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Configurations of the Past in the Narrative Imagination : Hamid Abdelkader's Prisoner of the Sun Between Reality and Narrative

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Abstract :

This article examines the representation of the past within the fictional imagination through the novel *Asir al-Shams* (Prisoner of the Sun) by Hamid Abdel Qader, starting from the nature of the relationship between the referential and the imaginary in the retrieval of historical events and facts. At the same time, it seeks to uncover how memory and imagination contribute to transforming the past from factual material into a new narrative construct, through the employment of flashback, dialogue, description, and the construction of characters and setting.

The research also highlights that memory does not retrieve the past in an identical manner, but rather selects and rearranges it according to the self's perspective and the needs of the present, where the real and the imagined intertwine. It concludes that the past in the novel *Asir al-Shams* does not appear as a bygone time or fixed historical material, but rather its presence is shaped through the dialectic of reality, memory, and narration, which grants it human, artistic, and semantic dimensions that go beyond mere historical documentation.

Keywords: Past; fictional imagination; memory; narrative; reality and the imaginary; flashback; Prisoner of the Sun.

Introduction:

The past is one of the most prominent components in the Arabic novelistic experience, owing to the vast possibilities it affords for retrieving memory, interrogating history, and uncovering the transformations that have contributed to shaping the individual and society. However, the evocation of the past in the novel does not occur as ready-made material that moves from reality to the text through an unregulated transfer; rather, it undergoes a complex process of selection, rearrangement, and interpretation, rendering it an active element in the construction of the fictional imagination.

For when the novel retrieves the past, it distances itself from being mere facts and events to transform into narrative material that is reshaped according to the author's vision, the mechanisms of narration, and the specificity of the novelistic experience. The particularity of this presence stems from the nature of the ambiguous relationship between reality and fiction; for the past appears, on one hand, to be linked to referents, events, characters, and places that belong to a world prior to the text, while on the other hand, it is subject to the logic of the novel, which reproduces it within a different linguistic and artistic space. Thus, it can be said that the past presented by the novel cannot be viewed as an exact replica of what happened, nor can it be entirely separated from its factual reference, for it resides in a middle ground where memory intermingles with imagination, the referent with fiction, and the event with the story.

This means that if reality grants the past its initial existence, memory grants it the capacity for retrieval, while narrative grants it its new existence within the text. The matter at this level is not about seeking the past in the novel as it truly was, but rather about uncovering the manner in which the past transforms from a referential fact into an imagined construct, and from an elapsed time into a time that continues to be present through language and narration.

Based on this premise, the novel *Asir al-Shams* (Prisoner of the Sun) by Hamid Abdel Qader acquires special significance, as it offers the possibility of approaching this liminal zone between reality and narration, as well as tracing the manner in which the past is retrieved and reshaped within the fictional imagination. For in this particular novel, the past does not appear merely as a temporal framework for events; rather, its presence reflects an interaction with memory, characters, places, and narrative time, thereby becoming part of the process of meaning construction. Hence, the novel *Asir al-Shams* raises a fundamental question about the nature of the relationship between the referential and the imaginary, and about how narration can transform factual material into a novelistic experience open to rereading and interpretation.

The Past: From Memory to Fictional Imagination

The past does not settle in the novel at the limits of being a time that has elapsed and become detached from the present, due to the multiple forms of its retrieval and representation within narrative discourse. When the novel summons the past, it does not conjure it in its original image; rather, it reconstructs it through two intertwined pathways: the first is the transition of the past from being a prior reality to being a material amenable to fictionalization, and the second is the passage of this material through memory, which selects from the past and rearranges its elements according to the self's perspective and the needs of the present. Thus, the fictional imagination becomes a domain where the truth of what happened intersects with the image of what remains of it in memory, with writing undertaking its reformulation within a new narrative structure, for "the search for memory is then considered a response to identities that have suffered damage and lost their balance"

Based on that, approaching the presence of the past in the fictional imagination requires first examining its nature as material for fictionalization, as well as uncovering the manner in which it transforms from a factual reference into an artistic and semantic element within the novel. Then, one must turn to memory as a fundamental mediator in retrieving this past and reconstructing it narratively. Between this and that, the image of the novelistic past takes shape—an image that does not rely on reproduction or exact correspondence, but rather on selection, transformation, and rearrangement. This contributes to making the past capable of being narrated anew and of acquiring, within the text, connotations that go beyond merely retrieving what happened. However, this does not preclude the relationship between the past and fictional narration from resting on the idea that "the novel must be faithful to history, despite its invented protagonist and imagined plot"², for the novel's fidelity to history does not mean reproducing it or transmitting it in its documentary form; rather, it requires preserving its significance and its major referents, particularly at a time when fictionalization allows the novelist to reconstruct that past according to the exigencies of artistic narration, which simultaneously enables its re-representation and the bestowal of human and narrative meaning upon it, thereby creating a space in which the faithfulness to the historical referent coexists with the freedom of the imagination.

For the writing of "the historical novel is fraught with pitfalls, because the characters in history have a specific existence, or in other words, they are pre-prepared, as are the historical events, place, time, and so on. The artist must mould them in a new form, not transmit them as they are in history"³, this places novelistic writing before a precise equation based on combining the exigencies of the historical referent with the imperatives of artistic fictionalization. For when the past moves from the domain of historical documentation to the domain of novelistic representation, it moves from a referential system to a narrative system in which it loses its purely documentary character and becomes susceptible to reshaping according to the logic of narration—without this meaning the erasure of its referentiality or the emptying of its historical significance. Hence, the legitimacy of fictionalization is determined by its capacity to reorganize and interpret historical material, not by fabricating a past alien to it.

The Past as Material for Fictionalization:

When the novel summons the past, it does not summon a complete time waiting to be transferred from one place to another; rather, it summons material amenable to reshaping. For the past, once it enters the space of the novel, relinquishes part of its referential independence to become an element within an artistic structure in which characters, events, places, and times interact. Thus, the novelistic past cannot be understood through the question of the extent of its correspondence to the actual past, because correspondence is not the primary aim of fictionalization. The openness of the past to the act of fictionalization establishes "a narratively significant artistic entity, and it becomes possible for history to benefit from novelistic materials to construct a historically significant narrative entity"⁴, this conception is based on transcending the dividing lines between historical discourse and novelistic discourse, and revealing the possibility of interaction between

them at the level of meaning construction and the representation of the past. For when the novel invests historical material, it does not suffice with summoning it as a set of fixed facts; rather, it works to transform it into a narratively significant artistic entity, by subjecting it to the mechanisms of fictionalization, reorganization, and selection, thereby bestowing upon it an aesthetic structure that transcends the documentary function.

Conversely, the effect of this interaction is not confined to a single direction; for historical discourse itself can benefit from some of the techniques and materials afforded by novelistic narration, which allows it to construct a historically significant narrative entity that makes the past a shared domain for reconstruction and representation. This necessitates distinguishing

between the past in its historical existence and the past in its narrative presence—especially when it exists within a semantic space where memories and emotions accumulate. For fictionalization in this sense does not necessarily mean inventing the past out of nothing; rather, it means reorganizing past material within a new narrative system. The factual event does not enter the novel in its raw form, because it passes through the writer, then through language, then through the structure of narration, reaching the reader having acquired a new form and a new specificity.

Here the specificity of the novel in its relationship to the past becomes clear: it neither competes with history in documenting facts, nor vies with memory in preserving them; rather, it grants the past another possibility of existence. For if the document seeks to fix the event, the novel seeks to interrogate it; and if history asks what happened, the novel asks about how people lived through that event and the impact it left on their souls, still lingering in memory.

The presence of the past in the fictional imagination is also founded, on the other hand, on the capacity of facts and events to be re-represented within a narrative structure different from their initial referential existence. For the novel works to "re-represent them in a narrative formula whereby events and facts are transferred from their discordant and fragmented existence to a new existence marked by harmony and interconnectedness within a temporal trajectory"⁵. It is not determined merely by summoning past facts or evoking them within the text; rather, it is founded on subjecting them to a process of reshaping and narrative organization, whereby they are transferred from the level of historical existence to the level of narrative existence, within which the relationships between events are determined according to a specific logic of arrangement, succession, and connection along a narrative trajectory that grants them a degree of coherence and the ability to alter the system of their presence within discourse—as a reservoir of semantic possibilities that narration can rediscover.

More importantly, fictionalization does not operate only at the level of major events; rather, it infiltrates the small details—such as the manner of describing place, the features of character, imagined dialogue, inner sensations, the arrangement of memories, and even the silence that separates two events. It is precisely in these details that the difference takes shape between the past as it was and the past as it becomes within the novel.

Memory and the Narrative Reconstruction of the Past:

If fictionalization is the space in which the past is reshaped, then memory is one of the most important gates through which this past enters the novel. For memory does not preserve the past as a camera preserves a static image; rather, it reproduces it each time it summons it. It selects, deletes, connects, adds, and rearranges details according to the impact the event has left on the self—as we have previously indicated—because memory is not a repository of the past so much as it is a way of constructing the past. Memory may be individual, retrieving an experience lived by a particular character, or it may be collective, bearing the traces of an experience lived by a society or an entire generation. In either case, the past does not appear in its complete form, but rather emerges in the form of fragments: an old scene, an absent face, a house, a road, a voice, a smell, an incident, or a word that remains lodged in consciousness. These fragments afford the novel the possibility of constructing the past gradually.

For the reader does not always receive the past in the form of a complete narrative; rather, they may piece it together from scattered flashbacks, dispersed references, dialogues, characters' memories, and objects that summon what has been lost. Hence, memory is closely connected to the act of fictionalization, as it allows the novelist access to aspects of past experience that the historical novel in its official form may not accommodate, for "the novelist seeks to reveal the faces of truth that history and historians have overlooked"⁶. This pursuit of revealing the faces of truth should not be understood as a competition with history in establishing facts, nor as an invitation to substitute the novel for the historian; rather, it is an attempt to reconsider the settled image of the past and to uncover human, emotional, and social dimensions that remained outside historical representation or did not receive sufficient attention. For novelistic memory retrieves what the document does not necessarily preserve, and summons voices, experiences, and events from the margins, reintegrating them into a temporal narrative that grants them presence and significance.

Hence, novelistic time differs from real time; real time moves in a single direction, whereas the time of the novel can go backward, interrupt the sequence, repeat an event, and present a single moment from different angles. This allows the past to be present in the text as a time amenable to retelling, where this engagement with memory finds its narrative translation in the technique of flashback, which enables narration to transcend the linearity of time and retrieve past events from within the narrative present.

However, narrative flashback in this framework serves two functions: a temporal function and also a semantic function. For when the narration returns to the past, it does so because something in the present needs explanation, or because a certain character needs to understand themselves, or because a current event cannot have its meaning grasped except by returning to its roots.

Thus, memory transforms into a bridge between two times: the past and the present. Yet this bridge is not a neutral one, for it reshapes the past according to the self's position in the present.

Therefore, the past that a character remembers at a particular moment may not be the same past they would have remembered at another moment.

Hence, the relationship between memory and narration is established such that memory provides narration with its material, and narration gives memory its form. Between the two, the novelistic past is born as a new construct that derives its existence from the interaction between experience, remembrance, and storytelling. In the context of narratively reconstructing the past, memory acquires its significance through the multiplicity of narratives and voices that preserve different aspects of human experience. For arriving at the truth of the past cannot be achieved by confining oneself to a single narrative or a unidimensional perspective; rather, it requires listening to the multiplicity of testimonies and representations produced by memory. This is grounded in the premise: "Listen to everything and believe everything, then quietly discern the truth—that is the optimal way to know history⁷, this confirms that knowledge of the past remains linked to the multiplicity of its sources and the diversity of its narratives, and that historical truth is not exhausted in a single narrative but is rather shaped through the interaction of multiple voices, experiences, and perspectives.

This vision is connected to the nature of novelistic memory, which does not treat the past as a single, complete truth, but rather retrieves it through the multiplicity of selves who lived through it or retained some trace of it. Each memory offers a part of the past and reveals a particular angle of it, which makes the multiplicity of memories a gateway to reassembling the overall image of the past. Here, narrative fiction becomes a space for hosting these multiple voices and rearranging them within a narrative structure that allows for the juxtaposition and divergence of perspectives, rather than subjecting them to a single voice that monopolizes the representation of truth—including those voices that remained marginalized or absent from official historical narration. In this way, it makes the retrieval of the past a cognitive act that does not merely collect memories, but seeks to understand the relationships that organize them and to uncover the connotations they carry, in order to construct a more composite image of it.

The Past in *Asir al-Shams*: From Reality to Narration:

If the past, at its theoretical level, transforms from retrieved material to material amenable to fictionalization, then examining the novel *Asir al-Shams* allows us to uncover how this transformation materializes within the narrative text. For the past in the novel does not appear isolated from its factual referents, nor does it reproduce them in a documentary form; rather, it enters into a complex relationship between what refers to reality and what the imagination reshapes in an image that summons the past as a narrative act in which referentiality intertwines with fictionalization, and in which the event is transformed from a fact prior to the text into an experience reproduced through language and narration.

Hamid Abdel Qader says: "Influenced by Romanticism, he became perpetually desirous of distancing himself from those turbulent atmospheres, so he drifted in search of different places filled

with clear, blue skies and expressive characters. Hence, he became forever yearning for the Eastern woman and flowing enchantment, finding her in the distant cities of the sun, conjured for him by books about the East that he devoured greedily—books written by spies in the guise of travellers who had spent many years of their lives moving between cities where the sun never set, so they recorded its temptations and the consolations it granted to weary souls like his own. And from the moment he began reading those books regularly, imagination became fundamental in his life, and the sun of the East became a healing balm that he constantly wished to feel touching his ailing body"⁸ , It is evident from this passage that the author moves from historical reality to the fictional narrative by recalling the character's past and artistically reshaping it. He does not merely present the events experienced by Delacroix; rather, he reveals his psychological and intellectual motivations by linking his fascination with Romanticism and his desire to escape his troubled reality to his reading of books that provided him with an imagined representation of the East.

The use of past-tense verbs such as **"was influenced," "became," "began to read,"** and **"came to be"** also contributes to constructing a narrative sequence that reveals the character's development and his transition from a troubled reality to a world of imagination.

Furthermore, the author transforms reality into an imagined space imbued with psychological and symbolic connotations through description and figurative imagery, particularly the images of **"the sun of the East"** and **"the healing balm."**

Accordingly, the past in *Asir al-Shams* was reconstructed within the narrative through memory, imagination, and the character's consciousness as novelistic material that revealed the character's relationship to place and the East, and highlighted how imagination and reading contributed to shaping her/his image of reality.

The importance of this approach stems from the fact that the transition from reality to the novel does not occur spontaneously, but rather passes through a set of choices and narrative mechanisms that bestow upon factual material its novelistic form. Hamid Abdel Qader selects from the past what he deems worthy of retrieval, rearranges events, distributes information, determines points of view, and invests in time, place, and characters to construct a narrative world that does not match reality even as it remains connected to it.

Accordingly, the investigation into the representation of the past in *Asir al-Shams* requires, first, tracing the nature of the relationship between the referential and the imaginary in retrieving the past, and then uncovering the manner in which factual material is transformed into a narrative construct that produces its own connotations. This leads us to interrogate the past within the novel through two complementary levels: the level of its retrieval—between what is grounded in the referent and what the imagination affords in terms of formative possibilities—and the level of transforming this referent into a narrative structure, in the formulation of which narrative techniques, mechanisms of constructing time, characters, places, and points of view intervene.

Hamid Abdel Qader says: "After a moment of silence, he added, saying: 'The East is a woman waiting for the European to liberate her.' He ran his hand through his thick hair and continued: 'I will paint a painting that makes light spread in every dark place, where there is darkness, despite the sun. I will take it upon myself to make the white man's burden possible in the savage jungles of Africa'"⁹ This passage moves from historical reality to novelistic narration by evoking the Orientalist and colonial perception of the East and reformulating it in the character's own words. The phrase "The East is a woman waiting for the European to liberate her" encapsulates a colonial vision that portrays the East in a position of helplessness, while presenting the European as saviour and liberator. In this way, Hamid Abdel Qader transforms a historical discourse linked to colonialism into a novelistic discourse through which he reveals the nature of the mentality that governed the European's relationship with the East.

The transition to narration is also evident through direct dialogue, as the writer allowed the character to express, in her own words, her perception of the East and Africa. The discourse thus served to reveal her consciousness and ideas more than being a mere transmission of events. The writer also employed movement and description in his phrase: "He ran his hand through his thick hair and continued," combining physical action with speech, which transformed the historical idea into a living narrative scene.

Conversely, the image of "light" versus "darkness" reveals the ideological dimension of this discourse; for light refers to Europe and its claim to civilization and enlightenment, while Africa and the East are portrayed as spaces of darkness and savagery. This connotation becomes even more evident in the phrases "the white man's burden" and "the savage jungles of Africa"—expressions that directly evoke the logic of colonial justification, which presented European intervention as a civilizing mission.

Thus, the writer did not transmit colonial reality in a documentary manner, but rather transformed it into novelistic narration through dialogue, description, and symbolic imagery, while simultaneously revealing the character's consciousness. Historical reality thus became narrative material that allows the reader to perceive how colonial discourse was formed, while at the same time the novel exposes its contradictions; for the claim of "liberation" and "light" turns into a discourse that justifies the domination of the Other, thus, the transition from reality to narration is embodied in the transformation of historical colonial thought into a position, dialogue, character, and scene within the novel.

Through this transition from the referential to the narrative, the specificity of *Asir al-Shams* in reproducing the past becomes clear—not as material preserved from reality on one hand, nor as a world reconstructed within the fictional imagination on the other, but as a dynamic interplay between both.

Retrieving the Past Between the Referential and the Imaginary:

The past in *Asir al-Shams* occupies a position that goes beyond the function of a temporal backdrop for events, as it becomes part of the fabric through which the novelistic vision of the world is shaped. This is because the retrieval of the past in the text does not occur outside narration, but rather from within it. Therefore, this past remains suspended between what refers to the factual referent and what the imagination constructs from possibilities, in an image that mediates between the two scenes.

The importance of this in-betweenness lies in the fact that it places the reader before a past that appears familiar and close to reality, yet at the same time cannot be reduced to it. For the novel *Asir al-Shams* invests the referent not to confirm it in a documentary manner, but rather to reformulate it within its own artistic logic. The referent gives the past its initial features, but it does not give it its final image; the reason for this is that when the event enters the novel, it becomes subject to the authority of the narrator, and to the manner in which events are arranged, and to the distribution of information, the rhythm of narration, and the language of description and dialogue. This is what makes the referential truth not disappear, but rather transform from a truth outside the text into material within the text.

Hamid Abdel Qader says: "The people of Al-'Awfiya opened their eyes to death, and they were slaughtered one after another. Everything was taken, rather stolen, with no distinction made between age or gender; killing was carried out blindly. Upon their return, the soldiers placed the heads of the people of Al-'Awfiya at the tips of their rifle spears. They knew all of this just as they knew that all the tribe's livestock had been sold, and that the remaining spoils—among them bloodstained bracelets and earrings of women—were displayed in the market of Bab 'Azzoun"¹⁰

This passage retrieves a historical past linked to colonial violence in Algeria, as it evokes what the people of Al-'Awfiya suffered in terms of killing and plunder. The writer transforms the historical event into a highly impactful narrative scene, where the referential dimension is evident in the presence of elements that refer to a specific historical reality, such as "the people of Al-'Awfiya," "the soldiers," "the market of Bab 'Azzoun," the sale of the tribe's livestock, and the display of spoils. These are references that lend the event a realistic character and connect it to a collective memory that transcends the boundaries of fictional imagination.

Conversely, fictionalization intervenes in the way this event is constructed within the narrative. The author does not present it as a dry historical account; rather, he reshapes it through scene, description, and sensory details, such as **"the heads of the people of Al-Awfiya"** and **"the bracelets and earrings of women stained with blood."** These details give the past a vivid and tragic image, contributing to the transformation of the historical event into a fictional scene that evokes its horror and enables the reader to engage with it emotionally.

The recollection of the past is also manifested through third-person narration and the use of past-tense verbs such as **"opened," "slaughtered," "took," "stole," "occurred," "placed," "sold,"** and **"displayed"**, through this, Hamid Abdel Qader retrieves past events and rearranges them within the

narrative. The role of this retrieval in this passage was not limited to transmitting what happened; rather, it contributed to revealing the scale of the violence inflicted upon the population, particularly through the phrases "no distinction was made between age or gender" and "killing was carried out blindly."

Accordingly, the past in this passage is based on the interaction of the referential and the imaginary: the referential gives the event its historical foundation and credibility, while the imaginary gives it its artistic form and emotional impact, in order to evoke the collective memory of colonial violence and highlight its human consequences. Thus, the past is transformed from a concluded historical event into a living experience within the narrative.

In *Asir al-Shams*, the significance of this transformation lies in the fact that the past is not retrieved as something separate from the characters, but rather as part of their consciousness, memory, and position in the world, for it inhabits them, influences their view of the present, and gives meaning to certain experiences.

Because the process of fictionalization does not stop at rearranging events, but extends to the construction of the characters themselves. When a novelistic character carries a particular past, they do not merely become a witness to it, but rather become a medium through which that past passes. Through their consciousness, memory, and emotions, the past takes on its human form. Herein lies the power of the novel: it can give the past what historical records cannot—a voice, a feeling, and a human experience.

Accordingly, the past in *Asir al-Shams* moves constantly between two poles: the pole of the referent, which links it to a world prior to the text, and the pole of fictionalization, which grants it its existence within the text itself. Conversely, the value of this novel lies not in choosing one of the two poles, but rather in the space that arises between them—a space in which reality becomes narratable, and narration becomes capable of reinterpreting reality.

Transforming Reality into a Narrative Construct:

The transition from reality to the novel does not occur directly; rather, it passes through a series of narrative operations that reshape it and grant it a new order. Reality in itself does not come arranged according to a beginning, middle, and end, nor does it present itself through a specific narrator, nor does it distribute its information according to the reader's need; the novel, however, does all of this.

Because a factual event becomes novelistic when it enters a network of relationships that determine its position within the story. It may be presented before another event that was prior to it in reality, or some of its information may be delayed, or it may be recalled from a different character's perspective, such that time attempts to transcend the framework linked to events and becomes a tool for producing meaning through the technique of flashback. Narration allows the past to intrude upon the present, transforming time into a flexible structure in which times coexist

and intertwine, so that what was concluded in reality becomes capable of presence once again through memory and storytelling.

The narrator also plays a decisive role in this process, for choosing a particular angle from which to narrate the past simultaneously means excluding other angles, moving away from the idea of presenting the complete truth, and being content with presenting what he knows, what he sees, and what he wishes to reveal. Here, narration becomes an act of selection and an act of reporting.

As for place, it does not remain merely a geographical space; rather, it becomes a carrier of memory. The place through which the characters have passed may retrieve the past simply by its appearance, becoming a stimulus for recollection, so that geography intertwines with time, and place becomes capable of storing what the characters cannot express explicitly and directly.

Thus, the character is transformed from an individual linked to a specific reality into a narrative entity bearing a history, motives, and memory. It is this transformation that allows the novel to render the past a tangible experience.

Hamid Abdel Qader says: "He was fascinated by the idea of the open door, for keeping the door closed in his painting would mean that Algeria was not permitted and not allowable. How could he close the door when the entry of soldiers and settlers into the country had become possible? He knew that his task was to urge people to accompany the soldiers to settle in open places."¹¹

This passage highlights one of the fundamental mechanisms in the formation of novelistic discourse, namely the transformation of referential reality—particularly historical and political reality—into a narrative reality in whose construction narrative vision, fictionalization, and symbolism intertwine.

In addition, the passage is founded upon a clear historical referent, namely the entry of soldiers and settlers into the country and the practice of settlement—a reality that refers to a specific colonial context. However, this reality undergoes a process of narrative reshaping through its incorporation into the character's consciousness, as she is struck by the notion of the "open door," transforming the historical event into an object of contemplation and the production of meaning. Hence, the historical event becomes part of the character's experience and perception, rather than remaining mere external information conveyed by the narrator.

The mechanism of fictionalization becomes even more evident in the symbolic structure of the door. On its literal level, the door is a spatial element associated with opening and closing; but on the semantic level, it transforms into a sign of the possibility of crossing, appropriation, and the forced opening of the domain to soldiers and settlers. Therefore, the phrase "the open door" does not merely serve a descriptive function; rather, it encapsulates an entire historical situation. The open space becomes a narrative equivalent to a political reality that allows the colonizer's entry and enables settlement.

The passage also rests on the tension between the spatial signifier and the historical signified. Closing the door, according to the logic of the image, presupposes prohibition and protection, whereas the historical reality evoked by the character contradicts this, because "the entry of soldiers and settlers into the country had become possible." Through this contradiction, the narration moves from representing reality to interpreting it and revealing its paradoxes. The writer employs the artistic image to reread historical reality, making place a means of embodying political and social transformations.

On the other hand, the narrative perspective contributed to the construction of this reality through the character's perception and stance, as is evident in the phrase: "He was fascinated by the idea of the open door." Thus, objective reality is transformed into a perceived and interpreted reality—that is, into a narrative reality in which the self intervenes to bestow upon it its own significance.

It attempts to create a new novelistic reality based on it and by returning to it, for this new reality is not less valuable because it is imagined; rather, its value lies precisely in that it allows for a re-examination of reality from an angle that was not possible while it was occurring. *Asir al-Shams* does not make the past preserved material, but rather introduces it into a narrative process that grants it a new structure. The past becomes events, characters, memories, and places, and these elements in turn become part of a narrative system that directs reading and redistributes meaning.

Thus, the distance between reality and narration becomes clear. It is not a distance of separation so much as a distance of transformation. Reality is the starting point, narration is the process of transformation, and the imaginary is the space that embraces the result.

Conclusion

It becomes clear from the foregoing that the presence of the past in the novel is not based on retrieving it as a bygone time or fixed historical material, but rather on reproducing it within the fictional imagination according to narrative and aesthetic mechanisms in which memory interacts with imagination, the referent with the story, and reality with subjective vision. For the past, once it moves from the referential domain to the novelistic domain, loses its linear and closed character, and becomes susceptible to rearrangement, interpretation, and the production of new connotations that are connected to the present as much as they are connected to the past.

The examination of the relationship between the past, memory, and the fictional imagination has led to the conclusion that memory does not perform a purely retrievable function, but rather assumes a constructive role in shaping the past through selection, deletion, rearrangement, and the evocation of details that have remained lodged in individual and collective consciousness. In turn, fictionalization undertakes the reorganization of this mnemonic material within a narrative structure that grants it coherence and harmony, transforming it from fragments and scattered experiences into a narrative world open to reading and interpretation. Hence, the past in the

novel is no longer merely what happened, but also becomes how what happened is remembered, how it is narrated, and how it is interpreted.

The novel *Asir al-Shams* by Hamid Abdel Qader has likewise clearly revealed this complex relationship, for the writer did not treat historical past as ready-made material for transmission or documentation, but rather reconstructed it through a set of narrative mechanisms, most notably flashback, dialogue, description, character construction, the employment of place, the adoption of narrative perspective, and the intensification of symbolism. Thanks to these mechanisms, facts were transferred from their historical existence prior to the text to a new narrative existence, in which events became linked to the characters' consciousness, emotions, and memory—a transformation that granted them human and semantic dimensions that transcend their documentary dimension.

Accordingly, it can be said that the past in *Asir al-Shams* moves within a triadic dialectic consisting of reality, memory, and narration. Reality grants it its referentiality, memory grants it the capacity for retrieval and reshaping, while narration grants it its new existence within the text. From this interaction, the fictional imagination is formed—one that does not content itself with retrieving the past, but rather re-examines it, reinterprets it, and renders it present in consciousness through language and storytelling. Thus, the novel affirms that the past does not end with the passing of its historical time, but remains susceptible to reconstruction whenever memory retrieves it and narration bestows upon it a new form and new meaning.

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