lalla Mbarka's advanced consciousness and her articulation of this truth constitute an act of "spectacular resistance" in itself; she categorically refuses to be merely an object to be viewed and possessed, transforming instead into a subject who observes and deconstructs the mechanisms of male oppression, shifting the man from a dominant subject to an object dissected under her critical gaze. This reveals that the domination was not merely physical but also cultural and social, as Casanova's behavior is predicated on the notion that power is the sole means of obtaining what he desires—a concept that becomes entrenched in the consciousness of the women surrounding him. In this way, the novel's visual dimension transforms into a network of scenes and utterances that reshape the relationship between strength and weakness, and between memory and reality. It reveals layers of domination and resistance, forging an intense visual discourse that reflects the societal struggles over identity and power.

The novel rounds out this scene with a poignant description of the heart attack and stroke that landed Casanova in the hospital, where his body becomes an object of both mockery and pity: "Passersby who know him exchange knowing glances—Casanova in a wheelchair; poor Casanova."

Here, we encounter a starkly cinematic image representing the final, free-fall collapse of the patriarchal order. The words act as a lens capturing how society tears apart its fallen icons; while the deconstruction of male identity in earlier scenes occurred within enclosed spaces—voiced by women scorched by that very authority—this passage skillfully shifts the scene to the "public sphere," widening the scope to encompass society as a whole. The phrase "passersby exchange knowing glances" describes more than a fleeting street encounter; it establishes a brutal tableau in which the collective social gaze acts as both censor and executioner. These exchanged glances are a visual gesture charged with immense mockery, sarcasm, and even gloating—a simultaneous implicit and explicit declaration that the aura once surrounding the protagonist has shattered. In this open space, Lot/Casanova is no longer the subject who sees, observes, and controls; he has transformed into an exposed object, vulnerable to the scrutiny of others. He has lost his cultural immunity, and his crumbling body has become a free spectacle on the stage of the street, where the "power of the gaze" strips the tyrant of his remaining pride. The scene reaches the peak of its visual shock through the sharp contrast and glaring paradox created by the phrase "Casanova in a wheelchair." We are confronted with a violent clash between two contradictory signs: the name—bearing a cultural legacy rich in connotations of virility, potency, mobility, and conquest—and the object—the wheelchair—which visually and materially signifies infirmity, paralysis, and stasis. Placing Casanova within this confined physical framework constitutes a genuine affront to his virility and a clear indication of its collapse; the narrative strips the man of his primary instrument of dominance: mobility. Here, the wheelchair is not merely a medical device but a visual frame that captures that inflated masculinity, imprisoning it within the confines of infirmity and definitively shattering the phallocentric dominance that can no longer exert its aggressive force upon the surrounding space. This scene of decline concludes with the decisive, colloquial phrase: "Poor Casanova." The protagonist's transformation—shifting from a figure commanding admiration or even fear to one eliciting pity—marks the "zero point" in the deconstruction of his narrative identity. In this cultural context, pity is not a noble human emotion but a symbolic death sentence passed by the collective memory upon the man who once claimed absolute power. The system has been completely stripped bare, and the image of the wealthy, fearsome tyrant—as Lalla Mbarka had described him—has transformed into that of a broken figure begging for pity on the street. Through this progression of scenes, Waciny Laredj completes his portrayal of power's profound transformations, affirming that oppressive systems—regardless of their initial might and visual grandeur—harbor the seeds of their own demise, ultimately ending up as pitiful wreckage upon the sidewalks of memory. Thus, it can be said that Laredj's description does more than merely depict a physical state; it highlights the collapse of prestige and authority, illustrating the transformation of a once-dominant man into a humiliated figure viewed with a mixture of pity and scorn. He demonstrates that nothing lasts forever, and that no matter what status or power a person attains, a day will inevitably come when it all comes to an end.

2- The Final Tableau: Symbolic Death and the Dissolution of the Masculine Paradigm

The narrative subsequently completes the scene with a precise description of Casanova's features: "His features had lost much of their luster; they were gray, his eyes fixed on the void, searching for something cherished that had suddenly vanished." As if the physical and spatial collapse were not enough to dismantle this fractured narrative identity, the text delves deeper into the facial features—viewing the face as a screen upon which internal defeats are projected. In this meticulous passage, the author employs a technique of deliberate "visual extinguishing." Stripping the features of their customary radiance and replacing it with grayness is not merely a description of illness or biological aging; rather, it is a profound semiotic use of the color gray, which directly evokes burnout and nothingness. Here, gray represents the space between presence and absence, between life and death. It heralds the final extinguishing of the "aura" that had long surrounded the protagonist—the very aura that once granted him authority and allure in the eyes of women—which has now vanished, leaving behind a tableau devoid of any signifier of power or superiority. This chromatic fading serves as the visual equivalent of the collapse of the masculine center, which loses its *raison d'être* the moment it loses its capacity to radiate and dominate. Thus, the description imbues the scene with profound psychological depth: the body becomes a signifier of loss and brokenness, while the eyes transform into windows searching for a lost meaning amidst the surrounding void. 3- The Architecture of Isolation: The Villa as a Visual Space for the Collapse of Patriarchal Power.

The spaces delineated by the novel—the villa, the maid's room, the wives' quarters, the hospital, and others—are not merely narrative settings; they are imbued with connotations of power dynamics and marginalization. The enclosed villa embodies a totalizing social order wherein power is distributed according to specific rooms or pieces of furniture. The visual dialectic between the open space—wrapped in modernity and advertisements—and the city's impoverished alleyways reflects the conflict between socioeconomic classes, lending the imagery a significance that transcends the immediate narrative surface. The potency of this system becomes strikingly evident in the novel's opening, which offers a clear, symbolic description of the protagonist's villa—"The Big House" (or the Casanova Building). This description affirms the presence of power as a silent yet dominating entity: "He raised his head again. He contemplated the towering Casanova Building—'The Big House,' as all the residents of Manara City called it." Here, the sentence presents the building like a grand cinematic image where power and wealth converge; it captures how people perceive the city not merely as a concrete structure, but as a landmark that fills both the eye and the heart of Manara City. Through this visual framework, the building's height and its colloquial name, "The Big House," serve as a simple, lucid means for the text to highlight class disparity and the hegemony of a single man over an entire city. Opening the sentence with the imperative verb "Contemplate" immediately positions the reader as a visual observer, as if the narrator is demanding an eye that reads the image before reading the words. In visual semiotics, directing the gaze is a foundational step in creating an "interpretive path" that moves from the eye to the mind; this is not merely a neutral description but an invitation to objectify the structure before us as a sign requiring decoding. This invitation to contemplate shifts the narrative from an auditory-linguistic mode to a visual one that dominates how the fictional world is perceived.

"Casanova's High-Rise" is presented first through the attribute of height—specifically its visible vertical dimension—rather than its function or location, making its elevation the primary visual signifier. Vertically,

high-rises in the contemporary urban imagination symbolize dominance, the capacity for oversight and control, and the command of the city's skyline; this aligns with Casanova's persona as a businessman with "octopus-like hands" grasping the threads of the economy and the lives of the people. Thus, the building transforms into a symbolic physical extension of its owner—a colossal capitalist body towering over the other bodies and spaces of Manara City.

The shift from the individual name "Casanova's High-Rise" to the collective name—"The Big House," as all Manara City residents call it—reveals the sign's transition from private ownership to a fixture in the collective consciousness. In cultural semiotics, when people assign a unified name to a spatial element, they transform it into a shared symbol—an integral part of the city's collective visual memory. The phrase "the Big House" carries a dual semantic charge: "House" evokes intimacy, domesticity, and familiarity, while "Big" connotes class disparity, power, and prestige; the text thus creates a paradox between the warmth of the term and the harshness of reality.

In a cultural reading of the novel's setting, architecture serves as a vehicle for embodying inequality; the massive structure transforms into a class marker, physically and symbolically separating those who inhabit the "heights" from those who remain in the city's depths. Manara City is presented as an imagined modern metropolis governed by networks of money and corruption—with Casanova standing as a prime symbol of these networks—making his building an "urban signifier" of the encroachment of wealth and its domination of the city skyline. Here, the building's verticality is inseparable from the height of economic and social status, establishing a visual system based on the dichotomies of above/below, rich/poor, and ruler/ruled.

When it is said that all the residents of Manara City call it "The Big House," it implies that the building has become a visual anchor, structuring people's relationship with the city as well as their movements and gazes. The visual configuration here extends beyond the building itself to encompass the arrangement of surrounding homes, the press coverage tracking news of "Casanova," and the mental images people hold of it; it becomes the central point against which the value of everything else is measured. Thus, Manara City transforms into a narrative space "visually centered" on a single, outsized landmark—the Casanova building—reflecting an Arab-modernist culture in crisis, one besieged by the powers of capital and patriarchy that reproduce themselves in the form of a towering architectural structure. In contrast to impoverished neighborhoods like "Hayy al-Shira"—which Waciny Laredj designates as the setting for the character Lalla Mbaraka—she remarks: "Hayy al-Shira bears none of the names found in your upscale districts and neighborhoods: the 'Madame la Comtesse' quarter—renamed 'Hayy al-Yasmine' after independence—which the colonizers built during their era of dominance; 'Hayy al-Manzar al-Jamil' (Beautiful View), overlooking the sea from the heights; or 'Hayy al-Amira' (The Princess's Quarter), where European women vied to display their latest, most expensive fashions. In Al-Shira, things are different. Here, we find names like 'Darb al-Afa' (Snake Alley), 'Zuqaq al-Hamir' (Donkey Lane), 'Nahj al-Ma'dumīn' (Avenue of the Executed), and 'Shari' al-Khalaya al-Na'ima' (Street of Sleeper Cells). From the very start, Sir, our paths were never the same."

Visually, the sentence weaves a network of signs—the act of gazing, the building's height, the sheer scale of the "Dar" (mansion), and the collective naming—to construct a cohesive image of a central authority

dominating both the city and its inhabitants. Culturally, this image serves as a concentrated representation of an Arab world reduced to a "grand mansion" owned by a single man; everyone is invited merely to gaze upon it rather than alter its structure, thereby revealing the disparity between those who own the space and those who possess nothing but the right to look at it.

In the final scene, women surround the ailing man in a dimly lit room; the faint light illuminates faces that reflect a history of pain and vengeance. This scene functions as a visual system implying a trial of the body of power itself, where the man's silence transforms into a scream against symbolic violence. Each woman gives voice to her inner feelings, presenting us with the grotesque image of him that he—unwittingly—had etched into their minds. Secondly: Manifestations of the Imaginative Mode in the Novel:

While visual scenes constitute the novel's surface, another force imbues this structure with its soul and depth: the writer's ability to transcend immediate reality and reimagine it in a novel, innovative form. A novel does not merely convey the world as it is; rather, it creates a parallel space where reality and memory intertwine, granting characters the freedom to express their identities and enact the rituals that reflect their needs and purposes. Here, imagination is the essence that clothes the artwork in a new guise, liberating it from the constraints of reality and transporting it into the realm of unfettered creativity. Novelistic discourse is characterized as a form of fiction—and fiction, in one sense, implies a type of artistic ruse or illusion. Indeed, Littré defines the novel as a "deceptive story written in prose," for it narrates a virtual world that dissolves the equation of correspondence between the realm of fiction and the realm of reality. This lies at the heart of the complex relationship between the novel as a narrative discourse and the act of imagination itself; to classify the novel as a form of fiction is to acknowledge that its structure rests on the creation of a world that does not demand factual veracity from the reader, but rather invites an acceptance of the illusion. Here, the act of imagining approaches a form of aesthetic enticement that convinces the reader of the text's internal vitality, even when the subject lacks a basis in reality. Far from implying mere deception or artistic illusion in a negative sense, this imaginative process functions as a deliberate technique—a strategy employed by the writing to blur the boundaries of reality, generate the pleasure of discovery, and keep the reader in a state of constant alertness and interpretation. This "deception" is not a lie but a narrative game; it allows the novel to expand the horizons of understanding and articulate what remains unsaid in direct discourse. In this sense, the novel does not evade truth but constructs its own reality through a meticulously crafted imaginative framework—one that slightly unsettles the reader, compelling them to participate in the creation of meaning. The "imaginative system" refers to the network of symbolic and metaphorical representations woven by the novel around its characters and worlds. By interweaving the real with the mythical, and dreams with nightmares, the text transforms into a laboratory for deconstructing dominant ideologies through the power of imagination. It is a force that governs the creation of symbols and the proliferation of imagery, elevating ordinary language and allowing it to flourish within a referential framework—one perceived through the senses and structured by an imagined narrative order. In **Casanova's Women**, this imaginative system centers on transforming the protagonist into a figure of myth and folklore. He is a blend of reality, myth, and folklore—a figure of popular legend—making him a symbol of a deeply rooted authoritarian structure rather than merely a specific individual. This imaginative framework manifests in the novel **Casanova's Women** not only through storytelling and narrative but also

through the transformation of characters and settings into fantastical worlds imbued with symbolic significance and profound psychological conflicts. The novel intertwines reality with dreams and memories with myth, creating an imaginative realm that articulates psychological crises and weaves a web of fantasies reflecting the characters' own interpretations of reality.

1 - Giacomo Casanova: From Historical Reality to Legend

The name of the Italian "Casanova" is associated in the public imagination with romantic adventures; however, the modern discovery of his writings and memoirs has revealed a far more complex figure. "Casanova" has become synonymous with anyone who seeks to capture women's attention and pursue romantic liaisons. It is hardly surprising, then, that many overlook the fact that Casanova was a real person who lived in 18th-century Europe, mingled within its diverse social circles, and chronicled his adventures in candid language. "In 1725, the Italian adventurer Casanova sought out various occupations in Venice; he became renowned for his daring escapades and romantic affairs. Known as an international swindler, he came to symbolize both deception and adventure. He held diverse roles—clerk, soldier, diplomat, priest, spy, and more—serving a cardinal in Rome, playing the violin in Messina, and joining the Freemasons in Lyon; he was even accused of sorcery and witchcraft, for which he was imprisoned. He lived in Paris, Prague, and Vienna."

"He was known for his extensive travels, which added layers of complexity and fame to his persona—often causing the reality of his life to blur into legend and take on a global dimension. In Paris, he established a lottery and amassed a fortune; he traveled to the Netherlands, where he was knighted, and visited Switzerland, where he met Voltaire. His travels took him to Florence, Rome, London, Berlin, Warsaw, and Spain. He eventually returned to Venice to work as a spy monitoring state inspectors, translated the *Iliad*, wrote his memoirs, and spent the final years of his life in Bohemia." All information regarding this figure—an eccentric individual who captivated writers and creative minds alike—is drawn from his memoirs. He began writing in 1789 on his doctor's advice as a therapeutic measure to combat melancholy. He would write for eighteen hours a day (as he mentioned to a friend in a letter two years later), laughing aloud at the situations he recalled—what a joy it is to look back on moments that once brought pleasure! This fascinates me, for I invented nothing; it was all drawn from reality. The manuscript was released for reading in 1821, though not before passing through the hands of censors; despite this, the Vatican placed it on the list of banned books. The memoirs' notorious reputation did not end there, however; the French library even sequestered its copy in a special cabinet reserved for "scandalous" works—the "Sun of Hell." These are among the reasons the legend of Casanova remains alive to this day. Giacomo Casanova became a symbol of seduction and allure, defined by his numerous relationships with women—engaging in romantic role-play that went far beyond mere flirtation. He traveled with a massive wardrobe and a trunk filled with items—fans, jewelry, and accessories—intended as gifts for the women he pursued. Much of what he said and did was drawn from the novels he had read and the stories he had heard; he would envelop women in an atmosphere of deep romance—one that felt remarkably authentic to their senses.

2. Casanova in the Work of Waciny Laredj: A Seducer in His Own Right

The writer Waciny Laredj stays close to the real-life persona of the famous seducer Giacomo Casanova. He portrays his protagonist—also named Casanova—as a man captivated by women, or more accurately, a womanizer who married four times. The first point of connection between the two figures is the name itself; although the character is also called "Lot," he bears the famous name "Casanova." The author chose "Manara City" as the fictional setting for the novel's events—a place described as "Manara City, Bride of the Mediterranean; so it was known in ancient times, a city that distilled all civilizations." This description constructs the city as an imagined entity charged with civilizational significance, rather than merely a neutral geographical location. The name "Manara City" positions the city as a guiding beacon. In the Mediterranean imagination, the lighthouse signifies guidance, navigational safety, and the illumination of the path through darkness; this transforms the city into a center of symbolic radiance rather than merely a point on a map. Characterizing the city as the "Bride of the Mediterranean" transmutes it into an adorned, desirable female body that draws admiring and celebratory gazes, thereby forging a feminine identity rooted in beauty, allure, and festivity rather than in function or production.

As for the phrase "that is what it was called in ancient times," it invokes the authority of the past as a golden age, turning the name itself into a heritage artifact that legitimizes the city's imagined image—as if the city derives its value from the history of its name rather than its current reality. The phrase "it encapsulated all civilizations" reveals a totalizing or appropriative impulse; the city is not merely a meeting point for cultures but a vessel that absorbs and epitomizes them, positioning itself as a center relative to civilizational peripheries that dissolve within it.

3- The Ideological Dimension and the Representation of the Mediterranean:

This discourse reproduces the image of the Mediterranean as a space of universal cross-pollination, yet it assigns the city an idealized function that transcends reality, turning it into a microcosm of the world—or a "collection of civilizations" concentrated in a single spot. This is a common trope in the representation of Mediterranean cities like Alexandria or coastal cities in the Maghreb. Underlying this imagery is a local or national ideology striving to distinguish the city from others by exaggerating its aesthetic and civilizational qualities; the description thus shifts into a discourse of boastfulness and exceptionalism, obscuring historical and civilizational tensions in favor of a harmonious, sanitized image of... "Beacon City" and "Bride City."

He also appears in the dreams and nightmares interspersed throughout the novel; these become events in their own right, shaping diverse imaginary realms that reveal women's fears and internal struggles. Each woman reimagines herself and reconstructs her past through dreams and memory, transforming the novel into an imaginative arena where reality and fantasy clash, thereby exposing the characters' psychological and social dimensions. Thus, the imaginative framework of **Casanova's Women** is not limited to mere storytelling; it extends to the construction of symbolic spaces and the reframing of reality through the characters' imaginations. The text becomes an imaginative stage reflecting women's tragedies, identity struggles, and experiences of power within a vast and distinctive imaginative horizon.

The novel begins by reconstructing Casanova's life through the memories of the women around him; each woman transforms into a distinct narrative, and the story evolves into a proliferating act of imagination that reinterprets the same event from various perspectives.

Third: The Formation of the Cultural Narrative Discourse (Unveiling the Unspoken):

The formation of cultural narrative discourse in **Casanova's Women** lies in Al-Araj's ability to articulate what remains unspoken within contemporary Arab culture. By blending the visual with the imaginative, the novel reveals a set of cultural patterns that underpin the discourse of male hegemony:

1- The Masculinity/Power Pattern: "Casanova" embodies the cultural pattern of hegemonic masculinity, exploiting wealth and influence to control bodies and destinies. His tragic downfall—a stroke—serves as a visual act of retribution against this pattern.

From the title and the novel's introduction, Casanova is portrayed as a businessman with "octopus-like reach" in the city of "Manara City." This establishes him as a cultural symbol of hegemonic masculinity, combining economic power with patronage networks and the ability to dictate the fates of others—both men and women—in a manner that echoes the archetype of the dominant "Leader/Father" figure in the Arab imagination. This hegemony is visually manifested through scenes of ostentatious wealth and the commanding presence of a male body that dictates the rhythm of its surroundings (the villa, the office, spaces of pleasure). Yet, this image is abruptly shattered by the stroke, which paralyzes him and confines him to a white bed; he transforms from an absolute agent of action into a "passive body" subjected to the gazes and narratives of others. Some critics have interpreted this shift as a deconstruction of the absoluteness of male hegemony, revealing it to be a historically contingent construct susceptible to collapse. The visual spectacle of broken masculinity—a paralyzed body surrounded by women recounting his history—thus becomes a form of "visual retribution" against the masculine order. The narrative confines Casanova within a static frame, whereas the narrative camera moves freely alongside the voices of the women; thus, he transforms from the one who controls discourse and the destinies of others into the object of discourse himself.

2- The Femininity/Margin Paradigm: The women represent the voice of the margin—compelled to speak out—as the narrative transforms into a counter-cultural space that exposes latent practices and behaviors, such as violence, rape, and betrayal, permeating various strata of society.

At the outset of the narrative, the women—the four wives and the maid—are implicitly defined as "domestic chattel" belonging to a powerful man. This is underscored by the novel's framing, which serves as a metaphor for an Arab world that continues to relegate women to the role of domestic objects rather than acknowledging them as creative forces. However, the narrative structure gradually shifts; by employing polyphony and modern narrative techniques, the novel transfers the storytelling center from Casanova to the women. Each woman becomes the bearer of a narrative thread revealing layers of symbolic and material violence: class-based violence that marginalizes the maid, Mubarak; physical and sexual violence that turns the female body into a site of exploitation; and emotional and psychological violence that crushes the dreams of the artist, the student, and others. According to specialized critical analysis, the feminist

agency within the novel operates at the level of "discursive resistance" rather than manifesting as a wholesale social upheaval. In other words, women exact revenge through narrative—by exposing what was previously left unsaid. The novel's space thus transforms into a "counter-cultural space" that redefines relationships and reveals the chasm between the official social image of marriage and family and the acts of rape, betrayal, and blackmail occurring beneath the surface.

3. The Tradition/Modernity Paradigm: The implicit comparison with **One Thousand and One Nights** creates a cultural paradox. While Scheherazade told stories to survive, the women in **Casanova** tell stories to exact revenge—reflecting a shift in women's cultural discourse from mere narrators to active critics. The novel employs a modern intertextual engagement with **One Thousand and One Nights** regarding its general structure: a dominant male figure at the center, with women taking turns to narrate across successive nights or segments. However, the fundamental difference is that Scheherazade narrated to stave off death, whereas the women in **Casanova** narrate to strip the "Master" of his immunity and transform his history into an indictment. This signifies a transition in cultural discourse: the woman moves from the role of narrator-survivor to that of narrator-critic-avenger. The novel utilizes techniques such as intertextuality, collage, and cinematic narrative—methods noted by various scholars—to draw upon the reservoir of **The Nights** and narrative heritage, rewriting them within a contemporary city amidst financial, political, and moral corruption. Consequently, invoking the Scheherazade archetype serves as a cultural backdrop against which the status of modern women is measured; for them, mere disclosure is no longer sufficient for survival—instead, they wield disclosure itself as a tool to accuse and condemn the patriarchal structure. Thus emerges the third paradigm—that of heritage versus modernity—wherein the reservoir of tradition shifts from a source of recycled imagery to a goldmine of ironic juxtaposition. The traditional discourse of "protecting women" is pitted against a reality that theoretically regards women as "half of society" yet practically confines them to marginal roles; the novel reflects this dynamic, serving—as described by the publisher and various critical analyses—as a "mirror to an Arab world held captive by its own backwardness and its insistence on marginalizing women."

Conclusion:

Following this journey through the novel **Casanova's Women** (**Nisa' Casanova**), we arrive at the following conclusions:

_ **Casanova's Women** is not merely a love story about a man and the women in his life; rather, it is a complex narrative tapestry that weaves together visual and imaginative elements to produce a critical discourse that deconstructs male hegemony.

_ Waciny Laredj succeeded in transforming images, colors, and spaces from mere décor into vibrant signs pulsating with meaning; Casanova's crumbling body, colorful wings, and mingled scents all evolved into a visual language narrating a story of decline and brokenness.

_ The imaginative dimension provided women with a genuine space to articulate their suffering, where dreams intertwine with nightmares and memories with myth, transforming the novel into a realm that reshapes reality and lays bare hidden wounds.

_ The novel demonstrates that male hegemony is not an inevitable destiny but a social construct open to deconstruction, and that the voices of marginalized women can re-emerge to tell their stories in their own unique ways.

_ This novel affirms that literature is not a passive mirror reflecting reality, but an active critical tool that reconstructs meaning and poses fundamental questions regarding identity, power, and social justice.

_ Ultimately, **Casanova's Women** stands as a vivid literary testament that invites us to reflect on power dynamics within society and urges us to listen to the voices of the marginalized, serving as a message of hope regarding the possibility of change and liberation from the shackles of the past.

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