

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.36719/2706-6185/48/82-93>

Sihamdi Barkati

Mohamed Boudiaf University of M'sila
<https://orcid.org/0009-0001-7949-8141>
sihamdi.barkati@univ-msila.dz

Amar Alioui

Mohamed Boudiaf University of M'sila
<https://orcid.org/0009-0005-5157-3874>
amar.alioui@univ-msila.dz

Ali Houiche

Mohamed Boudiaf University of M'sila
<https://orcid.org/0009-0001-3470-8221>
houiche.ali@univ-msila.dz

Historical Figures in the Algerian Novel: Roles and Representations The Novel "The Prince" by Wassini Al-Araj

Abstract

Roles and representations are two crucial elements in the construction of the historical novel, as they determine how characters interact with events and contribute to conveying the writer's intellectual vision across eras. The historical novel does not merely recount facts; it adds psychological and social dimensions to the characters, making them more vivid. Through representation (i.e., portraying the character as imagined by the author), the novelist reshapes historical heroes with traits that may differ from official narratives, adding dramatic depth and enabling readers to empathize with them as individuals rather than as abstract symbols. This article explores these aspects using the semiotic approach to understand representations and historical roles, aiming to depict events and preserve the narrative texts from a semiotic perspective.

Keywords: *Representations, historical roles, historical novel, semiotic approach, fictional character*

Sihamdi Barkati

Msila Mohamed Boudiaf Universiteti
<https://orcid.org/0009-0001-7949-8141>
sihamdi.barkati@univ-msila.dz

Amar Alioui

Msila Mohamed Boudiaf Universiteti
<https://orcid.org/0009-0005-5157-3874>
amar.alioui@univ-msila.dz

Əli Houiche

Msila Mohamed Boudiaf Universiteti
<https://orcid.org/0009-0001-3470-8221>
houiche.ali@univ-msila.dz

Əlcəzair romanında tarixi şəxsiyyətlər: rollar və təmsillər Vassini Əl-Aracın "Şahzadə" romanı

Xülasə

Rollar və təsvirlər tarixi romanın qurulmasında iki mühüm elementdir, çünki onlar personajların hadisələrlə necə qarşılıqlı əlaqədə olduğunu müəyyənləşdirir və yazıçının intellektual baxışını dövrlər arasında çatdırmağa kömək edir. Tarixi roman sadəcə faktları danışmır; personajlara psixoloji və

sosial ölçülər əlavə edərək onları daha canlı edir. Təqdimat vasitəsilə (yəni, personajı müəllifin təsəvvür etdiyi kimi təsvir etməklə) romançı tarixi qəhrəmanları rəsmi povestlərdən fərqlənə bilən əlamətlərlə yenidən formalaşdırır, dramatik dərinlik əlavə edir və oxuculara mücərrəd simvollar kimi deyil, fərdlər kimi onlarla empatiya qurmağa imkan verir. Bu məqalə hadisələri təsvir etmək və povest mətnlərini semiotik nöqteyi-nəzərdən qorumaq məqsədi ilə təmsilləri və tarixi rolları anlamaq üçün semiotik yanaşmadan istifadə edərək bu aspektləri araşdırır.

Açar sözlər: Təmsillər, tarixi rollar, tarixi roman, semiotik yanaşma, bədii personaj

Introduction

One of the most prominent challenges faced by novelists—especially writers of historical fiction—is dealing with pre-established characters that come with defined features and a specific cultural background. These are figures documented by official history, which has etched their traits and recorded their beginnings and ends, thereby imposing constraints on the novelist's freedom and limiting their creative imagination.

However, the novelist's task goes beyond merely recounting historical events; it extends to reshaping them through a contemporary lens, shaped by the context of the era in which the text is written and by the writer's own ideology, which reflects their values and the goals they seek to achieve. While history may be seen as an objective and fixed past, it is also a mutable entity—every era reinterprets the past in new ways through the narratives and expressions it inherits. This understanding becomes deeper when the present offers objective conditions similar to those that prevailed in the past.

The historical novel is also considered one of the most complex literary genres, as it stands at the intersection between established facts and the writer's imagination—between what historians have recorded and what the novelist reimagines. (Mustafa, p. 112) The writer is confronted with pre-existing, well-known characters, which limits the scope for innovation and presents challenges related to how these historical figures can be reshaped in a way that aligns with the writer's intellectual and contemporary vision.

Research

The novel *The Book of the Prince* is rich with both historical and fictional characters. Among those confirmed in historical records, we find, in addition to Emir Abdelkader, Father Debouche, and the narrator John Moby, several other figures within the Emir's army and the French army and its commanders. Moreover, numerous fictional characters contribute to blending reality with mystery in its finest details and play a role in the development and progression of events. These include Sidi Al-A'raj, the storyteller, the town crier, the children chasing dogs to stave off their hunger, the nanny Nora, the old woman Khanata, the hunchbacked man, and others. The traits given to these fictional characters, as well as the roles assigned to them by the novelist, make them closely resemble historical figures—or what might be called “quasi-historical” characters. (Al-Zamralli, p. 26)

As a novelist—an artist rather than a historian—he undoubtedly seeks to achieve artistic expression without distorting the truth, insofar as it reveals the novelist's approach to dealing with pre-established historical figures and their intellectual, cultural, and religious backgrounds. Knowing that the writer, when constructing a fictional character based on his interaction with his experiential reality, aims to present a vision of the world he lives in—by creating that world as he imagines it or as he perceives it according to his stance toward it. (Said, 2006, p. 141) By examining the cultural and ideological background of the novelist, we are prompted to ask the following question: Did Al-A'raj manage to find his desired subject in the figure of the Emir? And was he able to embody an ideology that may, perhaps, contrast with that of the Emir? Moreover, did he succeed in revealing the hidden dimensions of the Emir's character—as a religious scholar, a Sufi mystic, and a spiritual leader before being a political and military one? And what are the things that history did not say about the Emir, which the novel seeks to reveal?

1– Historical Characters in *The Book of the Prince*:

The pursuit of truth is what led the novelist to select fully developed artistic characters. A fully developed character is one that appears in the story—when it does appear—without undergoing any transformation in its core makeup; it only changes in relation to other characters, while its behavior retains a consistent nature. For example, (Al-Zamrali, p. 27) the character of the Emir, as the protagonist of the story, shows no noticeable change in his development or goals. Rather, he reflects his ideology with subtle shifts, allowing the narrative to highlight the major causes of economic, social, cultural, and even religious decline during the historical period being portrayed. At the same time, the novel reveals the primary reasons behind the triumph of the Other—the West—and the collapse of the resistance, and how all of this is mirrored in the contemporary period during which the novel was written. In order to give space for this ideology to emerge and for the fictional reality to harmonize with historical events and characters, the author employed techniques that liberated him from the constraints of predefined characters and rigid historical events, allowing him to avoid the trap of mere documentation. The most important of these techniques are:

- **Use of the Third-Person Narrator:** In *The Book of the Prince*, two different references interact: a historical reference and an artistic one. The novelist draws his narrative presence from the historical dimension in general and engages in intertextuality in particular—as the author subtly leads us to believe—with a book written by Father Debouche titled *Abd el-Kader in the Château of Amboise*. This intertextual link led the author to choose a foreign narrator imbued with Christian religious thought: John Moby. He is tasked with narrating the events and presenting the Emir's character along with other figures, despite the potential risk of distorting the truth or misrepresenting historical facts. (Mohammed, p. 117) For this reason, the writer often resorts to documenting the information by citing some of its historical sources, such as the book by Monsignor Debouche, *Abd el-Kader in the Château of Amboise*, which was dedicated to Mr. Louis-Napoleon Bonaparte, President of the French Republic, and authored by Monsignor Antoine. At the bottom of the page, the word “Bordeaux” is printed in bold letters, beneath which are the details of the printing and lithography: H. Fay, 139 Saint Catherine Street, April 1849. (Wasini, pp. 18-19)

- **The narrator says in one passage:** “In the morning, Ibn Dourane set out toward the capital, his face tense, his eyes swollen and empty from lack of sleep, broken by his last journey, carrying his final letter to Marshal Vallée. Its words echoed in his head every time the Emir dictated it to his personal scribe in his presence: *‘Peace be upon those who follow guidance. We have read the two letters and understood their content. I told you in previous messages that the Arabs from Oulhaça to El Kef are determined to wage jihad, and I can only stand beside those who pledged allegiance to me in this position. I have been faithful to all the commitments I made to you and kept you informed of every development, and here I am doing so truthfully’* (Wasini)...” (Wasini, pp. 264-265)

- **Use of the Second-Person Pronoun:** The second-person pronoun is most often used in the dialogues between the priest and the Emir. The priest takes on the role of uncovering the truth about the Emir and investigating the accuracy of the information related to his character. This intent is clearly stated in the preface, where he declares: “*While awaiting the opportunity to do something more significant, I believe it has now become my human duty to strive tirelessly in defense of the truth concerning this man, and to clear him of serious accusations falsely attributed to him—perhaps even to hasten the removal of the ambiguity and darkness that have long shrouded the face of truth.*” (Wasini, p. 6)” This was done through researching historical books as well as the direct dialogues the priest had with the Emir in his prison.

However, the priest's desire to uncover the truth in order to confront the Emir was aimed at freeing him from his imprisonment and convincing King "Bonaparte" to release him, thereby unshackling him from the chains he found himself bound by after declaring his surrender on certain terms. This was not for the purpose of condemning him, as the investigator and police commissioner described by Michel Butor do, who interrogate the character and "gather the various elements of the story that the main character or the narrator refuses to tell or cannot tell, and then organize these elements into a story told in the second person to expose the words that the narrator refused to disclose or could not express." (Michel, 1986, p. 69)

• **Use of the First-Person Pronoun:** This pronoun serves to distinguish between the past and present, allowing the historical character to become a living entity that moves beyond the past to relive in the present (Mohammed, p. 120). The historical character speaks about themselves, and the narrator permits them to recount stages and moments from their life, as the Emir does, allowing him to narrate his struggle against the French occupation and his suffering on all fronts. The Emir delves into the depths of his soul, where history cannot reach, and reveals his pain through the many dialogue scenes that fill the novel. These scenes differ from the temporal pauses, as they contribute to the development of the plot rather than hindering it, and they enable the characters to express themselves in their own voice.

The Emir says after assuming the responsibility of leadership, addressing his father:

"Father, do not make me regret a leadership I never sought. The wars of the ancient Muslims are no longer useful. Words are no longer enough. We thought we were the best at everything, but now we realize that others have made themselves from our empty noise." (Wasini, p. 83)

The freedom in dealing with historical characters grows, reaching the level of psychological reflection and internal monologue. This allows the novelist to exploit the historical gaps and fill them with a world of imagination. There are many examples of this, such as when the narrator, through the Emir's monologue, presents him as dissatisfied with his actions, which only serve to escalate conflicts and disperse his strength. The Emir mutters or speaks to someone while gazing into the void. His brother, Sidi Said, and Mustafa bin al-Tahami had **withdrawn to the tents when he began to destroy the city of Ain Madi**: *"This is how tyranny looks, and this is how it ends in the heart of ashes."* Then, he looked far beyond the city of Ain Madi, seeing nothing but more blazing fires, ashes, and the cries of children and the groans of pregnant women in their final months. He mounted his horse and returned to his camp. (Wasini, pp. 384-385)

In another passage, he says: *"While on horseback, when he saw the vanguard of Tariq ibn Ziyad approaching from afar, with Tariq at the forefront, urging those who hesitated either to cross the sea or accept a cheap death, he smelled the burning wood and heard the swords clashing in the dry, merciless air. 'Why did you burn your ships, Tariq? If only you knew how much we need them to cross the Moulouya waters! Why did you set fire to everything, my friend?'"*

But time had changed greatly, and he felt the vast distance that had crossed his memory: he had no ships to burn, as Tariq ibn Ziyad did when difficulties, betrayals, and treacheries mounted, and there was no solution but to save the circle as the ancients did or die for it." (Wasini, p. 196)

On the other hand, the world was changing quickly, which made the Emir fully realize: *"Why did I lose my final battle? The world was changing deeply and quickly. The sword and courage were no longer enough. The huge cannons, fast machines, ships, barges, and well-equipped and organized armies had changed all the balances. People resemble their eras."* These words he repeated whenever he cast his gaze over the massive buildings, the clean streets, and observed the people walking in order. *"The world was changing fast,"* he scratched the top of his head with a mechanical motion, unable to suppress his murmuring: *"We were defeated by all this,"* and he did not say another word. (Wasini, p. 289)

2- The Character of the Cultured Arab Prince:

The character of the Emir embodies many qualities; he is a political and military leader, a man of religion, and an intellectual who is keen on books and their study. He is always eager to return to them after circumstances have deprived him of the pleasure of sitting with them, which he expresses by saying: (Wasini, p. 175) *"How I wish this misery would end, and I could return to my books,"* and he would cry over a book more than over a loved one.

This is a message the author wanted to convey to the reader, starting with the title of the novel, *"The Book of the Emir,"* because a book preserves the memory of peoples and nations, which often forget their own memory, constantly denies the good deeds of others, and fails to acknowledge their contributions, letting them be forgotten as they are buried in graves. This is why the Emir also carries the burden of writing his own memoir. He says: *"We write our lives as we lived them, without addition or omission, better than having others recount it for us with their means, which are not always good."*

There is no better way than for a person to tell their own history and illuminate the path for those who shared with them the same longings and pains."(David, 2002, p. 45)

At the beginning of the novel, we encounter a scene of a conversation between a bookseller and Emir Abdelkader, who found solace and companionship in books, particularly those of Ibn Khaldun and Ibn Arabi. The narrator says: *"Abdelkader extended his hand toward the manuscript of Ibn Khaldun's Muqaddimah, in which he had written many notes. It had come from the Maghreb, from a merchant and scribe whom he had met only once, when he entered his tent during the midday rest and placed it in his lap, saying: 'Read it and pray for me, or curse me if you do not find what satisfies your heart.' Then he withdrew without even taking payment for it."*(Wasini, p. 289)

At the end of the novel, the narrator also describes one of the characters, "Noura," who cared for the Emir's children, "Mohieddine" and "Mohammad." She placed the book of signs in its leather cover as usual, like someone trying to preserve gold from damage, while murmuring in the face of one who was between wakefulness and sleep, his eyes half-closed: *"Sir, you must not leave the books exposed to dust and wind."* These words not only reflect "Noura's" care for the book but also carry a message from the writer to the Arab reader, in particular. The choice of this name, Noura, and others for the imagined characters in the novel was not arbitrary. It is, in fact, a deliberate artistic process that reflects the writer's ability to create and innovate. In the novel, names are never without meaning; they always conceal something, even if it's just the ordinary surface meaning... Naming the characters is always an important part of the creative process, and it carries significant considerations.(Wasini, p. 290).

The name "Noura" is significant, referring to a concept embedded in the collective Arab consciousness, primarily associated with knowledge. This is reflected in the famous saying, "Knowledge is light." The choice of the name "Mohammed" as a recipient of information also carries a particular connotation. Mohammed, regardless of being a real historical figure, is the common name (standard) that refers to any Arab Muslim. In our customs, when we don't know someone's name, we often call them "Ya Mohammed." Additionally, the novel "The Book" mirrors the first heavenly message "Read," which was sent to the Prophet Mohammed (PBUH), and its message is directed to Arabs and Muslims, urging them to return to reading—a practice that has long been exclusive to the West and continues to be so. The prince says: "I, too, long to go to the library to get a book to read, just as you do."(Said, 2006, p. 142).

Even in the midst of battle and in the absence of stability, the library was present; it was the most important thing for the prince in his circle or his mobile capital. But the most important thing was the library I created through my efforts, and it was the nucleus of the Takaddamet library, though circumstances forced us to move.

"Sad, as I told you a while ago, because the value of the books that were scattered and burned is countless."(Wasini, p. 44)

The reliance of Al-Araj on a cultural figure gives us realistic and historical images of the modern Arab intellectual, who lives in an internal conflict between two contradictory worlds: a world of values deeply ingrained within him, and he tries to rebel against it by being aware of them, and a world that clings to these values and fights for them. This contradiction creates a sense of alienation, rejection, and thus suffering.

This is why the novelist creates a dramatic conflict between two opposing sides, standing at the crossroads of two eras: one that harshly shows its face and one that retreats, leaving behind the bitter legacy of people who cling to its remnants and live on its memories.

The first side represents Prince Abdelkader, who, although living in the past, expresses the future through his thoughts, aspirations, and ambitions, especially through his project to awaken people from their slumber, change mentalities, build a state, and unify people under one roof, far from tribal authority. On the other side, we have his people, who are dominated by the sacred reference of the past, clinging to it, and which is destined to fade away due to its isolation in the past.

This is clearly evident in the novel. The prince's suffering did not stem from his struggle with the enemy, France, but from his conflict with his cultural, intellectual, and religious environment. Therefore, he sought to change everything on all levels, including religious ones. The narrator,

speaking through the prince, says in a dialogue with the priest: "Give me some of your time so I can learn about your religion, and if I am convinced by it, I will follow it." (Megal & Saad 2005, p. 130)

Even the concept of nationalism changed and became more about personal interest. Wherever your rights and the rights of your children are guaranteed, there lies nationalism. This is what Colonel Yusuf explained to Agha Ben Farhat when he mentioned the word "treason," saying: "Do not worry, Agha. I too abandoned the Ottomans when I found it more beneficial to serve a strong state that guarantees my rights and the rights of my children. Our generation, who have been educated, can no longer bear the backwardness of our people and relatives." (George, pp. 32-33)

The writer often tried to highlight the ongoing conflict between the "intellectual" prince, who reveres knowledge and scholars, and the environment in which he lives—an environment steeped in ignorance, poverty, and backwardness. The novel does not present the prince as a warrior against an enemy called France. Rather, all his battles are against his environment and his own people. Even the war he waged against France was not his own choice; he was pushed into it, finding himself caught between its grinding forces. He was always keen, after assuming leadership, to maintain peace and defend it by seeking treaties whenever possible. The prince says in a dialogue with the priest: "The meaning of jihad is not to kill everyone you encounter, but to raise the sword when the doors of peace are closed." (Hamid, p. 156)

Perhaps this passivity in the prince's character is intentional on the part of the novelist, aiming to break free from the constraint of the ready-made character. His actions are presented as a reflection of the actions of secondary characters. This is a technique that novelists have invented for dealing with such types of characters. We often find them transforming the character into a secondary one that hardly contributes to the direct event; rather, their role is depicted as a reflection of the actions of imagined characters. A person who was a hero in history might become a secondary character in the novel, and the opposite can be true as well. (Taha, p. 7)

The prince says, addressing the tribes that chose the path of war after Ibn Malik burned the Tafna Treaty and passed through the Gates of Iron: "If you want jihad and nothing else, as this is your will, I bow before the decisions you have collectively made, and I cannot go against the group."

He also says: "All the nobles, tribal chiefs, and officers refused to approve the annex of the July 4th Agreement, and I add my voice to theirs. I am, first and foremost (Wasini, p. 122), their servant and nothing more. I see what they see and walk the path they take." Then he addresses Ibn Duran, the "Jewish origin," who was trying to convince him to reconsider his decision to go to war: "O Ibn Duran, do you think I am a supporter of war? I know that wars are destructive and that we will taste the harsh bitterness. The allies are determined to go to war, and any action contrary to that will be considered a departure from the faith." The narrator also says: The prince had chosen the heights of Bani Saleh to conduct this war, which the tribes had chosen, and everyone adhered to it. (Abu Al-Aid, 1989, p. 106).

In any case, the writer uses the prince as the character who corrects the perspective of his followers. He defends others and attacks the ideas of his family and surroundings. This has created within him a sense of alienation and sufferings, making him live in constant anxiety about his relationship with himself or with his surroundings. He finds no solace except in the book of divine signs, specifically in the chapter about the stranger. The writer expressed these meanings when the prince was being led to his prison on board his ship: "He leaned back, then opened the book that had never left his hand, 'The Divine Signs,' and paused for a moment at the chapter about the stranger, which filled his heart and eyes: 'Oh you... where are you in relation to the stranger, whose exile in his homeland has prolonged, whose fortune and share of his beloved and his dwelling have diminished? Where are you from the stranger, who has no refuge but the homeland, and no strength to settle anywhere?'"

The prince and the model of the passive good hero: Perhaps the presence of the character in the novel is highlighted through the expression of their instincts, desires, ambitions, thoughts, and psychological disturbances. These are the blank spaces or gaps that the novelist fills, revealing their method of dealing with pre-existing characters. In this part of the research, we focused on two main characters in the novel: Prince Abdelkader and Father Debouche, as the novel alternates between

telling their stories, and because they are symbolic characters, each representing a different civilization, religion, and culture. They reveal the novelist's stance on both civilizations, and we touched on some other characters that reflect the way the writer builds them, their stance, and ideology, reinforcing the way the two main characters are constructed. As the critic Mohammed Kamel Al-Khatib says in his book "The Novel and Reality," the novel contains ideological impurities in the consciousness of its characters and in the consciousness of its author. However, there is a dominant characteristic for this direction; this characteristic does not give itself directly, but requires a lengthy process of analysis to reach it, to understand the true ideology behind the novel's work. There is no doubt that every novel says something, and it is not a mere play on words to say that a novel claiming to say nothing is, in fact, saying something specific. (Al-Araj, p. 297)

The writer establishes his approach to portraying the character of Prince Abdelkader as a civilizational dialogue between two men representing different religions. This type of dialogue is only managed by educated characters, carrying different ideas and ideologies, where each side wants to convince the other of their viewpoint. The novelist presents this in a calm artistic manner, so it can be read by both opponents and supporters, making it acceptable to both simultaneously. This calm artistic approach, which seems objective in managing the dialogue, in reality, portrays the prince with an excessive humanistic tendency in his passivity. It is more of an invitation to a manipulative dialogue, where the character appears shaky from within, devoid of will, mesmerized by the other more than calling upon him, and is not determined to defend his land, which contradicts the nature of the positive character—the prince as a leader, who is supposed to have been chosen for jihad and resistance. These are the traits of the "passive hero," a model that has become common among most contemporary literary heroes. He is helpless, estranged, possessing much awareness and understanding, knowing the source of his pain and the cause of his troubles, but unable to take positive steps to alleviate injustice or eradicate evil. He is a person who has vision but lacks the ability to act, turning into an "alienated" hero who feels isolation and loneliness. While in literature, we try to avoid subjective judgments and impressions as much as possible, there are objective indicators that point to these judgments.

The following passage gives the impression that the prince had declared his surrender from the very beginning through the expressions of defeat and retreat he often repeated: "How I wish this misery would end and I could return to my books... the sword has begun to withdraw today in front of gunpowder, the Lombard cannon, and the great horses, which are more authentic than the steam-powered cars." On the other hand, the novelist mocks the tribes and the expressions of jihad that he attributes to them, such as "the sale of the sacred house of Islam," "jihad against the invaders." The strength and bravery of the prince's character are only evident when confronting those who defy his authority, and they only appear in his small battles against his own brothers, even if they betray him. This, despite historical records proving the opposite. This is not only true in his dealings with the French army but also in his position with the Hashim tribe, which betrayed him. The case with the tribe of Hashim serves as a prime example: despite their betrayal, deception, and seizing of his wealth and palace after the fall of his camp, when he returned to them with a large force from Tafna, he asked them about it. They apologized and returned his money, and he accepted it. He said to them, "Go on your way; I have forgiven you and forgotten what happened. God wanted to teach you my system once again. Keep whatever you have taken from me if it does not trouble you to eat what is forbidden, but beware of doing so again. And know that Ibn al-Zahra is able to strike a thousand of your heads again." (Al-Sadiq, 2002, p. 39)

In contrast, we find that the psychological presence of the character of Depeche is stronger and more dominant than that of the prince, who tends to submit and yield. This is evident through his desperate efforts to defend the prince, stay up late to complete the book, and deliver it to the king. This is an attempt by the novelist to present the side that serves France, as Depeche has a dual culture and studies at one of its universities. This reflects the concept of nationalism, which he conveys through the words of Colonel Yusuf, as mentioned earlier: "Do not worry, Agha, I too abandoned the Ottomans when I found it more beneficial to serve a strong state that guarantees my rights and the

rights of my children. Our generation, which has been educated, can no longer bear the backwardness of its people and relatives."

The strong presence of the priest is clearly seen in the realization of all the projects the novel presents. He wished to return to the land he loved, even if dead, and he achieved that. As for the prince, his wish remained suspended until it would be fulfilled in another novel. Meanwhile, the priest succeeded in freeing the prince.

That promise he made to himself is something we read in the preface presented by the novel: "In anticipation of doing what is more important, I believe it is my human duty to strive relentlessly to support the truth regarding this man and to clear him of serious accusations that were falsely attributed to him, perhaps hastening the removal of the ambiguity and the dark cloud that has enveloped the face of truth for a long time, Monsignor Depeche." We also read it in the joy that overwhelmed the prince after his release. At that moment, he thought of many people, and little by little, all the faces shifted to reveal the features of Monsignor Depeche. He closed his eyes briefly, and when he opened them, he had written the first sentence of his letter to Monsignor Depeche, who was still in Paris: "Your Excellency, I can now tell you that your goodness has been completed, and God has guided your steps, and what you have planted has grown." (Megal & Saad 2005, p. 46)

This presence is not limited to the main characters alone; even for the other characters present at the heart of the battles, the novelist portrays them in a way that reflects a subtle feeling underlying two different perspectives from both sides. The first perspective is represented by Colonel Yusuf, a harsh character who lacks even the most basic ethics of war, always finding pleasure in delivering the mercy shot to those who still have a chance at survival among the wounded, or ordering their heads to be cut off. On the other side is the character of Maurice, who possesses high military ethics and responded to Yusuf in one situation, saying: "War is harsh, but it has a minimum level of ethics, Yusuf... Do not dare to cut off my enemy's head while he is lying beneath my feet, wounded, unable even to move, and stripped of any weapon." (Nidal, p. 236)

3- Reasons for Resorting to History in the Novel "The Book of the Prince":

It is impossible to read a literary work outside the context of the era in which it was produced or the circumstances that gave rise to it, because a narrative work is a cultural artifact that may not necessarily reflect the spirit of the era to which the adventure works belong. (Al-Farouk, May 17, 2005, p. 13) but rather reveals the spirit of the time in which it was created through methods that may be more complex or at deeper levels of subtlety. From the perspective of cultural methodology, it is part of a historical context that interacts with other components of culture such as institutions, beliefs, power balances, and so on. From this perspective, many artistic, cultural, political, social, and economic motives emerge, driving novelists to return to history. The most important of these is the search for a lost self and the discovery of the meaning of continuity and belonging to something that may have been lost forever, dusting off old images and reconstructing the past—these are all concepts we recall when discussing historical fiction. (Y. Said, p. 49)

The novel "The Book of the Prince" was written in 2004 according to the printing date, and the author, based on his statements in the press, spent several years writing it. This period in the history of Algeria was characterized by political, cultural, and social conditions, and therefore, the novel carries a set of motivations that led the novelist to embark on a new experimental adventure, drawing its material from history and using it as the foundation to build its imagination and construct its horizon of expectations. In the following, we will attempt to identify the most important of these motivations at all levels.

A. The Artistic Level: Looking at Al-Araj's previous experiences, where the imagination was given more space, whether those that delve deeply into Arab heritage to engage with and oppose it through a tone of sarcasm and biting humor (Taha, p. 9) (to build another reality upon its ruins), such as in the novels *Nawar al-Lawz*, *Raml al-Mayya*, and *The Seventh Night After a Thousand*, or those that draw their material from the reality of Algeria, its current circumstances, or its contemporary history, such as the novels documenting the hardship of the 1990s, like *Sayedat al-Maqam*, *Harisat al-Zalam*, *Miraya al-Dhareer*, and others, the return to history in *The Book of the Prince* is considered a new experimental adventure. In this work, the author introduces a new narrative form, building his

imaginative work by diving deeper into modern Algerian history and retrieving that period linked to the early stages of the establishment of the modern Algerian state. It is a complex experience since it is based on events tied to historical facts recorded in history books in the form of correspondence, texts, and historical documents related to the life of Emir Abdelkader. This narrows the space for the imagination and limits the novelist's freedom. The difficulty of the task lies in the construction of an imaginative narrative that relies on a historical reference, while at the same time transcends mere realism to create artistic freedom that does not say what history says but what the novel says. This also includes how to portray historical characters in a way that responds to the author's ideology while not detaching from their historical authenticity.

B. The Political Level: The novelist, in any case, cannot be detached from politics when presenting his vision of the world and expressing his ideology, no matter how much he may try to mislead us into thinking otherwise, such as hiding behind a deceptive historical framework (Abdulwahab, p. 5). This is the case with *The Book of the Prince*, where the novel presents what is possible and looks toward the future, even when recalling past events. *The Book of the Prince* explores the international struggle between the great powers of the time, namely the French and British empires, and their competition for interests in all parts of the Arab world, including Algeria, after the collapse of the Ottoman Empire. Their aim was to subjugate Algeria and control its wealth. However, the struggle continues into the present day, albeit in a different form.

On the other hand, this period in which the novel was written can be called the post-crisis phase in Algerian history, or what is commonly referred to as the period of national reconciliation, which came after nearly ten years of turmoil that ravaged the people of Algeria. Blood was spilled, honor was violated, homes were destroyed, and fear gripped hearts and homes. However, the repercussions of this crisis are still ongoing, despite the nation's urgent need for other circumstances that would allow for the forgetting of grudges, putting aside conflicts, and closing all files related to the causes and consequences of the unrest. Everyone would then contribute to rebuilding the country, amid the worsening economic and social problems. Waciny Laredj tried to embody this phase through *The Book of the Prince*, which can be called a post-crisis novel. It represents "a new phase in the relationship with Algerian history, colonial history in terms of theme, content, and perspective, where a different space is formed, with socio-cultural, historical, and political data that point to the idea that history is full of living symbols and allusions. It is not useful to simply record it in a structured form, but rather to discover the living and suggestive capacities of the person of the third millennium to rebuild himself with a new awareness in his human relationship with the other." (Al-Araj, p. 253)

Laredj reconstructs modern Algerian history by changing the perspective on both the self and the other. Therefore, from the beginning, the novel sought to establish the theme of "change," a path that the prince followed in dealing with his people, his followers, and everyone under his command. The change is seen in customs and traditions, ways of thinking, clothing, earning a living, dealing with friends or enemies, and altering the heroic or Don Quixote-like mentality that had taken root in the minds of a people still believing in victory without providing reasons. The novelist attempts to show that, with his limited resources, the prince could not, even over centuries, defeat an army that thrives on civilization, power, and order. Victory only comes through preparation, even by learning from the French army's military organization, and thus, our imitation of them became a source of strength, not subordination.

The author brings us back to that period of Algerian history to draw lessons and shine a light on certain human issues that recur in people's lives, lessons that future generations can learn from. One of these issues is how a person deals with another, especially in the context of Islam. The novelist expresses through the prince's words: "What can I say to those who saw in us an example to follow, especially towards prisoners? Here we are, returning to an Islam that only knows burning, destruction, killing, and extermination, as this image was falsely attached to us. I spent all the years of the war proving to others that we fought, but with honor and manhood. We drove our enemies back by following our traditions, but in the blink of a knife, everything vanished with the wind." (Al-Araj, p. 168)

The author's use of the verb "we returned" evokes two time periods: a past submerged in ignorance and a present that repeats the same mistakes. The writer also holds religions responsible for suppressing freedoms, equating them in this dark side of extremism, for example, what Catholics did to Protestants on one hand and what Muslims did to each other on the other. These are the same mistakes that can be applied to our contemporary reality, which still repeats itself due to the extremism that a group of youth have adopted, inheriting a misinterpretation of Islam that focuses only on the outward appearance of things. This belief has led them to the abyss. The novelist embodied these meanings in a bold dialogue between the hungry child who refused to eat from the French soldier's hand until he had performed ablution.(Al-Araj, p. 521)

The dominance of historical events over the present narrative in the novel implies that the circumstances continue in the present, just as they were in the past. This is reflected in the phrases the narrator repeatedly uses on the prince's lips in each section of the novel, stating that the Arab tribes have not yet taken advantage of this and continue to stumble in the same conditions. This was what the prince tried to achieve in his state, but he failed. Nonetheless, he hopes that future generations will accomplish it, learning from the mistakes of those before them and changing their perspective on the other, following his example to rebuild the self on scientific foundations and enlightened certainties. The narrator, through the prince's words, says: "When people were digging the earth, extracting soil, and transforming it into steam engines, warships, cars, and laws to govern the country, we were sinking in certainties that later proved to be weak, and we were living in an era that has since withdrawn and ended. Do we today have the ability to open our eyes to these truths and teach our children from our deadly mistakes? I don't know, time is passing too quickly, and I fear it will not leave us the opportunity to gather our fragments."

The word "today" likely does not refer to the prince's era as much as it refers to the time in which the story was created—a time that continues to repeat itself since the time of the prince or even before. Along with it, the same circumstances and mistakes repeat. It is the prince's will, or rather the writer's, to future generations to reread history with caution and attention. The novel, in this sense, does not merely recall isolated historical events from a distant past but rather reintroduces them to rebuild the present and foresee the future. It does not write history, but casts its shadows over our contemporary reality. "What the text suggests in its probable meanings is not only the reproduction of reality, but also a reminder of the necessity to activate reality and move it forward, or in the best case, it warns of an expected new movement for reality that surpasses the stagnant state that does not align with the logic of history."(Hamid, p. 133)

C. Cultural Level: Culturally, the novel revisits the history of Algeria, represented in the life of Emir Abdelkader, the founder of modern Algeria. It attempts to draw the attention of future generations to this history and market it in a literary way, because novelistic writing compensates for history by saying what history cannot say, as Carlos Fuentes expresses. The return to the past here is meant to get to know the country, its regions, people, and ways of life. And if the novel today serves as compensation for history, then the novelist is the true historian of many of the nation's events and issues, through characters who suffer and struggle to deny the agonies of the self and achieve the goals of society. It has today attained a high position in the art of storytelling.(A. Said, p. 8)

The novel, in returning to the past and recalling its events, does not do so in order to impose it on the present. Rather, it questions it and re-reads it productively to create new knowledge that interacts with both tradition and the era in which it was created, in order to rebuild a new reality. The novel does not consider this tradition as a substitute for the era or its counterpart, as long as we understand the era as that of the "other" (the West), and do not consider it a "heightening" of our immediate, backward, and defeated reality, nor a "salvation" from the burdens and problems that trouble our nation. This view shifts our perspective of tradition, no longer as a text confined to the past or a magical refuge, but as a reality that still exists among us, an essential part of our self, emotional, and imaginative being.(Taha, p. 5)

The present that the novel *"The Prince's Book"* seeks to rebuild is based on the principles of peace, dialogue, and cultural exchange. The beginning of the twenty-first century marks the beginning of a new way of thinking in the context of globalization. This thinking seeks to establish a civilizational

dialogue, something that al-Araj attempted to lay the foundation for and anticipate through his "Vision of Sidi al-Araj." The novel foresees events that would solidify this pattern of thought between religions and peoples, with a focus on human issues as issues of humanity. A dialogue between Islam and Christianity, between Prince Abdelkader and Father Debouche, begins in the prologue, where the two men exchange language and each seeks to serve the other or serve humanity, regardless of faith, nationality, or homeland.

This dialogue continues throughout the novel's pages, which can be considered a message for building states on peace, cultural dialogue, and changing the perception of the other by accepting them as human. This is reflected in the words of Father Debouche after his arrival in Algeria and his appointment as head of the Algerian church in 1838, where he expresses his deep sadness for arriving in a land of war while he had come to this land as a messenger of peace. (Y. Said, p. 144)

This is the same sentiment we find with the Prince. Despite his victory in the Battle of Macta against General Trézel, he did not feel the taste of victory. He did not appear to have the usual familiarity, as if he had come from a battle where he was defeated and not victorious. At that moment, the Prince felt as though he had buried someone dear and precious to his heart. He won the war but lost the battle for peace.

Conclusion

In conclusion, we deduce that *The Prince's Book* novel, unlike al-Araj's previous works, employs events of ascent or positive periods in history in order to transcend the current reality, which is mired in backwardness and conflict, as determined by the period of crisis. It aims to rebuild a new reality that benefits from the experiences of the past and looks forward to a future inspired by the ideas and methods used by Prince Abdelkader in managing the affairs of his state, while also reassessing some heroic behaviors and historical assumptions related to the perception of self and the other/the West.

There are also many ways in which the historical operates within the artistic, as the writer transfers historical documents into the novel in various ways. One such way is by presenting information through its reflection on the behavior and actions of people, or by having multiple characters narrate the event and manage the information among them.

The writer's use of a cultured historical character creates a conflict between them and the reality in which they live, making them experience a sense of alienation due to their inability to keep up with the understanding of a people whose mentality is rooted in a connected heritage. This gives the character a sense of passivity and fragility, which ultimately leads to surrender.

References

1. Abdulwahab, B. (n.d.). Colonialism and Strategy of Overcoming: The Experience of Wasini Al-Araj [Prince Abderrahmane University, Constantine].
2. Abu Al-Aid, D. (1989). Algeria in the Writings of German Travelers 1830–1955. National Book Institution.
3. Al-Araj, W. (n.d.). The Book of the Prince.
4. Al-Farouk, F. (2005, May 17). Novelist Wasini Al-Araj shares his intimacies. Al-Nasr Newspaper, 13.
5. Al-Sadiq, Q. (2002). Methods of Story Analysis. Dar Al-Junub for Publishing.
6. Al-Zamrali, F. (n.d.). Historical Novel in the Works of Bashir Kharriif.
7. David, L. (2002). The Art of the Novel (M. Al-Batouti, Trans.). Supreme Council for Culture.
8. George, L. (n.d.). The Historical Novel.
9. Hamid, L. (n.d.). Novel Criticism and Ideology.
10. Hamid, L. (n.d.). Reading and Generating Meaning.
11. Megal, A.-R., & Saad, A.-B. (2005). The Literary Critic's Guide. Al-Maktaba Al-Thaqafiya Al-Arabiya.
12. Michel, B. (1986). Research on the New Novel (F. Antonius, Trans.). Ouyad Publications.

13. Mohammed, R. W. (n.d.). The Use of Heritage in Contemporary Arabic Novels.
14. Mustafa, A.-M. (n.d.). The Components of the Novel.
15. Nidal, A.-S. (n.d.). The Novel and History.
16. Said, A. (n.d.). The Violence of Imagined Reality in the Works of Emil Habibi. National Development Center.
17. Said, Y. (n.d.). The Novel and Narrative Heritage.
18. Said, Y. (2006). The Openness of the Novel Text and Context. Al-Maktaba Al-Thaqafiya Al-Arabiya.
19. Taha, W. (n.d.). The Political Novel.
20. Wasini, A.-A. (n.d.). The Book of the Prince.

Received: 05.02.2025

Accepted: 21.05.2025