

***FLOWERS IN THE ATTIC AND THE BRIDE OF AMMAN:
A CROSS-CULTURAL INVESTIGATION OF INCESTUOUS
UNITIES IN THE LIGHT OF FEMINIST LITERARY THEORY***

*FLORES EN EL ÁTICO Y LA NOVIA DE AMMÁN: UNA INVESTIGACIÓN
TRANSCULTURAL DE LAS UNIDADES INCESTUOSAS A LA LUZ DE LA
TEORÍA LITERARIA FEMINISTA*

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Abstract: This research paper aims at setting forward a cross-cultural investigation of incestuous relationships in the light of feminist literary theory. The article thus centers on four literary works: *Pillars of Salt* by Fadi Faqir (1996), *Uncle Vampire* by Cynthia Grant (1996), *Flowers in the Attic* by Virginia Andrews (2003), and *The Bride of Amman* by Fadi Zaghmout (2015). The core contribution in this research paper is to address the acceptability of incest as highlighted in the western and eastern socio-cultural contexts of the chosen literary works. This article is therefore targeted towards addressing three research questions: “what are the different types of incestuous relationships that have been addressed in *Flowers in the Attic* by Virginia Andrews (2003) and *The Bride of Amman* by Fadi Zaghmout (2015)?”; “what are the main socio-cultural responses to incest that have been acknowledged in *Flowers in the Attic* by Virginia Andrews (2003) and *The Bride of Amman* by Fadi Zaghmout (2015)?” and “what are the factors that impact terminating an incestuous relationship as presented in *Flowers in the Attic* by Virginia Andrews (2003) and *The Bride of Amman* by Fadi Zaghmout (2015)?”.

Keywords: Incest, Feminist Literary Theory, Particularity, Literary Studies.

Resumen: Este trabajo de investigación pretende proponer una investigación transcultural sobre las relaciones incestuosas desde la perspectiva de la teoría literaria feminista. El artículo se centra en cuatro obras literarias: *Pilares de Sal* de Fadi Faqir (1996), *Tío Vampiro* de Cynthia Grant (1996), *Flores en el ático* de Virginia Andrews

(2003) y *La novia de Ammán* de Fadi Zaghmout (2015). La principal contribución de este trabajo de investigación es abordar la aceptabilidad del incesto, tal como se destaca en los contextos socioculturales occidental y oriental de las obras literarias seleccionadas. Por lo tanto, este artículo se centra en abordar tres preguntas de investigación: “¿Cuáles son los diferentes tipos de relaciones incestuosas que se han abordado en Flores en el ático de Virginia Andrews (2003) y La novia de Ammán de Fadi Zaghmout (2015)?”; “¿Cuáles son las principales respuestas socioculturales al incesto que se reconocen en Flores en el ático de Virginia Andrews (2003) y La novia de Ammán de Fadi Zaghmout (2015)?” y “¿Cuáles son los factores que influyen en la terminación de una relación incestuosa, como se presenta en Flores en el ático de Virginia Andrews (2003) y La novia de Ammán de Fadi Zaghmout (2015)?”.

Palabras clave: Incesto, Teoría literaria feminista, Particularidad, Estudios literarios.

Received: 09/04/2024. Accepted: 26/06/2025.

Introduction

Incest is a multifaceted state of human relations (Leeson, 2018; Klages and Zhang, 2012; Sonbol, 2003; Atiyat, et al., 2023). It is an experience that is far from being generalizable (Atiyat et al., 2023). This article focuses on investigating the particularity of incest in the light of its acceptability as portrayed in the examples of western and eastern literary productions investigated. The particularity of the socio-cultural values governing the acceptability of incest will be investigated. For this purpose, four literary works will be examined: *The Bride of Amman* by Fadi Zaghmout, *Pillars of Salt* by Fadi Faqir, *Flowers in the Attic* by Virginia Andrews and *Uncle Vampire* by Cynthia Grant.

The central concern of the researcher is therefore to voice the specificity of the victimized characters' struggle throughout the repeated incestuous experiences, and to visualize the available resources and limitations impacting the efficiency of their attempts to end their tormenting cyclic incestuous experiences. Therefore; this paper is divided into three sections. After the introduction which includes the subsections of the literature review and the methodological approach implemented to carry out this research paper, the second section will be concerned with analyzing the far-from-generalizable sexual experiences of the protagonists in all the literary productions explored. Finally, the third section concludes this research paper.

In the following subsection, this research paper shall detail a review of the literature.

A Review of the Literature

Interest in investigating incestuous bonds has been increasingly growing in the field of literary studies since the 1970s (Atiyat et al., 2022; Leeson, 2018; Sorcha, 2012), especially in relation to the suppressed feelings that they cause, and their effects on abused female characters' consciousness (Lanser, 1992; Humm, 2015). Ever since, many literarians have endeavored to envision and skillfully portray characters entrapped in incestuous relationships, shedding light on the multitude of contexts, settings and resources that render each of these characters' experiences unique (Zaghmout; Andrews; Faqir; Grant). Incestuous bonds might range from father-daughter incest, to mother-son, mother-daughter, and father-son incest. Step-parents (Pollak) and in-laws (Fotopoulos) could also be involved in such bonds.

Yet, to presume that the complexity of investigating incest in literary studies is merely attributed to the different patterns according to which incest could be manifested is a false presumption. The conceptualization of incest in literary studies is further complicated due to the diverse reasoning shaping the acceptability of this phenomenon across different cultures (Atiyat et al., 2022; Leeson, 2018; Sonbol, 2003). Some literary studies portray incest as whole-heartedly being rejected due to deeply rooted, religiously-based values (Atiyat et al., 2023; Sonbol, 2003) or to its potential threat to power relations (Gwin, 2002; Horvitz, 2000) and socio-cultural stability:

The emergence of incest taboos signified the transition from a state of ignorance and barbarism to a stage of more civilized society. The anthropologist Bronislaw Kasper Malinowski, for example, supplies a social-cultural explanation for the universal prohibition of incest. According to him, incest is detrimental for the hierarchic boundaries of the family structure, thus harming its function in maintaining social stability. (Sharaby, 2019, 172).

Other researchers, however, bear a broader understanding regarding the acceptability of this phenomenon (Sabeen; Leeson; Grogan). That is,

some literarians and critics depict particular forms of incest to be acceptable due to the positive power-based alliances these unities create in order to fill up voids of loss and pain (Sabean, 2023; Leeson, 2018; Hudson, 2014; Andrews, 2005):

Children of the same family, the same blood, with the same first associations and habits, have some means of enjoyment in their power, which no subsequent connections can supply; and it must be by a long and unnatural estrangement, by a divorce which no subsequent connection can justify, if such precious remains of the earliest attachment are ever outlived. (Hudson, 2014)

In line with Hudson (2014), Sabean (2023) maintains that not all incestuous patterns cause negative, destructive feelings in the characters taking part in the incestuous relationship:

‘I long for a pure and deep, pliant and forming, female heart, in which I might worthily reflect all my love and her creations as in a pure, beautiful mirror’ (Sabean, 2023, 294). Therefore; the investigation of incestuous unities must be taken into consideration as individual cases, each with its particular circumstances in order to be able to adequately comprehend the actions and reactions carried out by the parties involved in incestuous bonds (Atiyat et al., 2023).

Finally, the third aspect of research that has clearly added to the complexity of investigating incest within the context of literary studies is research concentrating on the diverse factors that shape potential attempts to terminate incestuous relationships (Atiyat et al., 2023; Atiyat, 2021; Pollak, 1997; Sonbol, 2003). After having provided a review of the literature in this segment of the paper, the following subsection will be primarily concerned with discussing the methodological approach followed in order to conduct this research paper.

Methodology

This research paper is intended to shed light on the different responses that incest survivors might carry out upon the occurrence of the incestuous acts

in literary studies. These responses or reactions are analyzed in the form of segments of stories revealing details of the incestuous relationships explored. The aim behind addressing these stories is to enable the reader to form an understanding of not only the incestuous experiences themselves, but also the reactions of the female characters who have been entrapped in such bonds. According to Islam et al. (2022), qualitative ‘research is carried out with the qualitative phenomena to understand human behavior or motivations or attitude. Qualitative research is focused on the qualitative aspect that is relating to or involves quality or kind... This type of research is carried out ... to understand the motive of human behavior, e.g., how people behave in a particular situation and why’ (Islam et al., 2022, 19).

This urge to comprehend human behavior is not the mere concern of behavioral sciences (Islam et al., 2022). Rather, it has constituted the focal point of researchers interested in the field of literary studies (Torrecilla): “Founded on ‘empirical research,’ the system, ideal for *all* literature, shows texts to be ‘the intentional productions of living, individual human beings who are responding to their own particular environmental circumstances’ and, in doing so, uncovers ‘the structure of determinate meaning within the text’” (Torrecilla 30). The qualitative approach chosen to conduct this research paper is content analysis. According to Silverman, Given, and Frost, content analysis could be defined as:

...the intellectual process of categorizing qualitative textual data into clusters of similar entities, or conceptual categories, to identify consistent patterns and relationships between variables or themes. Qualitative content analysis is sometimes referred to as latent content analysis. This analytical method is a way of reducing data and making sense of them – of deriving meaning. (Given, 2008, 1)

The accounts of the surviving characters of incestuous relationships in *The Bride of Amman* by Fadi Zaghmout (2015), *Pillars of Salt* by Fadia Faqir (1996) and *Flowers in the Attic* by Virginia Andrews (2005) are the raw material for the incestuous experiences that were subject to analysis. *The Bride of Amman* by Fadi Zaghmout (2015) and *Pillars of Salt* by Fadia Faqir (1996) were analyzed under the category of paternal incest. *Flowers in the Attic* by Virginia Andrews (2005), however, was examined with particular attention given to details on sibling incest. The types of incestu-

ous relationships determined were specified after having read the literary works thoroughly. This step is referred to as reading or scanning in qualitative content analysis (Silverman; Given). The second step is that of categorizing. In line with Silverman (2005), Given (2008) explains this step saying: 'Content analysis is a systematic examination of forms of communication used to objectively document patterns. In general, the text is broken down into categories and the presence of these categories is often quantified' (Given, 2008). Nevertheless, qualitative content analysis is never to be mixed up for an exact equivalent to qualitative discourse analysis. In her words, Given explains: 'Discourse analysis also uses written, spoken, or signed language as its object but is concerned with larger units of analysis such as conversations and the interrelationship between language and society' (Given, 2008). Thus, bearing in mind the sensitivity surrounding the discussion of incest (Leeson), it becomes understandable that the details provided by those involved in incestuous bonds are far from being extensive or prolonged. Overtness is an issue to the women who have been part of the incestuous experiences. Therefore; adopting a feminist approach throughout the conduct of this research paper becomes crucial to breaking the ice surrounding such a silenced topic as incest which is of particular concern to women (Atiyat and Almomani, 2021; Atiyat et al., 2023). Ailwood et al. (2022), in line with Atiyat and Almomani (2021) and Atiyat, Sarayreh, and Rimawi (2023), shed light onto the impact of voicing abused women's experiences to adjust and empower laws pertaining to the elimination of domestic violence including incest:

Through giving voice to experiences of gender inequality, violence, and the inadequacy of legal responses to it, as 'stories', 'narratives' and 'testimony', women have challenged the law's claims to neutrality and objectivity. Moreover, they have highlighted the law's partiality and perspectives as those of the powerful, calling for recognition of women's experiences as valid and robust evidence bases for law reform (Ailwood et al., 2022, 218).

The process of conducting this research paper was therefore initiated by choosing novels that centered on incest for the purpose of specifying the type of domestic violence being addressed. Nevertheless, *The Bride of Amman* (2015) and *Pillars of Salt* (1996) were rooted in an eastern socio-

cultural background and focused on parental incest, whereas *Uncle Vampire* (1996) was fixated on western socio-cultural values while addressing parental incest and *Flowers in the Attic* (2005) was rooted in a western socio-cultural background and centered on sibling incest. This choice of the literary works was deliberately done in an attempt structure a comparison between literary samples showing eastern and western socio-cultural values in relation to the acceptability of parental incest as opposed to sibling incest.

After having explained the rationale behind choosing the literary works or samples that have been highlighted in this paper, the remaining stages of the research process will be outlined in order. In line with Silverman (2005), Given (2008), and Frost (2011) maintain that the second step carried out was the scanning phase. It was of great importance for the researchers to read the literary works, and identify the patterns of the incestuous experiences. The third stage, however, is focused on finding statements uttered by the characters to describe the details of the incestuous experiences.

Initially, accounts under the category of paternal incest in *The Bride of Amman* (2015) and *Pillars of Salt* (1996) were compared to one another within the socio-cultural context of Arab Muslim cultures. Then, they were compared to accounts under the category of parental incest in western socio-cultural contexts as found in *Uncle Vampire* (1996). However, the third category for comparison was structured amongst accounts of paternal incest in *The Bride of Amman* (2015), *Pillars of Salt* (1996) and *Uncle Vampire* (1996) as opposed to accounts of sibling incest highlighted in *Flowers in the Attic* (1996). It was crucial for the researchers to keep in mind that parental incest and sibling incest are two different categories. Therefore; the two sets of underlying incestuous accounts or statements must never be treated as having the same features, especially in relation to the consent of each character involved in the incestuous acts. Both the similarities and differences determining the incestuous experiences in the four literary works were examined; in an attempt to show why certain forms of incest are found to be acceptable depending on the socio-cultural contexts in which they occur. In their book, *Successful Qualitative Research: A Practical Guide for Beginners*, Braun and Clarke maintain that a qualitative researcher can be

sensitive to context by contextualizing the research in relation to relevant theoretical and empirical literature; being sensitive to participants' perspectives and the socio-cultural context (during both data collection—by, for example, asking open-ended questions that encourage participants to talk about what is important to them— and during data analysis by exploring how the participants' socio-cultural contexts shape their accounts' (Braun and Clarke, 2013, 290).

Addressing particularity in the light of socio-cultural and context-determined values enables the researcher to avoid misleading generalizations, and therefore paves the way for a greater degree of accuracy. After having discussed the methodological approach carried out to conduct this research paper, the following section will set forward the discussion section.

Discussion

Available research confirms rising interest in the investigation of incest within the context of literary studies, and particularly within the context of feminist literary studies since the 1980s (Atiyat et al; Leeson; Pollak). Feminist contributions to the exploration of incest within various fields of study including the field of literature have been given recognizable cruciality for their targeting and attempting to terminate socio-cultural and institutional bias against women who have experienced incestuous violence:

In Woolf's fiction, male sexual violence pervades women's lives as lived experience. . . Woolf's pre-occupation with the impact of male violence on women derives from her wide-ranging commitments to social justice, her love for and loyalty to women, but also her personal experience of childhood sexual abuse by her half-brothers. (Cramer, 2010: 184)

This importance is understandable because feminist literary works have served to voice the long-silenced tolerance of sexual oppression that female characters endure:

Correspondently, literary critic, Elizabeth Ammons maintains that a reformist feminist "political climate ha[s] the effect of empowering women, including writers," at both cultural and personal levels. Ammons indicates that "women writers at the beginning of the twentieth century

flourished in large part— as they do . . . in the 1980s— because of an intensified and pervasive feminist political climate”. (Horvitz, 2000, 3)

In opposition to this feminist stance, rejecting non-consensual incestuous relationships has been addressed in the available literature on the acceptability of incest as a controversial matter. Sorcha (2012), in line with other feminist literary scholars (Atiyat et al., 2023; Leeson, 2018; Pollak, 1997), for instance, acknowledges the possible rejection of incest for its violation of women’s bodies, yet argues that some critics have considered incestuous relationships to be acceptable as the source of female pleasure and delight despite the absence of mutual consent: “Most representations of rape prior to 1970 focused on the thoughts and motivations of the rapist. These depictions excluded the perspective of the violated woman or portrayed her as subconsciously craving and ultimately enjoying the ‘rough sex’” (Sorcha, 2012, 55-56). This stance regarding incest as acceptable was not abolished after the emergence of literary feminist activism on incest in the 1980s (Atiyat et al; Leeson; Pollak), but rather continues to be echoed in misogynist andro-centric writings on this phenomena (Atiyat et al; Leeson; Sorcha). The female victim of incest in andro-centric writings is thus labelled as socio-culturally and religiously ‘bad’ or morally-fallen (Sorcha). This andro-centric label that is imposed on female characters as survivors of incest is however not only restricted to some western cultural and literary values (Leeson; Sorcha; Pollak), but also prevails in eastern, conservative socio-cultural and literary contexts (Sonbol). Given this degrading label, literary studies acknowledge the idea that characters surviving incest are exposed to both shaming and victim-blaming (Leeson; Pollak). Such reactions towards these characters serve to deprive incest survivors from sharing their horrific experiences, and thus give inaccurate indications regarding the pervasiveness and severity of incest (Leeson; Pollak). These different literary considerations of incest have been reflected in the available body of research as shall be shown below.

Reading *The Bride of Amman* by Fadi Zaghmout (2015), *Pillars of Salt* by Fadi Faqir (1996), *Flowers in the Attic* by Virginia Andrews (2005) and *Uncle Vampire* by Cynthia Grant (1996), one will realize that all four literary works are novels that highlighted incestuous experiences. Yet, to presume that all four novels examined incest from an identical socio-cul-

turally- based critical stance would be a matter of over-simplification. The reason behind the difference in the examination of this phenomenon as found in the assigned literary works is attributed, I would like to argue, to the type of incest that is being examined, and the sociocultural context in which it is portrayed and explored. *The Bride of Amman* by Fadi Zaghmout (2015), *Pillars of Salt* by Fadi Faqir (1996), and *Uncle Vampire* by Cynthia Grant (1996) are all novels that addressed the issue of parental incest, whereas *Flowers in the Attic* by Virginia Andrews (2005) is a novel that explored sibling incest. While *The Bride of Amman* by Fadi Zaghmout (2015), *Pillars of Salt* by Fadi Faqir (1996), and *Uncle Vampire* by Cynthia Grant (1996) shed light onto the rejection of parental incest, as maintained by feminist scholars and researchers (Atiyat et al; Leeson; Pollak), due to its negative impacts on the women who have experienced incest, *Flowers in the Attic* by Virginia Andrews (2005) presents sibling incest as being the source of socio-cultural unity, support and strength (Andrews, 2005). It is of great importance to stress the idea that in the light of their Arab Muslim socio-cultural values, literary works like *The Bride of Amman* by Fadi Zaghmout (2015) and *Pillars of Salt* by Fadi Faqir (1996) acknowledge the absolute rejection of incest in all its types as asserted in the available research on literary studies regardless of the impacts of the incestuous experiences in question (Van Gelder, 2012). This rejection, as explained in feminist literary theory (Atiyat et al; Leeson; Pollak), is unquestionable for it aligns with the teachings of the Holy Quran which Muslims hold dear. In line with Van Gelder (2012), Leeson (2018) acknowledged the impossibility of generalizing the effects of incestuous experiences on the characters involved, along with the impossibility of generalizing the acceptability of incest across different socio-cultural contexts.

Reading through the lines of *The Bride of Amman* by Fadi Zaghmout (2015), for example, the reader unveils the reality surrounding the protagonist's life, and why she ended up exploding with rage in the face of her perpetrator after years of imposed silence. She is a young woman from a conservative Arab Muslim background. Silenced by the prevailing socio-cultural values of shame and subjugation to patriarchal authority (Leeson; Pollak), this young woman is forced to endure years of sexual assault waged against her by her socio-culturally presumed source of safety, love and support, her father.

I remember that he hit me so hard three years ago just because I refused to accompany the family to visit my grandmother' (Zaghmout, 2015: 3-4). As stated in the previous lines, Zaghmout's protagonist, Hayat, is forced to succumb to the patriarchal authority and dominance of her father due to her fear of his constant practice of physical violence against her, and due to her internalized fear of the potential shame that will cripple her life lest she exposed her father as the one who has imprisoned her in an incestuous cyclic life. Yet, Hayat rebels against this culturally imposed patriarchal pressure that led to her silence for long. She finally decides to take counter-action against her perpetrator. From a feminist psychoanalytic perspective 'a woman's hidden feelings, emotions, fears and insecurities are not maintained in the secrecy of her stream of consciousness. Rather, they are dug out from the deepest ends of the character's psyche to meet the reader's attentive ears' (Atiyat and Khassawneh, 2020). Feminist psychoanalysts stress the importance of addressing female characters' reactions to incest in the light of the hidden gendered oppression that surround these characters (Lanser). In her more recent contribution to feminist psychoanalysis *A Reader's Guide to Contemporary Feminist Criticism*, Maggie Humm (2015) affirms, in line with Lanser (1992) and Pollak (2009), the importance of addressing suppressed feelings since "... Feminists think that aspects of women's sexual experience are often repressed or 'unconscious'. Consciousness-raising in feminist literary theory is like the bringing 'up' of the repressed into consciousness in therapy or the raising of the subtext in literature – all ways of learning about the previously unexpressed effects of patriarchy" (Humm, 2015).

It is thus, in the light of feminist psychoanalysis, of great importance to acknowledge the idea that gendered oppression imposed by patriarchal authority and power controls characters like Hayat and robs them of maintaining authority over their bodies, and eventually turns them into pawns programmed and destined for male servitude. Hayat portrays her experience saying:

He approached me finally and clung onto me. He pushed me down to the ground while I was struggling to breathe and to free myself. He stripped me naked while I was screaming and struggling to escape. He forced his hand over my mouth to shut me up. All I had left was to cry in order

to numb my pain until everything was over, just as if nothing had happened at all. (Zaghmout 7)

Another example mirroring the particularity of incest in feminist literary theory is found in *Pillars of Salt* by Fadia Faqir (1996). Upon the investigation of *Pillars of Salt* by Fadia Faqir (1996), the reader comes to realize the similarities between the experience of Hayat and that of Fadia Faqir's protagonist, Maha. Both women in these novels were brought up in strictly conservative Muslim socio-cultural settings. In such male-dominated socio-cultural contexts, as Arab feminist scholars argue, female characters are not allowed to voice their experiences of incest (Atiyat et al; Sonbol). They are silenced by their fear of being exposed to victim-blaming, and by their dread of getting ultimately killed by their male family members under what is known as preserving family honor (Atiyat et al; Sonbol). Terrified by the possibility of becoming an honor crime victim herself, Faqir's protagonist, Maha asks her sexual abuser: 'What are you doing here? If Daffash, my brother, sees you, he will kill us both' (Faqir 9). She needed to keep him out of sight, and is forced to internalize her fear of the revelation of her pre-marital sexual relationship with him for years. In addition, Maha is even forced to remain silent about her incestuous experience with her own brother; fearing the potential lethal results. Her suffering in silence is voiced through her stream of consciousness as her brother describes her breasts shamelessly as being sexually attractive and therefore must be covered (Faqir). It is through feminist psychoanalysis that the reader is able to unveil and address the recurrent emotional abuse resulting from incest that female characters endure as projected in literary narratives. In *Pillars of Salt*, sibling incest is portrayed as being emotionally consuming; as it robs the victim from her sense of stability and safety (Faqir; Atiyat et al).

With respect to female characters' experiences of incest, as documented in western literary works, *Uncle Vampire* by Cynthia Grant (1996) stands as an additional confirmation of socio-cultural attempts to silence victims of incest, in addition to the negative impacts of incest on the women who have been forced to live such experiences: "My parents always tell me that I'm an actress, that I invent drama to keep life interesting. How on earth could my uncle be a vampire? Vampires are a myth based on a man who lived in the Middle Ages, a cruel prince known as Vlad the Impaler, who

tortured peasants and drank their blood” (Atiyat et al 5; Grant 8). Thus, the protagonist in *Uncle Vampire* was forced to not only endure a prolonged experience of incest, but also sink into the tormenting grip of denial. According to the premises of feminist psychoanalysis, gendered oppression might cause psychological responses that enable the victim of sexual abuse to either cope with or survive and rebel against her painful sexual experience:

For some incest survivors the memory has been repressed and kept out of consciousness, while for others it is a constantly intrusive, walking nightmare. . . As public denial began to break down, the emphasis was on the search for someone to blame—feminists, social services, mothers, the child victims, therapists. . . we are beginning to acknowledge that there is a problem which will not be solved by denial. (Krzowski, 1997, 161)

Denial is shown indirectly in *Uncle Vampire* (1993). The reader is introduced to a dysfunctional family in America in the 1990s. The members of the family fail to communicate with one another regardless of the arising issue (Grant). Constantly though, Carolyn who plays the role of the daughter in the novel, runs to her room upstairs to express her anger about the issue at hand to her twin sister (Grant). Surprisingly, the reader comes to realize as the novel progresses that the twin sister is merely a mirage. Carolyn turns out to have no sisters at all (Grant). She denies the fact that she has been exposed to recurrent sexual abuse waged by her uncle. Therefore; she eventually creates the character of her sister in order to reduce the tremendous stress she is exposed to. She literally voices the hatred she feels towards her perpetrator. Her feelings of pain, suffering and rejection that she feels for her abusive uncle are gradually released throughout the literary work until she gathers the courage to speak up about her experience and seek assistance outside the borders of her deafened, crippled home (Grant). The creation of the twin sister, I would like to argue, is the embodiment of a negative psychological effect that is caused by the incestuous experience. From a feminist psychoanalytical stance, it is a temporary resort or a form of escape to enable survival on the part of the victim (Stone; Pollak; Chodorow).

Despite the fact that all the three novels previously examined in this re-

search paper have echoed the firm cross-cultural rejection of incest because of its destructive effects on the victim of incest (Zaghmout; Faqir, Grant), some western researchers argue that incestuous relationships could reflect positive impacts on the individuals involved; hence they are rendered as being socio-culturally acceptable (Lanser; Leeson). Reading through the lines of *Flowers in the Attic* (2005), for instance, the reader is exposed to the socio-cultural clash between the potential acceptability of incestuous relationships in western literary studies (Andrews; Leeson) as opposed to their absolute rejection in Muslim culture-based literary writings (Van Gelder). The reader is introduced to the protagonist, Corrine, who resides with her seemingly normative family in America during the postmodern era. Her family is considered normative in the light of the prevailing socio-cultural rejection of incest regardless of its type, and the circumstances that served to both nurture and maintain this sexual bond. Corrine's incestuous bond with Chris was kept secret due to the surrounding socio-cultural rejection of incest (Andrews).

Corrine's family, however, gradually loses its masking veil of socio-cultural normativity and acceptability upon the death of her husband, Chris (Andrews). Eventually, Chris turns out to be Corrine's half-uncle. Corrine warns her daughter Cathy after Chris's death against the potential socio-culturally infused rejection of their incestuous family saying: "Keep this always in your minds if your grandfather learns too soon you are up here, then he will throw all of you out without one red penny—after he has severely punished you for being alive!" (Andrews 69).

Chris and Corrine's union was frowned upon by Corrine's natal family for its pejorative denial of strict Christian values that perceive incest with disdain (Lanser; Andrews; Leeson). Corrine is thus alienated from and disinherited by her natal family (Andrews). In desperate need for financial support, Corrine moves back into her parents' mansion, and hides her four children from Chris in the mansion's attic. Cathy pictures the financial struggle of her family saying: "The time for dinner came and went. We were afraid that now even meals might be cancelled, so even without our mother's voice to call us in, we caught hold of the dimpled, fat hands of the twins and dragged them along toward the house" (Andrews).

Corrine had hoped that since her incestuous husband has passed away, her father would bring her back into his will and she would receive her

inheritance after his death (Andrews). Corrine also tries to comfort her children, especially Chris and Cathy, regarding the family's deteriorating financial status by revealing information about her natal family's wealth:

Don't look so heartbroken. It's not really as bad as I've made it seem. You must forgive me if I was thoughtless and forgot how young you still are. I've told you the bad news first, and saved the best for the last. Now hold your breath! You are not going to believe what I have to tell you—for my parents are rich! Not middle-class rich, or upper-class rich, but very, very rich! Filthy, unbelievably, sinfully rich! They live in a fine big house in Virginia—such a house as you've never seen before. (Andrews 40)

While keeping her children a secret, the visits she gave to her children were gradually reduced (Andrews). Having grown into their teenage years, Corrine's older son and daughter, Chris and Cathy, had become sexually attracted to each other (Andrews): "Eventually, just when I thought she never would, Momma took notice of how tired Christopher and I were, and we were allowed to undress in the bathroom, and then to climb into bed—at long last" (Andrews 72).

They had not received any form of education, they were minimally fed, and their sole access to the world outside the mansion was through watching a television that their mother had secretly bought (Andrews, 2005). They had been locked up in the attic like beasts in a dungeon:

Scary to be locked in, children alone. What if a fire started? Fire. Always I was to think of fire and how to escape. If we were going to be here locked in, no one would hear us if we cried out for help. Who could hear us in this remote, forbidden room on the second floor, where no one came but once a month, on the last Friday? Thank God this was just a temporary arrangement—one night. And then, tomorrow Momma would win over the dying grandfather. And we were alone. Locked in. All the lights were turned off. Around us, below us, this huge house seemed a monster, holding us in its sharp-toothed mouth. If we moved, whispered, breathed heavily, we'd be swallowed and digested. (Andrews 74-75)

The attic was suffocating and dehumanizing, despite Chris and Cathy's endeavors to make the place look like an actual home where they were socio-culturally accepted as a proper family (Andrews). In her words, Cathy

describes the horrid place she and her siblings were imprisoned in:

Thank God this was just a temporary arrangement—one night. And then, tomorrow Momma would win over the dying grandfather. And we were alone. Locked in. All the lights were turned off. Around us, below us, this huge house seemed a monster, holding us in its sharp-toothed mouth. If we moved, whispered, breathed heavily, we'd be swallowed and digested (Andrews 75).

Chris and Cathy had twin brothers as well. Yet, with the passage of time, one of the twins becomes severely ill and finally dies. This was mainly because the children were neglected and eventually abandoned upon their mother's decision to get married one more time (Andrews).

Giving a closer look into the state of the attic, the reader, I would like to argue, may come to realize its significance. The portrayal of the poorly furnished tight place stands for the degrading state of being through which people involved in incestuous relationships are perceived by those who reject incest on the whole in western literary studies. Corrine's abandonment of all her four children, and her decision to marry a man to whom she is not even related also mirror's her awakening to the idea that in order for her to be accepted socio-culturally, she must cast every trace of her family with Chris into the oblivion. In line with their feminist views on incest, Chodorow (1989), Stone (2013) and Leeson (2018) argue that incest might be perceived as a monstrous state of being that must be abolished depending on whether its outcomes are beneficial to those involved in it or not (Leeson). This explains why Corrine ultimately fed her children rat poison which was the actual reason behind one of the twins' death. Poisoning Corrine's children was her way to grant socio-cultural acceptability away from incest. Her marriage to Chris was a mark of shame that she desperately needed to rid herself of. Nevertheless, *Flowers in the Attic* (2005) echoes a daring stance with regard to the potential acceptability of incest in western literary studies. *Flowers in the Attic* (2005) portrays the potential acceptability of incest as being psychologically constructive rather than destructive. After Chris and Cathy discovered their mother's plot to get rid of them and their brothers, they were sure that she will never come back. She had turned her back on them for good. Yet, Chris refused to give up on his remains of a family. He assumed a husband/father figure to Cathy, and decided to con-

tinue taking care of his younger brother who had known nobody but him for a father figure (Andrews, 2005). Cathy voices her inner solace towards Chris's husband/father behavior:

Disconcerting, the curious way my brother was watching me and my reactions. I whirled to hide what I was feeling—but he saw. He stepped closer and caught my hand, and said so much like Daddy, “Cathy, it is going to be all right. There must be very simple explanations for everything that seems to us very complex and mysterious” (Andrews 103).

Feelings of support, warmth and empathy was all what Cathy needed. She embraced this relationship with satisfaction. Society with all its views and values, I would like to argue, did not matter. Shaming and blame-casting were projections of ruthlessness and coldness. Society simply did not live her thirst for affections. Thus, Cathy also refused to give up on Chris. She assumed a wife/sister identity as she was by no means going to stop loving Chris. She also decided that she was going to mother her younger brother. Their family was, in Chris and Cathy's eyes, built on passionate affection and was therefore unbreakable in the face of meaningless socio-cultural values. After having discussed *The Bride of Amman* by Fadi Za-ghmout (2015), *Pillars of Salt* by Fadi Faqir (1996), and *Uncle Vampire* by Cynthia Grant (1996) in comparison to *Flowers in the Attic* by Virginia Andrews (2005), the following section will conclude this research paper.

Conclusion

In conclusion, although much research has been conducted in order to address incest in literature (Atiyat et al; Leeson; Klages and Zhang; Pollak). Yet, there remain gaps of knowledge that require further investigation (Pollak, 2009; Leeson; Atiyat et al). Pollak (2009), for instance, maintains that the “feminist project of unraveling the cultural significances of incest is an ambitious one in which much is at stake and much remains to be done” (Pollak 300). Indeed, “historical gaps need filling so that the incest texts can be mined for their historical specificities and socio-cultural nuances. Literary theories also need to look more closely at the writings of incest survivors, such as those collected by Ellen Bass and Louise Thornton

in 1983” (Pollak, 300). Conceptualizing “the multiple discourses that constitute incest –fictional, autobiographical, and theoretical– is one way to work toward eradicating this damaging social syndrome” (Pollak 300). The socio-cultural reception of incest, as a topic of discussion in literary studies, also remains a controversial matter (Leeson; Atiyat et al). While some researchers maintain a solid stance regarding the rejection of incest (Sonbol; Atiyat et al), others argue that the acceptance of incest continues to be subject to constantly variable conditions and circumstances that shape the lives of those caught up in incestuous bonds. Thus, making cross-cultural generalizations stand futile. The particular circumstances that shape the life of an incest victim are numerous, which renders the acceptability of the incestuous experience unpredictable and devoid of certainty. As depicted in *Flowers in the Attic*, the acceptability of incest depends on the positive outcomes potentially associated with such relationships in western literary studies, whereas incest is rejected in western literature when the relationship is not based on mutual consent as is the case in *Uncle Vampire*. Nevertheless, incestuous relationships in all their forms are utterly rejected and fought against in literary works shaped by Muslim values as is the case in *Pillars of Salt* by Fadia Faqir (1996) and *The Bride of Amman* by Fadi Zaghmout (2015).

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