

**AYLCEE TARHA**

# **DUALITIES**

*SENTIMENTAL NOVEL*



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## **Book Summary**

A young Althais girl accidentally finds herself between two men, in the middle of the Victorian era, when societal codes were strict for young women. A love story where marriage is definitive, with no way out of the 'what will people say?' What will she say or do? Will a romantic tale bring her happiness?

## **The Author**

I, Aylcée Tarha, have decided to speak directly to adults, parents of young children and teenagers. A storyteller before being a novelist, my imagination is put to the service of liberated writing.

### **NB:**

Defending freedom of expression, I leave it to these parents and readers to decide the content of my works by encouraging them to read them first. You are responsible for their intellectual structure.

## **BIBLIOGRAPHY**

- The Watchtower, a fantasy novel
- Clara, a Witch's Love, a fantasy tale
- Clara and the Stone Circle, a fantasy tale
- The Elemental Peoples, a collection of tales
- Lost Stories, a text collection
- Epidamus, a fantasy novel

## DEDICATION

'Just out of a desire to tell stories where everyone has the right to a wild imagination, without morals but with a touch of fanciful storytelling under a historical thread where love has its place!

This text can be downloaded FREE of charge directly from my website by adults, parents, family members, friends, etc., who remain solely responsible for opening the minds of their children (specifically, those between the ages of fourteen and eighteen, in their teens).

I am an independent author and editor.

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## **SUMMARY**

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## Prologue

One beautiful spring day, a pretty young girl is bored to tears in her private boudoir at her parents' home, an open book on her knees, gazing at the tree-lined park lying at her feet. Her name is Althaïs, a charming nickname for such a beautiful child. She is entering her sixteenth year: a true flower girl, all buds... of roses, of course.

Each of her relatives readily acknowledges the positive attraction she radiates, of which her aunt is the most faithful and ardent standard-bearer. She declaims, to anyone who will listen, the countless qualities of her dear niece, old enough to be presented at the annual debutante ball in order to be married! Althaïs possesses all the virtues listed, according to societal norms and laws.

These are rigorist and austere, for every English aristocratic family. According to her, she has no notable flaws. But what is not mentioned is a fiery personality, proof of which is that, so far, none of the young noblemen of this rural region want to invite her, almost fighting to avoid her, so much do they fear her acerbic repartee. These dandies are no match for her.

They do everything, absolutely everything, including the most stupid bets or dares, to avoid being around her again, even sitting down or facing her, so afraid are they of her impulsiveness and her somewhat loose tongue! Yet, her sharp intelligence, her taste for conversation, and her witty remarks are brilliant, but not always interpreted wisely. She defends the status of women tooth and nail.

'Women are essential in society, obliged to be 'wallpapers' so these gentlemen shine alone!'

Her extensive culture, her uninhibited knowledge, offers every possible topic of discussion that only a man can broach. Her wit refutes this discrimination, hoping to relegate her to the status of 'silly'. A flattering example for her, although very acidic for the person in question, took place at

a very high-society party, demonstrating to everyone her intellectual peak. It goes something like this:

-Georges, come on: a little decency with these young ladies!

-But Mother, I haven't said anything to anyone here yet this evening!

-That's not surprising, 'Georges,' you won't get any puns in because I'm here, come on! And then your mother, oh God, what a brat! I don't envy you, poor man...

-You're being absolutely impertinent, Miss! I'm a lady, you see! It's not your cup of tea!

-Oh yes, of course, Madam! Only your husband is so pleased with you that he prefers the company of women who pride themselves on being less 'perfect' than Your Holiness! Perfection bores both of your men, one might say... easily.

-Oh, you! You... won't set foot in my house again!

-So much the better, Lady Fawseth! Then I won't be contaminated, like that poor 'George'! How I pity him... being under your thumb. You've just escaped a plausible future daughter-in-law who would have overpowered you, or worse, taken your place... so little coveted... by strong young women.

-Oh, help! Ah, me, all of you! Help me!

-Oh, I managed to shut you up, you inexhaustible one?

-I hate you, you and all those of your generation!

-Finally, no more words, straight away the insults! What a tribute!

Sporty, she naturally enjoys horseback riding, fox hunting, and croquet. She is a diligent student in swimming, fencing, and rifle shooting, which is exclusive to the boys. Long walks are taken through the surrounding countryside: multiple discoveries of truffles and mushrooms, asparagus and wild or aromatic herbs, berries and forest fruits. She breathes in the forest air deeply.

'I am only truly myself in contact with this marvelous nature that surrounds me, envelops me, calls to me!'

Her parents, having no sons, were absolutely determined that their only child, a daughter, be able to fend for herself,

thus acquiring a certain autonomy, an independence of mind and body. Pioneers and innovators, they were few in number to renovate an education that considered itself exceptional parenting. For their era, so harsh in terms of moral rectitude, they openly ignored their detractors.

From her earliest years, they established a handpicked staff, highly qualified and respectful of the hallmarks of the aristocracy, whether rural or urban. Althais spent entire days studying living and dead languages, mathematics, geography, history, and general sciences. Her mind opens, but sometimes her words become electric when the young lady explodes:

-Miss! When will you stop answering me like that? I'm the teacher! Respect my authority!

-Sir, I really don't want your job, but it turns out that on this issue, I'm right, and I say it openly, that's all! If you don't like that, well, too bad!

-But, Miss...! No one has ever spoken to me like that!

-There's no such thing as a 'but, Miss!' I maintain that I'm right in front of you, is that so hard to admit?

-For today, I'm done with you, my colleague is taking over. Perhaps reading the Aeneid will calm you down!

-That's what I don't appreciate about you: the escapism and no constructive dialogue! Yes, it will relax me to be in the company of a scholar who loves contradiction!

-Oh my, what a character! I'm going to break down, Miss...

And this kind of situation happens all day long.

Nannies, stylish household staff, governesses, and tutors all agree that 'Mademoiselle Althais' is gifted, even talented, but that, alas, her touchy temperament will do her a lot of harm if she doesn't calm down a little. Not to mention her fearlessness and her many escapes, such as climbing trees to watch the hunt from above, swimming alone in the water's edge...

She is mischievous, cheeky, naughty, and enjoys doing as she pleases, guided at times by a vibrant faith. She adores

freedom, independence, belonging, and transforms into a true wild child, a girl of the woods: she often acts on instinct: impulse, urge, intuition, action, reflection. Effectiveness remains fortuitous or inclusive, in excess, negative or positive. Proof of this is the morning when:

-Althais, what are you doing on the branch of this hundred-year-old tree?

-I'm trying to save this poor kitten who's trembling with fear!

-You risk breaking your neck, be reasonable, come down from up there immediately, this isn't your place, you naughty girl!

-Father, I'm almost finished, I'll finish it and I'll be there. I promise!

-You'll give me gray hair before I'm old!

-But no, look, you see, I did it and he's very happy!

Since early childhood, her parents always took her on trips with them, telling her all sorts of legends and true stories in each country they traveled through and visited. They treated her as a complete equal, teaching her bits and pieces of their knowledge: great lovers of art, architecture, ancient history, painting, and sculpture, they pointed out the masterpieces that had remained in the possession of mankind.

'Just look at the Mona Lisa! Look at her eyes, her gaze follows you wherever you go, that's perspective in drawing!'

They introduced her to different literatures: English, French, German, Roman, Greek, Arabic, Spanish, and Portuguese. Applied and Oriental sciences came alive for her, as did geography, providing her with an audible and reliable cultural level. 'A strong mind in a healthy body!' her father would swear. She remembers that hot afternoon when they strolled through the Acropolis in Athens:

-I'm so disappointed, Mother. I didn't expect these stones strewn across the paved ground; everything is so bare, crumbling, broken.

-Why this criticism, my darling? It's a long time ago.

-I lingered in front of the palaces in perfect condition with draped servants, the gods present on the building stones.

- Have you lived through their legends so much? Is reality shocking to you?

-Yes, I thought I'd see the effigies of Odysseus returning to Ithaca where his wife, the beautiful Penelope, so desperately hoped, of Jason and his golden fleece, of Achilles in the Trojan War, the twelve labors of the fabulous Hercules... In short, yes, I'm disappointed.

-So you're very bored with what you just visited?

-Yes, where are Aristotle, Plato, Homer, Plutarch, and others?

-In the spirit of the times, in the ruins of the Agora, in the streets of Athens, you will soon see Turkey with Troy...

Teenage girls generally don't bother with languages, whatever they may be: their obligation is simply to conform to the canon of fashion and morals enforced by the 'godmothers,' outdated spokespersons for the sometimes cruel rules imposed on young girls. Althais is an exception to this yoke, which revolts her: she isn't affected by it, but finds this marginalization unbearable for others.

'It's a true disgrace to reduce us to the role of objects adorning a reception room or a 'womb' for children!'

She remains the confirmed exemption from her time, so backward and so demanding by many feminists: Greek and Latin do not present any academic gaps, English is native, Italian is learned for pleasure, Spanish out of pure international duty, and Arabic out of necessity, if the wife of an ambassador. One of their last journeys took them in a caravan to the Tuareg. Travel shapes the mind and the heart!

She remembers this nomadic people, spending their lives in the desert, between endless expanses of sand dunes and vampirized oases or dried-up waterholes. Living in tents with a hierarchy, swarms of children, a few very lively horses, dromedaries, and camels where everyone rubs shoulders, requires extraordinary mental strength. Night comes when scorpions, sand foxes, hyenas, and snakes come out.

They have crossed the Middle and Near East from one end to the other.

The female brain works in slow motion, according to the males, these 'gentlemen' fresh out of their royal military schools. For all of them, their outings are most often on horseback or in spacious carriages in summer and on dog sleds in winter to honor neighborly invitations. Hunting with their howling packs turns out to be a sport for the nobles on their lands.

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