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Ideological Dimensions and Cultural Representations in the Very Short Story: A Study in the Critique of Criticism

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Abstract

The very short story is one of the narrative forms that has accompanied the wave of change owing to its fluid and highly condensed nature and its expressive potential, which has enabled it to preserve the culture of the past and the present within collective memory. Accordingly many writers and critics have devoted attention to studying this emerging project, assessing its presence within the literary and cultural reality and investigating the question of its formation and historical development. These creative and critical endeavors have revealed the existence of various profound human historical and social dimensions that cannot be overlooked or left without reading and evaluation. Consequently critics have sought to assess this new artistic phenomenon through various systematic and contextual critical approaches with the aim of identifying the most significant aesthetic epistemological and cultural values embedded in its essence and substance. Among these researchers are Hamid Raqata and Mustafa Ould Youcef.

Keywords: Very Short Story, Cultural Dimension, Ideological Dimension, Critique of Criticism, Cultural References.

Introduction

The very short story has occupied a significant space within the literary and cultural scene owing to the distinctive characteristics it has introduced into narrative discourse. It has succeeded in breaking the established conventions upon which the very short narrative text was traditionally based while introducing new themes to the prose genre in both form and content. As a result this art form has become a widely circulated artistic phenomenon among writers and readers as a literary genre



capable of addressing numerous human social, cultural ideological and philosophical issues with its uses expanding across both print and digital spaces.

Writers have also sought to move beyond the notion that the very short story is self-contained insofar as it is a concise text supposedly capable of accommodating only a single subject within its narrative structure. Instead they have employed a process of cutting and pasting in its construction by activating the technique of intertextuality and incorporating various passages into its textual fabric drawn from poetry drama the novel and different forms of art. Consequently this art form has become a text enriched by diverse cultural and epistemological systems through the activation of mechanisms of artistic interaction within it. As a result of these intersections and relationships between the very short story and various literary and creative arts a constellation of diverse themes has emerged within its underlying structures. This has contributed to its maturity and broadened its sources and horizons transforming it into a concentrated and highly condensed text in terms of its thematic content.

1. Ideological Manifestations in Very Short Stories According to Arab Theorists

The very short story has undergone several turning points and transformations that have contributed to its formation and to establishing its presence within the literary field. The progress it has achieved in the literary scene has encouraged its texts to address a wide range of themes, including social, cultural, religious, and philosophical issues. This diversity of content has transformed the very short story into a constellation of interrelated perspectives that bring together the past, the present, and the future. Consequently, this literary form has become rapidly circulated and widely disseminated, owing to its engagement with various civilizational issues concerning humanity. Its scope of interest has also expanded to include historical and ideological themes, given their close connection with human identity and belonging.

Critics have addressed the presence of the ideological phenomenon in very short stories in various narrative contexts. Before examining these dimensions, however, it is necessary to consider the concept of ideology, which is defined in dictionaries as follows: "an intellectual system or a set of ideas embraced by a group of people, determining their view of the world or their interpretation of its phenomena, and consequently shaping their way of confronting life. Such a system may contain certain contradictions, but these are employed in a manner that conceals their contradictory nature from those who challenge them."ⁱ

From this perspective ideology can be understood as the totality of ideas generated by various universal and existential concepts. Human communities consequently derive from these conceptions certain laws principles integral to human existence shared among individuals in their various

attitudes and positions toward life. As time passes, such experiences and moments become living scenes that enter history ultimately giving rise to different ideological structures addressing diverse subjects and expressing an individual's sense of belonging and ways of thinking.

Ideological thought constitutes a collective memory from which human beings cannot entirely detach themselves as it continually draws them back to their past while carrying them toward their present and future. Along this path individuals encounter various customs\$ practices and traditions from which they cannot easily free themselves particularly when these elements represent their identity and the culture of their society. Thus individuals preserve those aspects that remain relevant while abandoning customs and ideas that are incompatible with the present or inconsistent with the developments of the age. The writer observes all these transformations taking place within social and cultural life and records them in creative works thereby making literature a companion to human beings throughout the different stages of their public lives.

The very short story is among the narrative forms that have engaged with the various manifestations and dimensions of life. It is described as "an attentive listening to the speed of the world and a slowing down of what is fast and accelerating in order to grasp it or attempt to understand it in depth."ⁱⁱ This literary form captures numerous human and civilizational moments and themes thereby becoming a record that represents reality in all its social cultural intellectual philosophical and ideological dimensions. For this reason the very short story has attracted considerable attention from researchers and creative writers, particularly because of its ability to illuminate and portray the turning points of human life.

Within the literary field the very short story has acquired a strong presence in various creative works alongside critical studies that have examined the ideological dimension of these literary texts. The ideological concept has thus occupied a significant position within very short stories and has also figured prominently in critical writings that have approached these texts through analysis and evaluation.

Among the critics who have devoted attention to this aspect of ideological study are Hamid Rkata Mohammed Aqdad and Mustafa Ould Youssef.

1-1. The Ideological Dimension of the Very Short Story According to Hamid Raqata:

Hamid Raqata presented his critical perspective on the question of the presence of the ideological dimension in this literary genre. In this context, he referred to the argument put forward by one of the researchers which states: "The very short story is an expression of the universality of a literary genre that emerged to articulate a critical stage in human history a stage characterized by the

collapse of the major totalitarian ideologies that had swept humaneness and human dignity from the historical record and by the collapse of the grand ideologies."ⁱⁱⁱ

The critic considers this genre to constitute a record for preserving the various historical moments experienced by humankind, particularly the difficult transitional periods that contributed to changing the laws governing the world and overturning its established standards. The period of totalitarianism, or totalitarian regimes represents one of the major stages through which humanity has passed. During this period forms of social governance shifted between liberalism and dictatorship. These colonial periods were accompanied by a number of political parties and movements such as Nazism Fascism, and other corrupt regimes. The totalitarian movement is regarded as one of the most oppressive systems imposed upon peoples and their freedoms. Hannah Arendt summarized its concept by stating: "Total terror the essence of the totalitarian system, exists neither for the people nor against them... and the further its movement advances, the clearer it becomes that its power is greater than that of the most powerful forces generated by human activities or wills."^{iv}

This statement suggests that totalitarianism established systems more powerful than the state itself thereby coming to control peoples and dominate their interests and activities. Those who rejected submission to such systems were destined for destruction. As a result of these oppressive laws, class divisions spread in all their manifestations, including injustice and the coercive rule imposed upon weaker peoples.

Ideology therefore may be understood as an accumulation of knowledge laden with the various manifestations of social cultural political and historical life experienced by humanity throughout the ages. In other words "ideology refers to the ways in which human beings live out their roles within a class society as well as to the values ideas and images that connect them to their social functions."^v

Ideological thought became deeply rooted in societies as a result of the miserable social conditions experienced by the world during periods of transformation and transition from one form of authority to another often worse than its predecessor. This resulted in fragmentation and fragility within the structure of society leaving people to live under the threat of rulers and military authority both before and after the Renaissance. This was particularly evident during periods marked by military coups associated with Nazism and Bolshevism, when the world was transformed into a landscape of bloodshed and wars.

All these conflicts left behind a widespread tendency toward rebellion against authority and the formation of popular political parties seeking to escape the control of rulers. These circumstances divided the world into different political ideologies each characterized by its own orientations and demands concerning freedom authority or rebellion.

With the passage of time, these ideological ideas remained embedded in collective memory and became among the principles through which individuals organized the course of their lives making it difficult for them to detach themselves from them. Thus "an ideological system is a coherent entity composed of shared images ideas, and ideals that provide those who subscribe to it with a consistent overall orientation."^{vi} Consequently these ideas came to constitute a particular pattern of rigid decisions that people were expected to follow regardless of their consequences.

Therefore critics identified the sedimentation of such ideas within the textual fabric of creative works. Some of these ideas emerged as a consequence of the writer's intellectual orientation while others were deliberately incorporated as central themes of their writings. This is what Hamid Rqaytah sought to clarify through the critical propositions he put forward regarding the theorization of this literary genre. In doing so he attempted to shed light on the ideologies embedded within the content of very short stories, commenting on these developments as follows: "This is what endowed very short fiction with a special aura, and even deservedly bestowed upon it the distinction of universality as a literary genre amid the major transformations witnessed by the world as though it had emerged in response to and fulfillment of a fundamental need to express the particularities of an extremely critical period."^{vii}

The critic perceived in this genre an enormous internal capacity to encompass the various issues experienced by humanity and to capture critical transitional periods that reshaped the map of the world. Thus despite its extremely concise form very short fiction was capable of incorporating major issues within its inner structure which contributed to its emergence and prominence in the literary field.

The critic also examined these ideological ideas through a number of short-story models including the story "Eclipse" by Mustafa Lghatiri, in which he writes: "In the poor land of India an eclipsed moon slowly and steadily emerged creeping across the firmament only to reveal its sun."^{viii}

The critic analyzed and interpreted this very short story stating: "Through the Rif War the text presents a historical and human perspective that rises to a universal intellectual level in defining a concept that imperialism through its Orientalists attempted to promote in order to fulfill its expansionist ambitions in various parts of the world... The war waged by the Spaniards and British colonialism in Asia constitute a reference to the peaceful resistance of Gandhi the unarmed man who led a people toward freedom from the grip of an empire over which the sun never set."^{ix}

In his critical reading of the text "Eclipse" the critic highlights the arrival of numerous Spanish and British military forces in India and other Asian countries with the aim of colonizing them. These powers sought to establish their influence either through peaceful means represented by the

dissemination of certain ideas intended to transform these societies into dependent entities or through military bombardment and armed force. This was indeed the case during the two World Wars. The people however did not surrender to these wars rather they sacrificed everything in order to preserve the land of their ancestors from the hands of the enemy. They thus adopted the stance of the unarmed man yet ultimately achieved victory, and the sun of freedom rose over their lands despite the human and material losses sustained during these resistance movements.

Within the context of cultural studies the text consequently reveals the hidden dimensions of Western settler colonialism which entered various countries under the pretext of promoting economic and social development. Yet at the same time, it did not find it easy to establish control over certain countries, owing to the spread of awareness and the presence of an intellectual class that supported popular revolutions and assisted in liberating their homelands. This Western-centered worldview did not leave either Western or Arab countries untouched in its desire to plunder their resources; nevertheless, it failed in many of its attempts to impose its centrality upon the world.

Accordingly, the critic found in the model presented by Mustafa Lghatiri a return to the distant history experienced by the world during periods of war and the widespread dissemination of political ideologies, which contributed to the collapse of socialist and democratic regimes and to the division of society into social classes. The short-story writer therefore sought to retrieve a historical fragment from the past and incorporate it into his narrative text in order to introduce the ideas and cultures that prevailed in earlier periods and to demonstrate their subsequent impact on the mentality of peoples. History itself bears witness to this: "In the 1920s, the ideologies of fascism, Bolshevism, and Nazism had been formulated by people who had lived and grown up before the war and who continued to remember that period in a distinctive manner, so that the general political and cultural climate came to be characterized by the dominance of totalitarianism."^x

Ideological doctrines exerted a powerful influence over European societies and did not remain confined within their geographical boundaries; rather, they expanded to encompass neighboring countries. This increased interaction among different peoples through the exchange of cultures. Such coexistence generated an atmosphere of intellectual intermingling that led to the acquisition of corrupt values, which destroyed numerous societies because of absurd ideas that did not serve the individual but instead drew people toward harmful customs and traditions, ultimately resulting in intellectual stagnation. Meanwhile, the ruling elite remained largely protected from such falsehoods because, behind these ideologies, it sought to destroy people's minds in order to control them and their possessions.

We find the argument presented by Hamid Rakata to be a reasonable one, because literature is, quite simply, the faithful record of human history. This is precisely what the very short story has undertaken to do: to revive a past marked by tension and profound disruption within societies in earlier times, while drawing attention to those sterile ideas that constrained individuals through the fallacies of liberal, bourgeois, Bolshevik, Nazi, and dictatorial thought, as well as the various other ideologies that implanted their corrupt content in the minds of humanity. Life subsequently became a bloody struggle between states, parties, and various movements, each seeking to attain power and assert the dominance of the strong over the weak. Accordingly, the text "Eclipse" provides a realistic representational image of the sun that had, at that time, disappeared from humanity because of those dark ideas and on the other hand, because of wars. The world did not rid itself of those ideas until peoples rebelled against oppressive governments. Nevertheless, those ideologies and forms of fanaticism however much the world has attempted to distance itself from them still exist to this day and cannot be completely escaped, because they have simply become an inseparable part of the memory and structure of societies.

From this perspective, it can be argued that the interpretation offered by the critic in the text "Eclipse" is profound, as it points to the damage caused by those corrupt ideas to the social structure and to human thought. However, the critic was not entirely successful in his analysis, since he approached the text through a descriptive-analytical methodology without providing the broader analysis that the text requires. In particular, he did not address the components of ideological discourse within the short story by identifying the linguistic signifiers that demonstrate the text's connection to those ideological ideas. Nor did he substantiate his argument with historical evidence to clarify whether these ideologies are genuine historical ideologies drawn from the core of historical reality, or merely conceptions and ideas constructed by the short-story writer through his imaginative creativity.

Furthermore, he did not identify the context in which the writer composed this text whether it was historical, religious, political, or economic. Therefore, this critical approach reveals a deficiency in describing and explaining the ideological dimensions present in the text "Eclipse."

(Hamid Rekkata) addressed another short narrative text in which he dealt with the issue of the relationship between the intellectual and authority, entitled "The Jester" In this story, the narrator says:

"When Al-Tawhidi had finished recounting what he had to say, the vizier addressed him, as was his custom, saying: 'Come, Abu Hayyan, give us a parting anecdote.' Al-Tawhidi thought for a moment and then said: 'Once upon a time, there was a king from the Sasanian dynasty who would summon

a wise man to seek his counsel. Whenever he had finished obtaining what he needed from him, he would order him to tell something that would make him laugh. The wise man would do so in order to remind him constantly that, no matter how great his status might be, he was nothing more than a jester.' The vizier laughed may God make him laugh and Al-Tawhidi left the place."^{xi}

A dialogue takes place in this text between Abu Hayyan al-Tawhidi and the vizier of the Sasanian king. The king sought to exploit Abu Hayyan al-Tawhidi to fulfill his needs and entertain him, without taking into consideration his intellectual and scholarly status, which entitled him not to be a servant to anyone. However, kings paid little attention to such ranks and distinctions. Therefore, the intellectual often resorted to his intelligence, cunning, and prudence in order to avoid the injustices of kings.

(Hamid Rekkaka) explains Abu Hayyan al-Tawhidi's ingenuity as follows:

"Human history bears witness to the setbacks and downfall of intellectuals, and to their becoming victims of official ideologies. As soon as the foundations supporting such ideologies collapse, everything collapses with them, because free thought had been rendered ineffective and its freedom had been restrained. Throughout history, the relationship between the intellectual and authority has been characterized by a movement of ebb and flow. The intellectual's status does not rise, nor is his position determined, except through an understanding of the nature of his connection and relationship with authority or the state. The text presents al-Tawhidi as a prominent intellectual of his age and as a model worthy of emulation."^{xii}

In this interpretation, the critic exposes the issue of the manipulation and exploitation of intellectuals in earlier periods by the rulers of the state. They exploited intellectuals to serve their personal interests and strengthen their authority, particularly by benefiting from their scholarly and intellectual achievements that they contributed to the state. The ruler would then place these achievements under his own authority and name in order to enhance his standing in the eyes of the people. Conversely, thinkers and critics such as Abu Hayyan al-Tawhidi became mere followers and servants of the rulers, without having a recognized position within the state council or the royal court.

This story reveals historical realities concerning the relationship between authority and the intellectual, portraying it as a conflict between two social structures: the ruling class and the intellectual class. The story consequently highlights a dialectical relationship between two systems: the system of the intellectual and the system of authority. Through these relationships, the reader is presented with an exposure of realities that had been concealed from the general public, particularly issues relating to the marginalization of intellectuals, their deprivation of positions within the state,

and the suppression of their writings for fear that they might expose the hidden policies and ideologies of rulers.

This is clearly manifested in the text "The Jester", in which the narrator attempts to present a genuine picture of the harsh reality experienced by al-Tawhidi and other scholars and thinkers at the royal court, where they were subjected to humiliation and the undermining of their intellectual and social value. Consequently, many of them resorted to using their ingenuity and wisdom to outwit the kings in order to preserve their social and cultural status within society.

This is precisely what al-Tawhidi did when he concluded his dialogue with the king. He gave him the advice he had requested, concerning one of the Sasanian kings. On the apparent level, the statement suggests that the Sasanian king would ultimately meet his end as a jester or clown. However on its implicit level, it alludes to the fact that the king whom al-Tawhidi served was himself the clown, and that he was not referring to any other king. This reflects al-Tawhidi's astuteness and intelligence. Having recognized the king's limited intelligence, al-Tawhidi sarcastically told him that, regardless of how powerful a king might become or how elevated his status might be, he would ultimately remain nothing more than a clown. The king admired this piece of advice, believing that al-Tawhidi had directed it toward another king, whereas in reality it was addressed to him personally. Thanks to al-Tawhidi's cunning, the king was unable to decipher the hidden meaning of the advice. This context thus highlights the intellectual dullness of kings in contrast to the ingenuity and shrewdness of thinkers and scholars during al-Tawhidi's time. Hamid Rekkata clarified this point by stating: "It highlights the intellectual's ingenuity and his ability to distance himself from strange demands that do not befit his intellectual stature, position, and prestige, confronting them with cunning, craftiness, and criticism, while teaching the requester a lesson."^{xiii}

Al-Tawhidi succeeded in freeing himself from the king's demands thanks to his intellectual, mental, and cultural abilities, which made him an educated intellectual whose worth could neither be underestimated nor diminished in the presence of kings. In his text *The Jester*, the short-story writer sought to shed light on the relationship between the king and the intellectual. This dialectical relationship prompted Hamid Rekkata to examine it closely and identify the absence of intellectuals' rights as the underlying cause of such conflicts. In ancient times, the king used the intellectual and exploited all of his cultural and intellectual capacities to advance his own interests "through ideological and repressive apparatuses, which he seeks to preserve his own interests."^{xiv} Accordingly, ancient kings sought protection under the cover of intellectuals in order to expand their empires, while the intellectual, in contrast, remained merely part of the state's entourage, possessing neither authority nor any significant value. Consequently, intellectuals attempted to disengage themselves

from the ideological coverings under which kings sheltered themselves by employing their intellectual abilities, intelligence, and cunning to evade serving kings.

This is what Hamid Rekkata sought to address in the very short story clown, particularly the manifestations of the political and cultural ideology that kings constructed for themselves at the expense of intellectuals. Based on the interpretation provided by Hamid Rekkata of clown, it is evident that his descriptive analysis was accurate, as he offered a precise depiction of the ideological cover beneath which kings sought protection, at the expense of intellectuals whose intellectual and cognitive abilities and energies were exploited to serve their personal interests. The political justification underlying this situation was that the intellectual possessed no authority superior to that of the state. In Hamid Rekkata's view, this constituted a grave injustice toward al-Tawhidi and other intellectuals like him.

This relationship between the king and the intellectual persisted across the ages because of the ideological values prevailing in the societies in which al-Tawhidi lived. These values established laws and rules that prevented intellectuals from challenging the king or rejecting his requests, regardless of their nature. They also prohibited intellectuals from overstepping their boundaries in an attempt to gain access to the council or to political authority. Such coercive laws diminished the status and value of intellectuals, except for those who possessed the intelligence and cunning necessary to outmaneuver kings and escape their grasp. These laws enacted by the state eventually came to function like a sacred book that no one could challenge, even members of the elite and intellectual classes. Therefore, in clown, the short-story writer invokes the relationship between the ruler and the intellectual in order to draw our attention to the negative manifestations that became widespread during the reign of ancient kings.

And since their relations with them were driven by personal interests, we may say that the story of The Acrobat grasped a subtle thread of the broader ideological strands that characterized ancient societies, particularly the arrogance of kings and their oppression of both the people and the intellectual elite.

In Hamid Raqata's analysis of the story The Acrobat, we observe the same cultural approach that he adopted in his analysis of the text Eclipse. He did not introduce anything substantially new to this critical approach, limiting himself instead to a semantic analysis of the textual context. He referred to the political ideologies that served as a cover behind which kings sought to conceal themselves in order to pursue their interests within the state at the expense of intellectuals and thinkers. Conversely, he highlighted certain qualities that revealed the astuteness of these intellectuals and

showed how they manipulated kings through the eloquence of their speech and the ingenuity of their thinking in order to evade serving them and escape their oppression.

However, this analysis remains devoid of a systematic methodological foundation. It revolves primarily around cultural contexts, discussing the circumstances of the event and the setting in which it takes place, namely the king's court. The critic does not identify the linguistic signifiers or the semiotic markers that point to the cultural structures embedded in these narrative texts and that reveal the ideological context underlying them. Nor does he address the repercussions that these ideas had on society, apart from a number of linguistic indications mentioned in his analysis, such as cunning, deception, criticism of the failures of intellectuals, their submission to ideologies, and the suppression of free thought.

Consequently, his analysis appears to be comprehensive in a general sense, but it does not adequately correspond to the particular characteristics of the very short story. Nor does it indicate the impact of those ideologies on its narrative components. It remains unclear whether these ideologies are merely interactive platforms introduced by the storyteller into his text as a means of opening it up to the political ideologies known to humankind in ancient times, or whether they constitute distinctive signs deliberately incorporated into the text, given that this literary form possesses narrative components capable of accommodating more than one subject within its internal structure through compression and condensation.

Accordingly, we find that the critic did not provide the necessary procedures for interrogating and interpreting the very short story, nor did he make effective use of the elements that he himself established for this genre when theorizing about it. He should have applied the principles he identified for the very short story namely, multiple forms of play, surprise, paradox, boldness, and condensation and analyzed the narrative text according to the elements that best suited the text and the ideological phenomenon present in both *Eclipse* and *The Acrobat*.

Furthermore, he did not elaborate on the issues addressed by cultural studies concerning the central and the marginal, nor did he refer to the mechanisms of cultural analysis that could substantiate the methodological basis of his interpretation of the implicit cultural and ideological structures embedded in the stories he examined.

1.2. The Ideological Dimension in Mustafa Ould Youssef's Very Short Stories

Alongside Hamid Rekkata, Mustafa Ould Youssef has put forward a number of critical perspectives on the presence of ideological phenomena in narrative writings, particularly in the very short story, which has played a significant role in exposing numerous truths and realities that other forms of

writing have failed to reveal. Among the issues he addresses is the question of the marginal and the central. He states:

"The transcendence of the center led to the exclusion of the discourse of equality. This became evident in the postcolonial context in relation to masculinity and femininity, as the privilege of the center shifted toward masculinity in these societies. Women were placed within predetermined boundaries, and sovereignty was transformed into a sadistic masculine authority that practiced rituals of socially and psychologically torturing femininity. This transcendence continued as long as the Western or masculine center remained dominant over the mental structure. Consequently, writings denouncing the continued presence of masculine dominance at the forefront emerged through the authority of politics and custom."^{xv}

In this argument, the critic addresses a universal issue that has existed since ancient times: the issue of patriarchal authority, which diminished the value of women and reduced them to representations of the body and weakness. As for their cultural status, society paid little attention to it. Women therefore resisted patriarchal authority in an attempt to change the course of the inferior view imposed upon them. They chose writing, intellectual engagement, and integration into society as means of confronting such authority.

There was also a group of women who chose a different path from the masculine world and joined associations and political parties advocating for their rights, away from male authority. Over the years, they succeeded in reclaiming their dignity and value and in creating their own strong world with all its human, cultural, and social dimensions. Consequently, the sadistic authority that had deprived women of their rights gradually declined, allowing them to become equal to men in terms of rights.

The idea of male superiority over women, however, was not confined to this human dimension alone. There is another dark aspect of life that remained unspoken for many years or, more precisely, one that was deliberately silenced so that the truth would not emerge. Among the long-standing ideas that have existed throughout human history is the concept of the marginal and the central. This concept divided the world into two poles: a world of power and centrality that exercises control over another world characterized by weakness and marginality. From this division emerged class distinctions and all forms of exploitation and colonialism, making the world a space of multiple ideologies and political orientations.

All these realities were eventually brought to light through cultural studies and cultural criticism. These approaches exposed the practices of rulers and politicians who destroyed numerous countries and plundered their resources. Truths that had been preserved for years in official records were

brought to the surface through cultural studies of literary texts, and were subsequently documented in historical works.

Adapted from:.^{xvi}

All those social and political circumstances that the countries experienced were widely covered in the news, newspapers, and magazines. Their dissemination, however, did not stop there; writers also took up their pens to document those moments with all their events and details. Very short stories were among the literary forms that paid considerable attention to such issues. Therefore, Mustafa Ould Youssef regarded them as one of the narrative genres capable of encompassing those ideologies by exposing major political issues that shook the world and transformed its systems and trajectories. This is evident, for instance, in the issue of discrimination between men and women, as illustrated in Issa Chriet's short story "The Ghost of the Small Door", which states:

"...Imane walks alone, speaking to no one and paying no attention to the harassment of loiterers... Are all people wolves?... At the age of eight, I thought of writing to God and asking Him why He had created me female?"^{xvii}

The critic found in this very short narrative passage an authentic representation of the inferior image of women in society, whereby a woman is perceived merely as a female object of seduction rather than as an educated woman who contributes to society in the same way as a man. The critic explains this text as follows:

"We discover an implicit, unconscious, and unspoken system that conveys something else: namely, the extension of colonial culture beyond the human being in order to besiege the female being, through the adoption by patriarchal culture of foundations hostile to those who differ in race, religion, history, and gender, as well as the subjugation of the other who is weaker intellectually, economically, physically, and morphologically. It is a culture of superiority and discrimination."

The critic's argument suggests that male domination over women's sphere has deep historical roots extending back to ancient times. It reflects the coercive subjugation of women for the service of men, stripping them of their human, intellectual, and cultural dimensions and reducing them to mere objects that men may demand whenever they wish. Such oppressive authority, however, did not persist indefinitely, particularly with the emergence of feminist consciousness, which spread forcefully and denounced the necessity of liberating women from the control of domineering men and granting them the right to exercise authority and agency in all spheres of life.

According to the critic, this literary form therefore emerged to expose issues that had long remained unspoken and to convey explicit, as well as coded, messages to rulers who had deprived peoples of

even their most basic human rights. This is demonstrated by the critic's analysis of the consequences of such ideologies in "The Ghost of the Small Door":

"Colonial culture stripped the colonized human being of his identity in order to physically eliminate him through the massacres perpetrated against indigenous populations, and culturally and psychologically through Westernization and the distortion of identity."^{xviii}

From this perspective, very short fiction becomes, through this literary platform, a political discourse presented in an artistic form and addressed to the world as a whole. It seeks to restore dignity and recognition to women and the oppressed, while exposing rulers who have sought to dominate the world through corrupt and dictatorial ideologies.

Mustapha Ould Youcef provides another narrative model from which he derives several ideological dimensions, represented in the short story *The Knights of the Last Dawn*. The story includes the following passage: "...The last war was bloody, and when it subsided, it was like embers covered with ashes... It was only to enable them to regain their barely remaining breath and prepare themselves for the coming stages"^{xix}

In this very short narrative passage, the storyteller recounts an aspect of Algerian history marked by the dark suffering that Algeria endured for several long decades. The critic interprets this passage as follows: "The narrator recounts, in a descriptive style, historical events integrated into the heroic action and steadfastness of Algerian society in its resistance against the empires of Europe and France. This represents a unique case in human history, as it resulted from the accumulation of the national struggle throughout Algeria's history, extending from Massinissa to the present day. Accordingly, the storyteller constructed his text around the act of steadfast resistance in confronting outsiders and collaborators"^{xx}

The critic considers the Algerian cause one of the greatest acts of heroism witnessed by the world, owing to the greatness of its people and their extraordinary patience in confronting the enemy and resisting it with every possible sacrifice in order to liberate their homeland. This was indeed realized in practice, as the Algerians stood united and liberated their land from all tyrants.

Based on the foregoing, it can be observed that the critic constructed his critical analyses on two levels: the masculine and the colonial. This characterization becomes evident through the very short stories to which he devoted his attention, identifying a conflict between masculinity and femininity, as well as another conflict between centrality and marginality. All these conflicts converge toward the same objective: relegating the weaker world and women to a state of weakness, fragmentation, and objectification. These are ideological and political ideas that deprived the world of inner peace and transformed it into a scene of bloody wars that continued for many years. As a consequence, they

led to the corruption of minds and the destruction of women's freedom. The world did not recover from that state of fragmentation and rupture until such dictatorships were confronted and the rulers who clung to war were overthrown, allowing some degree of peace to prevail and enabling women to reclaim their lost identity within the space dominated by the authoritarian male.

Accordingly, Mustapha Ould Youcef supported those very short narrative texts that called for liberating the world from corrupt ideologies. He also portrayed women as educated and fully human beings, rather than merely as objects of male desire. Thus, he interpreted these historical manifestations by drawing upon a number of explanatory textual indicators. He examined the narrative manifestations present within the story, particularly the descriptive style adopted by the storyteller, while also drawing upon linguistic phenomena that clarify the process of documenting and historicizing political issues deeply rooted in world history and, more specifically, in the history of Algeria.

He consequently highlighted the semantic deictic references employed by the storyteller, including historical time, such as the Algerian War of Liberation, and spatial references, such as Algeria, Europe, and France. He also examined the characters that embodied the ideological dimension: the oppressed and marginalized woman, the oppressive and patriarchal man, the central colonial system, and, in contrast, the weak and marginalized system. All these binaries divide the world into two opposing sides: ruler and ruled, oppressor and oppressed.

Consequently, these utterances and semantic structures function, in the critic's view, as a declaration, revelation, and exposure of facts buried within the colonial period and the history of nations. The narrative technique adopted by the storyteller thus becomes a revealing language that dismantles the corrupt customs and traditions that prevailed in ancient societies. At the same time, it constitutes a departure from conventional narrative writing through the use of techniques of irony, boldness, and disclosure, intended to expose the hidden dimensions of human history. This represents a daring revolution undertaken by writers of very short stories in order to engage with cultural, political, social, and ideological structures at the very depths of civilizations.

Building upon the approach adopted by Mustapha Ould Youcef in addressing the ideological dimensions of the very short story, we find that he provides an accurate analysis of certain deeply rooted political, social, and cultural manifestations that have shaped the world throughout history. He draws upon a number of historical scenes incorporated by the short-story writer into his text in order to emphasize the existence of corrupt mentalities and ideas that prevailed throughout the world and altered its natural course. He also examines the causes that led to the division and fragmentation of the world into a weak world and a powerful one that exercises control over it, as

well as the negative consequences that such dictatorial systems have produced for humanity and the planet.

Accordingly, the descriptive analysis presented by the critic remains accurate in terms of its interpretation of ideological phenomena in all their details within very short stories. Methodologically, it is also characterized by his examination of the narrative space within which the short-story writer operates, particularly with regard to the narrative actions employed, as well as space, time, events, and the implicit and explicit themes underlying these systems. Hence, Mustapha Ould Youcef's analysis appears to be deeper than the ideological analysis presented by Hamid Rekkata, particularly in terms of interpretation, analysis, methodological treatment, and his extensive knowledge of the ideological issues that have shaped the world.

Nevertheless, some shortcomings can also be identified in Mustapha Ould Youcef's analysis. From a thematic perspective, he provides an adequate explanation of these ideologies, supported by examples of the political and economic systems in question. However, he does not sufficiently address certain aesthetic dimensions of the narrative text resulting from the incorporation of historical events into the condensed narrative imagination. For instance, the binary oppositions highlighted by the critic—such as the marginal and the central, and the woman and the man—constitute aesthetic structures that serve the narrative text by generating elements of surprise, paradox, and linguistic play. They also create a rhetorical space arising from these contradictions.

Consequently, these aesthetic values give the very short story a poetic dimension, as well as an intellectual and epistemological dimension that reveals the various historical phenomena embedded in the collective memory of humanity, including those recorded in the annals of history. In this way, the very short story retrieves historical fragments in order to reconstruct a fractured human civilization and revive it in the form of a narrative that conveys ideas recounting the heroic deeds led by peoples during times of war.

The treatment presented by the critic constitutes an attempt to establish and contextualize the very short story as a literary text through which he sought to restore human life to its vitality and liberate human beings from the darkness of ideas that had prevailed in the human mind and exhausted it in its search for inner peace. Accordingly, the critic found in the texts he examined a space through which to restore to women their rightful human value, liberate them from patriarchal authority, and attempt to erase the imposed divisions that the world had experienced, thereby reimagining it as a unified space in which the strong does not exercise power over the weak. The ethical values that seek peace and freedom were also present, in the critic's view, in these very short fictional texts. He

regarded such values as civilizational principles deeply rooted in customs and traditions that society cannot dispense with.

2. Cultural Dimensions in the Very Short Story

Cultural, social, and political dimensions constitute fertile spaces for creative works, as writers frequently draw upon them to enrich their creations with evidence and facts that touch upon the human interior and express the profound history of civilizations. Consequently, these referential relationships have become deep structures embedded within literary texts, which writers cannot transcend as long as they provide an aesthetic space and introduce diverse values into the textual sphere.

Both Hamid Rkata and Mustapha Ould Youcef have addressed the issue of incorporating ideological dimensions into the very short story. Following their study and evaluation, the researchers ultimately concluded that this literary form represents a profound universe of structures and references, capable of recording the human history of various ancient civilizations. As a literary form characterized by condensation and compression, the very short story possesses the ability to load its narrative expressions with the greatest possible amount of knowledge and events within a limited textual space.

The very short story has adopted numerous orientations throughout its writing experiences, which has increased its acceptance among both creative writers and readers. It has succeeded in delving into the depths of human social reality and approaching important issues in people's lives. Culture and the various circumstances of everyday life have therefore become among the contexts that short-story writers have addressed through writing and documentation. Since life does not remain confined to particular moments, but rather circumstances change, conditions are renewed, and realities evolve, the story likewise engages with all the turning points and developments surrounding human life.

Culture is considered one of the decisive factors in transforming the geography of the world, as certain ideas may disappear from society while new ones emerge according to changing circumstances and according to the collective memory's acceptance of such ideas. From this perspective, critics have examined the cultural transformations that have entered this literary form, just as they have influenced other literary genres.

Cultural backgrounds constitute one of the most frequently employed components in literary texts because of their significant role in revealing the identities and affiliations of peoples and introducing their customs and traditions. Writers of the very short story have extensively employed such references in their creative texts in order to diversify their meanings and enhance their aesthetic and

intellectual value. This is particularly evident in the fictional texts examined by critics of this literary form, who have identified and analyzed the cultural fragments incorporated by short-story writers into their works. Among these critics are Hamid Rukata and Mustapha Ould Youcef.

2.1. The Cultural Dimension of the Very Short Story in Hamid Rukata's Work

Hamid Rukata traced the various stages through which the very short story developed, identifying its essential elements as being based on a set of fundamental components, namely: "multiple play, surprise and paradox, boldness, and condensation." He found in these components distinctive characteristics that enriched this literary genre and contributed to deepening its meanings and connotations. Thanks to condensation and its various forms of paradox, the very short story has been able to accommodate numerous major and minor human concerns. For this reason, the critic considers it a vast repository of human history. In this context, he states: "The very short story has the capacity to encompass human records through contexts and connotations that call for provocation, confrontation, and rejection. It mourns contemporary society, defines its new concepts of things, and announces a new perspective on values according to differing perceptions that seek to reconstruct or rewrite human history by delving into the depths of the absolute, both the sacred and the profane, in an attempt to reshape it anew."^{xxi}

In this statement, the critic provides a profound interpretation of the very short story, attributing to it a number of features that have broadened its scope and diversified its narrative functions. This capacity is manifested in its ability to trace the various developments of life by examining the historical and cultural backgrounds experienced by human beings over the decades. The very short story retrieves these scenes and incorporates them into its narrative fabric, thereby introducing the reader to the vast reservoir of memories that embodies the history of civilizations in their various forms and cultures. It also records different moments of human life, both in their depth and simplicity, while portraying them through a variety of paradoxes.

The very short story does not, however, stop at merely documenting events and retrieving the past. Rather, it has brought about an intellectual and epistemological shift in the field of writing by reconstructing the history of civilizations through different forms and ideas that aspire to change and renewal, thereby moving beyond the negative ideas that prevailed in past cultures.

The critic also examined a number of short-story models by Ismail Al-Bouyahyaoui, including his collection *The Flood*. In one of its texts, he writes: "They tore apart the sons of Hanbal, muscle by muscle... They burned them, idea by idea. The thirst for the game was not quenched... Enlightened ideas were aflame, while consuming fires lay in wait... These are thinkers... these are burners; therefore, the fire shed its blazing heat and wrapped itself in the radiance of light."^{xxii}

In this short-story model, the writer creates an intellectual transition from the pre-Islamic state, in which darkness and falsehood prevailed, to a conscious and rational existence, far removed from all absurdities and superstitions. Accordingly, the critic finds in this story and in other texts from *The Flood* “a cultural destabilization in Morocco, revealing the other face of an astonishing cultural dynamism. These texts possess aesthetic characteristics manifested in the rhetoric of ellipsis and omission, the condensation of the narrative distance, and a language charged with multiple connotations. They also engage with the Qur’anic text in order to delve into the various human registers—religious, philosophical, intellectual, and heritage-related. These texts have created a new reading of history and its theories, together with a clear inspiration from the laws of an eloquent game. They rely on intertextuality and condensation, all of which serve the construction of an alternative text and endow it with a style that gives the story another dimension.”^{xxiii}

Through this interpretation, the critic provides a broader reading of Ismail Al-Bouyahyaoui’s collection *Tufan*. He employs a number of analytical mechanisms in examining the short-story models, including condensation, intertextuality, surprise, multiple play, ellipsis and omission, and suggestive language. Based on these elements, the critic employs some of the fundamental components that he established as characteristic of this literary genre, while also adding distinctive features that differentiate it from other literary genres.

From the foregoing, it becomes clear that the critic has presented a broad perspective on this literary form, drawing on the ideological and cultural dimensions that he identifies within it. Cultural criticism is based on several premises, as it “reveals the cultural energies and systems, ideological issues, and modes of domination and control embedded in texts.”^{xxiv} From the critic’s perspective, and in light of this approach, cultural criticism seeks to raise awareness through the vivid scenes incorporated by the short-story writer into the narrative texts. These scenes transform such realities into a kind of new history, constructed upon the foundations of the old, while introducing slight modifications to its natural, cultural, and intellectual laws.

This transformation and reformulation of lived reality into a written reality within the very short story requires procedural mechanisms capable of reducing major issues and incorporating them into this extremely concise literary form. The critic identifies these mechanisms as condensation, brevity, suggestive language, intertextuality, symbolism, and engagement with narrative experimentation. Through these techniques, the vast and complex world becomes condensed into an intensive narrative work, interwoven with various historical and cultural texts that rely on implicit structures revealing the underlying dimensions of civilizations and their cultures.

Accordingly, the critic regards this narrative model as a conscious mode of writing, owing to its ability to accommodate the various developments of the contemporary era and respond to its modern features, transforming them into short narrative passages charged with ideas that keep pace with the rhythm of the age. Thus, the very short story introduces new concepts of writing that correspond to the circumstances and requirements of the contemporary era. It does so by employing new narrative spaces that draw upon the intellectual, cultural, and social heritage of civilizations and reformulate it in contemporary forms.

The short-story writer also employs a set of techniques to transform these established references. Such techniques contribute to defining the new values of the emerging world and interpreting ancient cultures from a modern perspective. This is achieved through the use of language and rhetorical expressions that differ from traditional narrative patterns, the treatment of bold themes, and the incorporation of vivid images and scenes drawn from lived reality, so that the text presented to the reader becomes a message detached from the immediate circumstances of everyday life.

Hamid Rkata analyzed a number of very short stories, extracting from them several cultural dimensions. He ultimately concluded that these texts are models that "go beyond the familiar, seeking and anticipating broader and more beautiful horizons in order to champion freedom and love and achieve social justice that shatters the falsity of ideologies and taboos and exposes what has been silenced. They are stories that establish a new form of authority and champion broad segments of the oppressed under authoritarian regimes, colonialism, and dictatorships, relying on biting satire... It is a form of writing in which the narrative self seeks to employ the flash and the imaginative evocation of the very short story in order to correct the trajectories of human values and expectations betrayed by dreams and that missed their rendezvous with history."^{xxv}

The critic, in this argument, presents an insightful perspective on the significance of the themes addressed by the very short story. These themes involve reconstructing heritage according to a new mindset, one that differs from that of the community that had built its life upon a set of strict customs and traditions. Here, narrative writing intervenes boldly to remove the dust that has accumulated over certain invalid cultural practices, to strip them of their negative connotations, and to reintroduce them through positive ideas that serve the individual in the context of the new life. The revival referred to by the critic thus represents a renaissance aimed at reversing the established balance of the world and raising awareness within society in order to confront the dictatorships that have drawn the map of the world in accordance with their own interests. From the critic's perspective, narrative writing therefore becomes a mirror reflecting the realities of the world: it exposes what has been concealed and provides humanity with the impetus to resist and restrain corrupt authorities. Consequently, the story becomes an intellectual weapon through the cultural

awareness that it instills in its readers. Based on this argument, it can be said that the critic is justified in considering the story a distinctive model of writing, given its capacity to disseminate awareness while also reviving heritage in a new form that corresponds to the realities and requirements of the contemporary age.

The critic also relies, in presenting his critical argument, on a set of critical criteria that scholars have regarded as essential characteristics of this literary genre, namely satire, the flash, transgression of the familiar, and boldness. The latter is among the elements that the critic has incorporated into the fundamental components of this genre, while the other elements have been addressed by other researchers. From this perspective, it can be argued that the critic is justified in regarding this genre as an open model that engages with both the past and the present in all their thematic dimensions. On the other hand, however, he does not provide a sufficient analysis to clarify how the short-story writer employs these narrative models from a narratological perspective. Researching the cultural dimensions of the very short story requires procedural tools that facilitate their identification and manifestation within the very short narrative text, such as intertextuality, which functions to evoke past references within the text. If this technique is absent, how can the short-story writer recall the collective memory of the past and attempt to transform its modes of thought into another, modern form of thinking? Thus, we find that the critic moves beyond this aspect of interpretation, in addition to the absence of the elements that he himself mentioned in his theoretical conceptualization of this genre when he attributed to it "multiple play, surprise, paradox, boldness, and condensation." All of these are elements upon which he could have worked more extensively in the story he analyzed and evaluated.

He should also have pointed to some of the linguistic devices employed by the short-story writer in his text, which enabled him to produce a narrative that was unconventional both in language and subject matter. The critic, however, confined himself to emphasizing the cultural value of the very short story and dealt only briefly with its aesthetic value, stating: "Narrative innovation does not mean aesthetic destruction; rather, it means the creation of beauty, and the very short story is open to the horizons of beauty as long as beauty springs from the contemplative self."^{xxvi} The aesthetic values of this genre are realized according to the degree of reception and response that it achieves among its readers.

Starting from the level of artistic maturity achieved by the text, which generates the pleasure of reading for the reader, the text thus reaches its artistic and aesthetic climax. From the foregoing, we observe that the critic did not make use of the tools of cultural analysis to deconstruct the very short story text, except that he identified some of the cultural signs embedded by the short-story writer in his texts. He focused his analysis on presenting certain implicit cultural and ideological manifestations

and provided a semantic interpretation of them, without employing the methodological tools established by critics for analyzing literary texts according to specific criteria.

Among the scholars who have been concerned with the cultural analysis of literary texts is Abdullah Al-Ghadhami, who established a number of critical foundations, or procedural mechanisms, for reading texts in accordance with the premises of cultural criticism. These include: "the elements of the message (the systemic function – metaphor (the total metaphor) – cultural euphemism – type of signification – the generic sentence – the dual author)."^{xxvii} These elements provide methodological starting points for cultural criticism, upon which critics rely when examining literary texts within the framework of cultural analysis or cultural studies.

However, the critic only made a brief and rapid examination of very short stories in an attempt to explore their cultural dimensions. He did not introduce any procedural tool from among the methodological mechanisms of cultural criticism. Consequently, his reading remained superficial, his deconstruction of the texts incomplete, and his analysis largely descriptive. We may therefore conclude that the critic lacked a systematic awareness of cultural analysis.

2-2. The Cultural Dimension of the Very Short Story According to Mustafa Ould Youcef

Mustafa Ould Youcef presented a perspective different from that of Hamid Rakāṭa regarding the issue of the cultural dimension of the very short story. He focused on the virtual world generated by this fragmentary form of writing. In this regard, he states: "The very short story production is governed by a socio-cultural context, engaging with the virtual world and generating new traditions and behaviors based on fictional illusion and an attractive image characterized by aesthetic qualities and controversy, while exploring various human situations."^{xxviii}

The critic argues that this literary genre has taken different paths within the cultural scene since it entered the virtual world. It has established for itself visual forms within this visual space, presenting readers with aesthetic glimpses that express various human issues.

The critic considers these recent cultural transformations to be a factor behind the change in writing and its transition from a horizon of auditory reception to one of visual reception. The short-story writer has accompanied these developments in all their dimensions; rather than merely reproducing his literary works from lived reality, he has also mapped them out in accordance with the developments brought about by the digital and cultural revolution that has swept across the contemporary world. As a result, digital storytelling has become one of the literary forms that has gained considerable popularity because of its proximity to the developments of the information age.

The very short story has undertaken the task of transcending conventional writing by shifting from a report-like and classical mode of writing toward visual writing, which is rich in symbols, linguistic and non-linguistic signs, as well as various typographical devices that articulate their silent language within the narrative text. Through this transgression, the genre becomes a text that breaks away from conventional cultural frameworks in order to create a new writing culture that corresponds to the challenges and demands of the contemporary age.

The critic examines a very short story model saturated with digital elements, namely "Absence" by Fatima Nasser, which reads: "A cloud draped in love... She carries a knife, he carries a rose... She killed her out of love!... So he killed her through absence!"^{xxix}

The critic identified in this short narrative text certain features that foreshadow the female short-story writer's departure from the strict conventions of classical narrative. In this regard, he states: "The great rhetorical potential is achieved through the metaphorical component ... The plot has disappeared because the text has adopted nano-narrative, whereas the plot belongs to macro-narrative. Consequently, the narrative label replaces the narrative image as an immediate response to the reader in a hurry, seeking to satisfy their instantaneous curiosity"^{xxx}

The critic found in this text a departure from the familiar conventions of narrative, which traditionally relied on syntactic arrangement and a well-structured plot. The text thus becomes a digital text imbued with the details of virtual data, including flash, speed, the snapshot, or the visual label. All these textual and visual configurations satisfy the reader's desire for pleasure through the rapid consumption of the text.

The critic linked the very short story to the conditions of the contemporary age through the digital criteria that characterize its topographical space. Conversely, he observed a considerable and remarkable degree of reader reception, owing to its ability to meet the expectations of an audience that has embraced this rapid narrative model. This is evident, on the one hand, in its typographical form, which fulfils the requirements of brevity and condensation. On the other hand, however, the critic did not provide a sufficient interpretation of the cultural dimensions embedded in this narrative model. Instead, he focused primarily on its formal aspects, particularly the female writer's reliance on visual composition in writing through punctuation marks, overt and implicit ellipsis, and extreme brevity in sentences. He did not, however, provide an analysis of the impact of this cultural, intellectual, and epistemological transformation on writing or on the semantic and thematic dimensions of the text. Consequently, his critical analysis remains incomplete.

The critic further elaborated on this new form of writing, stating: "Narrative conventions have been shattered, giving way to the convention of condensation, whose essence lies in surprise and

symbolic indication. Thus, this art converges with caricature, as it is governed by a culture based on immediacy and narrative drawing, reducing reading to useful knowledge in order to achieve cognitive and aesthetic satisfaction"^{xxxi}

The critic added further conclusions to his previous argument as a result of the entry of this literary form into the virtual world and its adoption of the language of digitization. He found in it a breaking away from the conventional and standardized mode of writing that had prevailed in the past, both formally and thematically. Consequently, stories came to resemble caricatural configurations carrying rich narrative meanings characterized by irony, enigmas, and symbolism. All these narrative labels, as the critic argues, aim to astonish the reader and introduce them to the various major issues that they experience within an immediate temporal moment—without requiring a long period of time or lengthy sentences for the reader to understand the world around them.

Based on the foregoing, it can be argued that some of the judgments presented by Mustafa Ould Youcef regarding the cultural dimensions of the very short story are valid, whereas others are less convincing. He was correct in considering it a narrative model produced by the digital and technological conditions of the contemporary age, since this concise art form, with its rapid structure and flash-like quality, corresponds to the immediacy of contemporary life and its diverse issues. This is particularly relevant to the reader, for whom concise forms of writing have become more compatible with a life whose moments unfold at an accelerating pace.

Accordingly, this art form has found social, cultural, and epistemological conditions that have contributed to its emergence and dissemination on the digital screen, just as it has circulated in printed form. The virtual world that has embraced this art form thus becomes a catalyst for developing visual writing and for transferring literary works into concrete visual configurations on web pages and other forms of hypertextual writing.

The other aspect in which the critic fell short lies in the absence of printed texts of the very short story from his analysis of the cultural dimension. He focused primarily on the hypertextual text and the virtual text produced by digitalization, but he did not give sufficient attention to the numerous texts that occupied the cultural scene with their diverse themes. Nor did he provide critical analyses of the cultural issues that influenced the very short story. Instead, he confined his work exclusively to the virtual world. Furthermore, he addressed only one level concerning the impact of digital conditions on the emergence and formation of the very short story, without examining the second level, namely, the positive role that digitalization played in bringing cultural issues into the texts and in raising readers' awareness of the diverse cultures of different peoples through the techniques of intertextuality and symbolism. Accordingly, his critical approach remains incomplete.

Based on the foregoing, some points of convergence and divergence can be identified between the approaches presented by Mustapha Ould Youcef and Hamid Rekaïka regarding the presence of ideological and cultural dimensions in the very short story, as follows:

Hamid Rekaïka regarded the ideological dimension in the very short story as an intellectual foundation for human civilization, insofar as it conveys various political and cultural data that contributed to the construction of societies. It also introduces the ideas that spread throughout the world during periods of ideological conflict, represented by liberalism, Bolshevism, and the bourgeoisie. All of these constitute political manifestations that exerted a powerful influence on changing the map of the world and recording decisive moments in human history.

The critic Hamid Rekaïka identified two levels in this literary genre. The first is an initial level through which the short-story writer seeks to delve into the past and articulate the various universal and human phenomena experienced by humankind. The second is a level that aspires to lift the veil from those corrupt mentalities and replace them with ideas compatible with the spirit of an age that seeks renewal. The critic addressed these dimensions through a descriptive and analytical approach, without relying on the procedural mechanisms he established for this genre, namely astonishment, boldness, multiple play, paradox, and condensation. Therefore, his work remains incomplete and requires a more systematic and rigorous analysis.

As for Mustapha Ould Youcef, his analysis of ideological phenomena was more profound. He provided an extensive interpretation of the ideological dimensions present in very short fictional texts and did not focus solely on the old ideologies of the world, as Hamid Rekaïka did. Mustapha Ould Youcef also drew attention to several important issues addressed by these short fictional texts, particularly the marginal and the central. The critic did not limit his examination of this binary to the division of the world into two poles the powerful and the weak or to the subordination of the weaker world to liberal and central powers. Rather, he extended his analysis to broader studies encompassing the binary of masculinity and femininity and the dominance of patriarchal authority over women's lives. This constitutes an important point to which the critic devoted particular attention in order to highlight the negative impact that various ideologies have had on the course of the world and on the formation of social structures.

Accordingly, his work was closer to precision and comprehensiveness, both in terms of the quantity of knowledge addressed and the qualitative depth of the analysis. He referred to some of the narrative binary oppositions explored by short-story writers in their fictional texts. Moreover, he did not overlook the narrative functions of these texts in their engagement with ideological phenomena. The critic examined these functions through the spatial and temporal settings of the events, the

narrative event itself, and the subject addressed in the text. Therefore, the work of Mustafa Ould Youcef was more precise than that of Hamid Rakaïa and closer to methodological rigor, as he employed certain procedural mechanisms in his analysis based on the narrative criteria he specifically established for this literary genre. This was particularly evident when he regarded this genre as an immediate literary form that corresponds to the voice of the contemporary age through condensation, brevity, and content. Such reduction in verbal expression necessarily requires a reduction in the events of the text. Accordingly, the critic considered the contradictory binary oppositions employed by writers in their texts as a form of linguistic play that leads to symbolism and the reduction of descriptive language, such as: masculinity and femininity, the marginal and the central, the self and the Other. Nevertheless, he also overlooked certain verbal markers that indicate the role of paradox and surprise in bringing these narrative binary oppositions into effect.

The critic Mustafa Ould Youcef addressed the treatment of oppositional signs in the very short story from the perspective of their thematic content and their role in determining the meanings of the narrative text. However, he did not provide a critical interpretation of the aesthetic values generated by the phenomenon of binary oppositions. Their presence in the text constitutes rhetorical forms that contribute to verbal condensation, whereby the short-story writer employs such oppositions to economize on language. Through this use, the text becomes more enigmatic and allusive, thereby producing the pleasure of reading through these figurative structures of contrast. In addition to their semantic function, these oppositions also perform a narrative function by intensifying this literary genre and reducing description and lengthy narration. The juxtaposition of a word and its opposite enables the writer to avoid verbal elaboration and repeated explanations of the objects or qualities being described. This is similar to Hamid Rakaïa, who provided certain interpretations of the speech acts present in the texts he studied, observing that writers had employed concise ideological vocabulary without the need to elaborate on the historical details underlying those ideological ideas.

From the perspective of the cultural dimensions, we find that Hamid Raqata regarded this genre as a miniature narrative representation of the larger world, a world that encompasses more than one culture and intellectual orientation. This narrow textual structure contains within it a rich cultural reservoir. When the short-short story writer incorporates such cultural scenes into the very short story, he imbues them with the dynamics of the contemporary age and introduces modern details that reflect the new lived reality. Through this reality, human beings seek to transform their lives from erroneous ideas and cultures into more conscious and mature forms of thought that can help humanity build strong and cohesive societies, better than those of the past, which experienced fractures and breakdowns at the social, political, and cultural levels.

Accordingly, the critical approach presented by Hamid Raqata concerning these cultural scenes in the narrative texts can be regarded as accurate and sound in its analysis. Nevertheless, it remains incomplete in another respect, since it focused primarily on the thematic dimension of the very short story and did not employ the procedural mechanisms that would have enabled him to provide a more systematic analysis. Discussing the incorporation of cultures and ideologies into the very short story requires an explanation of how the writer makes use of these textual fragments. Therefore, he should have addressed intertextuality, condensation, symbolism, surprise, and paradox, as these constitute the appropriate elements through which cultural scenes are evoked within the narrative text. This is particularly relevant when he asserts the necessity of reviving heritage in a modern form compatible with the developments of the contemporary age. Such a project requires certain narrative criteria that clarify the process of renewal in literary writing, including experimentation, transcending the familiar, boldness, and linguistic and thematic deviation. All these elements necessarily contribute to reviving heritage through a new narrative form.

As for the approach adopted by Mustapha Ould Youcef regarding the cultural dimensions of this genre, it differs from that of his predecessor. He focused on digital culture and its role in activating the very short story, viewing contemporary culture as a fertile ground for the growth and dissemination of this genre with considerable flexibility. This is because its essential characteristics have emerged in response to the demands of the contemporary age, particularly speed, immediacy, and brevity in all aspects of life. Writers of this genre have employed the language of the contemporary age to express the cultures that prevailed in ancient societies, seeking to reconstruct them in a modern form integrated into the virtual world.

At this point, we observe an area of convergence between Hamid Raqata and Mustapha Ould Youcef, as both attempt to revive heritage in a modern form that corresponds to the contemporary age's aspirations toward renewal. However, each follows a different approach in reviving this heritage. Mustapha Ould Youcef seeks to revive it on the basis of the conditions and characteristics of the virtual world, whereas Hamid Raqata seeks to revive it through the perspectives of modernity, contemporaneity, and intellectual renewal, as well as through a heightened awareness of modern literary writing.

Mustapha Ould Youcef and Hamid Raqata also differ in their methods of analyzing narrative texts. Mustapha Ould Youcef draws upon the critical theoretical frameworks he established for this emerging literary project, employing the aforementioned structural components in his analysis. Hamid Raqata, by contrast, does not give particular attention to these elements; instead, he provides a description and interpretation of the ideological and cultural phenomena present in the very short

story. Mustapha Ould Youcef, however, focuses on these structural components and highlights their narrative interactions with those ideological and cultural phenomena.

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- ^{xxviii} Mustafa Ould Youcef, *In Criticism of an Imagined: Narrative Reduction (From the Short Story to the Very Short Story)*, p. 37.
- ^{xxix} *Ibid.*, p. 38.
- ^{xxx} The same reference, p. 38.
- ^{xxxi} Adapted from the same reference, p. 39.