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Abstract

The Development of the Main Characters Design in Ibrahim Nasrallahs Novels (from 1985 to 2014)

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Abstract

This thesis deals with the development of characters in Arabic novels from the second half of the nineteenth century until the emergence of modernist and post-modernist novels influenced by modern mechanisms of narrative construction, with particular emphasis on the works of the novelist Ibrāhīm Naṣrallāh (b. 1954), especially with respect to the evolution and design of the main characters, the artistic methods used in their construction, and the influence of their design on their functional roles.

Our study examines the connection of literature to the cultural system, in accordance with Even Zohar's polysystem theory, which views literature as a polysystem consisting of a variety of prose and poetry genres. It is distinct from the rest of the polysystem, which has also political, social and mental components, yet at the same time it is connected to it via a number of links.¹

Numerous scholars and critics have pointed out this connection, which has led to far-reaching changes in language and style. They argued that the new techniques utilized in modernist novels were not adopted out of choice, but were imposed by the changes in contents, as dictated by intellectual, political and social views.

Naṣrallāh produced seventeen novels between the years 1985 and 2014. They can be divided into three periods:

1. The first period (1985-1998). Naṣrallāh published three independent novels: *Barārī al-ḥummā* (1985), *ʿAww* (1990) and *Ḥāris al-madīna al-dāʿiʿa* (1998).
2. The second period (1988-2012), during which he produced his "Palestinian Comedy" project, consisting of nine novels: *al-Amwāj al-barriyya* (1988),

¹ See Even Zohar 1990, p. 27.

Mujarrad 2 faqaṭ (1992), *Ṭuyūr al-ḥadhr* (1996), *Ṭifl al-mimḥāt* (2000), *A 'rās āmina* (2004), *Taḥta shams al-ḍuhā* (2004), *Zaman al-khuyūl al-bayḍā'* (2007) and *Qanādīl malik al-Jalīl* (2012).

3. The third period (2005-2014), in which he composed the "Balconies" project, which consists of the following five novels: *Shurfat al-hadhayān* (2005), *Shurfat rajul al-thalj* (2009), *Shurfat al-'ār* (2010), *Shurfat al-hāwiya* (2013) and *Shurfat al-firdaws* (2014).

The present study follows the evolution of the main characters in these novels and examines the characters' intellectual semiotics, by means of describing them from a profound and extensive humanistic perspective.

As for the study of the language of literature, the thesis examines the literary function of language as a central element in the development and design of major characters in modern novels, in association with the "poetic function" of language as described by the formalist critic Roman Jakobson, who argued that the moment a reader focuses on the linguistic element, language becomes an aim in itself, enabling the reader to experience the artistic pleasure that is the unique feature of the language of literature, in which the poetic function takes precedence over all others.

It should be noted that when conducting research into modern novels, it is necessary to analyze the linguistic and narrative styles that shaped the writing experience. A literary analysis of language is certain to lead to a deeper and more accurate understanding of the contents of a work of literature, and will help to understand the design and evolution of the characters, since it is impossible to separate form from content, in accordance with the new approach which entered Arabic literature through the later formalistic school of Mikhail Bakhtin. This school, while presenting a fruitful fusion of formalism and Marxism, remained formalistic in its approach to linguistic structure, although it

was influenced by the Marxist approach that did not recognize the need to separate language from ideology.

The study also used the theories of the Russian formalist school, by which Naṣrallāh was influenced. This literary school's main focus was on the format, which it considered a major component in literature. The works with which the present study deals show that the author succeeded in making the narrative formats conform to the contents, so that each novel possesses its own unique narrative format, resulting in a new type of novel. The search for novel forms is unavoidable, for no writer composes all his or her novels using just a single format.

My research into the uniqueness and variety of literary formats led me to the formalist Shklovsky's concept of defamiliarization. He argues that once reception becomes familiar, it also becomes automatic. Defamiliarization is a technique that counteracts the technique with which conventional works of art are created using perspective and style, and gives rise to a "defamiliarized" literary work, one that is surrounded by mystery and is deprived of boring intimacy.

Borrowing the concept of atomization from modern physics, we examine this phenomenon as it applies to the main characters in the modern novel, taking into account the fact that the atomization of stories' form and content, as well as the atomization of the characters and the plot, have become a major characteristic of modern novels.

The thesis' structure

The thesis consists of four chapters. *Chapter One* provides the theoretical background, with a historical-literary survey of the evolution of characters in Arab novels from the second half of the nineteenth century to the 1960s (when modern novels, influenced by Western narratives, began to appear). The survey is divided into four sections:

1. Literary characters in the nineteenth century.

2. Literary characters in the first real novel (according to most scholars) in modern Arabic literature, *Zaynab* (1914) by Muḥammad Ḥasanayn Haykal (1888-1956).
3. The main character in the traditional realistic novel, as exemplified in *Bidāya wa-nihāya* (1949) by Naguib Mahfouz (1911-2006).
4. The main character in the modern novel, as exemplified in *Ayyām al-insān al-sab‘a* (1968) by ‘Abd al-Ḥakīm Qāsim (1935-1990).

These four stages witnessed the evolution of the characters of Arab novels, from the nineteenth century to the emergence of the modern novel. The survey found that in general the characters in Arab novels developed side-by-side with the development of the writing technique, which in turn was influenced by Western literature. Several writers played a crucial role in transforming the passive literary characters into dramatic figures that play a prominent role in the presentation of the novel's events. A convincing character that presented a contemporary social reality first appeared in Haykal's novel *Zaynab*, considered the first true novel in Arabic, thanks to the novel way in which it presented the main character.

A dramatic change in the design of literary characters was signaled by the publication of Mahfouz' novel *Bidāya wa-nihāya* in 1949. The change was signaled by the use of new devices that enhanced the character's contribution to the narrative. However, the contribution was not enough to enable one to classify the work as a modern novel. Furthermore, the novel was still dominated by classical elements. But authors continued, while maintaining a continuing connection to Western literature, to search for more modern techniques that would enable them to make their characters play a greater role in the process of narrative processing and to reduce the dominance of the narrator in all aspects of the novel. Writers succeeded in creating novel characters when they began to cast light on the characters' inner world and to reflect their external

surroundings. Eventually this had a considerable effect on narrative writing, especially among novelists of the 1960s, when modern novels appeared that showed the influence of both the achievements of Western novels at the time and of universal theories of literature. The novel that marked the beginning of this significant development was 'Abd al-Hakīm Qāsim's *Ayyām al-insān al-sab'a*.

Chapter Two deals with the elements that make up the main characters during the first period in Ibrāhīm Naṣrallāh's literary career, during which he composed three novels. The thesis briefly discusses the main characters of these novels, followed by an extensive discussion of the main character in the novel *'Aww*.

These novels show signs of a qualitative evolution in the nature of the main characters, a development that is indicative of post-modernist literature. The novel *Barārī al-ḥummā* represents a sharp break with previous Arab novels, presenting as it does a harsh journey into the depths of a worn-out main character, reflecting the crisis-ridden realities in the Arab world, in which the citizen cannot obtain the minimal necessities for a decent life. This state of affairs led the main character to live in a world of dreams, dreadful nightmares and distorted visions.

These features of the main character imposed a particular form on the novel, which was freed of traditional narrative techniques and characterized by detachment, atomization and marginalization of the events, using post-modernist devices. Perhaps the most important conclusion of our study is that the author succeeded in creating a dialogue between the main character and his split self throughout the novel. The scenes examined in the study point to the creation of exceptional narrative forms based on transitions between persons, although the second person still predominates, and plays a functional role in signaling the split personality of the main character.

In the novel *ʿAww* Naṣrallāh felt himself free to move in a variety of different directions and designed his characters using various material, philosophical and psychological elements. The thesis addresses three important aspects: material, psychological and philosophical, with the aim of identifying the methods used to give shape to the main characters. The thesis presents three methods used by Naṣrallāh to show the main characters to the reader: Showing, introspection and telling.

The use of these methods means that the novel belongs to the stream-of-consciousness type, and it does, indeed, present many novel narrative mechanisms and devices that are typical of this type. The novel possesses a number of characteristics which clearly demonstrate that the author was aware of this current in literature, whose focus is on revealing the character's inner world without the intervention of an external narrator. The thesis also discusses the main techniques used by stream-of-consciousness novels, such as inner monologues, dreams and obsessions, and a confusion between the character and the omniscient narrator, focusing especially on language and the important role it plays in the novel *ʿAww*.

The study concludes that Naṣrallāh created a new form of internal monologue, a device used in realistic and modernistic novels. The novel's scenes point to a disintegration of the structure of the internal monologue, which is given the form of an external monologue among two or more people. The author depicts the character's psyche with consummate skill and describes his inner personality, its motivations and the directions taken by its thoughts with great accuracy.

The novel also testifies to the creation of two types of internal monologue, one expressing tension and confusion and the other expressing intellectual controversy. The two types were identified through an analysis of linguistic elements. Language has the function of expressing the inner world of the novel's characters, that is, whenever that

inner world is filled with tension, this has an effect on the language that is used, which appears disjointed and "atomized", and in contrast, if the character's inner world feels secure and peaceful, the language that is used appears more ordered, and in many cases immaculate. The latter type of monologue appears whenever the character is in a state of mental purity: Well-ordered sentences reflect the personality of the novel's main character.

The study also highlights the importance of the stylistic indicators that implement the principle of the transition of the narrative from the external to the internal perspective. These techniques define the style used by the author in order to make the novel's main character participate in the narration, so that the external narrator no longer controls the story. This technique is used frequently as part of the introspective and the descriptive styles.

In the novel *Hāris al-madīna al-dā'i'a* there is a clear break in the way the main character is treated. The novel focuses on a single character, who leaves his work place and discovers that all the people of his city, Amman, have disappeared. He begins a difficult search for an explanation for what happened. The study comes to the conclusion that this novel uses techniques and devices that are unusual in Arabic novels. Perhaps the most important of these is the dialogue which takes place throughout the novel between the main character and the omniscient narrator. This device compensates for the lack of other characters in the novel. The main character has no one to speak to except for the narrator, who therefore accompanies the character from the novel's beginning to the end.

Chapter Three deals with the features of the main characters in the second period of Naṣrallāh's literary career, when he composed what he called "The Palestinian Comedy", consisting of nine novels. Here we focused on the most important techniques

and styles used in seven of these novels, such as deconstruction and atomization, fantasy, obliteration of the character, an omniscient narrator and his relation with the main character, linguistic structures, stylistic indicators and their literary function, and the symbolic meanings of the main characters. With respect to some of these novels, the study focused on the relationship between literary form, the main character and content. As for the novel *Qanādīl malik al-Jalīl*, the study focused on the features of the character of Zāhir al-'Umar al-Zaydānī as a model positive hero for this period, whom the author intended to mystify as the first leader of the Palestinian people in the eighteenth century.

In this chapter we conclude that Naṣrallāh was, among contemporary Palestinian novelists, one of the greatest champions of the Palestinian cause. His extensive project "The Palestinian Comedy" is evidence of this. The project describes the tragedy and pain of the suffering and dying Palestinian people. The study discusses the masterful design of the novels' characters and their evolution. The author used numerous techniques that point to significant changes in the way the novels' characters are treated. Subsequently we point to the styles and devices used by Naṣrallāh in each of novels of "The Palestinian Comedy":

In the unique composition *al-Amwāj al-barriyya*, it cannot be classified as a novel, but rather as a new kind of work composed of elements of a variety of literary genres, including prose narrative, dramatic dialogue, poetic language, and more. This work is based on place as the fundamental element around which a conflict takes place between two characters, al-Baḥrī and Shlomo. Our study came to the conclusion that in the design of the character of al-Baḥrī Naṣrallāh adhered to his own ideology as a Palestinian resistance writer. The main character is powerful, symbolizing the power and determination of the Palestinian people, while Shlomo is depicted as weak and

fragile in the face of the Palestinian people's strength of will and its arduous path towards national liberation.

In the novel *Mujarrad 2 faqaṭ* Naṣrallāh presents a "selective omniscience", who represents the main character and depicts various scenes that take place in numerous different locations. These transitions cause the literary form to disintegrate, perhaps ultimately due to the fact that the events are evoked by the novel's main character, influenced by the sad situation of the Palestinians and the poverty from which individual Palestinians suffer in the refugee camps. The novel adopts a style of dispersed information: the events do not appear in order, but are clearly "atomized" in the narration, turning the novel into an "unreadable texts", which the reader is forced to use all his wits in order to put the pieces together again.

The thesis discusses the relationship between a novel's form and its contents. The author used the technique of stream-of-consciousness, which is the most appropriate form for the kind of disintegration and atomization seen in this novel. The atomization is the result of the mental state of the protagonist, whose narration of the events is influenced by the winds. The thesis concludes that *Mujarrad 2 faqaṭ* employs techniques of cinematic photography, as shown by its use of flashbacks. The novel's events are related in the form of small units that together create a sense of dissociation in the text. These features act to make the reader acquainted with the main idea without the need for long-winded introductions to the events and the characters that are common in traditional realistic novels.

In the novel *Ṭuyūr al-ḥadhr* Naṣrallāh uses an esoteric character to present very fantastic events. The fantastic nature of the book is made clear through the features of the child who accompanies the omniscient narrator throughout the latter's narration of the events. The study shows the devices used for creating the fantastic character of the

child, and discusses the associated linguistic elements and their appropriateness to the nature of the main character. Language plays a major role in the evolution of the form of the novel and in the development of the main character. It operates in a functional manner through the element of defamiliarization to catch the reader's attention and to strengthen the connection between the latter and the literary text. The novel presents the protagonist as he is still a fetus in its mother's womb, then as a child who teaches birds to beware. The novelist uses language that fits a child's naivety and avoids usages that would adversely affect the novel's credibility. In other words, Naṣrallāh succeeded in creating a simple language that is consistent with the language expected of a child, but at the same time managed to preserve the language's literary character. The language of the novel is thus pliable but retains its features as a language of literature and also succeeds in imitating reality. In fact, had the author used the same language that he did in his other novels, the result would have been anything but an imitation of reality.

The novel *Ṭifl al-mimḥāt* presents a novel design of the main character, evidence for tangible progress in this domain. The novel is also a good example of a match between three components of a novel: Form, protagonist and content. The thesis analyzes these components and discusses the relationship among them through an examination of the literary devices used by the novelist, for example allowing the omniscient narrator to design the protagonists' character as he pleases, by letting him speak to the protagonist in a way that makes the latter appear crushed and impoverished. This downtrodden hero, Sergeant Fu'ād, represents the Arab armies that were assembled in order to defend Palestine in the war of 1948. As the novel points out, the victories which these armies claimed were nothing but lies. Sergeant Fu'ād vacillates between heroism and non-heroism: He succeeds in achieving some of his dreams, and fails to achieve others. He

does manage to obtain promotions and to move up the ranks, and to become a confidante of the country's ruler, but he fails at the formal level of the literary text, and at the level of content. With respect to literary form, he lacks the ability to express himself and does not participate in the act of narration or in the presentation of the events, having been deprived of this ability by the author, who made him helpless, an object to be described, but powerless to present the reader with any information. The omniscient narrator addresses him, but he himself does not appear as an independent personality in any of the novel's scenes, which change in accordance with the wishes of the narrator, who accompanies him at every step, as is made obvious by the dominance of the second person. As for the content, he failed to defend Palestine, symbolizing the weakness of the Arab Liberation Army that was created for that express purpose. The novel takes the form of an autobiographical account, a form which Naṣrallāh viewed as poor and weak, but which he used in this case in order to fit the form with the main character and the novel's content: The form is poor, the protagonist is worn out, and the Arab armies, who are the novel's real subject, are too weak to defend Palestine.

The thesis discusses the linguistic structures and the stylistic devices which serve a literary function in the novel *Ṭifl al-mimḥāt*. The most important of these devices is the shrinking of time, so that the past becomes the present and evokes the current situation in the reader, who is made to feel that the character about whom he is reading is a contemporary of his rather than a historical figure. This is a literary device that creates a balance between historical and fictional events; after all, the novelist presents a literary text, not a history book, and part of the pleasure one has in reading the novel derives from the use of literary language as an important tool, that highlights "the poetic function of language", to use a phrase coined by the formalist Roman Jakobson. In this sense the novel's objective is not restricted to providing historical information, but also

has the purpose of giving great literary pleasure to the reader. When the reader focuses on the artistic aspect of the novel's language, the latter is transformed into an objective of its own and no longer serves as a mere means. And it is the afore-mentioned features that make the language such a dominant element in the novel.

The novel *A'rās āmina* reflects the sufferings of Palestinian women as a result of the Gaza war of 2000. This war affected the characters of the novel, who are devastated both materially and mentally. In order to fit literary form to content, the novelist designed his characters using the principle of atomization, which he applied to the structure as well. The characters' devastation reflects the "machine of death" that destroyed both material objects and the people's morale. Naṣrallāh let the "machine of war" to fragment the narrative discourse. The study came to the conclusion that the "atomization" of the narrative was a technique which the author used in order to make the novel's artistic form fit its overall contents. The fragmentation and destruction had a clear effect on the novel's characters, who are obviously psychologically lost, as can be seen in the fact that they deal with the dead in the same way they deal with the living. The novel *Taḥt shams al-duḥā* deals with the issue of heroism in Palestinian society. It does so through two characters who symbolize two groups in Palestinian society, those who resist, and those whose heroism is mere dissimulation. Here Naṣrallāh harshly criticizes the sad situation of the Palestinians, using egotistical and power-hungry characters, whose role in the novel is to act as symbols that embody the unfortunate state in which the Palestinians find themselves.

The events of the novel *Zaytūn al-shawāri* revolve around the character of Salwā, a girl who in the course of the story is raped and deprived of her free will. She plays a major role in the novel by making the reader aware of some of the social and political

problems that beset a Palestinian refugee camp. This weak girl is raped by both her uncle and by a senior and influential official.

Linguistic and stylistic features are used to express the symbolism of the novel's protagonist Salwā, who stands for Palestine, which has been raped by its own people, who pretend to be loyal to their homeland but in fact are its real enemies. In this sense the novel conveys defamiliarization, which the author intended to use in order to make the novel "unreadable" in the sense this was used by Roland Barthes in his classification of literary genres.

The thesis then goes on to discuss the novel *Zaman al-khuyūl al-baydā'*, considered the most important of the novels in "The Palestinian Comedy" project, due to the fact that the author here uses extended oral testimonies by a number of witnesses who left their homeland and lived in exile. The novel constitutes a panoramic record that documents Palestinian history in three periods: The Ottoman period, the British Mandate and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

An interesting aspect of this novel is the vitality of the main characters which Naṣrallah was able to create, making creative use of the horse, to which he gave human features, depicting it variously as calm and enraged, as capable of thinking like a human, even making it participate in the act of narration, influence events and be influenced by them. The horse plays an important role in many of the novel's scenes, Naṣrallāh having granted it the ability to express itself in the text. This feature demonstrates the novelist's ability to use the device of "defamiliarization" which the formalist critic Shklovsky considers to be a major element in any work of literature.

But the crowning touch in this period is the mythification of the protagonist as seen in the novel *Qanādīl malik al-Jalīl*, the only one of the works included in "The Palestinian Comedy" which is based on an actual historical figure. The novel uses the figure of the

protagonist Zāhir al-‘Umar al-Zaydānī to convey his message, presenting his story as a model Palestinian myth, a figure that deserves our attention because it "illuminates the Palestinian people's psychic forces", to use the author's words.

Furthermore, Naṣrallāh in some of the novels of "The Palestinian Comedy" designed the main characters so as to refute folk legends and political myths, especially in *Ṭifl al-mimḥāt*, *Zaman al-khuyūl al-baydā’* and *Qanādīl malik al-Jalīl*. In these novels the issue is addressed in a way that is unprecedented in Arab or Palestinian literature. There are a number of events in Palestinian history that have given rise to considerable debate, especially with respect to the role of the Arab Salvation Army, established for the purpose of defending Palestine and placed under the command of Fawzī al-Qāuqjī. A number of the project's novels expose the true facts about these forces. They show how the Arabs plotted against the Palestinians and that the "Army" was nothing but a lie created by the Arab League, in the novelist's words. In the novel *Qanādīl malik al-Jalīl* the "myth of the candles" is debunked. This is a Palestinian folk myth according to which a person's life expectancy can supposedly be determined. The myth is refuted several times in the novel. Its refutation is used as a device for highlighting various aspects of the main character (Zāhir al-‘Umar al-Zaydānī). It also shows Naṣrallāh's commitment to the Palestinian issue and the care he takes to deal credibly with Palestinian history.

Chapter Four is the last chapter of the thesis, and deals with "Modeling characters and their symbolic and philosophical dimensions" in the third period of Ibrāhīm Naṣrallāh's literary career. The works he composed in this period are part of the "Balconies" project, consisting of five independent novels in which the author criticizes the political and social situation in the Arab world with considerable creativity, using a variety of devices of an experimental nature. His criticism is expressed through the use of negative

but influential characters that strive to quench their thirst during a period of twenty years before matters came to a point with the outbreak of the Arab revolutions. He presents characters with rich philosophical, symbolic and psychological dimensions, reflecting a bitter conflict between an unfortunate present, dominated by oppressive dictatorships, and the dreams of the simple people and their desire to overturn the despotic laws. This message, which the author conveys by means of symbolic meanings, is the key to understanding the characters in the novels of this period, providing a good connection between literature and the new situation in the Arab world. In fact, Naṣrallāh was among the first novelists to have made reference to the "Arab Spring" in their works. In this period he used symbolism in all his novels to deal with the issue of freedom in the Arab homeland.

The novels of this period are typified by the variety of protagonists which Naṣrallāh used to represent Arab characters, especially intellectuals. The "Balconies" project begins with a modest novel possessing a very advanced structure, *Shurfat al-hadhayān*, in which various different genres come together and in which a dialogue takes place among literary and non-literary genres. This phenomenon gives rise to an "unreadable" text, based on the fragmentation of the text's form. This structure arises within a framework in which Naṣrallāh tried to connect the literary form with the contents, a technique that enables him to expose a period in which values are shaken and become as disjointed as the text itself.

Through its main character, the novel *Shurfat al-hadhayān* examines the situation of an Arab who feels defeated in his inner self. It also contains some complex characters who give rise to numerous questions, and describes a number of absurd or illogical events that originate with the protagonist and members of his family, marginalized people who live in a state of unease. Rashīd al-Nimr, the novel's main character, lives with his wife

and children in a state of disorder, instability and psychological disintegration, as a marginalized and disrupted family, the same as the society which this family represents. The novel begins with a presentation of this family, whose members do not communicate with each other, but live their own lives by themselves. The thesis deals with this relationship through an analysis of the absurd scenes in the novel, which contain symbolic dimensions associated with the main character.

What is interesting about the "Balconies" project is the fact that in two of its novels the author used an omniscient narrator, who is given the task of narrating the events. This technique helps implement the principle of maintaining the symmetry between the three basic components of a novel: its form, the main character, and its contents. The study came to the conclusion that the traditional devices did not cease to be used in post-modernist literature, nor did they become fossilized and anachronistic. Indeed, they can be used in post-modernist novels, as shown quite clearly in the novels *Shurfat rajul al-thalj* and *Shurfat al-`ār*, where the omniscient narrator has the task of relating the events. In both novels the main characters themselves play no active part in the narration; rather, all the scenes exhibit the nearly total dominance of the omniscient narrator, who has been given in both novels the task of presenting the views of the novelist, who considers literary form to constitute the content itself. The study came to the conclusion that these two novels constitute a qualitative jump in the art the Arabic novel, by making the element of narration fit in with the nature of the literary form and also with the literary contents, which present the crushing of Arab intellectuals and the weakness of Arab women. This is what turns Naṣrallāh's works into an experiment worth studying for its uncommon devices that created new types of prose narration and redefined the omniscient narrator.

The study discovered a relationship between the themes and the design of the main character in the novel *Shurfat al- 'ār*. We conclude that Naṣrallāh's use of these devices made them the strongest and most visible element. Perhaps the most important function fulfilled by the many themes and symbols is their prominent role in the design of the main character. They also implemented the principle of textual cohesion as represented by the novel's linguistic and non-linguistic structure. The use of repetition contributed to a deeper meaning and helped transform the novel's language into a suggestive vehicle for shades of meaning.

As for the novel *Shurfat al-hāwiya*, its protagonists were constructed using the technique of polyphonic narration. The study concludes that this technique gave rise to characters with disparate ideologies, who express themselves under the principle of freedom of narration, with no intervention on the part of any external party, such as a narrator or the author. Perhaps the most important conclusion concerns the novel's artistic value and the way it fits literary form to content: Freedom pervades this work in all its aspects, in both form and content. The principle of freedom acts as a strong link that serves to enhance the bond between the various components of the composition. The most important element in this principle is the freedom of narration: The omniscient narrator is here pushed to the text's margins, enabling the novel's characters to present the events in absolute freedom. This is highlighted by the fact that a separate chapter is devoted to each character. The technique of polyphonic narration functions to present the reader with multiple perspectives, reflecting the various philosophical and ideological trends in Arab society. This fits in with the period with which the novel deals, with its allusions to the Arab Spring and the revolutions that broke out in the Arab world as a necessary result of freedom of thought, the demand

for social justice, and the efforts to implement freedom of expression that had their beginnings in Tunis.

Other important techniques and styles were also used by Naṣrallāh in *Shurfat al-hāwiya* in the design of his characters, including the bonds among the characters themselves, some of whom in the course of carrying out their function as narrator revealed previously hidden aspects of other characters in the novel. This technique avoids the need for the character to describe itself, or at least complements what the character does say about itself.

The study deals with the novel's language, which has certain special features and whose register is higher than that of the other novels of the "Balconies" project. The refined language of the novel is due to the main characters, who are well-educated and present their narration in language expected of such people: The novel's linguistic level is consistent with the characters' cultural and intellectual level. The study came to the conclusion that *Shurfat al-hāwiya* is the only one among all the novels discussed in it that refrains from using the colloquial language. The reason is to be found in the nature of the characters themselves and in the environments in which they operate: university, ministry, law office, seminars and conferences. A base spoken language would not be consistent with our perceptions of how an educated person speaks in such an environment. The technique of polyphonic narration helps convey ideas to the reader through characters capable of using Standard Arabic and a high register. These characters avoid the spoken language, which critics consider inferior, even in the novel's dialogues, produced in either a high or a medium register. The colloquial appears in only one scene, the only one in the novel in which an uneducated character plays a part. From this we conclude that the novel classifies the characters into educated

and non-educated, as was made clear in our analysis of the linguistic structures used as a literary tool in designing the characters.

The novel *Shurfat al-firdaws* marks a break in the type of main character to which the reader of the project's novels has become accustomed. In the other novels the characters are feeble and incapable of standing up to authority, but in this novel the protagonist quite exceptionally dares to challenge authority and refuses to obey despite the threats leveled against it. The study highlighted the unique features of this character, which constitutes the antithesis of the characters we met in the other novels of the "Balconies" project. In *Shurfat al-hadhayān*, *Shurfat rajul al-thalj*, *Shurfat al-‘ār* and *Shurfat al-hāwiya* the characters are weak and lack the courage to challenge the regime or their own society. Our comparison also revealed that the main character in this novel is the antithesis of the educated character in the novel *‘Aww*, who gave in to the regime's enticements and bullying, abandoning his principles in order to obtain a job. The difference between the way the main character behaves in this novel in comparison to the others lies in the period when the novel was published. It was an important period in the Arab world, when voices were raised that called for resistance to absolute rulers, and many attempts were made to rebel, by the educated and the non-educated alike, throughout the Arab world. These rebellions subsequently led to the "Arab Spring". The study concludes that Naṣrallāh in *Shurfat al-firdaws* succeeded in fitting the main character to the novel's contents and the time period to which it alludes through the use of symbolic meanings. In short, the main character is in harmony with the period in which the novel was published.

The symmetry between form and content in this novel can also be seen in its absurd scenes, which highlight the despotic nature of the rulers in the Arab world. The scenes have the task of fitting form to content, showing how life in the Arab world is indeed

absurd under oppressive rulers. The study points to the stylistic elements used to show how the oppression encompasses all aspects of life, but also how the novel's main character, Ḥayāt, who represents the regime's opponents, does not succumb.

The sharp change which Naṣrallāh introduces in *Shurfat al-firdaws* points to the evolution of the main characters in his novels in line with the changes and developments in the Arab world in recent decades. The nature of the main characters is consistent with the nature of the real figures who populated the Arab world and led it to a new phase of evolving collective awareness.

And finally, the study concludes that Naṣrallāh in some of his novels created a new type of narrator in Arabic literature. This new type can be seen especially in four of his novels, *Ḥāris al-madīna al-dā'i'a*, *Ṭifl al-mimḥāt*, *Shurfat rajul al-thalj* and *Shurfat al-hāwiya*. Naṣrallāh's novels thus retain their individuality in the way they use literary devices. The textual features used by Naṣrallāh in his works make the latter worthy of study. The present thesis has clearly shown how unique his novels are, especially in their intense use of the element of defamiliarization, which is so important for any work of art.