



Competition for the Male Versus the Female in August Strindberg's *The Stronger* and Ali Abdulnibi Al-Zadi's *Summer Rain*

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Abstract

This paper aims to analyze and discuss two distinct plays by two different playwrights hailing from divergent eras, countries, cultures, and nationalities: the Swedish playwright August Strindberg's *The Stronger* and the Iraqi playwright Ali Abdulnibi Al-Zadi's *Summer Rain*. Despite these geographical and temporal distances, the study identifies a unifying human struggle. The study relies on Frommian Humanistic Psychoanalysis to interpret the dramatic action and internal conflicts of the protagonists. The two main female characters—Mrs. X in *The Stronger* and Flana in *Summer Rain*—suffer from the same existential dilemma, manifested through the presence or absence of a male figure. The paper explains the situations and actions of both women through the lens of Erich Fromm's theory, examining how these characters compete to fulfill their fundamental human needs in the face of isolation. The characters in *The Stronger* and *Summer Rain* are nameless archetypes who struggle to maintain love, self-awareness, and identity. The research discusses the "basic anxiety" the protagonists experience throughout the two plays. Otherwise, the study implies a deep sense of conflict, collision, gender role negotiation, and the ultimate quest for women's self-realization in societies that often define them by their relationships to men.

Keywords: Fromm Humanistic Psychology, basic anxiety, *The Stronger*, *Summer Rain*.

Introduction

Erich Fromm (1900–1980) was a renowned psychoanalyst, philosopher, and socialist humanist whose work bridged the gap between individual psychology and

sociological structure. He devoted his intellectual life to discussing and analyzing the complex interaction between individuals and society, exploring how human personalities are shaped by these forces. He argues that human nature has been determined by social and economic aspects but retains a specific independence from them. Erich Fromm is regarded as a founder of Humanistic Psychology because he was the first to use the term “humanistic” to distinguish it from orthodox Freudian psychoanalysis (Helmut, 2015, p. 111). Unlike Freud, who focused on biological drives, Fromm focused on the idea of humanity and read it in a psychological context. As one of his favorite quotes was from Terence, the ancient Roman playwright: “I am a human being, and nothing human is alien to me.” This means that all humans have the potential to experience the whole humanity within.

According to Fromm, human beings are disconnected from their prehistoric union with nature. He theorizes regarding how “humanity’s separation from natural world has produced feeling of loneliness and isolation a condition called basic anxiety” (Franklin, 2024, p. 2). This separation creates an existential dichotomy that humans must resolve to maintain sanity. Fromm briefly explains the obligation of humans to fulfill their specific needs to survive this separation:

Whatever the solutions for this dichotomy are, they must fulfill certain conditions. Man must be affectively related to others in order to overcome the anxiety produced by his total isolation; he must have a frame of orientation, a picture of the world that permits him to orient himself in the world and to find his place in it as an acting subject; he must adopt certain norms that make it possible for him to make relatively consistent decisions without much hesitation. As far as the contents of his relatedness, of his frame of orientation, and of his norms are concerned, they are important, but nevertheless only of secondary importance from the standpoint of his mental survival. (Febriyani, 2018, p. 4)

To understand the dramatic struggles of the characters in *The Stronger* and *Summer Rain*, one must understand the five basic needs of humans as focused on by Erich Fromm:

1. **Relatedness:** The need to unite with other living beings.
2. **Transcendence:** The need to rise above a passive animal state and become a creator.
3. **Rootedness:** The need to feel a sense of belonging and connection to the world.
4. **Sense of Identity:** The need to be aware of oneself as a separate entity.
5. **Frame of Orientation:** The need for a consistent way of looking at the world.

The psychological need for **Relatedness** is perhaps the most crucial in dramatic literature. When a person fulfills this need, they do so in a productive or a non-

productive way. The way depends on the person's experience in life and their ability to adapt to social conditions. Healthy individuals are able to relate or unite with the world and their fellow human beings through love, power, and submission. However, the psychological need for relatedness can either be satisfied productively by a loving orientation or non-productively by a narcissistic orientation. The awareness of human separateness from each other and the world causes a particular anxiety. Whereby, a human needs to control and overcome it. As Fromm calls for love to maintain and fulfill this need: "is union with somebody, or something, outside oneself, under the condition of retaining the separateness and integrity of one's own self" (Rainer, 1993, p. 5). Hence, the person can transcend separateness without contracting oneself individuality.

Secondly, human beings have the ability to **Transcend** and create. This need could be fulfilled by creativity such as painting, writing, and music. At the same time, "If this need for transcendence is not creatively satisfied, then the individual tries to transcend by means of destructiveness" (Ibid, p. 6). The lack of creativity may lead to man's frustration and spending his energy in destructive activities. In the context of the plays discussed, this destructiveness often manifests in the dismantling of relationships or self-sabotage.

Rootedness is the need for being secure and safe. It is a strive for brotherhood, love, and universal humanism. The person needs to attain senses of belonging and independence. People cannot live by technological development alone. They need to be directed and controlled by certain values and ideals. They need to be socially, politically, and culturally rooted (Saba, 2002, p. 61). When a character is uprooted—such as by the loss of a husband or a societal role—panic ensues, driving the plot of the drama.

The fourth human need is for a **Sense of Identity**, or the awareness of having a separate entity. The identity of people still resides in their relation with others or institutions such as nation, religion, or social group. Without a sense of identity, people could not retain their sanity, and this threat provides a powerful motivation to do almost anything to acquire a sense of identity (Ibid, p. 62). In both plays, the female protagonists define their identities heavily through their relationships with men, leading to crisis when those relationships are threatened or absent.

Finally, a human as a creature born with self-awareness, reason, and imagination should own "an understanding of the nature of both self and the world" (Adler 44). Human beings need a way to follow and be in contact with nature using a protective **Frame of Orientation**. Without such a round map, they would be "confused and unable to act purposefully and consistently" (Fromm, 2013, p. 100). When the world stops making sense—as in the surreal environment of *Summer Rain* or the silent psychological warfare of *The Stronger*—the frame of orientation shatters.

August Strindberg's *The Stronger*

The Stronger is not only a play of two nameless women, one of them the only speaker (Mrs. X) and the second one (Miss Y) is the listener who has nothing to say. She can be known by her gestures and reactions. The play dramatizes an effective competition for a male between his wife Mrs. X and his friend Miss Y. A competition which is rooted in one of humans' needs to maintain physical and psychological oneness. *The Stronger* reveals the psychological conflict and woman 's struggle to gain her productive psychological needs. The main conflict circulates a male character (Bob, the husband). Mrs. X is a mother and dedicated wife, Miss Y is a liberated woman who lives her own way and she has an attractive personality. Miss Y (Amelia) becomes a threat to Mrs. X 's life and family unity. This threatening is shown by Mrs. X 's speech and her emotional tension, as stated in her speech; "Keep still! You don't have to say anything. I comprehend it all myself! It was because, and because, and because. Yes! Yes! Now everything is clear. So that's it!" (Strindberg, p. 1). Jessie points out that "woman alone could know the heart of a woman which might explain why" (Jessie, 1981, p. 104).

Fromm's theory is particularly illuminating when applied to the power dynamic between the two women. Mrs. X is seemingly the "stronger" one because she speaks, controls the narrative, and is legally bound to the man they both desire. However, her constant speech betrays a deep insecurity—a failure of **rootedness**. She is terrified of the silence of Miss Y because silence represents the unknown, and potentially, the truth that Mrs. X's marriage is a sham. According to Erich Fromm 's psychological needs, Mrs. X is afraid of losing her self-esteem when she loses her own love. Mrs. X, in her speech works strongly to regain her self-esteem and respect by provoking Miss Y and justifying her mistrust: ' ...they (women) must think he has something to say about theatre engagements because he's connected with the government. Perhaps you were there yourself and tried to influence him! I don't trust you any too much.'

She believes that her husband 's charming personality is inevitable, he has a distinctive position in society. She tells Amelia about many women who have tried to get close to him: "but Frederika wasn't the only one, would you believe it! I don't know why, but the women are so crazy about my husband." Mrs. X confirms that Miss Y as the other women, she tries to have an affair and get the advantage of her relationship with him. She continues to reveal the facts that she perceives through their friendship when even her child has named Eskil as Amelia's father name. She rationally imitates her by wearing the same colors, reading and food. It seems fearful to think about all that things together: " oh , my God, it's fearful , when I think about it ; It's fearful everything came from you to me". Amelia is with her everywhere but "she can't keep a man's love but she can steal away that love from others".

Here, Strindberg illustrates a twisted form of **Relatedness**. Mrs. X cannot relate to her husband directly; she relates to him *through* the preferences of his mistress. She

has adopted Miss Y's tastes in tulips, in drinking chocolate, and in literature to please Bob. This is a "symbiotic union" in Fromm's terms, but a parasitic one. Mrs. X has swallowed the identity of Miss Y to maintain her own. Yet, Mrs. X believes she fulfills her psychological needs successfully using productive and constructive ways to achieve them.

She shows her relentless at Christmas eve, expressing her love and devotion towards her husband and family when "Love is the only passion that satisfies man's need to unite with the world while giving him a sense of integrity and individuality" (Erich, 2008, p. 30). Moreover, Erich manifests that "love is the productive form of relatedness to others and oneself" (Erich, 2013, p. 67). She is able to transcend and create her future life. She deliberately adapts what her husband likes in Amelia and keeping her strength and household. Strindberg gives Mrs. X performance a great deal when she is the lonely speaker, defender, survivor and the winning female. She maintains her **rootedness** by active and productive actions as a wife and a mother when she opens her basket and takes out the Christmas presents. "Here you can see what I have bought for my little pigs. [Takes up a doll] Look at this! This is for Liza. See?--And here is Maja's pop gun... [Takes up a pair of embroidered slippers] And these are for my old man.' She talks about her husband daily routine which hasn't seen by Amelia. Bob's wife is her **identity** and she belongs to him and their sharing, practicing life in its up and fall. "I am I"—a sense of identity includes race, religion, social class, and occupation. The need to hold an identity is more important than to remain alive (David, 1970, p. 61). Mrs. X's monologue clearly reflects how she centers all the events in her life to herself. She talks to Miss Y, most of what she talks about centers on herself and for her own identity and interest.

A **frame of orientation** is the last need according to Erich Fromm's five basic human needs. He assures that man's ability to reason and imagine causes him to need a sense of who he is and the ability to orient himself intellectually in the world (Anton & Erica, 2017, p. 98). Mrs. X does everything that her husband wants her to do, suggesting male domination and gender assertion of how a wife should behave. From this gender point of view, Miss Y's silence might suggest that Strindberg intentionally silenced her because she does not fit the gendered world that he produced. Or perhaps, the silence acts as a mirror. As Mrs. X speaks, she constructs a frame of orientation where she is the victor, the "stronger" one because she has the home and the children. However, the audience is left to wonder if this frame is built on illusion. Is she truly stronger, or is she merely more adaptable to the whims of the male?

The first Swedish production was performed by a touring company from 1903 to 1904. It was first performed in Stockholm at the Intimate Theater on December 5, 1907. The first US production was at the Wisconsin Dramatic Society, Milwaukee, in 1911.

Ali Abdulnibi Al-Zadi's *Summer Rain*

Ali Abdulnibi Al-Zadi is an Iraqi playwright. He was born in 1965 in the city of Al-Nasiriyah southern of Iraq. Many of his written plays were performed on different stages inside and outside Iraq. Some of his works have been translated into English and French. *Summer Rain* is one of his remarkable plays. It presents the story of a nameless woman (Flana) with numerous nameless men (Flan). Flana is waiting for her absent husband who left the house and didn't come. Al-Zadi stages the dilemma of Flana with the idea of accepting one of the copied husbands to reunion again.

Flana has to fulfill her psychological needs but she will be shocked by the number of men who pretend that they are her real husband. They compete with each other to win her in spite of their fakeness. Her disappointed journey starts with the losing of her husband. She is at the age of forty five, she is talking with a picture (her husband picture) on the wall:

He will come my adorable husband and the light of my house, oh, it's time to come .. I am Flana, your wife, do you remember her, oh, how handsome you are my husband ? Oh, the laughing of my little daughter whose sound I always imagined. I will not say a bit of blame word as our lives no longer have a time for blaming and reproaching. The most important thing is your coming, I will apologize for your long absence..

Throughout her long speech addressing her husband picture, she exposes her **basic psychological needs**. She shows her need to **relatedness** when she mentioned above her need to him and his coming. Her **rooted** love to her husband is increased for his long time of absence. She counts her daily routine while he is pictured on the wall: " Do you know that I wash my hair to you every morning and arrange it, the way you like it". But her hair color is changed and she "wiped away the grayness that cover it". Flana 's preparation for Flan 's coming is dominated her whole reproach speech addressing her husband picture. This state of preparation is mingled with her sense of loneliness and isolation. Otherwise, it represents her basic psychological needs, rootedness, sense of identity, frame of orientation and her final approach to transcendence.

When she is alone in her state of waiting, she prepares herself to fulfill her needs powerfully and productively. She takes care of her appearance, using the perfume that is preferred by her husband, going out to search for him in every street, houses, asking about him to those who know him and even who don't know. It is twenty years of his absence and no one knows anything about him. She even sings the song that he likes: " When I was a child and you, we were knowing each other by eyes". Her sense of love, self-awareness, and realization is tested at the coming of her husband (as a copy). Her situation is changed when she meets more than one husbands besides her psychological needs.

The distortion of her personal psychological need is appeared when she encounters with the faked husbands. The second scene of the play starts with the coming of her

supposed husband. Flan 1 number one is at the age of fifty, he seems tired weak and confused. Flana feels afraid and also confused" What I should do, oh God, I am worried, confused, afraid,, no, no, I was waiting for you, oh I was, oh, I don't know what I was". While he is eager to meet her and announcing his need to be with her: " I need you, I don't need your words, as you with all your details, (he examines her), it seems to me that I left you yesterday." He examines everything in the room and reveals his feeling of love and longing but she is shy at some point. Flana discusses her request with him:

Flan1: I am your husband, has my appearance changed a lot? **Flana:** So much, I told them to bring you back as a young, oh God. What I will do. I assured that to them.

Her speech is reacted by his laughing: "bring me back, how do they do that?. She replies, they do that, they say, we will make a copy for you as your original husband. After a long time of waiting, she asked for a copied man to attain a natural and secure sexual life (wife-husband) relationship. As Azhar states that the playwright dramatizes the idea of natural and integrated life. The life which every woman calls for through marriage and stability, which is the sexual life that is usually safe in normal life with the husband who represents security for the woman. The justifications for this request to clone the husband is that this life has become incomplete without a husband or children. As loneliness affects the woman from the psychological and social aspects as well as the physical and material aspects when she is alone. It is necessary to take a fair decision for her in life that she believes in, as a cloned husband is better than life without a husband or waiting for an absent husband for twenty years who may not return. Henceforth, the alternative option is the best solution, which is what all waiting wives have taken who do not know what to do in this inevitable absence:

Flana: Copying, They made him and sent him to his wife, and our neighbor couldn't be able to spend her long nights in an empty bed. Can you believe that? They gave birth to cloned children, but they are happy. Everything is a copy, and how handsome cloned you are. **Flan1:** And where did my real friend go? **Flana:** The real things in our lives, when they leave, never come back. But their remains can come back, like the remains of your friend! **Flan1:** remains, it means **Flana:** Were you dead? **Flan1:** Do dead people stand on their feet as this? **Flana:** I don't mean you, I mean my real husband.

According to Erich Fromm five basic needs, she deluded herself at the beginning of the play. As it mentions in her talk with the picture. While at the coming of the cloned husband, she tries to fulfill them and being happy. The happiness or stability couldn't be achieved due to the conflict that she suffers from. Flan 1 wants to live with her regardless her physical and psychological split. She knows that he isn't her real husband while he insists to affirm the opposite:

Flana: After twenty years, I know that my lovely husband is still a live, As if I hear a story. You don't know him as I am, he is madly in love with me. **Flan1:** Try to trust me please, I want to give you what is remaining, I may come back with a quarter I admit that I am a collection of quarters, but I will gift it to you, you alone my love. **Falan:** Oh, my God, as if he was the one, that's how he was talking to me about our love on those hot nights, you drag my memory to nights that can't be forgotten. **Flan1:** I only fall asleep in your arms, oh, my life.

Flan 1 narrates many stories which they have shared in the past so as she feels comfortable. At this moment, she tries to fulfill her psychological needs of **relatedness, rootedness, transcendence, a sense of identity** and a **frame of orientation**. In the following conversation and when she specifies some of their past sharing experiences. Flan 1 reminds her of their lovable song, her perfume "When you miss my smell put some of my perfume on your nose, you will find me standing behind you with all of my belonging and love". Gradually, she announces the coming of her husband publically, she goes to the window and calling out of it addressing the passers-by: "Listen up, clones, my beloved husband is back and my soul is back too... My husband is the only truth in your cloned world. "

In her second stage, she obtains her basic needs. They exchange passionate words and loudly laughter. Suddenly, someone knocks. The actions will focus on the coming of another cloned husbands. They will compete against each other, and she will enter her third stage of conflict and struggle to uphold truthful and touchable reality in this world of falsehood. Besides, her personal crises, the three cloned husbands will compete to win her. All of them tell her the same words and their past secret as it has mentioned by Flan 1. They are quarreled in her house and she doesn't know how to solve her agony. Flan 1 wants her to drive Flan 2 out and she answers "You gave me evidence and I believed you. He came back with the same evidence. What do you want me to do? ". He blames her and orders her to obey him as a husband. He competes with Flan 2 but she becomes the center of his blaming and insulting. Flan 2 also asks her to drive Flan 1 out, "Get him out, I am tired, I will get him out by force ".

She moves between two rooms, each one is lying on a bed and each one of them shares the same orders and words. Flan 1 sees Flan 2 in the other room, he says "I will kill him if he doesn't get out". She doesn't sure of both of them, as she reacts "To kill who one, the coned or the real?". She exposes her final doubt of both of them. Flan 1 tries to warn Flan 2 of staying along "Go out of your room, you should leave my home now, oh cloned one, I will not permit you to stay along...". Flana feels sorry about herself and asks Flan 1 to stop his anger and looking for a peaceful solution, "Stop please, I will tell him your speech, we must talk, we may reach the truth". It seems the playwright puts Flana in a hard trap. Three men compete against each other depending on her longing to her real husband. At the coming of the third cloned husband, she revolts strongly against this absurdity and pain: "My soul no

longer needs your words, memories, dreams, lies, and your dirty faces, you don't have a love in my heart". Then she moves to address her heart:" O, heart, stop your pulse, love, longing, and eagerness... I should clean my heart from the dirtiness of waiting". Hence, she asks them to leave her house. She will wait for the truth alone, it will come to her doors: she" opens the doors, and the three of them come out completely disappointed. Then she forcefully closes the main door behind them.

The play ends with a rejection of the Frommian needs because they are being fulfilled artificially. She prefers **destructiveness** (the destruction of her new "family") with a bit of hope to reunion with her absent husband and revive her well-being past life. The three competed men show their love and their need to her, but no one cares about her feeling, passion, her mental and psychological conflict. All of them tell her the same words and memories. They don't leave her house, each one of them blames her of not kick the other one out. A violence clash has happened between Flan 1 and Flan 2:

Flan1: (Coming angry), no one can get me out of my house. I am here, the truth. (hitting the door of Flan2's room), I am the truth(trying to open the door). Open the door, I will force you to get out.I am still strong and able to stop this farce in my house. If you are a man, come out and face me. I will beat you up, throw you out of the house, and bring something from my room to fight with. (He quickly goes to the room). **Flan2:** (he comes out of his room holding a knife. He goes straight to the room, hits the door with the knife, tries to open it. You, you clone, you nobody, get out of my house now. Come on, face me. If you were a real husband. Where is your courage, clone? She enters after him, she hears words that do not seem clear, screaming, shouting, hitting and breaking things, meanwhile she hears knocking on the main door, she opens it, Flan3 enters, he is at the age of fifty. He seems tired, weak and confused. **Flan3:** Come to huge your husband .. he steps toward her. Come, come, come, oh my sweet wife. **Flana:** Screaming in terror, no, no, no, a third husband, no, no, no, another cloned, another and another.

The dramatist stages Flana in three phases; the phase of waiting, the phase of recalling and the phase of disappointment. In the first phase, she apparently tries to control over her basic anxiety by doing some activities. In the second phase, she meets her absent husband but not her real husband. He is made as many men are made to end the agonies of women who lose their men in war. At the first glance, she thinks that he is her real husband and especially after the stories and memories he has narrated. She feels a bit of comfort but she isn't certain at the same moment of the meeting. While Flan 1 hints eagerly to have a sexual affair as a husband. He insists to manage her duality(the soul and body) and persuades her to trust him. The coming of Flan 2 and Flan 3 make the situation worst and unbearable to her. Then she kicks them out of her house. In this stage, she exposes her failure to maintain her needs. In the third phase, she refers her past life with the memories wishing to his return one day. Flana sees the competed men as robots, ridiculous

and clone. They don't belong to the original world that she belongs to. The idea of "competing" to win women would, to Fromm, "be a distortion of love—treating it as a commodity or conquest, rather than a human relationship based on shared respect and inner improvement." (Fromm, 1957, p. 54). In other words, Fromm is against the idea of competing to win a woman, For him, true love could not emerge from ego-driven competition but from shared understanding, effort, and respect.

Conclusion

Mrs. X, in *The Stronger* can achieve her psychological basic needs. She attains her **relatedness, transcendence, rootedness, sense of identity** and the **frame of orientation**. Her long offensive speech reveals her basic anxiety and her psychological and physical suffering. She shields and empowers the self by love and productivity instead of hate and depression. She competes Miss Y to keep her husband and family. Throughout a raged argument, she unveils her anger and anxieties towards Miss Y when she describes her as a worm and a snake. Besides, she believes that women have bewitched by her husband's personality and position as a reason for competing. She effectively neutralizes the threat by absorbing it, showing a mastery of Fromm's concept of productive orientation, albeit in a manipulative way.

Flana in *Summer Rain* is unlike Mrs. X in *The Stronger*. She doesn't fulfill her psychological needs due to the confused world that she belongs. Flana's state of being has threatened by the appearance of three competed cloned husbands. In the phase of waiting, she gets her state of resilience when she retreats back to her memories with her lost husband. In the phase of recalling, she is hopefully challenged to achieve the truth. The truth about her real husband but she finds herself in a fierce cycle (the competing of the three cloned husbands: Flan 1, Flan 2 and Flan 3). She realizes that she couldn't choose anyone of them because each one proclaims that he is the real one. They treat her as an object to attain, while she is bewildered. Her eager to love as an act of giving and growing, not something one passively 'wins'. Otherwise, she only manifests it to her real husband who went to war and didn't come. In third phase, she decides to drive them out of her house preferring loneliness and isolation. Memories and past life become her confined resolution. Because this the obvious and touchable truth that she elects to live in.

Ultimately, both plays illustrate the severe psychological toll that the competition for male affection or male presence takes on the female psyche. Whether it is the silent competition against a mistress in Strindberg's work or the surreal competition against cloned entities in Al-Zadi's work, the female protagonists are forced to navigate a labyrinth of anxiety. Fromm's humanistic psychoanalysis provides the necessary framework to understand that these women are not merely fighting for a man; they are fighting for their **identity** and their place in the world. Mrs. X constructs a reality to survive, while Flana deconstructs a false reality to maintain

her integrity. Both actions are desperate attempts to overcome the "basic anxiety" of separation and find a home in a hostile world.

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