“Al-tajrib” (Experimentalism) in the Moroccan New Novel and the Debate Over Legitimacy

A Dissertation in

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by

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Abstract

My dissertation researches the literary phenomenon of *al-tajrīb* (Arabic for “experimentalism”) in the Moroccan novel during the decades following national independence in 1956. *Al-tajrīb* emerged as an alternative mode to the realist model of Egyptian Nobel laureate Najīb Maḥfūẓ (Naguib Mahfouz) (b. 1911-d. 2006), a model which influenced a number of novelists in Morocco. By contrasting experimental novels by Moroccan littératureurs to the realist model of the classical European novel and the classical Arabic novel, I do not imply that Moroccan and Arab novelistic experimentalism is un-realistic or treat the unreal. At stake in my dissertation is the new definition of “realism” that emerges through the practices and discourses of experimental fiction. Rather than proposing “realism” as a mimetic literary mode based on descriptive prose, what we see instead is a politics of form and a formalization of politics that work through the fusion of multiple narrative voices and layers, a reliance on the technique of fragmentation, the inclusion of a metafictional discourse that interrupts the narrative in order to reflect on the morphology and goal of literary writing, and so forth. As Moroccan novelist-critic Ahmad al-Madīnī points out, experimental formal features such as the “breaking and interpenetration of [narrative] times [and] the multiplicity of voices” constitute “legitimate attributes to a novelistic world [. . .] a tragic vision” (Qtd. in Abū Ḥamāla 54). In a similar vein, Muḥammad Barrādah, another prominent novelist-critic, notes that the “experimental takeoff” in Moroccan and Arab novelistic writing could be read as “a period of venting and settling of accounts with a handicapped heritage and an inert history” (*al-Riwayah al-ʿArabiyyah*, 37-38). Both al-Madīnī and Barrādah highlight the ideological implications of the shift in literary representation brought about by Arab experimentalism. I argue that formal experimentalism retains its tie to reality through political exigency. It is derived from a political need to break with continuous history,
which turns experimentalism into a discursive site that probes the question of how we do things differently.

It follows that reality, in its cultural and socio-political ramifications, undergirds Moroccan literary experimentalism. Along with novelist-critic Muḥammad Amanṣūr, I maintain that “realism is not in contradiction with experimentalism” (*Istrāṭījiyāt*, 168). The notion of realism in this context is not figural representation of plausible worldly coordinates, but the formal, structural, and linguistic invocation of new subject positions that correspond (implicitly and/or discursively) to immediate contemporary political exigency. Al-Madinī remarks that formal experimentalism has sought to establish “an extra-realistic relationship” with the social, which positions the individual—not his or her environment—in the center (*Ruʿyat*, 157). This new subject position or positioning is indicative of formal experimentalism’s endeavors to create new discursive spheres for the treatment of the social and the political, and in so doing Moroccan experimental writings become—or make the claim of being—realist. With the politics of formal experimentalism in mind, two parameters inform this dissertation. Firstly, it argues that experimental writings in Morocco are deeply ingrained in social reality—albeit in their own way—and, therefore, should not be seen as invested in formal experimentation for its own sake. That is, experimentalism has a point of reference in the political and socio-cultural arenas.

Secondly, it contends that the phenomenon of *al-tajrīb* (experimentalism) is weary of trends or modes imported from foreign literatures, and seeks to disentangle Moroccan literary activity from the pressures of influence. Moroccan experimentalism emerged out of a state of anxiety with regard to external influences—either from the *Mashriq* (the Arab East) or from the *West*—and has continued to explore ways that would set Moroccan literature (especially in the terrain of the novel) on a path towards more autonomy and specificity.
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IJMES Arabic Transliteration Table

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Note on Translation and Transliteration

Unless otherwise indicated, all translations from Arabic and French are my own. When available, I have used existing translations into English. Arabic words and names have been transliterated into the Latin alphabet using a system based on the *International Journal of Middle East Studies* (IJMES). For words ending in the letter ّ, for example, I have chosen to include the final ‘h.’ For authors who publish both in Arabic and French (such as and ‘Abdullāh al-‘Arwī—or Abdallah Laroui—and Muḥammad Barrādah—or Mohamed Berrada), I have included the Latinized version as well as a version based on the transliteration from the Arabic.
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Dedication

To my late parents, Zohra El-Khmissi and Mohamed El Younssi, I dedicate this work.

I am eternally grateful to my late mother Zohra, a strong, loving woman who gave so much …
Introduction: Mapping *al-Tajrīb* (Experimentalism) in the Postcolonial Moroccan Novel

When we reflect on the Arabic novelistic ‘explosion’ between 1960 and 1980, we find that its characteristic feature is *experimentation* with narrative ways and different [kinds of] writings, which usually have analogues in the realm of the world novel. [. . .] This experimental takeoff [. . .], together with what followed it, is like a period of venting and settling of accounts with a handicapped heritage and an inert history; it looks forward to opening a new page that goes beyond description and reviving the past in order to foresee and formulate another identity in the process of forming and bursting forth.¹ (Emphasis added)]

--Muḥammad Barrādah, *al-Riwaḥ al-ʿArabiyyah*²

¹ Unless indicated otherwise, all translations from the Arabic are mine.
This dissertation traces the development and evolution of experimental writing—what is often referred to in critical circles as al-tajrīb—in the contemporary Moroccan novel. My focus on Morocco is not arbitrary, but is rather a calculated choice. Generally speaking, the study of Arabic literature in the Anglophone world tends to focus more on the Mashriq (the Arab East), and devotes less attention to the Maghrib (the Arab West). Commenting on this situation, the prominent critic Roger Allen states that “in the [Arabic] novel, studies in English tend to concentrate on a single country (especially Egypt) or a single author.” The vast majority of Arabic literary works that get translated into English are by Mashriqi authors; the literature of the Maghrib, including Morocco, remains underrepresented. It is worth pointing out that Moroccan (and Maghrebian) literature is commonly studied in Francophone (and, at times, Hispanophone) circles. My work on the Moroccan novel partakes in the effort to highlight—in Anglophone circles—the contributions of Moroccan littérateurs to Arabic and World literature. My hope is that this dissertation will give more visibility to Moroccan and Maghrebian literature, and emphasize the need for more English translations of authors from the Maghreb region.

The phenomenon of al-tajrīb (experimentalism) seems to herald a new era of Moroccan literary history and creativity in the second half of the twentieth century. It has become almost synonymous with literary innovation, and is a valuable tool that provides a window into contemporary Moroccan society and culture. It is part of a larger transformational dynamic that affected Moroccan society during the decades following national independence in 1956. As a modernizing trend, al-tajrīb is a reaction to, and a reflection of, the transitional cultural landscape in the aftermath of decolonization and of Arab military-political defeats in the conflict with Israel, events that have left a mark on Moroccan as well as Arab consciousness, as I will

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detail in chapter one. The year 1967 in particular emerges as an important time frame, for it witnessed the historic defeat of Arab armies in the six-day war with Israel, which shook Arab consciousness and left an impact on Arabic literary activity—as many have argued. In his periodization of twentieth-century Moroccan literature, critic Abdelʿali Būṭayyib states that the period of *al-tajrīb* (experimentalism) has the mid-1970s as its starting point, adding that this period is marked by the aspiration to “modernize Arabic novel writing” (*Al-Riwayah al-Maghribiyyah*, 16-17). Similarly, critic Muḥammad Amansūr remarks that the trend of *al-tajrīb* in the contemporary Moroccan novel made its first appearance in the mid-1970s, with the publication of two novels, Saʿīd ʿAllūsh’s *Ḥājız al-Thalj* (The Frontier of Snow) in 1974 and Aḥmad al-Madīnī’s *Zaman bayna al-Wilādah wa al-Ḥulum*—or *ZBWWH* in short—(*Time between Birth and Dream*) in 1976 (*Kharāʾiṭ*, 15). Al-Madīnī’s text is one of three “experimental” novels I will treat in three separate chapters in this dissertation. These include, in addition to al-Madīnī’s *ZBWWH*, Muḥammad Barrādah (Mohamed Berrada’s) *Luʾbat al-Nisyān* (1987; *The Game of Forgetting*, 1996) and ʿAbdullāh al-ʿArwī (Abdallah Laroui’s) ‘Awrāq: *Sīrat ʾIdrīs al-Dhihniyyah* (1989, Papers: Idriss’ Mental Biography).4 In fact, al-Madīnī and al-ʿArwī5 were among a very few pioneers in the 1970s Moroccan literary landscape to experiment with new ways of writing literature, ways that diverged from the social realist mode popularized by the influential ʿAbdulkarīm Ghallāb and adopted by other well-known writers, such as Mubārak Rabī’, Muḥammad Shukrī (Mohamed Choukri), and Muḥammad Zafzāf.6 Al-Madīnī’s

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4 Of these three texts, only Barrādah’s has been translated into English. See Mohamed Berrada [Muḥammad Barrādah], *The Game of Forgetting*, translated by Issa J. Boullata (Austin: U of Texas at Austin P, 1996).


6 Al-Madīnī locates the realist trend in prose writing in Morocco post-Independence within the larger school of realism in Western literature and Mashriqi literature: he adds that Moroccan writers at the time either copied literally or imitated or were inspired by the works of Western and Mashriqi figures. See *al-Kitābah al-
debut novel ZBWWH and his earlier collection of short stories “al-ʿUnf fī al-Dimāgh” (Violence in the Brain, 1971) were, if not instrumental, at least catalysts in consolidating the horizon of literary experimentation in contemporary Moroccan literature in subsequent decades, and herein lies the value of al-Madīnī’s contribution to innovating literary writing in a Morocco yet to recover from the shock of decolonization and the internal conflicts over power that soon ensued between the monarchy and the Leftist opposition. It is interesting to point out that the trend of al-tajrīb (experimentalism), with al-Madīnī being one of its most vocal practitioner, was coldly received by critics in the 1970s, a state of affairs that would change in the 1980s and especially in the 1990s, seen by many as the decade in which the phenomenon of al-tajrīb was firmly established as to become the norm rather than the exception.

Literary critics in Morocco, thus, use the term al-tajrīb (experimentalism) or al-tajrīb al-riwāʿī (novelistic experimentalism) when discussing novel writings that emerged in the decades

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Sardiyah, 25. Refer especially to chapter two (261-295) for his critical analysis of the writings of Ghallāb and Rabī’. See also Abdelʿali Būṭayyib, al-Riwāyah al-Maghribiya, 14-15 for his examination of Moroccan realist writers, including Muḥammad Ẓafzāf, ʿAbdulkażīm Ghallāb, Muḥbārak Rabī’, and Muḥammad Shukrī (Mohamed Choukri). Būṭayyib locates the writings of these key figures of late twentieth-century Moroccan literature within “the period of realism” [al-marḥala al-wāqiʿiyyah], which, according to him, stretches from 1967 to approximately the mid-1970s (13-14). Muḥammad Azzām captures the novelistic world of these “realist” novelists when he avers that they explored “the issues of their new society” and took special interest in “their historical period, and thus they expressed the thought and ideology of the common people [al-tabaqah al-shaʿbiyyah], and portrayed [their society’s] ignorance, poverty, illness, backwardness, [and] corruption” (qtd. in Būṭayyib 14). The social dimension here figures as the pedestal that supports the novelistic world of these writers and gives it significance. Literature seeks to engage with society and lived experience, and thus more weight is given to the thematic dimension, perhaps at the expense of aesthetics.

Critic Sīdī ‘Umar ʿAbbūd writes that the negative critical reception of al-Madīnī’s ZBWWH and “al-ʿUnf fī al-Dimāgh” (situated within the first wave of Moroccan experimental writing) paved the way for the positive critical reception of the second wave of “the experimental novel” in the 1980s, a period that witnessed the consolidation of the trend of al-tajrīb in the Moroccan literary scene. See Sīdī ‘Umar ʿAbbūd, “al-Ḥadāthah wa al-Talaqī” [Modernism and Reception], aljabriabed.net, n.d. Web. 3 March 2015.

8 See for example al-Madīnī’s discussion of the ideological struggle of the Moroccan Left for the cause of democracy and social justice in the 1960s and 1970s, which brought it in direct confrontation with the regime. See al-Kitābah, 7 and also Ruʿyat al-Sard, 238-39.

9 As I will discuss in chapter three, al-Madīnī’s ZBWWH was strongly criticized by a number of critics inside and outside of Morocco, such as al-Najīb ʿAwfī, Bin ṣa Abū-Ḥamāla, and ʿAḥmad Laḥlū.

10 Sīdī ‘Umar ʿAbbūd, “al-Ḥadāthah wa al-Talaqī”
following national independence in 1956, starting in the 1970s.\textsuperscript{11} *Al-tajrīb* could be seen as heralding a new moment in Moroccan literary history and creativity, given that it arguably lays the grounds for a different brand of writing, one that attempts to overstep, in particular, the “traditional” model of Moroccan novelist ʿAbdulkarīm Ghallāb (b. 1919 –), a model that is inspired by the oeuvre of the Egyptian Najīb Mahfūz (Naguib Mahfouz)\textsuperscript{12} (b. 1911 – d. 2006), the 1988 Nobel Laureate in Literature. Even as I take Morocco as my case study in this dissertation, the Arab world still functions as my broader context, hence my drawing on Mahfūz (Mahfouz) as well as other prominent figures from the *Mashriq* (the Arab East), such as Ṭaha Ḥusayn. I should underscore that in the context of the Arab world, debates over literary innovation were, according to a number of critics, tackled first in the *Mashriq*, starting with the *nahḍah*\textsuperscript{13} (Arab Renaissance) intellectuals, with Ṭaha Ḥusayn assuming a prominent role in his role as a literary and cultural critic. In discussing the emergence of the trend of *al-tajrīb* (experimentalism) in the 1970s Moroccan literary scene, critic Saʿīd Yaḥṭūn notes that “this new novelistic experience in Morocco” followed the same “transformational cultural current” in the Arab world at large, before adding that one notices “that the beginnings of this current were

\textsuperscript{11} According to Gonzalo Fernandez Parrilla, the “beginning of the seventies can be considered as a turning point [...] in the history of modern Moroccan literature.” See “Breaking the Canon: Zafzaf, Laroui and the Moroccan novel” Academia.edu. Web. 12 Aug. 2015. 3-13, 9.

\textsuperscript{12} Parrilla stresses that Ghallāb is “the Moroccan debtor of Mahfūz,” adding that the Moroccan author’s 1966 novel *Dafannā al-Māḍī* (We Buried the Past) is “a literary work that for decades was considered a model, [...] a type of novel where ideology was too present.” Ibid., 7.

Moroccan novelist-critic Aḥmad al-Madīnī considers Mahfūz as “the father of the Arabic novel.” See *Tahawwulāt al-Nawf al-Riwāya al-ʿArabiyya: bayna Maghrib wa Mashriq* [Genre transformations in the Arabic novel: between West and East] (Rabat: Dar al-Amān, 2012), 131. I should add that the label “traditional” only designates the early phase (prior to 1967) of Mahfūz’s oeuvre as I amply discuss in chapter one.

\textsuperscript{13} According to Ann-Marie McManus,

*The nahda*—the Arabic awakening, or renaissance—refers to an age of reform that spanned the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and that had its center in Cairo. Although the term *nahda* is often understood to refer to this loosely defined historical period, it is also used to describe a constellation of cultural and political ideas and movements that emerged in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in Egypt, Syria, Lebanon, Palestine, and Iraq (the Mashriq), as well as in Morocco, Algeria, and Tunisia (the Maghreb). Among the central ideas of this *nahda* were the rise of anti-colonial nationalist movements and the cultural and literary elite’s embrace of a Eurocentric modernity project.

established since [...] the ‘nahḍah’ [...]” (al-Qirā‘ah, 288-89). Moroccan critics in general do not reject the view that the Mashriq (the Arab East), before the Maghrib (the Arab West), was first to seriously tackle the question of literary innovation (al-tajdīd), although I should stress that this does not imply a relationship of subordination and subservience between these two parts of the Arab world. In this regard, Moroccan critic Aḥmad al-Yabūrī writes that in the early decades of the twentieth century:

[The cultural relations between the Maghrib and the Mashriq witnessed a relative boom through the Egyptian press, which would reach the Maghrib, carrying the echoes of thought, literature, and politics. [...] (Al-Kitābah al-Riwā‘īyyah, 14)]

Al-Yabūrī emphasizes the preeminence of Egypt (and Lebanon) in reinvigorating the cultural, literary, and political scene in the Mashriq in the first decades of the last century, and the impact this had on Morocco and the other countries of the Maghrib. Al-Yabūrī continues:

[One of the consequences of that was the formation of Maghrebi-Mashriqi interculturality whose echoes extend to [...] the movement of poetry [in the Maghrib], which sought the new in the footsteps of the Egyptian Romantic school, and the movement of the [short]
story and the novel, which took the Egyptian and the Lebanese references as models.

(14)]

Thus, referencing the relationship between the *Mashriq* and the *Maghrib* in my examination of the trajectory of the novel in Morocco is not only useful, but also inevitable. One cannot invoke the “traditional” novelistic writings of Moroccan `Abdulkarīm Ghallāb, Abdelmajīd Binjillūn, and others without referencing influential *Mashriqi* figures, such as Najīb Maḥfūẓ (Naguib Mahfouz), Yūsuf Idrīs (1927-1991), Tawfīq al-Ḥakīm (1898-1987), and others. Furthermore, my privileging of Maḥfūẓ when discussing “traditional” novel writing speaks to the enormous weight his oeuvre carries in twentieth-century Arabic literature. Roger Allen has remarked that the realist novel in Arabic was popularized in the entire Arab world “thanks primarily to the genius and industry of Najīb Maḥfūẓ” (*The Arabic Novel*, 114). It is worthwhile mentioning that my use of the label “traditional” in referring to Maḥfūẓ only targets the early (pre-1967) phase of his novelistic writings—when, according to critic Mohamed-Salah Omri, he deliberately tried to emulate the traditional realist European novel (244). Omri adds that Maḥfūẓ “thought that the role of [his] generation was to write the novel in the correct [i.e. the European] form because [he] believed there was such a thing as the correct form and the wrong form” (244). As I elaborate in chapter one, the work of the Egyptian Nobel laureate underwent a major shift in the late 1960s, when he revised his writing trajectory and started experimenting with new literary forms that

14 It is noticeable that all these Mashriqi figures come from a single country (Egypt), which speaks to the centrality of Egypt in pushing the wheel of literary and cultural innovation forward in the Arabic-speaking territories. Egypt also assumes a critical position in the early development of the novel genre in the Arab world. Roger Allen writes:

Thus, in choosing Egypt as the focal point for the early development of the novelistic tradition in Arabic, we are talking chronologically about a tradition that in essence combined two, those of Egypt and Syria-Lebanon. In the other regions of the Arabic-speaking world, the development of the novel tradition moved *mutatis mutandis* along similar lines.

diverged drastically from the nineteenth-century European realist novel. As I will amply discuss, the paradigm shift in the Maḥfūzian oeuvre, in many ways, parallels the transition from a fascination with Western modernity to a re-discovery, re-interpretation, and integration of the Arab-Islamic heritage (al-turāth) as well as the pre-Islamic era of ancient Egypt.

My use of the word “traditional” in relation to Maḥfūz (Mahfouz’s) fictional work is limited to the early phase of his novelistic project. The label “traditional” in this context designates novel writings that approximate the trajectory of the realist, nineteenth-century European novel—as popularized by such well-known figures as the French writers from Victor Hugo, Emile Zola, and Honoré de Balzac, the British writers Charles Dickens, Thomas Hardy, and George Eliot, among others. Egyptian critic Rasheed El-Enany points out that the three volumes of Maḥfūz’s classic The Cairo Trilogy—which were published between 1956 and 1957—are “romans fleuves in the sense that they are concerned with the examination of the changing conditions of life for individuals and society across a succession of generations in a given family” (70). And most importantly, El-Enany adds that The Cairo Trilogy was fashioned “on the grand scale associated with this type of novel, as established by such European masters as Balzac, Zola and Mann” (70). In discussing the beginnings of the Arabic novel, Moroccan critic Abdulmalik Ashahbūn uses the label “traditional” (taqlīdī) to refer to Maḥfūz’s novelistic work (70). Ashahbūn adds that, among other aspects, meticulous attention to the novelistic space

15 Roger Allen has pointed out, albeit critically, that Maḥfūz, the 1988 Nobel Laureate, “was hailed by the Nobel Committee and by literary commentators as ‘the Dickens of Cairo’ or ‘the Balzac of Cairo.’” Allen is not necessarily opposed to these designations; only he finds them limited to the pre-1967 work of Maḥfūz. See “Literary History and the Arabic Novel” World Literature Today 75.2 (2001): 205-213, 205. Elsewhere, Allen notes: “In more literary terms, increasing contacts with Western literatures led to translations of works of European fiction into Arabic, followed by their adaptation and imitation, and culminating in the appearance of an indigenous tradition of modern fiction in Arabic.” See Moretti, “Conjectures,” 60. In a similar vein, Edward Said has stated that “at some point writers in Arabic became aware of European novels and began to write works like them.” Ibid., 60.

16 The Cairo Trilogy (or The Trilogy in short) consists of the following three novels: Palace Walk (1956), Palace of Desire (1957), and Sugar Street (1957).
(al-fadā‘) marks Maḥfūz’s works (73). The topography of his novels is presented in a detailed and elaborate fashion, in other words. It follows that a celebration of figural space is a dominant element of “traditional” novel writing, one that does not square well with the trend of al-tajrīb (experimentalism) in Moroccan novelistic writings. The so-called traditional novel makes claims to represent the world in its social and/or geopolitical forms. Ian Watt, in treating the key question of Realism in the 18th- and 19th-century European novel, notes that the French Realists, for instance, focused on “an issue which the novel raises more sharply than any other literary form—the problem of the correspondence between the literary work and the reality which it imitates” (11). Watt adds that two aspects assume a critical position in the European realist novel, the first being “characterization” and the second “presentation of background”; that is, this genre gives special attention “to the individualization of its characters and to the detailed presentation of their environment” (17-18). In accordance with the “principle of individuation,” novelistic characters “are set in a background of particularised time and place” (21). As the realist novel pursues “verisimilitude,” (27) the figural topography and chronology that underlie the unfolding chain of events emerge as extremely important and privileged devices. Thus, in this dissertation project, I use the word “traditional” to refer to a model of novelistic writing in the Arab world that sought inspiration in the European Realist School. In this model—for example, the (early) novels of the Egyptian Maḥfūz and the Moroccan Ghallāb—one notes such formal qualities as successive narrative temporality, identifiable characters, and descriptive focus on an identifiably spatialized world.17 Added to these is the dominance of “description” and the tendency towards “reviving the past,” as Muḥammad Barrādah remarks in the above-cited introductory passage.

17 It is telling that the titles of the three novels that make up Maḥfūz’s The Cairo Trilogy refer to the names of actual streets in the Egyptian capital, Cairo.
Following Barrādah, experimental Arabic literature looks to the future, with an eye on “opening a new page” and “formulat[ing] another identity in the process of forming and bursting forth.” This socio-cultural aspiration would necessitate innovating Moroccan and Arab literary activity and breaking the hegemony of the long-standing realist novel, a paradigm best represented in the early phase of Maḥfūz’s work—as noted earlier. I should underline that experimental Arab writers (Jamāl al-Ghīṭānī, Sunʿ allāh Ibrāhīm, Emile Habibi, Saʿīm Barakāt, Abdurrahmān Munīf, Elias Khoury, Ghāda Sammān, Aḥmad al-Madīnī, Muḥammad Barrādah, Muḥammad Amanṣūr, and others) overall do not necessarily reject the realist novels of the Nobel laureate, only they sought to overstep their formal, realist qualities. Al-tajrīb (experimentalism) suggests that the ultimate goal of this literary trend is to overstep the “traditional” realist mode of novel writing, glossed above. This notion of overstepping is key in the experimental current in Moroccan and Arabic literary activity. Saʿīd Yaqṭāne has underscored that al-tajāwuz (overstepping) is a constant feature of Arab experimental writings of the 1970s and 1980s (Al-Qirā’ah, 287). He states that the mechanism of overstepping operates differently, and in varying degrees of gravity, from one experimental writer to another (287). Yaqṭāne outlines three essential dimensions of overstepping: firstly, the breaking of the verticality of the narration (293); secondly, the overlap of various discourses (295); and lastly, the presence of the fantastical dimension (296). Such aspects of experimental Arab literature stand in sharp contrast to the traditional, realist model of the 18th- and 19th-century European novel as researched by Ian Watt. The experimental current in the Arabic novel does not value the linearity of the narrative. As it discards the pursuit of verisimilitude, al-tajrīb (experimentalism) does not place much emphasis on figural time and place or on characterization. In experimental writings characters might not be easily identifiable, and at times they do not even carry names—as in Aḥmad al-
Madīnī’s novel *Zaman bayna al-Wilādah wa al-Ḥulm* (Time between Birth and Dream). Al-Madīnī, a prominent novelist-critic and a vocal advocate of *al-tajrīb*, writes:

أن تكسر و تداخل الأزمنة، و تعدد الأصوات، و خرق الأنظمة الطوطولوجية، و كذا وقف نزيف النزعة الوصفية و الوعظية هي سمات شرعية لعالم روائي تعد الروئية المأساوية هوية اساسا له.

[The breaking and interpenetration of [narrative] times, the multiplicity of voices, the violation of tautological systems, and the stoppage of the descriptive stream constitute legitimate attributes to a novelistic world whose identity is based on a tragic vision. (Qtd. in Abū Ḥamāla 54)]

Such a configuration of Arab experimental fiction speaks to a new vision of literary writing, one that goes beyond the aspiration to achieve correspondence between the novelistic world and lived experience. According to Barrādah, experimentalism maintains an interactive relationship between the writing and the novelistic world, “a relationship of interpretation, vision, and recreation,” rather than “cloning and mimesis” of lived experiences (*al-Riwayah al-Arabiyyah*, 68). Barrādah is here referring to the traditional understanding of literary realism being an automatic and mirror-like transfer of everyday happenings to the literary text—i.e. verisimilitude.

Nevertheless, I want to emphasize that experimentalism in Moroccan and Arab novel writings is hardly divorced from the social context as I will be elaborate in a section below. By contrasting the experimental novels by Arab littérateurs to the realist model of the classical European novel and the classical Arabic novel, I do not imply that Arab novelistic experimentalism is un-realistic or treat the unreal. At stake here—and at stake in my dissertation
as a whole— will be the new definition of “realism” that emerges through the practices and discourses of experimental fiction in Morocco and the Arab world. Rather than proposing “realism” as a mimetic literary mode based on descriptive prose, what we see instead is a politics of form and a formalization of politics that work through the fusion of multiple narrative voices and layers, a reliance on the technique of fragmentation, the inclusion of a metafictional discourse that interrupts the narrative in order to reflect on the morphology and goal of literary writing, and so forth. Experimental Arab literature is marked by a formal shift in literary technique and an ideological shift in the politics of literary representation. As al-Madīnī underscores in the above-cited passage, experimental formal features such as the “breaking and interpenetration of [narrative] times [and] the multiplicity of voices” constitute “legitimate attributes to a novelistic world” with a tragic vision. In a similar vein, Barrādah notes in the epigraph that the “experimental takeoff” could be read as “a period of venting and settling of accounts with a handicapped heritage and an inert history.” Both al-Madīnī and Barrādah highlight the ideological implications of the shift in literary representation brought about by Arab experimentalism. Arab experimental authors impart a sense of crisis in their literary work, one that betrays the alienation they feel within their respective societies. Formal experimentalism thus retains its tie to reality through political exigency. It is derived from a political need to break with continuous history, which turns experimentalism into a discursive site that probes the question of how we do things differently. The tragicness which, according to al-Madīnī, marks experimental Arab literature could be a supplement to Barrādah’s view that experimentalism seeks to settle accounts with Arab heritage and history.

It follows that reality, in its cultural and socio-political ramifications, undergirds Arab literary experimentalism. Along with Moroccan novelist-critic Muḥammad Amanṣūr, I maintain
that “realism [al-wāqiʿīyyah] is not in contradiction with experimentalism [al-tajrīb]”
(Istrātījiyāt, 168). The notion of realism in this context is not figural representation of plausible
worldly coordinates, but the formal, structural, and linguistic invocation of new subject positions
that correspond—implicitly and/or discursively—to immediate contemporary political exigency.
Al-Madīnī remarks that formal experimentalism has sought to establish “an extra-realistic
relationship” (‘alāqah fawq wāqiʿīyyah) with the social (or lived experience), which positions
“the individual”—not his or her environment—in the center (Ruʿyat, 157). This new subject
position or positioning is indicative of formal experimentalism’s endeavors to create new
discursive spheres for the treatment of the social and the political, and in so doing Arab
experimental writings become—or make the claim of being—realist. Writing in 2006,
Muḥammad Amanṣūr notes that realism in the realm of experimental literature is different from
the “traditional understanding of realism,” which he believed “enchained the beginnings of the
project of Arabic novelistic authentication in Morocco” (Istrātījiyāt, 168). Amanṣūr makes a
distinction between two brands of realism, one “traditional” and the other “textual” (165).
Whereas “traditional realism” is “content-based realism” (al-wāqiʿīyyah al-maḍmūniyyah) (168),
the other type could carry different designations, ranging from “textual realism” (al-wāqiʿīyyah
al-naṣṣiyyah) to “realism of writing” (wāqiʿīyyat al-kitābah) to “absolute textuality” (al-
naṣṣiyyah al-muṭlaqah) (165). This second brand of realism, Amanṣūr continues, attempts “to
stylize the signs and symbols of reality and to fuse the historical reference [of reality] with the
references of the self, the popular imagination, and the memory of daily life” (167). The
strategies of writing that mark this latter type of realism unite in forging “a tragic consciousness
of existence” (167). What experimentalism ultimately yields, therefore, is a voice that is acutely
political. From this angle, one could argue that the realism of experimental Arab literature is
derived from the reality of its voice that is embedded in the political.

In other words, I see the form-politics relation as being constitutive of Arab
experimentalism. As I amply discuss in chapter three, al-Madînî’s debut novel Zaman bayna al-
Wilādah wa al-Ḥulum (Time between birth and dream, 1976) is a highly experimental text that
simultaneously flouts two distinct, but interrelated sites, of authority—one pertaining to form and
the other to the cultural and socio-political sphere. The novel is notable for staging a dissenting
voice that targets the textual and extra-textual dimensions of authority and continuity. Al-
Madînî’s text relies on the structure of the utterance fused with a metafictional and fragmentary
discourse in order to critique and satirize cultural and political symbols of power (the father, the
grandfather, the Qur’an, the Hadith, etc.), and to flout the literary norms and conventions of the
time. By combining these two dimensions of subversion—the formal and the socio-political—
Zaman bayna al-Wilādah wa al-Ḥulum probes the politics-form relation, performing an
experimentalism that diverges, in such a radical way, from existing trends in Moroccan
novelistic writing in the 1960s and 1970s. Al-Madînî has made clear his vision of literature when
he debuted his literary career in the late 1960s; he wanted to take “a different direction
commensurate with a culture of disobedience” (Tahawwulât, 352). This penchant for
disobedience is at odds with “traditional” realism—a literary mode that is continuous with
European fiction—and with the dominant ideologies that directly or implicitly manage and
control social and political activity in postcolonial Morocco. Al-Madînî’s “culture of
disobedience” materializes in his writings through, what I would like to call, a poetics of dissent.
With the structure of the utterance as its bedrock, the novel reclaims via this poetics of dissent
the voice of the self and crafts a discourse of urgency and immediacy that alerts us to its formal politics—or rather its formalization of the political.

With an eye on the politics of formal experimentalism, I should underscore at this juncture that two major parameters inform this dissertation project. Firstly, it argues that experimental writings in Morocco are deeply ingrained in social reality—albeit in their own way—and therefore should not be seen as invested in formal experimentation for its own sake. That is, experimentalism has a point of reference in the political and socio-cultural arenas. As Barrādah puts it, experimental literature is tied to questions of identity, which implies that the trend of *al-tajrīb* (experimentalism) is not antithetical to realism. In fact, experimentalism could offer us a window into pressing socio-cultural questions in postcolonial Morocco. As I will discuss below, the form-politics relation that undergirds Moroccan experimentalism emerged as a response not only to the traditional, realist model, but also to the trend of *al-‘llitizam* (commitment) and its excessive—and at times gratuitous—politicizing and moralizing discourses. Yet I have to caution that Moroccan, and by extension Arab, experimental writings do carry commitment undertones. From this perspective, I contend that *al-tajrīb*, despite its mechanism of “overstepping,” should not be read as enacting a total break in Moroccan literary activity. Its political exigency situates its experimental ideals and politicization of form within the larger framework of literary engagement. Experimentalism is not, and should not be construed as being, confined to a closed artistic sphere. Here, for example, I investigate *al-tajrīb*’s strategic investment in the key element of *al-turāth* (the Arab-Islamic prosaic heritage), a point that I discuss amply in chapters one and two. In place of a naturalist-realist mode of literary cosmopolitanism, the writers associated with *al-tajrīb* sought at once to draw from an autochthonous tradition (*al-turāth*) as well as to develop new possibilities for cosmopolitanism
derived from a critical engagement with Western experimental literatures rather than their mere absorption.

This brings me to my second point. I contend that *al-tajrib* is weary of trends or modes imported from foreign literatures, and has sought to disentangle Moroccan literary activity from the pressures of influence. Moroccan experimental literature emerged out of a state of anxiety with regard to external influences—either from the Arab East (the *Mashriq*) or from the West—and has continued to explore ways that would set Moroccan literature (especially in the terrain of the novel) on a path towards more autonomy and specificity. According to Amanṣūr, “traditional realism” hampered the flourishing of an “authentic” Arabic-language novelistic enterprise in Morocco, as noted above. Amanṣūr, in invoking a constrained embryonic novelistic project in the Moroccan territory, is in all likelihood alluding to figures that are most prominently associated with such a project, namely ‘Abdelkarīm Ghallāb, ‘Abdelmajīd Binjillūn, Mubārak Rabī’, and others. In Amanṣūr’s view, the “traditional realism” of these authors did not serve well the Moroccan novelistic project by virtue of its allegedly foreign imprint as embodied in the overwhelming influence of the realist Mahfūzian paradigm. The need to establish a Moroccan novelistic project with specificity and autonomy drove al-Madīnī to voice strong critiques of the Francophone literary tradition in Morocco and the Maghreb region. Al-Madīnī questions the

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18 Well-known Francophone writers from the Maghreb include figures, such as Tahar Ben Jelloun, Driss Chraibi, Mohamed Khair-Eddine, Abdellatif Laâbi, Mohammed Dib, Yasmina Khadra, Malik Hadad, and Abdelwahab Meddeb. However, other Maghrebi writers—mostly from Algeria—have a more complicated relationship with French, the language of the former colonizer. Discussing the history and evolution of Francophone literature in the Maghreb, Anne Armitage points out that, when the Algerian War of Independence broke out, Algerian writers “were urged to commit themselves politically to the cause of creating a modern Arab Algeria and to reassess their use of French in an increasingly Arabised society,” and adds that this new reality “placed writers in an untenable position and hard choices had to be made about the language in which one should write and the arena in which one should work” (42). After Algeria’s independence, Malik Haddad, for instance, decided to stop writing in French. He became skeptical of French being a language of “liberation and communion with the rest of the world” (53). Haddad saw the use of French by Algerian writers to be rather inhibiting, and argues that “when Francophone Algerian writers [. . .] tried to articulate, in French, ideas that were specifically Algerian, their thoughts would perhaps be given much fuller and clearer expression if they were framed in the Arabic tongue” (qtd. in Armitage
legitimacy of Francophone Maghrebian Literature, partly because of the gap that allegedly exists between its autochthonous subject-matter or point of reference and its French medium; he writes:

La littérature maghrébine de langue française n’est qu’une littérature dérivée de la littérature française. La littérature maghrébine est une, elle est en arabe. La langue arabe a un style, une rhétorique, un imaginaire. On n’appartient pas à une littérature par la nationalité, mais par la langue. (Qtd. in Mehanna 28-29)

[Maghrebian Literature in French is no more than a literature derived from French Literature. Maghrebian Literature is one; it is written in Arabic. The Arabic language has a certain style, rhetoric, and imaginary. We do not belong to a certain literature by nationality, but by language.]

According to al-Madīnī, the use of a foreign medium is a practice that shows, in a most obvious way, the workings of influence. In al-Madīnī’s view, adopting a foreign language—especially one directly linked to the (neo)colonial enterprise—defeats the very idea of an autonomous literary project. This issue remains open for debate, and goes beyond the scope of this dissertation—although it sheds some light on the controversial question of legitimacy in the literary craft. With the notion of influence in mind, I would like to probe the relationship between Moroccan experimentalism (in its Arabic articulation) and literary autonomy and specificity. Amansūr, for example, posits a direct link between the emergence of the trend of al-tajrīb in 1970s and “the growth of the Moroccan novelistic project” (Kharāʿīt, 15). Similarly, al-Amīn al-ʿUmrāni remarks that al-tajrīb was the outcome of a deeply-felt need on the part of Moroccan littérateurs to establish their literary freedom; he writes:

[The increased desire to bring to fruition a Moroccan novelistic specificity [... ] caused Moroccan novelistic creativity to undergo deep unrest [as it oscillates between] yielding to the constraints of influence [... ] and a frantic desire for liberation therefrom. This situation generated what came to be known as the phenomenon of al-tajrīb in Moroccan novelistic circles; al-tajrīb came into prominence as an essential means for liberation from the constraints of influence in its negative sense and for the authentication of the Moroccan novelistic discourse. (8)]

Along this analysis, al-tajrīb appears as a key phase in the development of the young¹⁹ Moroccan novelistic project. It betrays Moroccan littérature’s weariness of the negative aspects of so-called influence, and it constitutes a venue for the consolidation of the Moroccan novel that assumes a more active relation to literary genealogy with regard to contemporary and local political exigencies, as pointed out earlier. Again al-turāth (the Arab-Islamic heritage) takes on a critical role in this process; alongside Moroccan critic Aḥmad al-Yabūrī, I argue that al-tajrīb’s incorporation of al-turāth contributes to the efforts on the part of Moroccan novelists to explore a potential authenticity and lay the grounds for a Moroccan brand of literary modernity.

¹⁹ Parrilla notes that “critics today seem to agree that Morocco did not know a real differentiation among narrative genres until the 1970s, when the novel was consolidated as an autonomous genre.” See “Breaking the Canon: Zafzaf, Laroui and the Moroccan Novel,” 6.
independently of, yet in conversation with, the Mashriq (the Arab East) and the West. In studying al-tajrib, I research Moroccan modernism more broadly, and how it compares and contrasts with other modernisms in the West and in the Arab world. My project is, therefore, in conversation with fields, such as Modernism, Comparative Modernisms, and World Literature. Through my investigation of al-tajrib in the postcolonial period, I seek to reassess the trajectory of the novel tradition in Morocco in the 20th century and to examine the implications of the shifts in literary activity to the larger question of cultural production in postcolonial Morocco. Researching the experimental Moroccan novel in the post-independence era provides a good vantage point for assessing the trajectory of experimental Arabic novelistic writings of the latter half of the twentieth century and beyond. The geographic proximity of Morocco to Europe and its deep cultural, social, and linguistic ties to the Mashriq and the rest of the Arabic-speaking world put it in a privileged position that enriches its cultural and literary scene. Contemporary Moroccan literary criticism, which takes a leading role in the Arab world, has benefitted from its critical engagements with both the Mashriq and the West. Within the context of the Arab uprisings of the early twenty-first century, the political stability of Morocco and the flourishing of its cultural and literary scene make of studying the new Moroccan novel a worthwhile endeavor.

I should mention that my investigation of the political exigencies of the discourses undergirding al-tajrib is primarily in conversation with the work of four major Moroccan novelist-critics: Muḥammad Barrādah (Mohamed Berrada), Abdullāh al-ʿArwī (Abdallah Laroui), Aḥmad al-Madinī, and Saʿīd Yaqtīne, in addition to other literary figures, including

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Muḥammad Amanṣūr, Abdel‘ali Būṭayyib, Aḥmad al-Yabūrī, and al-Amīn al-ʿUmrāni. I also draw on the work of Roland Barthes, especially his classic Writing Degree Zero given that many of the authors I examine are in dialogue with his work. In advocating for a novel that goes beyond mimetic depiction of lived experience and gives priority to the very sphere of “writing” (al-κitābah), Muḥammad Barrādah, for example, borrows this concept (i.e., writing) from Barthes. Barrādah underscores:

نستعير مصطلح الكتابة من رولان بارط، مع إعادة تحديده وتدقيقه وفق ما يقتضيه سياق استعمالنا له في مجال تمييز وتقييم الرواية العربية الحديثة. ([Even as we borrow the concept of writing from Roland Barthes, we re-define and re-specify it in accordance with the context of our usage of it in relation to [our] endeavors to distinguish and assess the modern Arabic novel. (Al-Riwwāyah al-ʿArabiyyah, 32)]

It is important to draw attention to the fact that the Moroccan novelist-critic engages critically with Barthian theories. While acknowledging his debt to the influential French critic, Barrādah is cautious not to blindly adopt and apply the notion of “writing” to the Arab context without sufficient reconsideration and redefinition. Building on the views of Barthes as well as on those of Roman Jakobson, Barrādah develops his own theory of writing; he asserts:

تغدو الكتابة في نظرنا هي مجال تجلي وعي الكاتب بمختلف الأجناس الأدبية، وبوظيفة اللغة والشكل في تحرير وتغيير المقاييس الجمالية: إنها تمثل جماع تفاعل وعي الكاتب مع شروطه التاريخية و أجله ذاته المنقسمة، داخل مجتمع يمر بالفوارق والصراعات والاستلابات. ([In our view, writing becomes the domain in which the writer’s awareness of the different literary genres and the function of language and form in stirring and changing aesthetic]
standards is manifested. [Writing] constitutes the sum total of the interaction between the writer’s consciousness and his historical conditions and the questions of his fractured self, inside a society replete with [class] differences, conflicts, and alienations. (32)]

It is noteworthy that whereas the first sentence in the above-cited passage targets the terrain of form and aesthetics, the second moves the conversation beyond the frontiers of textuality and highlights writing’s political exigency. Following Barrādah, the change in aesthetic standards that mark experimental Moroccan and Arab writings cannot be isolated from the historical and socio-political sphere or from Arab authors’ existentialist questions. Writing, thus, carries or echoes the political voice of the self as it engages history and society. Barrādah continues:

الكتابة أقرب ماتكون إلى استراتيجية الكاتب في اتخاذ موقف من عصره ومجتمعه، عبر الاستتيقا وإعادة تأويل القيم من زاوية تزاوج بين توضيع الذات، وتذويت المجتمع، بين التمثل الواعي ومكونات اللاوعي.

[Writing is close to being a strategy of the writer to take a stand vis-à-vis his time and society through aesthetics and the reinterpretation of values from an angle that pairs between the objectification of the self and the subjectification of society, between conscious representation and the hidden components of the unconscious. (32)]

The politics of form and the formalization of politics, according to Barrādah, emerge as a key aspect of Arab literary experimentalism. The investment in aesthetics is a calculated move that bears on the political and the social. Writing pushes for questioning and innovating dominant aesthetic forms and the ideologies that run through them.
The above passage is also noteworthy for alluding to another major European figure (other than Barthes), Sigmund Freud—which speaks to Arab experimentalism’s entanglement with European ideas. Barrādah’s invocation of the conscious-unconscious binary is indicative of al-tajrīb’s dialogue with Freudian theories of subjectivity. Barrādah has stated that “psychoanalysis and its demonstration of the multiplicity of the I and the self” had a direct bearing on Arab experimentalism’s reliance on the formal aspect of fragmentation (51). It is worth mentioning that Barrādah’s novel Lu’bat al-Nisyān (1987, The Game of Forgetting, 1996)—which I will examine in chapter four—draws heavily on Freud’s theories of the unconscious. Egyptian critic Magda al-Nowaihi has remarked that Barrādah’s “formulation of the unconscious” shows the impact of Freudian theories on the Moroccan writer (373). As I will detail in chapter four, the novel articulates its vision of fractured subjectivities, firstly, by presenting a cast of characters manifesting contradictory behaviors, attitudes, and traits, and secondly, by its strategic use of multiple narrators as well as self-reflexive and meta-fictional discourses. The novel mentions Freud by name on multiple occasions.

Barrādah also interacts with Mikhail Bakhtin’s theories of the novel; the deployment of different narrative voices in his text The Game of Forgetting brings to mind the Bakhtinian concept of “heteroglossia.”21 As I will elaborate in chapter four, the Moroccan novelist-critic makes use of Bakhtin’s notion of “heteroglossia” by incorporating a variety of languages, dialects, voices, styles, viewpoints, etc. in order to lay out his own vision of the novel being a site that allows for a diversity of viewpoints and responds to “the exigencies of relativizing truth and reflecting the [kind of] doubt and suspicion which now mark the human-being’s relationships with him/herself, with the other, and with the world” (Barrādah, Fāḍā’āt

21 See Mikhail Bakhtin, The Dialogic Imagination, 300.
Both Barthian and Bakhtinian theories highlight the political exigency of Barrādah’s innovative literary and critical work and Arab experimentalism more broadly. Indeed, *al-tajrīb*’s entanglement with European figures and ideas should not be read as undermining the specificity and/or autonomy of Moroccan and Arab experimental writings. This entanglement speaks to a complex relationship resulting from an increasing dialogue across languages and literary traditions, and not to a simplistic notion of influence and passive consumption. In chapter one, I show the limitations of the model of “influence” as I attempt to make the case for an alternative matrix that instead embraces intertextuality, interaction, and dialogue. As I will elaborate, this matrix involves two layers: *al-turāth* (the Arab-Islamic heritage) and the world novel. That is, Arab experimentalism interacts with the heritage of the Arabs as well as with the world literary heritage.

- **Najīb Maḥfūẓ (Naguib Mahfouz) and the Consolidation of Social Realism in the Arabic Novel**

The trend of *al-tajrīb* surfaced on the literary scene of Morocco and other parts of the Arabic-speaking world with a view to exploring alternative ways of writing literature, ways that veered away from the realist model. *Al-tajrīb* ushered a new moment in Moroccan literary history and creativity, one that both reflected and responded to the socio-political transformations taking place in the post-independence era. Postcolonial experimental writings in Morocco could be seen as the effect of the shift in the country’s cultural scene, an effect that helped generate debates and conversations over the configuration of the novel genre and its role in the socio-political sphere of a “Third-World” nation. The debate over novelistic form in the Arab world—and in Morocco
in particular—reached high intensity in the 1970s and the decades that followed. Al-Madīnī asserts that two main approaches have marked the trajectory of the Arabic novel: One is summed up in the work of Maḥfūẓ, whereas the other is represented by writings with varying degrees of investment in “experimentation” (al-tajrīb) (Taḥawwulāt, 132). This view divides the Arabic-language novelistic project in Morocco and the Arab world into two broad periods, contrasting Maḥfūẓ’s “social realism” with literary works with various grains of “experimentation.” It is noticeable that Maḥfūẓ, single-handedly, makes up an entire movement or school. In a similar vein, Barrādah remarks that one could make a distinction between:

روأية تصدر عن استراتيجية المحاكاة المستهدفة القبض على الواقع و تحقيق تخييل يبعث على التماهي، و بين رواية تعطي الاسبقية للكتابة في وصفها عنصرًا أساسًا يوظف فيه الروائي عناصر السرد والتخيل ضمن تنويت للكتابة ينطوي على تخصيص اللغة و الشكل و الرؤية إلى العالم.

[A novel that is born out of a strategy of mimesis, the goal being to capture reality and to fulfill a fiction(alization) that borders on identification, and a novel that gives precedence to writing, [seen] as an essential element, through which the novelist employs narrative and fictional devices, as part of [a strategy] to individualize writing through making language, form, and the vision to the world peculiar. (Al-Riwa‘ah al-‘Arabiyyah 31)]

I have to underscore that I am not advocating a total equation between Barrādah’s categorization of the Arabic-language novel and al-Madīnī’s, although I must concede to the similarity between the two sets of distinctions. Maḥfūẓ’s pre-1967 “social realist” writings do aspire to capture the everyday life of the Egyptian society, as I discussed above, and also seem to rely to a large extent on the strategy of “mimesis,” what Barrādah refers to as al-muhākāt. Conversely, works that display a strong tendency towards experimentation appear to be more invested in
“writing” (al-kitābah) and giving more importance to language and form—the skeletal constituents of the writing sphere. This does not mean that “social realist” writings, including works by Maḥfūẓ and Ghallāb, are necessarily devoid of such elements nor that they should be neatly labelled as the exact opposite of “experimental” works. For example, societal issues—which are tackled explicitly and pointedly in the work of Maḥfūẓ and Ghallāb—are not completely absent in the “experimental” works of al-Madīnī, Barrādah, and al-ʿArwī, although their presence could be more nuanced within a literary economy that puts questions of aesthetics and artistic design first. As emphasized above, experimental literature in Morocco and other Arabic-speaking territories is not divorced from the social reality, only it privileges the sphere of writing itself (al-kitābah) and does not rely on the strategy of mimesis (al-muḥākāt) as incarnated in the social realist work of Maḥfūẓ or Ghallāb, for its literary vision goes beyond a mechanical transfer or depiction of lived experience. Following Barrādah, al-tajrīb foregrounds questions of form and literary language. Mimesis (al-muḥākāt) is relegated to a secondary sphere and writing (al-kitābah) takes center stage.

Indeed, Maḥfūẓ is considered the social realist novelist par excellence in the Arabic-speaking world. Whenever the concept of “realism” (al-wāqiʿiyyah) is brought up in relation to the Arabic novel, in all likelihood the name of Najīb Maḥfūẓ makes an appearance. Iraqi critic Abdullāh Ibrāhīm assigns the labels “traditional recording” (al-tawthīq al-taqlīdī) (109) and “traditional narration” (al-sard al-taqlīdī) to the novelistic writings of Maḥfūẓ, which, he underscores, celebrate al-hikāyah (the story) and highlights “its logical sequence”; this process takes into account “a continuous progression until the end [of the novel] when the crisis is resolved and the missing equilibrium is restored” (110). That is, priority is given to a novel’s content, which is presented in a coherent, straightforward, and oftentimes linear fashion. It is
indeed unusual not to encounter the designation “traditional” or “traditionalist” in discussions of Maḥfūz’s literary work. Admittedly, a large number of novels by Maḥfūz attempt to capture the everyday life of the Egyptian society, and rely to a large extent on the strategy of al-muhākāt (mimesis). Rasheed El-Enany remarks that the well-known Egyptian novelist Jamāl al-Ghīṭānī—who, like Maḥfūz, grew up in a place called Jamaliyya—has studied Maḥfūz’s characters and concluded that the novels “Khan al-Khalili, Midaq Alley and The Trilogy are accurate documentations of the features of the area during the period of their events” (1-2). Following al-Ghīṭānī, the Maḥfūzian literary model, which arguably strives to perfect the technique of mimesis, is heavily invested in the socio-historical aspects of a large segment of the Egyptian populace. This way, fiction serves literary as well as extra-literary purposes.

It comes as no surprise that the Maḥfūzian model takes up, in a direct fashion, societal and political issues, arguably with an eye to making an impact within the social milieu in question. Maḥfūz has himself stated: “In all my writings, you will find politics. You may find a story which ignores love or any other subject, but not politics; it is the very axis of our thinking” (qtd. in El-Enany 23). This statement is telling, and is consistent with the technique of mimesis being the bedrock of Maḥfūz’s oeuvre. It highlights the ideological bent of Maḥfūz’s social realism. In this regard, Roger Allen notes that Maḥfūz’s famous al-Thulāthiyya (1956-1957; The Trilogy 1990-1992) “provide[s] a vivid account of the many political, social, and intellectual conflicts of the interwar years,” before adding that The Trilogy and other novels “were carefully crafted portraits of Egyptian society that explored in precise detail the turbulent processes the Egyptian people had gone through [. . .] to reach political independence” (The Arabic Novel, 79; emphasis added). Maḥfūz’s work—The Trilogy at least—incorporates elements of what came to be labelled as “committed literature” (al-’adab al-multazīm) or “commitment” (al-’īltizām) in
Arab literary and intellectual circles. To this effect, Moroccan critic and novelist ‘Abdullāh Al-ʿArwī states in his seminal work al-Idyūlūjyā al-‘Arabiyya al-Muʿāṣira (Contemporary Arab Ideology, 1970) that during the “realist period” (marḥalah wāqiʿiyyah) of Arab literary production (al-‘intāj al-‘adabī al-ʿarabī), “all literary forms of expression—the novel, the story (al-qiṣṣah), and the theatre—united and [that this period] was completely dominated by the figure of Najīb Maḥfūẓ” (218). Al-ʿArwī continues his critique of Maḥfūẓ and the (social) realist school in these terms:

لا حاجة البتة إلى أن نثبت بالتفصيل ما يربط هذا الأدب بالبورجوازية الصغيرة واتجاهها الوضعاني. لقد كفانا نجيب محفوظ نفسه عناء ذلك، إذ شخّص سلامة موسى في ثلاثيته تحت إسم عدلي كريم، المثقف الجريء في أفكاره والمعتز بنفسه، مدير المجلة وزعيم الشباب التقدمي [...].

[We are not in need to prove in detail the link between this [realist] literature and the small bourgeoisie and its positivist tendencies. Najīb Maḥfūẓ has saved us the trouble, since he delineated Salāma Mūsā in his al-Thulāthiyya [The Trilogy] under the [fictional] name ‘Adlī Kaɾīm, the proud intellectual with bold ideas and the director of al-Majallah [The Magazine] and the leader of the progressive youth [...]. (218)]

Al-ʿArwī, a vocal advocate of literary innovation and experimentation on the levels of form and content, expresses reservation towards the Maḥfūzian realist school due to its alleged constraints.

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22 Al-Madīnī notes that al-ʿItīzām (commitment) gained some currency in Moroccan literary circles in the postcolonial era and became “a key notion in realist criticism”; al-Madīnī adds that al-ʿItīzām, as a concept, started to appear in newspapers first and then in “cultural magazines,” and then a “true consensus” was reached in adopting and institutionalizing this concept in the Union of the Arab Maghreb Writers. See Al-Kitābah al-Sardiyyah fī al-ʿAdab al-Maghribī al-Hadīth [Prose Writing in Modern Moroccan Literature] (Rabat: Maṭbaʿat al-Maʿarif al-Jadīda, 2000), 36.

and emphasis on certain segments of the Egyptian society—particularly that which he calls “the small bourgeoisie.” He avers that

[The realism of Najīb Maḥfūẓ [. . .] was limited in content, since it focused on exposing the conditions of the small bourgeoisie, victims of poverty, injustice, and negligence within a liberal system. (225)]

In his critique of the Maḥfūẓian oeuvre, a critique that oftentimes sound extremely harsh, al-ʿArwī draws a very important conclusion, namely that “the realist style” (al-uslūb al-wāqiʿi) is characterized by a “distressful lack of authentic artisticity” (lā fanniyya ‘asīliyya kaʿība), given that “what is expected of the linguistic expression [al-ʿibārah al-lughawiyyah] is to reflect—boringly and reductively—the proceedings of an administration, sadness, lethargy, misery, exhaustion—that is, what the small bourgeoisie experiences on a daily basis” (226-227). Al-ʿArwī questions the aesthetic value of the work of Maḥfūẓ. Roger Allen, on the other hand, writes that “the social-realist novel in Arabic, with all its creative and reformist potential, was placed at the disposal of so many [Arab] writers [. . .] thanks primarily to the genius and industry of Najīb Maḥfūẓ” (114; emphasis added). It is interesting to remark that Allen’s celebratory appraisal of Maḥfūẓ sharply contrasts with al-ʿArwī’s critical stance; yet, the two critics are in agreement over a significant point, namely the label “realist” or “social realist” as a characteristic feature of the Maḥfūẓian oeuvre. Nonetheless, I should take note of the historical context of al-ʿArwī’s remarks on Maḥfūẓ’s work. In fact, al-ʿArwī’s book made its appearance as early as 1967, and thus its analytical scope is limited to the pre-1967 writings of the Egyptian author. As
I will amply discuss in chapter one, Maḥfūz’s post-1967 work underwent a paradigm shift, marked by a departure from the European realist novelistic models.

My discussion of the Maḥfūzian realist literary paradigm is relevant to the Moroccan context owing to the fact that ʿAbdulkarīm Ghallāb, the most significant figure in the early phase of the novelistic project in Morocco, is viewed by many as the Moroccan Maḥfūz by virtue of his prolific œuvre which putatively parallels, in many ways, that of the Egyptian Nobel laureate. In discussing the “traditional narration” (al-sard al-taqlīdī) model in Arabic novel writing, ʿAbdullāh Ibrāhīm places Ghallāb and Maḥfūz in the same category (111). In a similar vein, Moroccan novelist-critic Aḥmad al-Madīnī makes a connection between Ghallāb’s novel Dafannā al-Māḍī (We buried the Past, 1966) and Maḥfūz’s al-Thulāthiyya (The Trilogy), before adding that the realism trend of the post-Independence era (i.e. after 1956) in Moroccan letters saw Maḥfūz as “the unrivalled teacher” (al-muʿallim bilā munāziʿ) (Taḥawwulāt, 132). This assessment corroborates Allen’s view regarding the enormous impact which Maḥfūz’s work has exerted on a large group of novelists throughout the vast Arabic-speaking world, including Morocco and the Maghreb region.

A number of critics in Morocco situate Ghallāb’s novel Dafannā al-Māḍī (We buried the Past) within the realism school of literature. For instance, ʿAbdulḥamīd ʿAqqār, while arguing that Dafannā al-Māḍī is the real starting point of novel writing in Morocco, emphasizes that this text constitutes such a momentous work that depicts a very crucial period of Morocco’s modern history—namely the country’s resistance to European colonialism and its attempts to reconstruct “national and individual identity” (24). On his part, al-Madīnī sees Dafannā al-Māḍī to partake in “historical commentary,” one that betrays a particular ideology and a particular view of history (al-Kitābah, 268). I should underscore that Ghallāb was an active member of the
Nationalist Movement—as well as the *Istiqlāl* [Independence] Party—that led the resistance against the Franco-Spanish occupation of the country and would play a major role in the attainment of political independence and Moroccan politics in the post-decolonization era. Al-Madinī states that Ghallāb found himself involved in a variety of responsibilities: “He was writing the novel; giving a testimony about the reality on the ground; contributing to the ongoing political debate; and somehow rewriting history” (268). Interestingly, al-Madinī situates Ghallāb’s work within what Susan Rubin Suleiman calls “Le roman à thèse” (i.e. the didactic novel) (qtd. in al-Madinī, 269). Suleiman defines “Le roman à thèse” as a realist novel that, in its core, presents itself to the reader as carrying information and uncovering “the truth” of a particular doctrine or ideology—political, philosophical, scientific, or religious (qtd. in al-Madinī 269). Al-Madinī avers that in the 1960s and 1970s literary works sought legitimacy by actively responding to the demands of *al-‘iltizām* (engagement) and *al-wāqi‘iyya* (realism) (33). Indeed, *Dafannā al-Mādī* (*We buried the Past*) is a text with a pointedly political, social, and cultural mission or agenda. It is shaped by the collective consciousness, and particularly by the ideology of the Nationalist Movement and its goal of undermining the European colonialist and imperialist enterprise. Moroccan critic Ḥamīd Laḥmīdānī affirms that Ghallāb’s novel attempts to account for a period of Morocco’s modern history, “in which society witnessed major transformations”; he adds that the novel “depicts the suffering of this [new] generation as it faces two challenges, social backwardness [. . .] and colonial intervention” (135). There are noticeable parallels—both thematic and formal—between Ghallab’s fiction and Maḥfūz’s. Both figures explicitly take up societal issues with an eye to making a difference within their respective societies. I have to emphasize that in this model, *al-ḥikāyah* (the story) dominates the narration so much so that the two enter in a relationship of unity and harmony, the effect being the reader’s
inability to separate one from the other. Put differently, there is very little to no distance or distancing between the story and the telling of the story. This is perhaps one of the defining features of the “traditional” (or “social realist”) mode, at least as articulated by Maḥfūẓ and Ghallāb.

Many critics attest to the shift in literary activity brought about by the phenomenon of al-tajrīb. This shift corresponds to the waning of the technique of mimesis and its pursuit of verisimilitude and conversely the flourishing of a novelistic discourse that values writing, a sphere that critically engages the form-politics relation. ʿAbdullāh Ibrāhīm notes that, whereas Maḥfūẓ’s “traditional narration” sees the act of narrating as “a representational means of expression” that mirrors the “dominant views and visions” in society, the “new experimental tendencies” in the Arabic novel highlight the very act of narration in its own right (110). Ibrāhīm succinctly outlines the new techniques adopted by the advocates and practitioners of experimentation as follows:

[The narration is focused on itself, and it becomes a subject of itself within the novelistic text. Thus, the narrators undertake the analysis of the levels of narration, the ways of constructing the story, the views of the narrators, the relationship between the real and the imaginary material, the impact of the text on [the reader], and the conflict that arises]
between the narrators themselves to gain exclusive attention and seize acknowledgment from [the readers] regarding the importance of their roles and functions. (110)]

These new techniques, when juxtaposed with the “social realist” model of Mahfūz or Ghallāb, appear new, if not revolutionary. In this “experimental” framework, al-hikāyah (the story) recedes into the background, and the act of writing itself assumes center-stage. In other words, there is an increasing distance between the story—or lack thereof—and the writing of the story. Put differently still, the discourse and the story enter into a relationship of disharmony and disjunction. The discourse dominates the story, and this latter oftentimes turns out to be no other than the story of writing itself. This is quite evident in Muḥammad Barrādah (Mohamed Berrada’s) highly experimental novel Lu’bat al-Nisyān (The Game of Forgetting), which in the words of its translator, Issa Boullata, is a creative work “with many narrators, who themselves get entangled in the act of narration and engross [the reader’s] mind in their points of view, their different voices and languages, [and] their disputes” (1). Boullata concludes that Lu’bat al-Nisyān “has some of the most creative narrative modes in modern Arabic fiction” (5). Indeed, Barrādah’s novel Lu’bat al-Nisyān has almost become the prototypical example of the phenomenon of al-tajrīb in the Moroccan literary scene in the latter half of the twentieth-century, and now occupies a prominent position in the Arabic novelistic canon. Like al-Madīnī’s ZBWWH and al-‘Arwā’s Awrāq (Papers), Lu’bat al-Nisyān (The Game of Forgetting) diverges in significant ways from the social realist model of Mahfūz and Ghallāb. In all three texts, the metafictional discourse dominates the story, sometimes to the extent of annihilation—as is the case in ZBWWH. And in Awrāq and Lu’bat al-Nisyān criticism proper interferes with the unfolding of the story; the texts discuss questions that are normally reserved for literary critics, such as the levels of the narration, the reliability of the narrator(s), the significance of literary
writings, and so forth. According to Aḥmad al-Yabūrī, Barrādah’s *Lu’bat al-Nisyān* (*The Game of Forgetting*) mixes “theorization” with “creative writing” (*Dīnāmiyat*, 56). Al-Yabūrī adds that several critics in Morocco saw Barrādah’s novel as some sort of theorization (56). It might be fair to suggest that Barrādah, the prominent literary critic who took on the garb of the novelist, sought in his debut novel to experiment with his views and theories of the novel genre.

In discussing contemporary Arabic novels, including Barrādah’s *Lu’bat al-Nisyān* and al-Madīnī’s *ZBWWH*, Roger Allen asserts that these two works belong to the wave of “experimentation in the realm of the Arabic novel in recent decades,” a wave that, for instance, manifests in the novel’s reliance on “contradictions, fractured or cancelled time, and textual pastiche and subversion” (*The Arabic Novel*, 122-24). In a similar vein, Fabio Caiani, in his study of experimental Arabic fiction, investigates Barrādah’s *The Game of Forgetting*, and notes that experimental Arab novelists make use of “narrative fragmentation, which upsets the main ingredients of traditional Mahfouzian writing: linear development, clear exposition, solid temporal and spatial settings” (8; emphasis in the text). This casts al-tajrīb (experimentalism) as having a different literary economy from that of social realism. Following critic ʿAbdullāh Ibrāhīm, al-tajrīb stands in an oppositional relationship to the Maḥfūzian school, and could be construed

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[. . .] as an implicit rebellion against the traditional pattern represented by the endeavor of Najīb Maḥfūẓ and other Arab novelists of the first half of the twentieth century [. . .].

(110)]

Whereas Ibrāhīm characterizes the relationship between the trend of al-tajrīb (experimentalism) and the Maḥfūzian-Ghallābian trajectory in clear-cut oppositional terms, I take a somewhat different approach; I view al-tajrīb through the lens of literary evolution. That is, the “experimental” and the “traditional” manifestations of novel writing—despite their contrasting tendencies—are not to be construed as diametrically opposed. I underscore that the demarcations between these two modes of literary activity in Morocco during the second half of the twentieth-century are far from static, instead manifesting varying degrees of flexibility. I argue that Moroccan novelistic writing—in its various incarnations, from its beginnings in the first half of the twentieth century to the present—follows an evolutionary line of progression in spite of the explicit differences that characterize the discourses of al-tajrīb. As I will argue, the phenomenon of al-tajrīb—even in its most radical and transgressive articulations—cannot be dismissed as a moment of utter discontinuity or rupture, in the sense of a complete divorce with other literary trends within the literary scene in Morocco. In other words, I see al-tajrīb (experimentalism) as developing out of, rather than in place of, the realist school as led by Maḥfūẓ, Ghallāb, and others. As I emphasized above, one major matrix of this dissertation project is that Moroccan experimental writings are indeed invested in social reality, and should not be dismissed as non-realistic or anti-realistic. Reality—understood here in terms of relations of political and social exigency rather than mimesis—remains the ultimate source that pumps life into the veins of al-tajrīb. The next section sheds further light on this cardinal issue.
• *Al-Tajrīb* (experimentalism) and Social Reality

The experimental impulse that undergirds the Moroccan experimental novel has extra-textual offshoots, since it is part of a larger transformational dynamic that affected Moroccan society in the post-decolonization era. The advocates of experimentation carried the banner of innovation both in the literary and socio-cultural spheres. This implies that the trend of *al-tajrīb* (experimentalism) cannot and should not be reduced to being a mere exercise in formalistic gymnastics, divorced from its historical and socio-political context. I contest the narrative that weds the thrust of *al-tajrīb* to formal and aesthetic experimentation, to the detriment of social reality. Perhaps one of the most vocal critical voices of the trend of *al-tajrīb* in Morocco is critic al-Ḥabīb al-Dāyim Rabbī, who charges *al-tajrīb* of landing novel writing in a quagmire. Following Rabbī, the cancellation of *al-ḥikāyah* (the narrative or the story) by the “new novelists” in Morocco has put the novel genre in a “real impasse” (124). In his critique, Rabbī points out that “most [Moroccan] writers of the novel are themselves [novel] critics, and most of these critics are university professors” (124). Although he does not provide names, one would assume that Aḥmad al-Madinī, Muḥammad Barrāda, and Abdullāh al-Arwī are likely targets. Rabbī underscores that these writers are “more readers of Western theories than novelists,” adding that the novel is “a complementary shelter” for them to experiment with such theories (124). Thus, *al-tajrīb*, Rabbī warns, could turn into *al-takhrīb* (destruction) (122; 124). In the name of modernism, he continues, these writers produce “novels of the nothing” (*riwāyāt al-lā-shay’*) (124). Rabbi’s remarks dismiss *al-tajrīb* as a mere exercise in “Western theories” of literary experimentation, and is therefore a foreign product that is unable to express, in any meaningful way, the real issues and challenges of the Moroccan subject. Rabbī’s views go against the two parameters that inform this dissertation. They have a tendency to place a barrier
between *al-tajrīb* and Moroccan social life, on the one hand, and they transfix Moroccan experimental writings firmly along the matrix of influence and subordination. I am skeptical of this approach, and I want to emphasize that critical studies of *al-tajrīb* should not neglect to view this current of experimental literature as a reaction to, and a reflection of, the transitional cultural landscape in the aftermath of decolonization and of Arab military-political defeats in the conflict with Israel, events that have left a mark on Moroccan (and Arab) subjectivity, as I will discuss in chapter one.

*Al-tajrīb* (experimentalism) provides an invaluable window into contemporary Moroccan literature and by extension Moroccan thought, and it illuminates the evolving Moroccan consciousness in the postcolonial era. *Al-tajrīb* has a broader significance that goes beyond the literary realm; it is tied to cultural production and cultural shifts in the Moroccan society. I argue that *al-tajrīb* surfaced in the literary scene to respond not only to “traditional” or “social realist” writings but also to the trend of *al-‘iltizām* (commitment) and its ideological Pan-Arab overtones. While I recognize that *al-tajrīb* is not necessarily antithetical to *al-‘iltizām*, I stress that it privileges the text and questions of form and style. It has a tendency to break the centrality of the story or the plot (content). In addressing the strand of *al-‘iltizām* (commitment) in Moroccan and Arabic literary activity, al-Madīnī underscores that *al-tajrīb* (experimentalism) is what imbues literary works with *legitimacy*, since only “the continued practice of *al-tajrīb* justifies and legitimizes writing”; al-Madini is very critical of works of literature whose authors use their “narrators” as “speaking platforms in order to engage in political, social, or moral gymnastics” (*al-Khiṭāb al-Riwā‘ī*,” 73). According to al-Madīnī, the emergence of *al-tajrīb* sought, among other things, to counter *al-‘iltizām* (commitment) and its tendency towards excessive politicizing and moralizing, a literary phenomenon that dominated the Moroccan literary scene in the 1960s.
and the 1970s. Al-Madinī states that *al-ʿiltizām* (commitment) made its first appearance in Moroccan literary criticism in the 1960s, and this resulted in the literary discourse assuming a subservient position to the ideological discourse (*Al-Kitābah*, 7). In Morocco, prose fiction in particular would actively and excessively engage with the new challenges facing the Moroccan society in its aspiration to justice, dignity, equality, and democracy. Al-Madinī avers that in the 60s and 70s literary works sought legitimacy by actively responding to the demands of *al-ʿiltizām* (commitment) and *al-wāqiʿiyya* (realism), which had become popular strands in literary theory and criticism (33). Within this dynamic, the value of literature was measured primarily against extra-literary criteria, and literariness assumed a subordinate position. The question of legitimacy in literature, following al-Madinī, is achieved through the text’s aesthetic and literary accomplishment, rather than through a simplistic engagement with a political or ideological cause. The eventual consolidation of *al-tajrīb* was an indirect factor behind *al-ʿiltizām* losing sway in Moroccan literature and criticism.

Yet, *al-tajrīb* (experimentalism) should not be viewed as the opposite of *al-ʿiltizām* (commitment). One could argue that experimental literature sought to acclimate the strand of *al-ʿiltizām* to an emerging criticism that wanted to put questions of textuality first and foremost while not losing sight of social reality and the historical developments that shapes it. According to Saʿīd Yaqṭīne, *al-tajrīb* partakes in a crucial historical moment when the (experimental) novel pushed poetry to the background and emerged as a privileged form “to embody and dissect the reality of defeat” (*al-Qirāʾah*, 291). *Al-tajrīb* as a critical stage of Moroccan literary evolution should be researched against the backdrop of the evolving Moroccan consciousness post-1956 and -1967. These two dates are very critical; 1956 is the year Morocco obtained its political independence from both France and Spain, and 1967 is the year Arab armies suffered a crushing
defeat in the six-day war with Israel, as noted earlier. The two dates show that *al-tajrīb* emerged in response to developments at home (Morocco) and abroad (the larger Arab world). This comes as no surprise given the cultural, linguistic, religious, civilizational, etc. links between Morocco and the Maghreb region as a whole with the rest of the Arabic-speaking world. Also, the European colonial enterprise was a further unifying element for the Arab nations.

*Al-tajrīb*, as part of literary transformations in the post-1956 and post-1967 eras, reflects, in one way or another, the evolving Moroccan and Arab consciousness. Yaqṭīne traces a number of changes in the Moroccan subjectivity in the latter half of the twentieth century: a- “from the stable and ready-made to the changing and the possible,” b- “from the absolute to the relative,” and c- “from the answer-mode that covers everything to the question-mode that interrogates everything” (291). In line with Yaqṭīne’s views, Barrādah takes the 1967 Arab defeat against Israel to be a turning point in the history of the Arabic (and Moroccan) novel; he writes:

[After 1967 and the uncovering of illusions, the Arabic literary discourse will take a special path, emptying itself of bombastic slogans and foolish optimism, in order to enter a space of hell, and interrogate that which has been silenced with regard to the self,]

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society, and the relationship with Heaven [i.e. God]. Thus, the novel became an effective means [. . .] to reveal and divest, to fathom but not sacralize, to scream, to shame, to uncover, and to be in dialogue with the disturbing phenomena that mirror the recurring defeats. (Al-Riwa'ah al-'Arabiyyah, 50)

Literary experimentation, thus, does not develop in a vacuum but rather has a point of reference in the political and socio-cultural spheres. Al-tajrib is not merely a site of formalist experimentation and a literary current that shuns investments in issues that preoccupy the Moroccan and Arab subject. While it privileges questions pertaining to form, language, and narrative style, Arabic and Moroccan experimental literature is not muted on challenges facing the individual and the collective in the Arab world in the postcolonial era. The experimental novel surfaced in order to reconsider how questions of form relate to the political and the social. It provided an aesthetic space for voicing complaints, worries, protests, critiques, etc. emanating from subjects suffering from various forms of oppression and injustice. The form-politics dialectic that informs Arab experimentalism has a point of reference in the idea of crisis, broadly understood. This crisis pertains to such terrains as culture, politics, and identity. Stefan Meyer asserts that “[e]xperimental Arab writers,” while facing the constraints of their respective societies and political regimes, “have focused their experimental efforts on the attempt to break down certain specific conventions of realism, particularly the construction of narrative to fit an ideological viewpoint” (7; emphasis added). He further remarks:

[Experimental Arab writers] have reacted to the formal unity, ideological bias, omniscient viewpoint, and heroism of realist narratives and countered these with narratives that are fragmented, artistically determined, multiple-voiced, and that reflect a
sense of cultural crisis, while still working from a standpoint that reflects the values and priorities of the *engagé*. (7; emphasis in the original)

Following Meyer’s observations, it appears that Arabic literary experimentation is two-sided. On the one hand, it seeks to make breakthroughs in the arena of form, with an eye on producing literary works that are formally and stylistically innovative. But on the other hand, it is bound to address, indirectly or otherwise, the immediate concerns, problems, challenges, and preoccupations of Arab societies despite the dire consequences these writers might face.26 This state of affairs drove Ceza Qasim Draz to conclude that “[a]vant-garde literature” in the Arab world is “deeply rooted in the social reality, a literature which is *engagée*” (qtd. in Meyer 7; emphasis in the original). In a similar vein, Magda al-Nowaihi, in her study of Barrādah’s *Lu’bat al-Nisyān (The Game of Forgetting)*, writes:

> Framed as it is within concrete issues of censorship, the question of the real need for *societal change* in a post-colonial era replete with problems of inequality, poverty, oppression, stagnation, and an identity crisis on both the personal and the national levels, adds immediacy and poignancy to the more general *postmodern* anxieties voiced in the text. (387; emphasis added)

Indeed, *Lu’bat al-Nisyān (The Game of Forgetting)* is a literary text that is deeply ingrained in the social and the political and is committed to voicing, in its own right, the demands of justice in a postcolonial Morocco under the dictatorial grip of King Hassan 2nd and his oppressive regime.

The commitment undertones in the three texts selected for examination in this dissertation

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project shows how complex the relationship between *al-tajrīb* (experimentalism) and *al-wāqiʿi iyāh* (realism) is. I want to reiterate that experimentation and realism are not diametrically opposed despite the views that take writings that espouse a certain version of *al-tajrīb* (e.g., the novels of al-Madīnī) as running counter to the current of realism, at least as modelled by Maḥfūẓ and Ghallāb. In addressing this question, Abdel’ali Būṭayyib notes that some critical studies of contemporary Moroccan “experimental novels” wrongfully make a conclusive distinction between such works and “realistic” ones, which implies that:

*هناك قطيعة نهائية بينهما ، و بأن الكتابة الروائية التجريبية غير واقعية ، أو أن الكتابة الروائية الواقعية لا يمكن أن تكون أبدا تجريبية ، و هو رأي مرفوض تماما [..] بإجماع الروائيين التجريبيين أنفسهم ، عربا كانوا أو غربيين ، ماداموا كلهم لا يقبلون بغير هذه الصفة ( الواقعية) ، و إن كانوا طبعا يختلفون في تحديد مفهومها [..]*

[There is a definitive rupture between them, and that experimental novel writing is non-realistic or [conversely] that realistic novel writing could never be experimental; this opinion is completely rejected by experimental novelists themselves—Arabs or Westerners—since all of them would not accept other than this label (realism), although of course they differ in specifying its meaning, (“Maḥūm”)]

In light of Būṭayyib’s remarks I want to propose that *al-tajrīb* (experimentalism) could arguably be seen as a mechanism that expands the purview of *al-wāqiʿi iyāh* (realism) as a critical and literary field. Realism, as a construct, is so broad and is not by necessity limited to content. Realism does not have stable or rigid formal, stylistic, and/or thematic configurations nor does it presuppose cloning the everyday proceedings of reality. Within the framework of experimentalism, realism—following Barrādah—is understood more in terms of the attempt to
reach “a relational balance” between the various components of the experimental text and to turn its textual and stylistic workings into a site that generates new questions in the reader and, by extension, in society (“‘Abʿād Wāqiʿ ‘iyyah,” 76). In other words, the experimental text, even as it privileges its formal and stylistic morphology, is still committed to—and seeks to establish productive dialogue with—its readership in the social milieu.

This new configuration of realism is in line with what Barrādah and al-Madinī call “al-wāqiʿ ‘iyyah al-naṣṣiyyah”27 (textual or text-based realism) and “wāqiʿ ‘iyyat al-kitābah”28 (the realism of writing) respectively. Interestingly, these two terms put more weight on the text, the centerpiece of the act of writing, thereby shifting the debate over realism from content to form. Put differently, the realm of the signifier is favored to that of the signified. The bottom line is that realism should not be seen as one unitary thing, whose domain is defined once and for all. Rather, one can speak of multiple realisms—so far as we agree that what we call “reality” is an increasingly complex and complicated domain that is hard to pin down definitively. In this regard, I would like to draw on Lucien Goldmann’s assessment of the fiction of French writer and theorist Alain Robbe-Grillet, who is seen as the best representative of the “nouveau roman” genre, which—according to Barrādah and Yaqtīn—bears some significance with regard to the trend of al-tajrīb in the Moroccan novel. Commenting specifically on Robbe-Grillet’s novels Le Voyeur (1955; The Voyeur, 1958) and Les Gommes (1953; The Erasers, 1994), Goldmann writes: “The theme of these two novels, the disappearance of any importance and any meaning from individual action, make them in my opinion two of the most realistic works of

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contemporary fiction” (145; emphasis added). This assessment might come as a surprise, given that “many critics and a large section of the public see the *nouveau roman* as a set of purely formal experiments and, generally speaking, an attempt to evade social reality” (132). Following Yaqṭīne, there are similarities between the French *nouveau roman* and the postcolonial Moroccan novel that advocates *al-tajrīb*; Yaqṭīne asserts that “the new Moroccan novel” developed at a time when the genre of the novel witnessed major *transformations* in France and the Arabic-speaking world (“Su’āl,” 26). This shows once more Moroccan experimentalism’s entanglement not only with the *Mashriq* (the Arab East) but also with European ideas, as mentioned earlier. *Al-tajrīb* benefitted from a critical engagement of the theories of Robbe-Grillet, which according to Yaqṭīne pushed for a new vision of literature, one that shifted the point of focus from the “traditional” concept of “genre” (*al-naw’*) to the notion of “the text” (*al-naṣṣ*) (26). Yaqṭīne also notes the contributions of Maurice Blanchot—especially his *L’Espace littéraire* (1955, *The Space of Literature*, 1982)—regarding the elusive and slippery contours of the idea of “genre”; no matter how hard a writer tries to stay within the framework of a certain literary genre the end product will in the final analysis reveal the cohabitation and interpenetration of myriad genres, a situation that renders this notion of genre as “a classical trick” worth discarding and surpassing (28). It is worthwhile stressing that the three texts selected for study in this dissertation are all marked by generic instability, as I will elaborate in the subsequent chapters. This speaks to Moroccan experimental authors’ active and productive interaction with other experimentalisms across languages and literary traditions, and further illuminates the debate over realism. Through Goldman’s views, realism appears as far from being a simplistic notion whose contours are well-established; rather realism is quite thorny and could have multiple dimensions. As Amanṣūr puts it, there are indeed several “realisms
[wāqi‘īyyāt], not just one realism so much so that one could propose that each writer has his or her own realism” (Istrātījiyāt, 165). One could go even further and suggest that each text could display a distinct version of realism, assuming that writers tend to diversify their work as they move from one literary piece to another.

In line with this thread, the three primary texts chosen for examination in this dissertation could each be said to articulate a distinct type of realism. Although this point is not the main focus of my project, it could be a fascinating topic for future research. My focus at this point is to show that these three highly experimental texts by al-Madinī, Barrādah, and al-‘Arwī do interact, in a variety of ways and in varying degrees of intensity, with cultural and socio-political issues in contemporary Morocco. In fact, Barrādah’s Lu‘bat al-Nisyān (The Game of Forgetting) and al-‘Arwī’s ‘Awrāq (Papers) could be overall construed as commentaries on the state of affairs in Morocco both in the pre- and post-independence periods. For instance, Al-‘Arwī has explicitly stated that he wrote ‘Awrāq (Papers) “to depict the cultural atmosphere in which the generation [he] belong[s] to lived” (Introduction, 5). Al-‘Arwī’s book offers the reader a window into the social, cultural, political, and ideological climes of Morocco both in the colonial and postcolonial eras. As I will elaborate in chapter five, Moroccan critic Muḥammad al-Dāhī stresses that ‘Awrāq (Papers) incorporates two versions of criticism, one ideological (174) and the other artistic (177). The book’s ideological critique targets a large number of issues, including “historiography, religion, politics, and society” in the pre- and post-Independence periods (174). In structuring Awrāq in such a way, al-‘Arwī is attempting to consolidate a critical consciousness in his reader as well as in Moroccan society at large. Similarly, Barrādah states that his first novel Lu‘bat al-Nisyān offered him the opportunity “to reflect on what we lived—intertwined, overlapping, and clouded” (Introduction, 3). As I will discuss in chapter four, Barrādah resorts to
the narrative devices of multiplicity and fragmentation to account for such lived experience. Interestingly, these two devices serve well Barrādah’s vision of literature, one that seeks to unsettle the political and socio-cultural structures of Moroccan society. Barrādah has himself remarked that “modernism” also comes to play in its “tendency to break up the social, political, ideological, and mental structures and their discursive centers of gravity” (qtd. in al-Kharrāṭ 23).

Thus, social reality and lived experience, in the words of both al-ʿArwī and Barrādah, are key aspects of their respective books ‘Awrāq (Papers) and Luʿbat al-Nisyān (The Game of Forgetting). These are two texts that combine, arguably in such a harmonious way, experimentation with realism.

Whether or not the investment of experimental literary works, such as the three texts chosen for analysis in this dissertation, in the strand of “engagé literature” compromises, in any way, their experimental quality could still remain open for debate. The resolution of such a debate goes beyond the scope of this project. Even as al-tajrīb combines literary experimentation with various grains of commitment, it still signals a shift in the Moroccan literary and critical scene. It is such a monumental phase in the trajectory of the Moroccan novel. The next section elaborates further on the transformations in novel writing brought about by the advent of the phenomenon of al-tajrīb.

- **Al-Tajrīb and the Transformation of Moroccan Literary Activity**

In order to contextualize al-tajrīb, it is crucial to frame this literary trend within a broader discussion of the concept of al-tahawwul (transformation), which a number of critics in Morocco and elsewhere use to account for the shift in Moroccan (and Arab) novel writing, a shift whose
palpations were strongly felt in the 1960s and 1970s—as mentioned before.\textsuperscript{29} Al-Madīnī grounds this notion of \textit{al-tahawwul} (transformation) in three points: firstly, in “a constant measuring and comparison of the old and the new”; secondly, in the formation of the novelistic writing as a totality, through a study of “the narrative structure,” the images used for description and representation, the “novelistic time” as opposed to “real time,” the levels of the discourse, etc.; and thirdly, in the content and signification of the literary work (\textit{Tahawwulāt}, 9-10). He underscores that the second and third points—which roughly parallel the notions of form and content—should never be treated separately, since the two unite and complement one another in forging a text’s “artistic construction and production of meaning” (10). Al-Madīnī gives more weight to questions of form and aesthetics in his examination of the transformations that have affected the Moroccan (and the Arabic) novel in the second half of the twentieth century, although he stresses that he is also wary not to overuse “the mechanisms of a purely formalist analysis” (11). This stance squares well with the general approach adopted in this dissertation, one that goes beyond the either-or language and highlights connectedness and continuity in analyzing the evolution of literary activity in Morocco and the larger Arab world.

Interestingly, al-Madīnī points out that \textit{al-tahawwul} (transformation) goes through stages (\textit{marāhil}), “including the experimental stage, of which there is a lot in the innovative novel and short story in our Arabic literature since the 70s of the previous century—and especially since the 80s” (9). Al-Madīnī proceeds to stress an issue of utmost importance to the general argument of this dissertation. He avers that the experimental phase, “despite its apparent boldness,

\footnote{The approximate English translation of this Arabic word could be “transformation,” “shift,” “turning,” or “mutation.” To give just two titles of books that address the idea of \textit{al-tahawwul} in the novel, we have Ahmad al-Madīnī’s \textit{Tahawwulāt al-naw’ fī al-riwāya al-‘arabiyya: bayna maghrīb wa mashriq} [Genre transformations in the Arabic novel: between West and East] (Rabat: Dar al-Amān, 2012). Also see Abd al-Ḥamīd ṬAqqār’s book \textit{al-Riwayah al-Maghāribiyah: Tahawwulāt al-Lughah wa al-Khiṭāb} [The Maghrebi novel: transformations of language and discourse] (Casablanca: al-Madāris, 2000).}
affectation, [declared intention for] rupture, etc., is indeed a transitional—not stable—moment” by virtue of the fact that it seeks “to mold an unprecedented state on the basis of an interaction between general elements” (9; emphasis added). Al-Madīnī posits that these “general elements,” which characterize the entire “system of literary prose fiction” (manẓūmat al-sard al-‘adabī), have absorbed “inherited traditions” (taqālīd mawrūthah), since “no writing comes to existence from a vacuum” before stressing that he is against a total parting with “literary heritage” (al-turāth al-‘adabī) under the pretext of “absolute innovation—despite the fact that my literary debut appeared extremely rebellious” (8). Although he does not provide names, al-Madīnī is perhaps referring to his first novel ZBWWH, which, I want to propose, manifests a version of al-tajrīb of the rebellious and subservice type while at the same time is—at least discursively—in dialogue with the Arab-Islamic heritage. As I detail in chapter three, ZBWWH draws heavily on Islamic scripture; for example, it employs archaic forms of address similar to classical Qur’anic Arabic. In fact, the aesthetic affinity of ZBWWH with the text of the Qur’an reaches an extreme level when entire Qur’anic passages are incorporated into the myriad speeches uttered by the protagonist.

Having said that, there is consensus among a number of Moroccan critics that al-Madīnī’s novel ZBWWH partakes, in significant ways, in the transformation of the young novel tradition in Morocco, which is reflective of larger social and cultural mutations. This consensus is of utmost importance to Moroccan literary historicity. It illuminates the fields of literary creativity and cultural production in contemporary Morocco. This serves not only the literary critic but the historian, the sociologist, and the cultural critic as well. Muḥammad Amanṣūr underscores that al-Madīnī’s novel ZBWWH brought with it a “strategic reversal” (qalb ʾistrāṭījī) of the question of literature as it was understood in the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s (Kharāʾīt, 17).
In a similar vein, Moroccan critic Ibrāhīm al-Khaṭīb has aptly described al-Madīnī’s first novel as an embodiment of “the chaos of writing,” which, he adds, could be interpreted “as a meaningful, coherent, and well-knit [textual] structure, emanating from an [extra-textual] ideological structure” that delineates the workings of “a group or a social class in search of a role in society” (qtd. in Amanṣūr 72). Likewise, Roger Allen asserts that both al-Madīnī’s ZBWWH and Barrādah’s Luʾbat al-Nisyān emphasize in fictional writing “a vision of contemporary society and [a] sense of alienation towards it” (124). Al-Khaṭīb and Allen link these transformational moments of Moroccan novel writing with societal issues, thereby avoiding a strictly formalist approach.

Significant as it was, the publication of ZBWWH was—to use al-Madīnī’s own words—a “transitional moment.” The novel was, in one way or another, experimenting with experimentation (al-tajrīb), hence its designation as “the chaos of writing” by al-Khaṭīb. In other words, the moment of ZBWWH was perhaps a premature version of al-tajrīb. Nevertheless, this significant work of modern Moroccan fiction did pave the way for the consolidation of the Moroccan novel’s transformation in the decades following its publication. Amanṣūr takes the decade of the 1980s to be “the field [haql] of al-tajrīb [experimentalism] par excellence”; he writes: “we can say that the 1980s was a transformational period from spontaneous al-tajrīb with [the novels] Ḥājiz al-Thalj and ZBWWH to al-tajrīb that is conscious of its strategies with the works of Ṭāzī, Aḥmad al-Madīnī, Mubārak Rabīʿ, Abdullāh al-ʿArwī, al-Mīlūdī Shaghmūm, Muḥammad Barrādah, Muḥammad al-Harrādī, and others” (25). Amanṣūr adds another transformational layer to novel writing, with the transition from a spontaneous, “premature” exercise of experimentation to one that is “conscious of its strategies.” It is telling that, in Amanṣūr’s list, al-Madīnī’s work appears in both categories. Indeed, al-Madīnī’s

- **Al-Tajrīb (Experimentalism) and the Dialectic of al-Tajdīd** and **al-Taqlīd**

  In treating the postcolonial Moroccan novel, I want to flesh out the nuances of the literary and critical field designated by the key notion of *al-tajrīb* (experimentalism). In order to unpack the complexity of *al-tajrīb*, I examine where it stands in relation to other important critical fields, including *al-tajdīd* (innovation), *al-taqlīd* (tradition-imitation), *al-ḥadāthah* (modernity), and *al-wāqiʿ iyyah* (realism). This list guides my analysis of the trend of *al-tajrīb* as seen through the umbrella frame of continuity-discontinuity that I would like to propose. In opting to situate *al-tajrīb* within these fields, I wish to achieve two objectives. Firstly, I want to keep my analysis of the otherwise porous contours and purview of *al-tajrīb* in focus. Here I should draw attention to the fact that there is not a unitary definition of *al-tajrīb* among Moroccan littérateurs. Muḥammad Amanṣūr and Abdelʿali Būṭayyib, for instance, are in agreement in acknowledging the definition problematic that attends *al-tajrīb* as a concept. Būṭayyib mentions that *al-tajrīb* is one of a few terms in literary criticism that enjoys “a consensus of use” on the part of literary critics in Morocco, in contrast to the case in the Mashriq (the Arab East), where other related terms are used, including *al-ḥasāsiyyah al-jadīdah* (the new sensitivity), *al-kitābah al-jadīdah* (the new writing), and *al-kitābah at-ṭalāʾiʿiyyah* (avant-gardist

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30 This is an Arabic term that means innovation or renewal.
31 This is such a broad term that encompasses such concepts as “tradition,” “traditionalism,” and “imitation.”
writing) (“Mafhūm”). Būṭayyib points out that, despite the definition problematic, al-tajrīb has become a “successful term” in the literary circles in Morocco (“Mafhūm”). On his part, Amanṣūr also draws on this “definition problematic” when discussing the textual strategies of al-tajrīb in the Moroccan novel (‘Istrātījiyāt, 74). Thus, I would like to contribute to the attempts to parse the discourses of al-tajrīb in the contemporary literary scene in Morocco. With regard to my second objective, I want to rethink the assumption that, on the one hand, equates al-tajrīb (experimentalism) with al-tajdīd (innovation), and, on the other hand, brings it into opposition with al-taqlīd (tradition or traditionalism). I would like to make the case that an investment in the Arab-Islamic literary heritage—or al-turāth—could for instance turn out to be the nexus of a novel’s attempt at experimentation and innovation. In so doing, I highlight that al-turāth could be a critical element that serves well the goal of renewing literary activity in Morocco and in the Arab world more broadly. In chapter two, I will shed more light on al-tajrīb’s investment in al-turāth in order to complicate the dialectic of al-tajdīd and al-taqlīd.

In unsettling the binaries al-tajdīd-al-taqlīd (innovation-tradition) and al-ḥadātha-al-taqlīd (modernity-tradition), I explore the possibility of a third way, one that allows the experimental text to oscillate the two sides of the spectrum. I would like to raise the following questions by way of attempting to concretize this point: Does a literary text which incorporates, either entirely or partially, al-turāth (Arab-Islamic literary heritage) by necessity run counter to the ideals of al-tajrīb (experimentation), al-tajdīd (innovation), and al-taḥdīth (modernization)—owing to this trope’s alleged conservative inclination? Or do these ideals pertain to an entirely

different plane, that of aesthetics and artistic design? What is the proper realm of *al-tajrīb*, form or content or a combination of both—or perhaps some other benchmark? Is literary experimentation a purely formalistic procedure, or does its horizon rather include other spheres that transcend the domain of form? As I elaborate when discussing the investment in *al-turāth* in al-Madinī’s novel *ZBWWH*, I contend that the technique of *fragmentation*, for example, is a driving force that affects seemingly two opposite poles, form and content, and contributes, in significant ways, to the novel’s (post)modernist, innovative endeavors, and at the same time it (i.e. fragmentation) keeps the text—regardless of the tone—in dialogue with the Arab-Islamic heritage. I stress that a critical study of *ZBWWH*’s reliance on *al-turāth* should not limit itself to a rigidly historicist or sociological approach, nor should “fragmentation” be viewed as a purely formalistic technique. I want to suggest that oftentimes these lines blur.

The notion of a “third way” also pertains to the question of genre. It is worthwhile noting that Abdullāh al-‘Arwī’s ‘*Awrāq* (Papers) is a text that, in a way, defies being pigeonholed to a specific genre; one is not certain whether it is an autobiography or a biography or a novel or some other genre. Although the cover of al-‘Arwī’s work does not include a generic label, the subtitle offers some clues; it reads: *Idrīs ‘s Mental Biography* (*Sīrat Idrīs al-Dhihniyyah*). But what does a “mental biography” signify? To what extent is it similar to or different from a biography or autobiography? One could also argue that *Awrāq* constitutes “an intellectual journey” (*riḥlah fikriyyah*) undertaken by the protagonist Idrīs, and is therefore in dialogue with the classical Arab literary heritage through the adaptation of the ancient Arabic genre of *al-riḥlah* (the journey). As I discuss in chapter five, the book is pregnant with intellectual materials

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(philosophical, artistic, literary, political, cultural, etc.), and one is drawn to venture on the proposition that al-ʿArwī might just be pushing for the consolidation of a new genre, one that goes along with his status as a major historian, thinker, and critic in the contemporary Arab world. Interestingly, al-ʿArwī has explicitly suggested that Arab authors should “create forms that are perhaps hybrid [mukhadramah] on condition that there be identity [muṭābaqah] between the chosen form and subject-matter” (qtd. in Būṭayyib, al-Riwyah, 41). Like al-ʿArwī’s ‘Awrāq, al-Madīnī’s ZBWWH is marked by generic instability. Moroccan critic Najīb al-ʿAwfī has critically remarked that al-Madīnī’s book manifests a total disregard for “the conventions of the novelistic game and ripped apart the relationships between the novel, poetry, and the short story,” before concluding that ZBWWH “came as an artistic mix that is difficult to specify to which one of these three arts it belongs” (Darajat al-Waʿy, 326). This aspect of mixing is on a par with the concept of the “third way,” and is in dialogue with Blanchot’s views on the notion of genre, as glossed above. Al-ʿArwī, while stressing the form-content dialectic, seems to welcome a third route through his push for the invention of hybrid forms.

In chapter one, I examine the trend of experimentalism in Morocco and the Arab world while surveying the trajectory of the Arabic novel as it navigates the first and second halves of the 20th century. I research the paradigm shift in the Arab novelistic tradition, a shift that involves a gradual and steady move from the matrix of influence to that of intertextuality. In attempting to transcend the narrative of influence embedded in the writings of Frederic Jameson, Franco Moretti, Pascal Casanova, and Taha Ḥusayn I propose the notion of “compromise,” which finds a point of reference in the work of Moroccan sociologist-novelist Abdelkebir Khatibi, especially his notion of the “bilingue,”34 as well as in that of Barrādah, who views the

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34 See Khatibi’s highly “experimental” novel Amour bilingue (Montpellier: Fata Morgana, 1983).
novel as becoming more of a universal art form. Chapter two moves the discussion of the paradigm shift from the broader context of the Arab world to Morocco. By examining Moroccan experimental writings, the chapter argues for the shift from domination to autonomy and investigates the umbrella notion of “al-tajrīb al-ważīfī” (functional experimentation) as a key strategy behind this shift. I explore to what extent the incorporation of al-turāth (Arab-Islamic heritage)—which goes well with the concept of “al-tajrīb al-ważīfī” (functional experimentation)—serves the consolidation of experimental Moroccan literature. Additionally, I research how the formal aspects of al-tajrīb have a bearing on the socio-cultural milieu. I seek to bring to light the socio-cultural dimensions of experimental Moroccan writings, highlighting in the process the ideological preoccupations of the advocates of al-tajrīb. Chapter three, four, and five move the conversation on Moroccan experimentalism to the three texts selected for study, highlighting the form-politics relation undergirding the trend of al-tajrīb. Chapter four argues that Aḥmad al-Madīnī’s novel Zaman bayna al-Wilādah wa al-Ḥulm (Time between birth and dream, 1976) is an experimental text that simultaneously flouts two distinct but interrelated forms of authority, one textual and the other extra-textual, performing thereby a poetics of dissent that point to the book’s commitment undertones. Chapter four analyses Muḥammad Barrādah’s novel Lu’bat al-Nisyān (1987, The Game of Forgetting, 1996), and focuses on the book’s unorthodox narrative design, in which recourse to multiplicity, metanarrative, and fragmentation are strategic choices that bring to light the author’s literary and extra-literary vision. The chapter shows how the novel’s compelling experimental quality and efficacious engagement of cultural and socio-political issues are at work. The fifth and last chapter studies ʿAbdullāh al-‘Arwī’s book Awrāq: Sīrat Idrīs al-Dhihniyyah (1989, Papers: Idriss’ Mental Biography). It examines the book’s treatment of the very topic of literary writing itself, bridging
the gap between fiction and criticism. Also, the chapter researches the *mise en abîme* motif that runs throughout the book and corroborates the text’s experimental ideals.
Chapter One: The New Novel in Morocco and the Arab World and the Question of Reception

As I mentioned in the Introduction, the phenomenon of *al-tajrīb* (experimentalism) envisaged itself as offering an alternative mode to the Maḥfūzian model, which, needless to say, impacted the oeuvre of a number of Moroccan authors, especially Abdelkarīm Ghallāb and Abdelmajīd Binjillūn. *Al-tajrīb* is the driving force in what came to be broadly designated as the “new novelistic writing” (*al-kitābah al-riwā’iyyah al-jadīdah*) in Morocco, Egypt, and other territories of the Arab world. I should underscore that *al-tajrīb* is often linked to the controversial question of “the new” (*al-jadīd*) or “newness,” (*al-jiddah*), and hence the appearance of such generic terms as “the new Arabic novel”[^35] (*al-riwāyah al-ʿarabiyyah al-jadīdah*), “the new novel”[^36] (*al-riwāyah al-jadīdah*), and “the new novelistic discourse”[^37] (*al-khiṭāb al-riwā’ī al-jadīd*) in Arabic critical circles as articulations of this literary trend. Saʿīd Yaqṭīne points out that in the late 1960s and early 1970s, one could speak of “a new novelistic experiment” (*tajribah riwā’iyyah jadīdah*) in the Mashriq (the Arab East), and underscores that figures such as Jamāl al-Ghīṭānī and Sunʿallāh Ibrāhīm played a crucial role in building its foundation and formulating its


fundamental features through the adoption of new and innovative tools \textit{(al-Qirā’ah, 289)}. And in his most recent book on the Arabic novel,\textsuperscript{38} Yaqțīne goes on to adopt the term “the new Arabic novel” \textit{(al-riwāya al-‘arabiyya al-jadīda)} to refer to the new novelistic writing in the Arab world that started to emerge in the 1960s, when “the Arabic novel moved away from its insistent preoccupation with its identity [when viewing itself] in comparison with the other literary forms (poetry and the short story), and opened up to innovation and experimentation [. . .]” (24). (There is consensus among a number of Arab critics that the novel, in sharp contrast to poetry, is a relatively young genre in the Arab world, especially in Morocco.)\textsuperscript{39} Interestingly, Yaqțīne makes a conceptual link between the trend of \textit{al-tajrīb} (experimentalism) and the aspiration towards \textit{al-tajdīd} (innovation or renewal.) I have to caution, however, that these two critical concepts are not necessarily interchangeable and should not be conflated. \textit{Al-tajdīd} is a broader category, and has the potential to impact areas outside the sphere of literature, including culture and thought. Muḥammad Barrādah asserts that \textit{al-tajdīd} is a “general movement” \textit{(ḥarakah ‘āmmah)} that affects both culture and literary creativity \textit{(al-Riwāyah al-‘Arabiyyah, 14)} and adds that it has links to “socio-political and structural transformations” (20). Yet \textit{al-tajdīd} in social and political life yields “new” or seemingly “new” experiences that provide the bedrock for a new brand of literary expression. In this regard, Yaqțīne avers:

إن هناك تجربة كما أن هناك "تجربة جديدة" . . . وهناك "القراءة الجديدة" التي ترمي النفاذ إلى أعمق التجربة. وكلما تمعنا في أوجه الاختلاف، بوعي و بحث، أمكننا التمييز بين الفعل و الإفعال، بين الإستمرار و التقطع، بين الإنتاج و إعادة الإنتاج. ويتقلى لنا التمييز بشكل أكثر عمقاً، عندما


[There exists some sort of experimentation [tajrīban] as well as a “new experience” [. . .], and there also exists “a new reading,” which strives to penetrate the depths of the experience. And whenever we scrutinize the differences—through awareness and searching—we can distinguish between action and reaction, continuity and discontinuity, production and reproduction. We get to make these distinctions on a deeper lever when we depart from a critique of the self, our textual assumptions, the relationship we establish with the subject, and finally the subject itself. (Al-Qirā’a 24-25)]

Yaqtīne concedes to the fact that there is a “new” state of affairs that goes along with the literary phenomenon of al-tajrīb (experimentalism). That is, there is a “new experience” as well as a “new reading.” Nevertheless, he underscores that when scrutinizing this “new experience” and this “experimentation,” we can detect a number of binaries that intermingle: “action and reaction, continuity and discontinuity, production and reproduction.” By putting them in dialogue, Yaqtīne unsettles these binaries, thus pushing for the thesis of a tertiary text that traverses the two sides of the spectrum. Of utmost importance to my argument about al-tajrīb (experimentalism) being a site marked by complexity and porous contours is the binary of continuity-discontinuity. Despite its “newness,” the experimental text straddles such seemingly opposite realms. In this context, the new is not completely new in the sense of bringing about a complete rupture with what came before, for there is always an act of return—always a trace—that “taints” any purity the “new” or “experimental” text might claim.
In a similar direction, Barrādah unsettles the episteme of “the new” in his attempt to unpack the concept of *al-tajrīb*, and complicates where it stands vis-à-vis the dialectic of *al-tajdīd*—*al-taqlīd* (innovation-imitation). Let us first consider these two quotes by Barrādah:

يحتاج مصطلح التجريب إلى تحديد و تمييز لأنه من المصطلحات التي شاع استعمالها بدلاً من المصطلحات التي شاع استعمالها بدلاً من المصطلح قرينا للتجديد.

[The notion of *al-tajrīb* [experimentalism] needs to be specified and identified because it is one of the notions that have been widely used with different meanings and it has increasingly been viewed as an equal to *al-tajdīd* [innovation]. (48)]

يمكن التمييز بين تجريب مسند إلى وعي نظري، و تجريب قائم على التصادي أو التقليد أو الحدس.

و أعتقد أن هذا التمييز يسعفنا في تقييم و تصنيف إنتاجات التجريب الروائي العربي.

[We can distinguish between *al-tajrīb* [experimentalism] that relies on theoretical awareness and *al-tajrīb* that is based on *al-taşādī* [obstruction] or *al-taqlīd* [tradition/imitation] or intuition. And I believe that this distinction helps us to assess and classify the products [i.e., writings] of Arabic novelistic *al-tajrīb* [experimentalism]. (49)]

The second quote, in a way, provides an answer—as tentative or provisional as it might sound—to the issue raised in the first. That is, it attempts to demarcate the otherwise loose parameters of the trend of *al-tajrīb*. It is important to note that part of the issue, following Barrādah’s first quote, seems to be tied to the widespread belief that *al-tajrīb* (experimentalism) is an analogue to *al-tajdīd* (innovation). The second quote indirectly challenges this assumption by categorically stating that *al-tajrīb* could be based on *al-taqlīd* (tradition or imitation)—among other elements. That is, the critical fields of “the experimental” (*al-tajrībī*), “the new” (*al-jadīd*) or the
“innovative” (al-tajdīdī), on one hand, and “the traditional” or “the imitative” (al-taqlīdī), on the other, are not necessarily in opposition, and might overlap in one way or another. I should note that al-jadīd (the new) and al-tajdīdī (the innovative) are both linguistic derivatives of the word al-tajdīd (innovation). Barrādah unsettles the notion of the new, and thus complicates the debate over how to be new within the Moroccan and Arab context. As far as I am concerned, a good way to avoid the conflation of al-tajrīb and al-tajdīd is to proceed from the following guiding statement: Any act of al-tajdīd is by necessity one of al-tajrīb, but the opposite is not necessarily true. In this respect, Barrādah’s distinction between a theoretically-informed al-tajrīb and one that relies on “obstruction or imitation or intuition” is very pertinent. A literary experiment could be wholly or partially imitative, but could still have a powerful impact and might contribute to literary innovation. Conversely, an experiment that might appear extremely “new” could have little to no impact at all, and would thereby fail to contribute to the innovation of a particular literary tradition.

Having said that, a question begs the answer: Where does the “new novel” (al-riwāyah al-jadīdah) or “new novelistic discourse” (al-khiṭāb al-riwā ʾī al-jadīd) stand vis-à-vis the mechanisms of al-tajdīd (innovation) and al-taqlīd (tradition/imitation)? Barrādah, in his discussion of “the new novel” in the Arabic-speaking world, remains true to his stance regarding the episteme of “the new.” He writes:

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Barrādah raises a very important point in his questioning of the notion of newness and its relationship with time. Following the Moroccan novelist-critic, the idea of newness is not just chronological; it is also conceptual. We have here a rethinking of the episteme of “the new,” a move that not only problematizes the construct “the new novel” (al-riwāyah al-jadīda), but also implicitly contests the idea of a rigid periodization of al-tajrīb (experimentalism), which some critics have attempted. 41 Barrādah locates a twofold source that underlies the problematic of “the new novel”: firstly, “delimiting the criteria and conceptions that mark the distinction between the new and the old, and [secondly] identifying which ones are qualified to judge the positive value of newness” (46). We glean from this that Barrādah rethinks qualitative categorizations of the

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41 Abdelʿali Būṭayyīb is one example of critics that adopt a rigid periodization approach towards the phenomenon of al-tajrīb. He provides a chronological outline that divides the trajectory of the Moroccan novel into three main periods. Firstly, we have “the foundational period,” which ends in 1967, the year Muḥammad Azīz Lahbābī’s novel Jīl al-ẓama’ [The Generation of Thirst] was published (9). Būṭayyīb does not give a particular date for the beginning of this so-called foundational period, and he stresses there is much debate over which literary work initiated the novel tradition in Morocco (9). Secondly, there is the “realistic period,” which extends from 1967 until approximately the mid-1970s (13). Finally, we have “the period of al-tajrīb,” whose starting point is the mid-1970s and whose defining feature is the aspiration “to modernize Arabic novel writing” (16-17). See al-Riwāya al-maghribiya mina at-ta’sīs ‘ilā al-tajrīb [The Moroccan Novel: From Foundation to Experimentation (al-tajrīb)], (Meknes: Meknes UP, 2010).
Arabic novel based on chronology. Along this line of reasoning, the writings of the “new”
generation of Moroccan novelists—al-ʿArwī, al-Madīnī, Abdelqādir al-Shāwī, Azzdīn al-Tāzi,
Saʿīd ʿAllūsh, Amanṣūr, al-Mīlūdī Shaghmūm, Barrādah himself, and others—is not necessarily
newer or better or superior to those of the “previous” or “old” generation—Binjillūn, Ghallāb,
and others—despite the former’s obvious attempts to surpass or overstep the literary paradigm of
the latter. Accordingly, Barrādah concludes that *al-riwāyah al-jadīda* (the new novel)
constitutes a problematic term (46). He explains:

و مصدر الإشكال هو في تحديد معنى الجدة و الجديد، إذ غالبا ما تتضمن هذه الكلمة و مشتقاتها قيمة
إيجابية بالنسبة إلى ما هو قديم. لكن، في مجال الإبداع الأدبي و الفني، يصعب أن نقرر الجديد أليا
بالتميز و الأمثلية على ما هو "قديم"، أي سابق زمنيا في التحقق. ذلك أن أعمالا أدبية و فنية لها
عمر طويل و تحمل قدامة قرون و عقود، تظل محافظة على "جنتها" من خلال تحريك مشاعر و
أفكار متلقين يعيشون في زمن راهن و جديد.

[The source of this problematic lies in delineating the meaning of newness and the new,
since these words and their derivatives usually carry a positive value vis-à-vis what is
old. However, within the domain of artistic and literary creation, it is difficult to equate
the new automatically with excellence and superiority in relation to “the old”—i.e., what
comes before chronologically – since many artistic and literary works whose age extends
along centuries or decades retain “their newness” through their ability to stir the emotions
and ideas of readers living in a current and new time. (46)]

Barrādah shows the limits and shortcomings of the episteme of “the new” in the construct “new
novel” and by extension of *al-tajrīb* itself by virtue of the assumption that, on one hand,
associates or equates the latter with *al-jadīd* (the new) and *al-tajdīd* (renewal), and on other hand
put it in contrast with al-taqlidī (the traditional) and al-taqlīd (imitation or tradition). As I will elaborate below in this and the next chapters, the new Arabic and Moroccan novel’s investment in the trope of al-turāth (Arab-Islamic literary and cultural heritage) further complicates this question of newness. The inclusion of al-turāth in novels that espouse experimentation and innovation shows that the moment of al-tajrīb does borrow from other moments, and therefore cannot be perceived as enacting a total break from tradition [al-taqlīd]. In his other book Al-Riwayah: Dhakhirah Maftūḥah (The Novel: An Open Memory), Barrādah underscores that since the 1960s some Arab novelists employed, in addition to “a modern language” (lugah ḥadīthah), “the Arabic prosaic heritage (al-turāth al-sardī al-‘arabī) in order to produce a novelistic form with specificity (khuṣūṣiyyah) in construction (al-binā‘) and language, [a form] inspired from the texts and language of history, journeys, and the books of Sufism, (auto)biographies (al-siyar), and accounts (al-‘akhbār)” (118). Barrādah mentions a number of novels from the larger Arabic literary tradition that manifest this trend; examples include: al-Zīnī Barakāt (Zini Barakat) and al-Tajaliyyāt (The Manifestations) by al-Ghīṭānī; Ḥadātha Abū Huraira qāl (Abu Huraira Narrated Saying) by al-Masʿ adī; al-Waqāʾī al-gharība (The Strange Happenings) by Emile Habībī; Majnūn al-ḥukm (The Power Crazy) by Ḥammīsh; and al-Nakkhās (Nakhas) by Būjah (118). As I will discuss in this chapter, an engagement with al-turāth serves the double role of innovating and enriching literary language and at the same time laying the foundations for a potential authenticity that could liberate Arab novelists—or at least those wary of the West’s cultural hegemony—from the “burden” of Western literary modernism. The next section gives a historical outline of the discourses of literary modernity and the trajectories of the novel, and investigates the reception of this “privileged” genre in the Arab world, with a focus on Morocco
and Egypt. It seeks to put in context how the Arabic novel negotiates the frames of innovation and tradition, on the one hand, and Western modernity on the other.

- **Rethinking Literary History: The Novel Genre in Morocco and the Arab World**

In his article “The Modern Renaissance of Arabic Literature” published in 1955, Ṭaha Ḥusayn (b. 1889-d. 1973)—the reputable “Dean of Arabic Literature”—wrote:

> Arab prose had never attained the abundance it enjoys today. The Ancients did not know either the journalistic article, or the literary essay, or the critique (in the *modern* sense of the word), or the novel, or even the short story or novelette, not even the drama. Now all the various genres are employed with success by contemporaries. I have already remarked that this same ancient Arab world never wanted to give literary freedom to narrative, whether it be short story, novelette, or novel, although these *existed without name* among the common classes. (253; emphasis added)

Ḥusayn ventures on a general—and perhaps generalized—periodization of Arabic literature, one that ultimately yields a division between two broad camps: the ancients and the moderns. The genre of “the narrative” assumes a pivotal role in this periodization and division of the centuries-old Arab literary activity. It is too apparent that Ḥusayn leans towards “the moderns”—to the detriment of “the ancients.” He continues his celebration of the genre of “the narrative” thus:

> It will be the great privilege and honor of the contemporary Arabic writers to have literally reinstated this genre by making it the *most* important in the realm of modern prose. [. . .] The writers of the last quarter of a century have thus to their credit the
introduction of an entirely new genre in classical Arabic literature, the narrative genre [. . .]. First, translations of Western stories were made; [. . .] and attempts were made to do the same in Arabic. (253; emphasis added)

After laying out his appraisal of the broader category of “the narrative,” which interestingly he deems to be completely “new” in the Arabic literary tradition, Ḥusayn proceeds to weigh in on a very specific genre, the novel. He avers:

[. . .] [S]ince the end of World War II, the novel has become the most important literary product of Egypt as well as of all the other Arabic countries. Indeed, a young author, if he wishes to try his talent today, begins by composing a short story; [. . .] then he launches into a big novel, which, if it is well received, establishes him as a novelist. (253; emphasis added)

Keeping in mind Ḥusayn’s remarks, I would like to turn to a fascinating statement by Najīb Maḥfūẓ (Naguib Mahfouz) made in 1980. The Nobel Laureate has noted:

As for us, the writers belonging to the developing or under-developed world, we used to think at the time that realising our real literary identity coincided with the annihilation of our own self-identity. What I mean to say is that the European novel was sacred, and departure from this form was sacrilege. For a while I thought that the role of our generation was to write the novel in the correct form because I believed there was such a thing as the correct form and the wrong form. Now, my theory has changed. The correct form is that which comes from an inner music. I do not imitate either the maqama or Joyce. Frankly, what irritates me these days is imitation, even of tradition! (Qtd. in Omri 244; emphasis added)
Taking these quotes by Ḥusayn and Maḥfūz as points of departure, I would like to examine the field of reception regarding the novel genre in the Arab world, including Morocco. I want to start this critical investigation by examining the debate over reception as it unfolds in the Mashriq (Arab East), especially Egypt, as a first step before turning to the state of affairs in Morocco. The rationale behind this methodological choice is basically one of chronology, and does not speak—in any intentional way—to a hierarchical mapping. As mentioned in the Introduction, the debates in Arab literary and critical circles over modernity and literary genres were tackled first in the Mashriq, starting with the nahḍah (Arab Renaissance) intellectuals. As Saʿīd Yaqṭīne has noted, the trend of al-tajrīb (experimentalism) in the Moroccan novel followed the same “transformational cultural current” in the Arab world, a current whose beginnings “were established since [. . .] the ‘nahḍah’ [. . .]” (al-Qirāʾah, 288-89). In a similar vein, Tarek El-Ariss, in his 2013 book Trials of Arab Modernity: Literary Affects and the New Political, underscores that the “question of modernity has dominated Arab intellectual thought from Qasim Amin’s (1863-1908) call for the ‘liberation’ of women to Taha [Husayn]’s (1889-1973) situating Egypt’s civilizational trajectory within that of the West” (4).42 El-Ariss also mentions that the prominent scholar Albert Hourani makes a direct link between “Arab modernity” and the Arab project of the Nahda (12). Drawing on the Mashriq (the Arab East) in my examination of the trajectory of the novel genre in Morocco and other parts of the Arab world is methodologically sound—hence my opening this section with quotes by the two Egyptian literary giants: Ṭaha Ḥusayn and Najīb Maḥfūz.

42 For a detailed discussion of the critical role played by Ṭaha Husayn in renewing Arab thought and culture, see Albert Hourani’s book Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age 1789-1939 (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1983); see especially chapter twelve (“Taha Husayn”) named after the Egyptian intellectual, pp. 324-340.
My objective in this chapter to review the critical reception of the novel genre in Morocco and the Arabic-speaking territories dictates that I explore its literary history—while keeping an eye on political history—a demand that cannot be satisfied without grounding this conversation in two important notions: “literary influence” and “intertextuality.” Whereas the first implies a relationship of subservience and domination in the realm of literature, and especially the sphere of the novel, the second points to literary autonomy and dialogue between equals or quasi-equals. In political and postcolonial language, these two notions bear some interesting affinities with “colonization” and “decolonization” respectively. In spatial language, “literary influence” directs us outward; intertextuality, by contrast, shifts the point of gravity inward. This line of investigation would necessitate bringing the literary traditions of Morocco, the Mashriq, and the West into conversation. As far as I am concerned, this approach is not just desirable but utterly necessary, given the various links that connect these three sites, and especially the first two: historical, geographical, cultural, and political—to say nothing of the economic. To further justify the necessity of using this methodology, I would like, at this juncture, to add a sweeping observation and point out the obvious, that the novel genre in Morocco and the Arab world did not develop in a vacuum, that it did not spring to light in isolation, but that indeed the two factors of “literary influence” and “intertextuality” played—and indeed continue to play in varying degrees—a crucial role in its formulation and growth. In

\footnote{While at this stage I use these spatial categories of the “outward” (or the exterior) and the “inward” (or the interior) in an uncomplicated manner to refer—roughly speaking—to “the West” and “the Arab world” respectively, I am nonetheless aware of their essentializing tendencies. I should underscore, however, that the Arab world is an expansive region that is far from being homogeneous, unitary, and equal. I will discuss this issue when investigating the novel genre in Morocco and the critique voiced by Moroccan scholars regarding its alleged imitation of the Mashriqi model—a scenario that points to a paradigm of “literary influence” (i.e. subordination and domination) within the Arab world itself. In treating this complicated state of affairs, I will consult the work of the prominent British-Lebanese historian Albert Hourani, especially his notion of “khusūsīyyāt” [specificities], which he stresses mark the various territories of the Arab world, and which became more pronounced in the post-1967 era. See Albert Hourani, A History of the Arab Peoples (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1991), 434-458.}
examining these two factors, I want to reassess the genre of the novel—and its subset, “the new novel”—from the viewpoint of reception.

Having said that, I would like to venture on the following proposition: the matrix of “literary influence” arguably dominated the Arabic novel tradition in the late nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth century, and then began to lose sway to “intertextuality,” starting in the 1960s with the increased interest in *al-turāth* (Arab-Muslim literary and cultural heritage) among Arab writers of the novel—such as Jamāl al-Ghīṭānī in Egypt and Binsālim Ḥammīsh in Morocco—a shift that, not by accident, coincided with the appearance of such concepts as *al-riwāyah al-jadīdah* (the new novel) or *al-ḥasāsiyyah al-jadīdah* (the new sensitivity) in the *Mashriq* (the Arab East) or *al-tajrīb* in Morocco, and whose dynamic carries over into the twenty-first century. Such an examination of the Arabic and Moroccan novel, as it undergoes this paradigm shift, will be carried out vis-à-vis the umbrella notion of *authenticity*[^44] (*‘aṣālah* in Arabic)—or lack thereof. In re-evaluating the novel genre in Morocco and the *Mashriq* against the backdrop of *al-turāth*, I seek to unsettle the notion of modernity (*al-ḥadāthah* in Arabic) in the context of Arab literary creativity both on temporal and conceptual planes: firstly, by drawing on the Syrian poet-critic Adonis, who attempts to salvage Arab literary modernity from the treasury of the ancient past—i.e., from the works of the eighth-century A.D. poets Abū Nuwās and Abū Tammām—I wish to problematize the construct *modernity* and its twentieth-century fixture. Secondly, in investigating the limits of modernity—as an ideology, life style, and worldview—in the contemporary Arab world, I examine critiques that question the modernist and/or postmodernist pretensions of some Moroccan and Arabic

[^44]: Tarek El-Ariss uses the concept “authenticity” in his discussion of debates over Arab modernity and the project of the *Nahdah*. Quoting Georges Tarabishi, El-Ariss writes that “Arab intellectual debates about progress, authenticity, and tradition are conditioned by lack.” See *Trials of Arab Modernity: Literary Affects and the New Political* (New York: Fordham UP, 2013), 4; See also p. 174.
nouns. In treating this second point, I take some of my cues primarily from Moroccan critics Muḥammad Amanṣūr and Muḥammad Binnīs and secondarily from Adonis.

Additionally, I would like to engage scholarship in US academia with respect to ongoing debates over form and content in relation to the novel genre, particularly the views of Franco Moretti and Frederic Jameson. In his article “Conjectures on World Literature,” Moretti—in referencing “the world-system school of economic history”—ventures on the following hypothesis: *world literature is one but unequal* (55-56). He elaborates thus:

One, and unequal: *one* literature (*Weltliteratur*, singular, as in Goethe and Marx), or perhaps, better, one world literary system (of inter-related literatures); but a system which is different from what Goethe and Marx had hoped for, because it’s profoundly unequal. [. . .] This is what one and unequal means: the destiny of a culture (usually a culture of the periphery, as Montserrat Iglesias Santos has specified) is intersected and altered by another culture (from the core) that ‘completely ignores it’. A familiar scenario, this asymmetry in international power [. . .]. (56; emphasis in the text)

After laying out this interesting and provocative (hypo)thesis, Moretti seeks evidence in Frederic Jameson’s views on the encounter between “‘the abstract formal patterns of Western novel construction’ and ‘the raw material of Japanese [and Indian] social experience,’” (65) which in the final analysis comes down to this basic formulation: foreign form vs. local content. The encounter between these two heterogeneous elements (i.e., the Western novel form and the Japanese or Indian material), Moretti notes, is bound to result in “a structural compromise” (62). (I will treat this issue at some length later on in the chapter when discussing the shift in the literary trajectory of Najīb Maḥfūẓ.) Interestingly, in his study, Moretti includes the Arabic novel
among the myriad non-Western novel traditions by way of consolidating his point on “world literature” being one but unequal. He quotes significant scholars, such as Edward Saïd and Roger Allen, to point out the influence the European novel exerted on the Arabic literary tradition (60 & 62). 45 It is important to add that Moretti’s argument does not just reproduce Jameson’s foreign form-local content binary wholesale, since he underscores that, whereas for Jameson the “relationship is fundamentally a binary one” contrasting “foreign” form with “local” content, for him (Moretti) “it’s more of a triangle: foreign form, local material—and local form. Simplifying somewhat: foreign plot; local characters; and then, local narrative voice” (64-65; emphasis in the text). My objective in this chapter is to use Moretti’s and Jameson’s views on the question of form and content to develop my own perspective on this debate with regard to the novel form in Morocco and the Arab world as it moves along the twentieth century.

With the postcolonial critique in mind, I would like to propose a different model for researching the Arabic novel, one that is both temporal and conceptual, and combines literary history with political history. While I acknowledge that all literature is, in one way or another, political and that some literary works could be deeply ingrained in questions of the political, I use the notion of “political history” to designate the field of the historian, rather than that of the literary critic. Thus, “political history” refers, among a number of things, to historical events of either major or minor importance that have shaped or impacted Arab societies in the 20th century. With that said, the model I am adopting involves a paradigm shift along a temporal plane that could be summed up as follows: the further we move away from the first half of the twentieth century, the more pronounced is the transition from “literary influence” to “intertextuality.” Or to

45 Edward Saïd has stated that “at some point writers in Arabic became aware of European novels and began to write works like them.” In a similar vein, Roger Allen notes: “In more literary terms, increasing contacts with Western literatures led to translations of works of European fiction into Arabic, followed by their adaptation and imitation, and culminating in the appearance of an indigenous tradition of modern fiction in Arabic.” See Moretti, “Conjectures,” 60.
put it differently, the closer we get to the twenty-first century, the less unequal, and the more autonomous, the Arabic novel becomes—in brief, a move from literary dependency towards literary freedom, more or less. The conceptual aspect of this configuration is the very idea of a paradigm shift or a major transformation in the Arabic novel involving a move from imitation towards experimentation and independence, which can only be fulfilled through the movement of time or history—its temporal dimension. Although this proposition does not refute Moretti’s and Jameson’s claims, it nonetheless attempts to expand or move beyond their formulations, which I see as rigidly grounded in the notions of subordination, domination, and inequality—in short, solely in the matrix of “literary influence.”

By adding the layer of “intertextuality,” I seek to expand the horizon of literary inquiry with regard to the Arabic novel.

Also, with the critiques voiced against the views of Husayn and other nahḍah figures in mind, I would like to offer a different kind of criticism, one that seeks a “way out” and is grounded in the idea of “the compromise.” This idea of “compromise” aims at transcending the narrative of “influence” in the writings of Jameson, Moretti, and Casanova as well as in the remarks of Husayn and other nahḍah intellectuals and the critiques directed against them by prominent contemporary figures, such as Adonis, al-ʿArwī, and others. I should underscore that this proposition of “the compromise” finds a point of reference in the work of Moroccan sociologist-novelist Abdelkebir Khatibi, especially his notion of the “bilingue,” as well as in

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46 This model of literary domination perhaps takes a fuller shape in Pascale Casanova’s critical study *La république mondiale des lettres* (1999; *The World Republic of Letters*, 2004); Casanova writes: “The central hypothesis of this book . . . is that there exists a ‘literature world,’ a literary universe relatively independent of the everyday world and its political divisions, whose boundaries and operational laws are not reducible to those of ordinary political space. Exerted within this international literary space are relations of force and a violence peculiar to them—in short, a literary domination whose forms I have tried to describe while taking care not to confuse this domination with the forms of political domination, even though it may in many respects be dependent upon them.” See Pascale Casanova, *The World Republic of Letters* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2004), xii.

47 See Khatibi’s highly “experimental” novel *Amour bilingue* (Montpellier: Fata Morgana, 1983) as well as his other works *Du bilinguisme* (Paris, Denoël, 1985); *Maghreb pluriel* (Paris, Denoël, 1983); *Penser le Maghreb* (Rabat: SMER, 1993); and *La Langue de l'autre* (New York: Les Mains secrètes, 1999). This model of
that of Barrādah, who sees the novel to be turning more into a universal art form. In the next section, I will attempt to flesh out this model I am advocating as an alternative to the study of the literary history of the Arabic and Moroccan novel, one that is oriented towards *al-turāth* (Arab-Muslim literary and cultural heritage) and “local material,” to borrow Moretti’s words. But first of all, let me examine—in a critical fashion—the early period of the Arabic novel tradition, a phase that is dominated—as Saïd and Allen have noted above—by the model of “literary influence” and thus seems to corroborate Casanova’s and Jameson’s remarks.

**The Discourse of Modernity and the “Rift” in Arab Memory and Creativity**

Keeping in mind the views of Moretti and Jameson on the form-content dialectic, it is quite fascinating to juxtapose Ḥusayn’s and Maḥfūz’s quotes introduced above. One cannot but notice a disconnect—a contradiction even—between Ḥusayn’s highly positive, celebratory comments and Maḥfūz’s revisionist—almost mournful—confessions on the problematic of form, with the question of the novel genre assuming a central position. In a way, Maḥfūz’s 1980 remarks on the novel do challenge, in a most pronounced manner, Ḥusayn’s views, which were made some twenty-five years prior. These two opposite stances alert us to the not so solid grounds of the novel genre in the Arabic-speaking world. The debate over the novel form and its alleged foreignness directly impacts the question of *authenticity* taken as a critical point in this chapter.

In other words, in reviewing the field of reception, I seek to find answers—provisional and

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“compromise” also shares the logic of Khatibi’s “double criticism,” which calls for, firstly, a “deconstruction of ‘logocentrism’ and of ethnocentrism, that speech of self-sufficiency par excellence which the West, in the course of its expansion, has imposed on the world,” and, secondly, “a criticism of the knowledge and discourse developed by the different societies of the Arab world about themselves”; see “Double Criticism: The Decolonization of Arab Sociology” in *Contemporary North Africa: Issues of Development and Integration*, ed. Halim Barakat (Washington D.C.: Center for Contemporary Arab Studies, 1985), 9-19, 9-10.
tentative nonetheless—to this basic query: is the novel genre, broadly defined, capable of being or becoming an authentic (or legitimate) form within the Arab and Moroccan contexts? This simple, straightforward question, while mostly concerned with the past and the present, extends the window of investigation to the future, hence the verb becoming. I have to underscore that the debates over the status and configuration of the novel in the Moroccan context, for instance, is far from being over. On the contrary, these debates have just picked up in the last few decades or so with the heightened interest in the question of authenticity in relation to literary innovation and experimentation in the post-Maḥfūẓ era for Arab novelists and the post-Ghallāb era for their Moroccan counterparts. In examining these debates, I seek to unsettle the very nomenclature of “the Arabic novel” or “the Moroccan novel,” and to search for the justification—or lack thereof—of its widespread use. Basically, by tracing the eruption and fast spread of the novel genre in the Arab world, I want to put pressure on the controversial question of authenticity with regard to this most privileged form of the literary craft.

Having said that, a number of questions spring to light: where do we locate the kernel of authenticity within this process of literary innovation, experimentation, and renewal in twentieth-century Arabic and Moroccan literatures? What is the relationship between innovation and modernity? Can we speak of one without implicating the other, or are they rather mutually inclusive? Where does al-turāth (the Arab-Muslim cultural and literary heritage) figure within the discourses of modernity, modernization, and the modern? How do we measure modernity in Arabic and Moroccan literary activity? Can we limit our investigation of Arab and Moroccan literary modernity to the sphere of textuality and ignore its extra-textual constituents, if any? How is Arab modernity similar to, or different from, its Western counterpart, so revered in Ḥusayn’s quote but questioned in Maḥfūẓ’s? What is the relationship between modernity and
what Moroccan critic Abdelfattah Kilito calls “Arabic literary memory” (*Thou Shalt*, 9)? And finally, is literary modernity a recent phenomenon that sprang to life in the late nineteenth (or early twentieth) century, or is it rather a much older occurrence to be traced all the way back to the eighth century A.D. as Adonis suggests (*An Introduction*, 75)? These queries on the relation of the novel to questions of authenticity, innovation, and modernity would ultimately take us to the dialectic of *form* and *content*, the core issue in the quotes by Ḥusayn and Maḥfūẓ, and this brings us back to the dialectical frame of “literary influence” and “intertextuality.”

With the problematic of authenticity in mind, I would like to make a few observations regarding Ḥusayn’s “exuberant” remarks and Maḥfūẓ’s “mournful” ones, this being part of, first, my critical assessment of the literary history of the novel genre in the Arab world and, second, my investigation of the local and foreign components of this art form. Firstly, in both quotes and especially in Ḥusayn’s, the tradition of the novel—or narrative prose in general—in its Western version assumes a privileged position, a scenario that rigidly transfixes the relationship between the European novel and its Arabic counterpart along the matrix of “literary influence” (or domination) rather than “intertextuality” (or autonomy). This echoes Moretti’s and Jameson’s formulations on the form-content binary. According to Ḥusayn, the genre of “the narrative”—and its subcategory, the novel—was imported wholesale from the West, yet he concedes—quite surprisingly—that the “short story, novelette, or novel . . . existed *without name* among the *common classes*” in the “ancient Arab world” (253; emphasis added). (Let us remember the phrases “without name” and “common classes.”) There is an apparent contradiction in Ḥusayn’s remarks, for he, all at once, denies and grants the Arab literary tradition this privileged genre of “the narrative.” And to remedy this discrepancy, Ḥusayn clarifies his position by stating that the ancient (or the “pre-modern”) Arabs did not know these subcategories of the narrative “in the
modern sense of the word” (253; emphasis added). Unfortunately, he does not elaborate on this interesting, but provocative, addition. I would nonetheless like to propound a few conjectures on what all this entails by taking cues from the language he opted for—a practice somewhat similar to reading between the lines.

The word “modern” is key in Ḫusayn’s formulations, and could offer the best clue in the endeavor to extricate the rationale behind the remarks of the “Dean of Arabic Literature.” Ḫusayn, the influential nahḍah figure, tends to read the modern and modernity—as it relates to the Arabs—through a Western lens; this is where he, I would like to propose, falls in the trap of conflating two distinct trajectories of literary activity and history. That is, he applies the discourse and the chronology of modernity and modernism in its Western framework to the Arabic tradition, which then makes it possible for him to dismiss the “nameless” narrative forms that existed in the ancient Arab world among the “common people” as non-modern or pre-modern or perhaps even anti-modern—i.e. lacking the validity of Western modernity he so admires to the point of veneration. I see this flaw of incommensurability as undermining the entire premise of Ḫusayn’s pronouncements. Nevertheless, here I must make a concession and, out of a sense of fairness, point out that Ḫusayn alone is not to blame for this mode of analysis, but that his approach unveils, and is symptomatic of, the larger crisis or confusion that befell the institution of criticism and adab in the aftermath of Arab decline—which became more visible with the fall of Al-Andalus (Muslim Spain) towards the end of the fifteenth century A.D.—and the European ascendancy that soon followed, and perhaps shocked the Arab subject when Napoléon invaded Egypt in 1798.48 This encounter with a rising and powerful Europe would

48 I should note that some of the recent work on Arabic letters has called into question the renaissance (nahḍah)-decline (inḥiṭat) binary. For instance, Muhsin al-Musawi, in his new book The Medieval Islamic Republic of Letters, studies the medieval Islamic literary heritage, and challenges the narrative that takes the period stretching
gradually create—according to Kilito—a *rift* in “Arabic literary memory,” one that arguably continues to the present day and in varying degrees of intensity throughout the entirety of the Arab world, a claim that I would, nevertheless, like to scrutinize and pinpoint its limitations. I should, however, note in passing my critique of the progressivist and neo-orientalist undertones of this claim. I will return to this notion of “the rift” and examine where it stands vis-à-vis the concept of modernity in order to offer a more in-depth discussion that engages the critiques voiced by Kilito and Adonis.

Noting that modernity—as a discourse or an ideology—could be a controversial or sensitive terrain, I would like to challenge Ḥusayn on three additional points. The first of this is the claim that the subcategories of the prose narrative genre were known to the ancient Arabs but “without name.” Here two scenarios offer themselves: either the Arabs knew and used narrative types but did not bother to give them names, or the names they developed did not—alas—match the categories of the “short story,” “novelette,” and “novel” in the Western sense. In both cases, the Arabs are to blame—or so the story goes. I see Ḥusayn to be at fault in either scenario. The ancient Arabs, I would like to assert, were not that neglectful as to forget to invent names for the narrative forms that were in circulation. I do not want to go into details, since this is not the main focus of this chapter, but suffice it to say that such narrative forms as “al-sīrah al-shaʿbiyya,” (popular biography) “al-maqāmah,” (assembly)⁴⁹ “al-qīṣṣah,” (the story) “al-ḥikāyah,” (the tale) from the fall of Baghdad in the mid-13th century to the fall of the Ottoman Empire in the early 20th century to be an "Age of Decay" followed by an "Awakening" (*nahḍah*). His study discredits this view by providing careful documentation of a vibrant, centuries-old "republic of letters" in the Islamic Near East and South Asia. See Muhsin al-Musawi, *The Medieval Islamic Republic of Letters: Arabic Knowledge Construction* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2015).

⁴⁹ *Encyclopædia Britannica* provides the following definition of *al-maqāmah*:

Maqāmah, (Arabic: “assembly”) Arabic literary genre in which entertaining anecdotes, often about rogues, mountebanks, and beggars, written in an elegant, rhymed prose (saj’), are presented in a dramatic or
“al-riḥlah,” (the journey) “al-akhbār,” (reports/news) “al-ḥadīth,” (the Prophetic tradition) “al-rasā’il” (letters) were indeed used in the ancient Arab world, and some of them—e.g., al-maqāmah and al-qiṣṣah—have survived to the present day. Critic ‘Abdelqādir Nwīwa has identified four genres in “the ancient Arabic prose” (al-sard al-‘Arabī al-qadīm): 1- “al-usṭūrah” (legend), 2- al-khurāfah (superstition), 3- “al-sīrah al-sha’biyyah” (popular biography), and 4- al-maqāmah (39). Sabry Hafez has underscored that the “Arab world had experienced many forms of narrative over the centuries, and there is ample evidence that this tradition continued well into the nineteenth century” (106), before adding that the writing of the maqāmah continued “with an intensity of production unparalleled since the maqāmāt of Bādiʿ al-Zamān al-Hamadānī (968-1008 [A.D.]) written in 990” (The Genesis, 109). In a similar vein, Mohamed-Salah Omri stresses that the “maqamah never really disappeared from Arabic literary production and will have a prominent role in the modern period” (247). Ḥusayn’s explicit disregard for the “Arabic prosaic heritage” (al-turāth al-sardī al-‘Arabī) alerts us to a problem or disconnect in Arabic literary history, one that Kilito has diagnosed and attempted to alleviate in his numerous critical studies, namely that the ancient Arabic prose has been unfairly treated in the literary histories by narrative context most suitable for the display of the author’s eloquence, wit, and erudition. The first collection of such writings, which make no pretense of being factual, was the Maqāmāt of al-Hamadhānī (d. 1008). It consists mainly of picaresque stories in alternating prose and verse woven round two imaginary characters. The genre was revived and finally established in the 11th century by al-Ḥarīrī of Basra (Iraq), whose Maqāmāt, closely imitating al-Hamadhānī’s, is regarded as a masterpiece of literary style.


50 Well-known examples from the Arabic prosaic heritage would include ‘Alf Layla wa Layla [The Arabian Nights]; Kalilah wa Dimnah; Risālat al-Ghufrān; Riḥlat Ibn Batţūta; Kitāb al-Hayawān; Sīrat Bani Hilāl; Sahīḥ al-Bukhārī & Sahīḥ Muslim; and others. See for example Roger Allen’s The Arabic Literary Heritage (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1999), especially Chapter 5 “Belletristic Prose and Narrative” pp. 218-315.

51 Omri mentions that a “recent history of the genre [of the maqāmah] lists an uninterrupted tradition of over two hundred writers. Maqama is present across genres and themes, written by humorists, sufis, philosophers, colloquial poets and journalists. It had major presence in the transitional phase of the nineteenth century and continues to be used today, particularly in journalism and fiction.” See “Local Narrative Form and Constructions of the Arabic Novel” Novel: A Forum on Fiction 41.2-3 (2008): 244-263, 248.
Arab scholars (*Al-Hikāyah*, 5).\(^{52}\) It is compelling to suggest that the discourse of modernity in its European construction has perhaps made Ḫusayn (almost) blinded with regard to this prosaic heritage, which in his eyes appears so inadequate as to meet the criteria of Western literary modernity. Let us remember that Ḫusayn did state that the Arabs were no strangers to the genre of the narrative, only they did not use it “in the modern sense of the word,” with the concept of “the modern” being here apparently filtered through the epistemological lens of Europe.

As to my second point, the views of Ḫusayn on the genre of the narrative betray a teleological hermeneutics of literary activity and history, which sees the novel as the culmination and apex of Arab creativity in the domain of literature. It is quite telling that, in 1955, Ḫusayn saw the European novel as “the most important literary product of Egypt as well as of all the other Arabic countries,” before outlining a teleological interpretation of literature in its bluntest articulation: “Indeed, a young author, if he wishes to try his talent today, begins by composing a short story . . . [and] then . . . launches into a big novel, which, if it is well received, establishes

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\(^{52}\) Kilito regretfully writes:

When we compare what was written on prose with that on poetry, we could but record the “injustice” done to prose. So many books deal with the history of Arabic poetry! But when it comes to prose, no one has cared to trace its periods and to highlight its styles. In all likelihood, it did not cross any researcher’s mind to write a history of prose. It is true there are attempts in this regard, but these attempts are mostly concerned with “literary” prose. Departing from a narrow notion of literature (*adab*), the researcher treats certain categories of prose, and eliminates others which he does not deem to be literary.


him as a novelist,” affirms the ‘Dean of Arabic Literature’ enthusiastically. This position is questionable in that it severs—either intentionally or unintentionally—the links between twentieth-century Arabic literatures and the ancient Arabic literary heritage, thus increasing the difficulty of establishing or maintaining continuity in the literary activity of Arab littérateurs.

One could argue that such a teleological over-celebration of the novel genre on the part of Husayn and other nahḍah figures has greatly impacted the trajectory of scholarship and criticism of twentieth-century Arabic literature in the various territories of the Arab world.53 Moroccan criticism is not free of this “teleological fever,” which assigns greater value to the novel. The prominent critic Ahmad al-Yabūrī, for instance, concludes his 2006 book Al-Kitābah al-Riwā‘īyyah fī al-Maghrib: Al-Binya wa al-Dalālah [Novelistic Writing in Morocco: Structure and Signification] on a highly teleological note.54 Thirdly, Ḥusayn’s remarks place the “modern” in symmetrical opposition with—let us suggest—the “pre-modern” in a most uncomplicated and

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53 Omri has indicated that the work of prominent contemporary scholars of Arabic literature, such as Sabry Hafez and Roger Allen, manifests a teleological undercurrent; he writes:

One key consequence of what might be called overValorization of the novel is that the study of modern Arabic narrative is dominated by a teleological vision of literary history, where the novel is perceived as the culmination of national aesthetic achievement. Among Arab historians, there is a sense of faith in the novel as the perfect form for all nations and cultures, a marker of modernity and a sign of integration in world culture. Historians of Arabic narrative, whether writing in Arabic or in Western languages, tend to share the argument for the “victorious” history of the novel.

See “Local Narrative Form and Constructions of the Arabic Novel,” 245. We could also add the well-known Egyptian critic Jābir ‘Asfūr to the list; see for example his book Zaman al-Riwāyah [The Age of the Novel] (Cairo: Al-Hay’a al-Masriyya al-‘Amma Lil-Kitāb, 1999), which argues that the novel has become the genre par excellence in “modern” Arabic literature.

54 Al-Yabūrī writes:

بصفة عامة فإن ترتيب المباحث في هذه المحاولة يخضع لتصور سابق تصنيفي وتحقيبي من الرحلة إلى الرواية التاريخية، فالرواية الإرثية، فالرواية التراثية الجديدة، وأخيرا الرواية المتعددة الأبعاد...

Generally speaking, the arrangement of the chapters in this [book] is subject to an a priori periodizing and categorizing vision: from the [genre of] the journey to the historical novel to the referential novel to the new heritage-based novel and finally to the multi-dimensional novel [...].

assured fashion, a move which I consider to be suspect, especially when juxtaposed with the views of Adonis, who traces the true beginnings of Arab literary modernity in the eighth-century A.D. in the writings of Abū Nuwās and Abū Tammām, as indicated above. Following Ḫusayn, it seems that one could talk about Arab literary modernity only in the context of the encounter between the Arab world and the West, an encounter whose earliest phase appears to be the Napoleonic conquest of Egypt in 1798. Ḫusayn’s understanding of modernity is one that greatly privileges the European episteme, and most importantly reveals the rift in his conception of the literary history of the Arabs. This rift highlights Ḫusayn’s conflation of two separate literary traditions and trajectories (the European and the Arabic), or, worse still, his dismissal of the Arabic tradition to the margin—a highly problematic move.

Indeed, uncovering this rift would help us identify the (semi-)Orientalist thought-processes in Ḫusayn’s remarks as well as in those by Maḥfūz. Taking their quotes above as cues, one could argue that these two giants of Arabic literature were the products of their times and, therefore, did not have the option to remain outside the sphere of influence of—let alone resist or provide a counter narrative to—the powerful, seductive current of an unstoppable Europe, intent

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55 Roger Allen is critical of this paradigm that limits Arabic literary history in the idea of an encounter with the West; he writes:

Studies of the movement of cultural change known in Arabic as al-nahḍah have been at some pains to point out that it involved... contacts with Europe—through the Christian community in Lebanon and more direct intervention via Napoleon’s invasion of Egypt in 1798 and the French annexation of Algeria in 1830, followed by a number of British and French colonial excursions, with their differing impacts upon society, and especially education and culture; from a more indigenous viewpoint, missions (baʿṭāt) to Europe, translation activities—the name of Rifāʿah al-Ṭahṭāwī (d. 1871) being particularly prominent, and then essays in generic imitation, assimilation, and so on... [T]his... has become the predominant matrix in the crafting of literary histories devoted to the development of Arabic fiction. ... It is one of the more ironic consequences, it seems to me, of the first strand of the al-nahḍah process that... among the young Egyptian scholars who traveled to Europe for further study in the 19th and early 20th centuries, both Ṭāhā Ḫusayn (d. 1973) and Aḥmad Amīn (d. 1954)---to cite two prominent examples---learned their postures... very well at the hands of their French tutors (Ṭāhā Ḫusayn’s dissertation at the Sorbonne was, after all, a highly critical study of Ibn Khaldūn’s history).

on imposing its order and its epistemology on the rest of the world, not just on the Arab peoples. It is worthwhile quoting Kilito in this regard:

Here we touch upon the subject of literary memory. When thinking of classical Arabic literature, I always refer to the Islamic calendar. Abu Nuwas [b. 756 - d. 814 A.D.] refers me to the second century [A.H.] and al-Mutanabbi [b. 915 – d. 965 A.D.] to the fourth [A.H.]. [. . .] Starting with the sixth century (that is, the twelfth A.D.), things get mixed up and the picture becomes obscure and uncertain. For seven centuries, Arabic literature fell into a long, deep sleep, from which it did not awake until the thirteenth century A.H. (the nineteenth A.D.) thanks to writers like Rifa’a Rafi’ al-Tahtawi [b. 1801– d. 1873 A.D.] and Ahmad Faris al-Shidyaq [b. 1804 – d. 1887 A.D.]. (Thou Shalt, 8; emphasis added) 56 57

Thus, after this seven-century records-long state of dormancy—following Kilito—the Arab world woke up only to be faced with the “shock” of Europe and its sweeping projects of (neo)colonialism and modernity, a dynamic that, in one way or the other, arguably carries over into the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Ḫusayn and Maḥfūz—like their predecessors al-Ṭahtāwī and al-Shidyāq but unlike Abū Nuwās and al-Mutanabbī—could not but be engrossed within this state of affairs; their statements on literary activity and creativity, therefore, do constitute useful case studies. The most serious outcome to emerge out of this “encroaching” European modernity could arguably be the heavy blow dealt “Arab memory” and Arab historiography, a blow that would cause such a rupture in various aspects of the life and reality of

56 A.H is the abbreviation of the Latin term anno hegirae (i.e. year of the migration or hijrah), which designates the Islamic lunar calendar that started in the year the Prophet Muḥammad and his followers migrated from Mecca to Medina in 622 C.E. In the Arab-Muslim world, the Hijri calendar (al-taqwīm al-hijrī) is used and contrasts with the Christian calendar (al-taqwīm al-mīlādī).

57 As mentioned above, this narrative of literary stagnation has recently been questioned by Muhsin al-Musawi in his 2015 book The Medieval Islamic Republic of Letters.
the Arabs—cultural, social, political, etc. One could argue that, at this historical juncture, the
Arab subject would be faced with a new world order, in which the European episteme was on the
rise. The Islamic Hijri calendar would retreat and surrender to the intensifying hegemony of the
Gregorian calendar—named after Pope Gregory XIII and euphemistically referred to nowadays
as the Common Era or C.E. And here let me go back to Kilito’s musings:

. . . [W]hen I hear of al-Tahtawi and al-Shidyaq, my mind does not turn to the thirteenth
[century A.H], but to the nineteenth century [A.D.]. If classical Arabic literature
automatically refers me to the spaciousness of the hijrah, modern literature spontaneously
refers me to Europe as a chronology and a frame of reference. Thus Arabic literature is
subject to a double chronology. At first [. . .] it was tied to the Islamic calendar, then one
day, without warning, it moved to the Christian calendar! [. . .] From this perspective,
Arabic literary memory is defined by three periods: the first is clear, the second
characterized by stagnation and slumber, and finally a third, lasting until now, where
memory lost its bearings and plunged into another memory and another time frame. (8-9;
emphasis added)

Kilito’s reading of Arab literary history is set along a paradigm of comparisons and contrasts—
geographic, historical, and conceptual—whereby seemingly heterogeneous entities enter into an
antagonistic relationship for hegemony, with Europe emerging as the victor and leaving the Arab
world—perhaps the rest of the globe—to choose between imitation or historical displacement or
irrelevance as ‘Abdullāh al-‘Arwī contends.\footnote{In an article that appeared in June 2014, al-‘Arwī refers to a historical point of utmost importance, one
that illuminates this discussion of European hegemony and the hard choices the non-European nations were
presented with; he writes:

القطيعة مع الماضي استكملت في أوروبا مع ماجلان الذي كان قد عاد إلى نقطة البداية لكن بعد أن دار حول العالم. وفضل نجاح الطراف حول
الأرض اكتشف أوروبا قبل الآخرين أن العالم انتهى ومنذ ذلك الوقت، ن 확 أن لا أحد يمكنه أن يسير أبعد منها فوق هذه الأرض. هذا الاكتشاف.}

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oppositions is the incommensurability that has deeply penetrated Arab consciousness to the point of normalization. This incommensurability is nothing but another name for the rift, the schizophrenia, and the loss of balance which characterize the literary memory of the Arabs, a condition that Kilito sees to be continuing to the present day. Along this line of analysis, one is drawn to make the conclusion that Kilito’s third period (i.e. from the nineteenth century A.D. to the present) stands solidly on the matrix of “literary influence,” a paradigm that involves unequal parts, as opposed to that of “intertextuality,” which presupposes a relationship between equals, one that is lacking at least during the lengthy colonial presence of Europe in Arab territories. Later on in the chapter, I would like to unsettle and show the limitations of this widely held assumption that sees this model of “literary influence” as continuing to the present day. I should note that Kilito’s use of the word “modern” in the quote above is, in a way, similar to Ḥusayn’s. For both Kilito and Ḥusayn, “the modern,” as a signifier, appears to find its signified and its point of reference in Europe and European temporal epistemology; furthermore, they both posit that classical Arabic literature exists either prior to the advent of or outside the sphere of the modern—although Kilito, unlike Ḥusayn, proceeds to outline the negative outcome of this categorization and the epistemological “harm” it inflicted upon the literary memory of the Arab peoples. By contrast, the Syrian writer Adonis (b. 1930-) challenges this temporal fixture of
literary modernity by tracing it back to a much earlier epoch: the eighth century A.D.; in his book *Introduction to Arab Poetics*, he avers:

> We will only be able to reach a proper understanding of the poetics of Arab modernity by viewing it in its social, cultural, and political context. Its development in the *eighth* century [A.D.] was bound up with the revolutionary movements demanding equality, justice and an end to discrimination between Muslims on grounds of race or color. It was also closely connected with the intellectual movements engaged in a *re-evaluation* of *traditional* ideas and beliefs, especially in the area of religion. (75; emphasis added)

Adonis’ unorthodox take on literary modernity perhaps runs counter to the views of most Arab critics and scholars, to say nothing of Westerners; and it starkly contrasts with Ḫusayn’s quote in particular. It is worthwhile to note that, whereas Ḫusayn’s remarks on “the modern” are *futuristic*, forward-looking, and inspired by the West, Adonis’s are bound to the past, and excavate literary modernity in the *ancient* history of the Arabs, this being a necessary step for the flourishing of an authentic Arab-inflected modernity. Adonis associates Arab modernity with ’Abū Nuwās (b. 756 - d. 814 A.D.) and ’Abū Tammām (b.788 - d. 845) in the domain of literature, especially poetry (78). He takes to task the Arab proponents of literary modernity—especially *al-nahḍah* figures, such as Ḫusayn—for not capitalizing on this early, and perhaps authentic, version of the *modern* in the writings and literary vision of ’Abū Nuwās, ’Abū Tammām and other ancient figures, who exerted much efforts to re-evaluate Arab-Muslim literary tradition as early as the eighth century. Adonis regrets that the Arab advocates of a literary—and cultural—renaissance saw Western modernity as offering the best alternative, (79) thereby skipping a path that could have led to a more cohesive and homogeneous project of modernity, one that would arguably firmly stand on local and internal elements specific to the
history, life style, and worldview of the Arabs, either independently of or in dialogue with the West.

With that said, it is very telling that Adonis took a long *detour* to arrive at the “older” Arab modernity he so cherishes: “I find no paradox in declaring that it was recent Western modernity which led me to discover our own, older, modernity outside our ‘modern’ politico-cultural system established on a Western model,” he admits before stressing that this “system separates us from our Arab modernity, from what is richest and most profound in our heritage” (81). Adonis’s “rediscovery” of this older, non-corrupted eighth-century Arab modernity is, nonetheless, mediated by and filtered through the lens of the “recent Western modernity,” a detour that somewhat undermines its forcefulness. Although a vocal critic of the duplicity that characterizes twentieth-century Arab politico-cultural system, Adonis’s detour ironically corroborates, albeit indirectly, the general *rift* in Arab consciousness and sense of history. This by no means constitutes a critique of Adonis’s remarks on my part, but is rather an observation with regard to his *mode* of critical analysis. I want to emphasize that his book *An Introduction to Arab Poetics* is an invaluable contribution to the effort to rethink, as well as to diagnose the issues facing, the question of the modern in the Arab world. Somehow like Kilito, Adonis locates the roots of “the crisis of [Arab] modernity” in an incommensurability between two heterogeneous elements and time frames; he adds that this crisis “appeared at its most complex during the *nahḍah*, a period which created a *split* in Arab life, both theoretically and practically” (79; emphasis added). Adonis notes that even “at the level of practical politics and daily life, the age of the *nahḍah* [Arab Renaissance] was set in motion in a state of complete dependency on the West” (80). We have to keep in mind that Ṭaha Ḥusayn is a major figure of the *nahḍah* movement, whose project and discourse of modernity is interrogated by Adonis. Following the
Syrian poet-critic, Western modernity and its discourses of liberalism and progress—initially imposed in a direct fashion through the colonial enterprise and maintained afterwards indirectly through neocolonial policies—is in complicity with the nahḍah intellectuals in hampering the natural progression and evolution of an Arab version or analogue of the modern. Along this thread of reasoning, the present “crisis” of Arab modernity could be attributable to both foreign and local factors.

In fact, other contemporary intellectuals—Arab and non-Arab alike—have also voiced similar concerns regarding the legacy of the nahḍah (Arab Renaissance) period in general and the views of Ḥusayn in particular. ‘Abdullāh al-‘Arwī, for instance, gives us an overall diagnosis of the nahḍah and its ideology of “liberal freedom” (al-ḥurriyyah al-libirāliyyah) in the literary and socio-political arenas, one that echoes Adonis’ critique:

[The Arabs were introduced to the novel, and consequently they did not give weight to any other literary [form]. Likewise, no one in that period [i.e. al-nahḍa] dared to contest the advantages of the parliamentary system in the political domain. And no one in the cultural field expressed doubt that the novel is the highest and finest of all literary [forms]. The caliphate [as a system of governance] was found faulty because it was not democratic and revolutionary, and [similarly] Arabic literature was found

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at fault because it did not arrive at crafting the long novel. This campaign was led on both fronts by Ṭaha Ḥusayn, who was influenced by Luṭfī al-Sayyid, culturally if not politically. (Al-Idyūlūjyā, 218)

With an eye on the novel as a privileged art form—and let us remember Moretti’s and Jameson’s formulations—in Arabic literature, these words could be read as a direct response to Ḥusayn’s remarks outlined above. Al-‘Arwī challenges Ḥusayn’s nahḍah ideals on two levels: literature and politics or, to put it differently, literary history and political history. What is interesting in al-‘Arwī’s critical reading of modern Arabic literature and culture is that it weaves together these two distinct categories, presenting them as manifestations of the same basic predicament facing contemporary Arab ideology: the imitation of Western literary and political models—i.e., big subsets of Western modernity. Thus, following al-‘Arwī, the parliament and the novel as political and artistic institutions respectively turn out to be two sides of the same coin or two manifestations of the same “crisis.” The fact that Ḥusayn is presented as the most important figure to lead this two-front “campaign” in an effort to push for these two “foreign” institutions to find a home in Egypt and the Arab world makes this predicament or crisis even the more poignant. For Ḥusayn and other nahḍah intellectuals, the project of the Arab renaissance entailed a rethinking of the entire paradigm of Arab life—social, political, cultural, literary, artistic, etc. The absence of the novel genre from the heritage of the Arabic literary system or that of the parliament from the Islamic political system is but a metonym of what the nahḍah advocates interpreted as a larger issue: a major lack or flaw in the Arab-Muslim tradition that was bound to impact negatively various aspects of the life of the Arabs, including literary and political activity.

This Western-inspired vision of the nahḍah project had far-reaching implications and influenced a large number of 20th-century Arab thinkers and littérateurs, including Najīb Maḥfūẓ,
the one and only Arab Nobel laureate in literature. Indeed, the quote by Maḥfūẓ  introduced earlier speaks to this, albeit in an indirect fashion. That Maḥfūẓ states explicitly that, during his early career as a novelist, he considered “the European novel [to be] sacred, and [that] departure from this form was sacrilege” speaks volumes to the degree to which the nahḍah ideals had penetrated his literary vision. Interestingly, Maḥfūẓ saw this subservience to “the European novel” as a predicament that was not limited to the Arabs but rather extended to all “writers belonging to the developing or under-developed world”—which corroborates Jameson’s “foreign form-local content” formula. I content that the highly celebratory remarks by Ḥusayn in relation to the value and importance of adopting the Western narrative forms (the short story, the novelette, and the novel) should be seen as part and parcel of the nahḍah discourses of modernization that had directly or indirectly impacted the literary trajectories of Maḥfūẓ and other Arab writers so much so that the Nobel laureate “thought that the role of [his] generation was to write the novel in the correct [i.e. the European] form” (qtd. in Omri, 244). Maḥfūẓ’s revelations are fascinating indeed. It would be worthwhile at this juncture to revisit al-ʿArwī’s critique of the Maḥfūẓian writing style, although in a different arena this time. The prominent Moroccan historian and novelist-critic indicates:

الأمر الذي يحمل دلالة قطعية ليس ما يصفه محفوظ، إذ لا أحد يستطيع أن يضمن لنا مطابقة الموصوف للواقع، وإنما كون محفوظ، الكاتب الشاب التواق إلى شكل روايي يلائم، اختار بعد التدبر و التروي أساليب الطبيعية بما فيه من تشاؤم و تشبت بعلوم المادة... . مدرسة الواقعية الطبيعية... . غير أصلية لأنها وصفت المجتمع العربي بأساليب تعبيرية و تشكيكية مستعارة. وهذه الأشكال، التي يطبقها الأدباء العرب على مادتهم الخاصة، تطوع رغما عنهم تلك المادة... . نستطيع

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The thing that carries a definitive meaning is not what Maḥfūz describes [in his fiction], for no one can guarantee us an identity between what is described and reality, but rather that Maḥfūz—the young writer being eager to adopt a novelistic form that suits him—chose, after some consideration and deliberation, the style of the Naturalists and the pessimism and clinging to the sciences of matter which [this style] incorporated. The school of Naturalist Realism [...] is not authentic because it described Arab society using writing and visual patterns that are borrowed. And these forms, which Arab littérates apply to their specific subject-matter, subdue this latter in spite of themselves. [...] We can say, for instance, that the pessimism of Najīb Maḥfūz is related more to the (Naturalist) novelistic form than to what is described or to the author’s view of life. (230-231; emphasis added)

Al-ʿArwī’s critique—which was made as early as 1967—complicates the debate over both form and content, and in so doing unsettles both Jameson’s foreign form-local content binary and Moretti’s foreign form-local content-local form triad—which were formulated much later, in 1993 and 2000 respectively. Following Al-ʿArwī’s analysis of Maḥfūz’s writing style, form and content are both somehow corrupted and inauthentic, for, even when the content of a certain literary work appears local on the surface, it is on a deeper level necessarily tampered with and “subdued” through the implicit workings of the “foreign” form. Al-ʿArwī offers us a concrete example to make his point, namely the fact that the highly pessimistic tone of Maḥfūz’s fiction is
attributable more to his adoption of the style of Naturalism than it is to the actual content—or raw material—of that fiction or to his own world view.

This point of view recalls Itamar Even-Zohar’s concept of “literary interference” (53). According to Even-Zohar, “Interference can be defined as a relation(ship) between literatures, whereby a certain literature A (a source literature) may become a source of direct or indirect loans for another literature B (a target literature)” (54). In light of this theory, the dark aspects of Mahfūz’s oeuvre is either a direct or indirect loan whose source—according to al-‘Arwī—is to be traced in the Naturalist school in both French literature (in the works of Émile Zola) and American literature (in the writings of Theodore Dreiser) (Al-Idylūjyā, 230). I should point out that this “interference” with the literary trajectory of Mahfūz as emanating from the Western literary school of Naturalism, nevertheless, echoes Moretti’s concept of “structural compromise”: “as I was reading my fellow historians, it became clear that the encounter of western forms and local reality did indeed produce everywhere a structural compromise—as the law predicted—but also, that the compromise itself was taking rather different forms,” underscores Moretti (62; emphasis added). Taking Mahfūz as a case study, this “structural compromise” would necessarily take shape on both ends of the form-content spectrum. One could argue that Moretti’s concept of “structural compromise” does not go well with his triangular formula of “foreign form, local material—and local form” (65), for a compromise would necessitate that this form-content binary interact in a mode marked by fusion and overlap, which would then result in the “foreign” form and “local” content not being capable to remain intact but rather dissolve into some other tertiary element. Retaining a strict division between “foreign form” and “local material” in the triad somehow works against the very idea of “structural compromise.”
Al-‘Arwī’s diagnosis of this “structural compromise” or “interference” with regard to Maḥfūz’s fiction remains subjective and relative at best. It is important to highlight the context of Al-‘Arwī’s critique; in fact, his seminal work Al-Idyūljyā al-‘Arabiyya al-Muʿāṣira (Contemporary Arab Ideology) appeared in French first—how ironically—as L’Idéologie arabe contemporaine as early as 1967—some thirteen years before Maḥfūz’s 1980 revelations in the quote above. To his credit, al-‘Arwī (Laroui) was cautious enough to point out that his critique targets the early phase of Maḥfūz’s literary career—when the Egyptian novelist was still a “young writer.” While I take the general premise in al-‘Arwī’s criticism to be valid in the context of the 1950s and the 1960s, a premise that is indeed corroborated by the revelations of Maḥfūz himself, it is useful to be reminded of its limitations from the vantage point of the subsequent decades of Arab literary creativity. Taking Maḥfūz as an example, we have to keep in mind that in 1980—eight years before he was crowned Nobel laureate—he did revise his literary trajectory in such a way that makes his confessions sound as a direct response to al-‘Arwī’s comments; “Now, my theory has changed,” he humbly admits. And to clarify what he meant, Maḥfūz proceeds to underscore that he does “not imitate either the maqama or Joyce. Frankly, what irritates me these days is imitation, even of tradition!” These words could also be read as an indirect response to HINGAYJN’s call on Arab writers to adopt and imitate “the European novel” and make it “the most important literary product of Egypt as well as of all the other Arabic countries.” In rejecting imitation—regardless of whether the “imitatee” is Western (Joyce) or Arab-Islamic (the pioneering writers of the maqāmah)—Maḥfūz has, in a way, identified the predicament facing “modern” Arabic literature, which then allowed him to come up with an

59 The fact that this major critique of the various structures and substructures of 20th-century Arab ideology and Arab political thought was first written in French in 1967 might have undermined its overall argument and purpose. Al-‘Arwī (Laroui) might have realized this “inconvenience” and, thus, might have felt compelled to produce an Arabic version, which actually came out in 1970.
antidote; by “rebelling” against and then (supposedly) abandoning Western literary forms, he arrived at the conclusion that the “correct form is that which comes from an inner music.”

Now the entire paradigm for Maḥfūz, one could argue, has shifted to such an extent that one is tempted to suggest a gradual move from the outer to the inner, from the other to the self, from the foreign to the local, and perhaps from the inauthentic to the authentic—a pattern that, in many ways, parallels the transition from a fascination with, and imitation of, Western modernity to a re-discovery, re-interpretation, and integration of the Arab-Islamic heritage (al-turāth). It is useful to close-read Maḥfūz’s statement and to reflect on two extremely important words: “Now” and “inner.” Juxtaposing these two vocabulary items, a linguist or grammarian would immediately note how they belong to two different grammatical categories (or parts of speech), with the first being an *adverb* (expressing time) and the second an *adjective* (denoting a certain quality or concept.) Indeed, these are the indicators of the two dimensions I am proposing as co-constituents of this paradigm shift: the *temporal* and the *conceptual*. Moreover, these two words serve as metonyms for the larger frames of “political history” and “literary history” respectively—which informs the methodology adopted in this chapter. The work that needs to be done next is to research and verify the veracity of this paradigm shift by critically engaging the later work of Maḥfūz, as well as the oeuvre of his fellow Arab novelists, a task that goes beyond the scope of this chapter, although I would like to offer it as a window for future research in the context of reassessing Arabic literary history. I shall, nevertheless, attempt to give an overview of this shift in Maḥfūz’s literary trajectory in the next section that investigates the investment in *al-turāth* (Arab-Moslem heritage) on the part of Arab and Moroccan novelists including Maḥfūz.
• *Al-Turāth* and the Search for Authenticity: From “Literary Influence” to “Intertextuality”

Let me take the following quote by Roger Allen as a point of departure to investigate the Arabic and Moroccan novel in the last decades of the twentieth century, bearing in mind the proposition of a paradigm shift from “literary influence” to “intertextuality”:

From the post-1988 perspective, by which I imply the “translation” or “exportation” of the Arabic novel to a larger readership, the Arabic novel clearly enjoys a higher profile than was the case before the award of the Nobel Prize. This is, of course, largely thanks to Najīb Maḥfūẓ, the laureate himself [. . .]. That said, however, the current situation poses an interesting dilemma for Arab novelists. If the novel has now been recognized in the Arab world as being a literary genre, or, as some critics would have it, the literary genre of this era [. . .] and if a Western readership has now become somewhat familiar with a few examples of that productivity, then how does the Arabic novel proceed to fulfill its role as an agent of change within the context of the Arab world, its cultural values, and its sense of heritage? And, if it chooses to do so, then what will be the reception of such works both within the different regions of the Arab world itself and, via translation, in the broader context of *world literature*? (Emphasis added) ⁶⁰

Needless to say, the “higher profile” enjoyed by the Arabic novel in the last decades of the 20th century (and perhaps at the turn of the 21st century) cannot solely be attributed to Maḥfūẓ’s win of the Novel Prize in 1988—especially if we consider this matter from within the Arab world independently of an external recognition in the form of the “formidable” Nobel award based in

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Europe. Indeed, Allen himself has questioned the “suspect” statement made by the Nobel committee, one that casts Maḥfūẓ as “the Dickens of Cairo” or “the Balzac of Cairo,” thereby highlighting only his earlier writing phase when he deliberately attempted to emulate the European novel.\(^{61}\) The Nobel committee’s statement, I want to underscore, sidelines the paradigm shift in Maḥfūẓ’s literary trajectory—which in 1980 Maḥfūẓ himself stressed in the quote provided above—and by extension in the Arabic novel tradition as a whole.\(^{62}\)\(^{63}\) Also, it rigidly transfixes the Maḥfūẓian oeuvre along the matrix of “literary influence,” and in so doing does not give full credit to the literary creativity of the Nobel laureate and the experimental quality of his later fictional work, one that diverges in significant ways from the “European novel” a la Dickens or Balzac. Painstaking Maḥfūẓ as a Dickensonian or a Balzackian betrays the Eurocentric mindset of the Nobel committee. Interestingly, the implications of this committee’s remarks on Maḥfūẓ’s Nobel win echo those made by Ḥusayn in 1955, detailed above, as well as the thought-processes of al-nahḍah (Arab Renaissance). These two sets of remarks by the

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\(^{61}\) Allen points out that:

Maḥfūẓ [. . .] was hailed by the Nobel Committee and by literary commentators as ‘the Dickens of Cairo’ or ‘the Balzac of Cairo.’ Along with the usual supply of political sour grapes and pretentious nonsense that accompanies the annual Nobel announcement in October, a number of questions were raised by Arab critics as to precisely what the longer-term implications of this award to an Arab novelist might be. \[Ibid., 205.\]

\(^{62}\) Allen is critical of this implication; he writes:

Even though Maḥfūẓ had continued writing novels and short stories right up to the time of the announcement of the award and indeed thereafter, the Nobel citation made no mention of his recent works and concentrated instead on those published before the June War of 1967 [. . .], lavishing particular praise on one work, \textit{Al-Thulāthiyya} (The Trilogy), a three-novel family saga set in inter-world-war Cairo that was originally published in the Egyptian capital in 1956 and 1957. \[Ibid., 205.\]

\(^{63}\) In a similar vein, Sā’id Yaqṭīne states that Maḥfūẓ’s work is extremely diverse, in terms of both content and form; he asserts that:

[Najīb Maḥfūẓ’s novelistic [career] is characterized by wealth and diversity at the levels of quantity and kind. . . Najīb Maḥfūẓ’s [career] has taken various features so much so that researchers can distinguish between several periods in his [literary] production. . . If most studies that talk about the “periods” in the history of his [literary] creativity depart from the angle of content, then they do not gain “legitimacy” unless they research [these periods] from angle of “forms,” and this research is yet to be done.] See Sā’id Yaqṭīne, \textit{Al-Riwāya wa al-Turāth al-Sardī: Min Ajl Wa’y Jadīd bi al-Turāth} [The Novel and Prosaic Heritage: For a New Awareness of Heritage] (Cairo: Ru’yah, 2006), 58-59.
Swedish committee and Ḥusayn give primacy to the European literary traditions, and grant legitimacy to non-Western literary traditions only insofar as they imitate or engage the European model. In this regard, Muhsin al-Musawi’s preface to the edition *Arabic Literary Thresholds: Sites of Rhetorical Turn in Contemporary Scholarship* (2009) refers to Jaroslav Stetkevych who critiques:

[A] “regime of truth” which Orientalism has long established as the sole custodian of Arabic literature, a custodian whose influence penetrated the thought and practice of many *nahḍah* intellectuals and scholars including Ṭāhā Ḥusayn. Modern Arabic scholarship made significant use of this regime of thought, often betraying enormous cultural *dependency* and adhering to many of its premises and methods without sufficient questioning and analysis. The *nahḍah* intellectual and those who inherited this tradition adopted the Orientalist discourse, which, in line with the Enlightenment and its own legitimization processes, paid *no or negligible* attention to popular literature, Sufi writings and non-official attitudes and figures. (x; emphasis added)

In the present section, I attempt to show how outdated this model of “literary influence” is by emphasizing the temporal factor, which enabled Arab littérature to slowly, but steadily, move away from the alleged dependency on Western models towards more literary freedom and independence. To this effect, it is important to stress the significance of the year 1967 and the impact of the political events it witnessed on Arabic literature and Arab littérature. The 1967 Arab defeat with Israel shocked the Arab consciousness and caused wide disillusionment among large segments of the Arab world, especially the intelligentsia. According to a number of critics,

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64 Jaroslav Stetkevych (1929- ) is a prominent scholar and Professor Emeritus of Arabic Literature at the University of Chicago. He is the author of many books and articles on Arabic literary studies. The edition *Arabic Literary Thresholds: Sites of Rhetorical Turn in Contemporary Scholarship* is dedicated to him.
the shock of 1967 greatly impacted Arabic literary activity so much so that this very year was viewed by many as a turning point in Arabic literatures. Muḥammad Barrādah, for instance, emphasizes the connections between the 1967 Arab defeat and the growing autonomy of Arab creativity, striking thus a direct link between the political and the literary; one could say that the Moroccan novelist-critic saw the “curse” of the political defeat of the Arabs with Israel as a “blessing” for the eventual growth and maturity of Arabic fiction; he avers:

[The evidence for the specificity of Arab creativity and its concern with its self-realization outside [the constraints of] guardianship and supervision is that new moment which exploded after the 1967 defeat, announcing fissure in political consensus. [. . .] The defeat came to expose the hidden, and to convince thinkers and authors that Pan-Arabism does not have the necessary means for realization and growth. [. . .] From this angle, we could glimpse the symbolic value of the post-1967 productions and creative works, since they charted transformations in the [Arab] intellectual and creative trajectory
and in the relationships between the cultural and the political. [...] (Al-Riwayah al-‘Arabiyyah, 17)\(^65\)

Taking into account the political events of 1967 is indeed crucial to my approach that views political history as an important component in the reassessment of Arabic literary history. Historical signposts of major political significance, such as the 1967 Arab defeat, do aid researchers to better understand the transformations in Arabic literature in general and in the novel more specifically as it navigates the last decades of the 20\(^{th}\) century. It might be puzzling why the Nobel committee chose to exclude Maḥfūz’s post-1967 fiction from its remarks. Here again the political might impact the cultural or the literary, although Stetkevych’s above critique of Orientalism’s “regime of truth” already illuminates this issue.

The paradigm shift in Maḥfūz’s fiction should not be divorced from Arab political history. Although this shift was clouded or entirely overlooked by the Swedish committee, one could still make a conclusion of utmost importance: In pursuing literary “freedom” outside the European episteme, the Arabic novel in the post-1967 era started to gradually move away from the constraints posed by “literary influence”—or by “interference” to use Even-Zohar’s term—to the tremendous opportunities offered by “intertextuality” fused with experimentation (al-tajrīb). As noted in the Introduction, Saʿīd Yaqūfīne has stated that in the late 1960s and early 1970s “a new novelistic experiment” in the Mashriq burst forth, and that prominent Arab literary figures such as Jamāl al-Ghīṭānī and Sunʿallāh Ibrāhīm played a major role in building its bases and

\(^{65}\) Likewise, Albert Hourani asserts that:
The events of 1967, and the processes of change which followed them, made more intense that disturbance of spirits, that sense of a world gone wrong, which had already been expressed in the poetry of the 1950s and the 1960s. The defeat of 1967 was widely regarded as being not only a military setback but a kind of moral judgment. If the Arabs had been defeated so quickly, completely and publicly, might it not be a sign that there was something rotten in their societies and in the moral system which they expressed? . . . Among educated and reflective men and women, there was a growing awareness of the vast and rapid changes in their societies, and of the ways in which their own position was being affected by them.

See *A History of the Arab Peoples*, 442.
developing its important characteristics via the adoption of new and innovative tools (al-Qirā’a, 289). I would like to suggest two levels of intertextuality; one involves al-turāth (the Arab-Islamic prose heritage)—which at times includes the pre-Islamic period—and the other the world novel. Put differently, in the first dimension, the post-1967 Arabic novel invokes and interacts with the heritage of the Arabs and the (pre-) Islamic era, with a view to producing new meanings or new knowledge; in the second dimension, however, it invokes and opens itself up to dialogue with the world literary heritage, and sees itself as being part of this universal heritage. On both dimensions, the Arabic novel posits freedom and autonomy rather than domination and dependence, and most importantly takes experimentation (al-tajrīb) as a strategic choice.

(Interestingly, these two levels are implied in Allen’s quote that introduces this section, for he does inquire what the state of reception for Arabic novels would be, firstly, “within the different regions of the Arab world itself,” and, secondly, “in the broader context of world literature.”) In researching these two levels of “literary freedom,” I will engage in some detail the critical work of Yaqṭīne and Barrādah respectively.

In his book Al-Riwa’ya wa al-Turāth al-Sardī: Min Ajl Wa’y Jadīd bi al-Turāth [The Novel and Prosaic Heritage: For a New Awareness of Heritage], Yaqṭīne studies the oeuvre of a number of Arab novelists—including Maḥfūz—and concludes that intertextuality between “modern” Arabic novels and the Arab-Islamic prosaic heritage is increasingly becoming a noticeable trend, one that manifests in two distinct ways, which I would like to sketch briefly. Firstly, the “modern” text adopts the very form of an “old prose genre” (naw’ sardī qadīm), such as al-maqāmah (the maqama), al-risālah (the letter), and al-riḥlah (the journey). Secondly, a new text departs from an “old prosaic text whose identity and writer are specified,” and through “textual interaction” (al-tafā’ul al-nasṣī) emerges “a new prosaic text (the novel) and the
production of *new* meaning related to the new time in which the text appears” (8; emphasis added). In this second category, the dialectic of the old and the new takes center stage, for we indeed have two texts—one from the 20th century and the other being centuries old—interacting with one another.

Following Yaqtīne, al-Ghīṭānī’s novel *Al-Zīnī Barakāt* (1974; Zini Barakat)—which interacts with a historical text, *Badāʾī’ al-Zuhūr fī Waqāʾī’ al-Duhūr* (The Wonders of Flowers in the Happenings of the Ages), by the Egyptian historian Ibn Iyyās (b. 1448-d. 1522 A.D.)—“transforms, on the level of the discourse, history into a novel,” and thus carries “a new vision of creativity” and “new meaning” for the older text it interacts with (194-95). Yaqtīne proceeds to draw a conclusion that is extremely significant:

[Al-Ghīṭānī “writes” the old text with a new consciousness. This new consciousness can only be embodied in a new “type,” which is the novel. [. . .] And on the basis of mimicry and transformation, it [the novel] mimics the old types [. . .] the goal not being to point out their accomplishments, but to surpass them [. . .], for al-Ghīṭānī has a prior awareness that “textual interaction” with the old Arabic prose allows for the creation of new artistic forms and patterns. This is what al-Ghīṭānī attempted to pursue in mimicking Ibn Iyyās
and transforming his text so that he could present us with a new text, which is the novel.

(195)

The value of Yaqṭīne’s analysis is that its scholarly endeavors could help researchers establish new theories of the novel genre and literary modernity strictly from within the context of the Arab world, and independently of the West, positing “intertextuality” and “textual interaction”—as elaborated by the Moroccan critic—as critical tools in this process. It is worth indicating that Yaqṭīne sees the novel as an indispensable form in enabling the embodiment of a new consciousness, one that is peculiar—in the case of al-Ghīṭānī’s novel Al-Zīnī Barakāt—to the Egyptian society. In Yaqṭīne’s study, this conclusion could equally apply to other new novels from the larger Arab world, ones that strive to reinterpret older texts. The significance of this argument is that it goes against Jameson’s “foreign form-local content” binary, for it views the novel genre (supposedly a Western form according to Jameson) as an asset rather than an impediment in the flourishing of Arab literary creativity and modernity in the context of the latter half of the 20th century. Viewed against Yaqṭīne’s thesis, Jameson’s formulation cannot claim to be an absolute theory, but turns out to be quite limited, subject to time and place. For while his binary could neatly apply to Maḥfūẓ’s early work, especially The Trilogy, it does not stand scrutiny when seen from the perspective of the Nobel laureate’s later work, one that intentionally interacts with the older Arabic prosaic heritage—and the ancient history of Egypt in the case of the novel Al-ʿā’ishī fi al-Ḥaqīqah (1985; Akhenaten, Dweller in Truth, 1998). Taking cues from Yaqṭīne’s study, the novel—even if we assume its foreignness in Arabic literary soil—does possess the potential of being, or rather becoming, an “authentic” literary form in Arab creativity. The paradigm shift in Maḥfūẓ’s oeuvre is such a powerful indicator of this
supposition. This remains a tentative answer to the question posed early on in the chapter with regard to whether the novel could be/come an authentic art form in the Arabic literary tradition.

With the question of authenticity in mind, Yaqţīne’s efforts to develop a text-based approach that juxtaposes and brings into conversation texts written after the (notorious) year of 1967 with older works in the Arab prosaic heritage paves the way for Arab scholars to rethink the grand narratives of modernity—for example, those that inform the literary and cultural project of Ṭaha Ḥusayn and the nahḍah entourage—and develop new ideas of Arab literary modernity based on the Arabic literary tradition, independently of Western formulations. Putting Yaqţīne’s intervention in dialogue with that of Adonis—which, as I have shown above, rethinks the concept of modernity by tracing it to the medievalist poets ’Abū Nuwās and ’Abū Tammām—an alternative model of Arab modernity appears in the horizon, a model that seems to be insistent on remedying or at least alleviating that rift and that incommensurability discussed earlier when treating the critiques voiced by Kilito and Adonis. The Egyptian novelist al-Ghīṭānī’s attempt to turn the medievalist historian Ibn Iyyās’s book of history Badā’i’ al-Zuhūr fī Waqā’i’ al-Duhūr (The Wonders of Flowers in the Happenings of the Ages) into a novel (Al-Zīnī Barakāt) that explores twentieth-century Egyptian society, thereby transforming history into fiction, does indeed alert us to “a new vision of creativity” and literary modernity in the making. This relationship of intertextuality between the two texts enables al-Ghīṭānī—and by extension Arab novelists—to develop a new literary language that is inspired by, and draws on, Arab history and literary heritage. To this effect, Adonis avers:

As language is a vocal, musical and social value, it has a history and a past. Without a knowledge of this past, modernity is not possible. Moreover, the language of modernity can have no value independent of the history of the creative genius of the language. In
any language, the establishing of a new artistic value relies first of all on a comprehensive understanding and assimilation of whatever is of value in the history of that language.

(100; emphasis added)

Adonis’s remarks, although specially made for poetry, could equally apply to prose fiction, since they address what the Syrian poet-critic—together with Moroccan al-‘Arwī—sees as a larger predicament facing Arab creativity: the imitation of and dependency on Western literary and political models. Elaborating on his vision of the modern in the context of the Arab world, Adonis contends that “modernity is an immersion in history, a kind of writing which subjects this history to constant questioning, and a form of self-awareness that exposes writing itself to constant scrutiny [. . .].” (101). Adonis sees a lot of potential in the Arabic language to be/come the bearer of an authentic version of modernity; he underscores that:

The Arabic language and Arab society are not two primitive plants but have firm roots reaching deep into history; it is these roots which provide the context for and the means of achieving modernity. Thus a knowledge of the origins of their ‘ancient’ forms, the changes they underwent and the problems they encountered [. . .] is essential to an understanding of the ‘modern’. (101; emphasis added)

Adonis’s adamant stance regarding the heated question of modernity finds a supplement in Yaqtīne’s text-based approach, which researches “modern” Arabic fiction through the lens of ancient texts, and identifies two different routes of intertextuality between the two sets of works as explained above. Indeed, these two dimensions of intertextuality, as outlined by Yaqtīne, could be seen as answering Adonis’s call on Arab writers and scholars to seek “knowledge of the
origins of their ‘ancient’ forms,” a necessary step for the flourishing of an authentic articulation of modernity.

Yaqtîne’s subjecting canonical and non-canonical figures of Arabic literature to his text-based analytical model goes in this direction of rethinking the question of the modern. It is noteworthy pointing out that, within the framework of this model that highlights the key elements of *al-turāth* and intertextuality, Maḥfūz’s work appears in both categories. While the scope of this chapter does not allow for an in-depth analysis of either *Rihlat Ibn Faṭṭūmah (The Journey of Ibn Fattouma)* or *Layālī Alf Laylah (Arabian Nights and Days)*, I would like to say a few things about these two texts that are good illustrative examples of Maḥfūz’s post-1980 fiction. *Rihlat Ibn Faṭṭūmah* is a text that invokes and is inspired by the older Arabic literary form of *al-riḥlah* (the journey), and it recounts the journey of the protagonist Ibn Faṭṭūmah in search of perfection and justice away from the corruption and injustice of his homeland. It is worth noting that this novel is reminiscent of, and is indeed inspired by, the text *Rihlat Ibn Baṭṭūṭah (The Journey of Ibn Baṭṭūṭah)* by the Moroccan explorer Ibn Baṭṭūṭah (b. 1304 – d. 1377 A.D). Maḥfūz’s other work, *Layālī Alf Laylah*, following Yaqtîne, stands in a most explicit intertextual relationship with the ancient text of the *Arabian Nights*, for Maḥfūz takes the frame story of Sheherazade and Shahryar as “the domain of his storytelling,” and “begins from its ending so that this becomes the start of his *Nights*” (64). Yaqtîne highlights a number of transformations that result from this interesting case of intertextuality: firstly, unlike the *Arabian Nights* which relies on “framing” (*al-ta’līr*) and “presupposition” (*al-tadmīn*), *Layālī Alf Laylah* makes use of progression (*al-tasalsul*) and continuity (*al-tātābu’*); secondly, Maḥfūz’s text selects and integrates different narrative structures taken from the *Arabian Nights* and then renders them as one bigger structure with a beginning and an ending; and, finally, the reader is
presented with “a new prosaic text,” which takes apart and reinterprets a previous text (65-66).

This short overview of these two works by Maḥfūẓ does illuminate in some fashion the paradigm shift mentioned above, and alerts us to the experimental tendencies of the Nobel laureate, especially in his later writing career.66

Yaqṭīne’s analytical work of contemporary Arabic literature, including the novels of Maḥfūž, is invaluable indeed. Yet I want to draw attention to the fact that its primary focus is predominantly text-oriented, and thus its investigation of al-turāth (Arab-Islamic heritage) in the Arabic novel does not necessarily take as its immediate goal establishing or theorizing for (a missing or potential) authenticity in the domain of the Arab novelistic tradition as it navigates the last decades of the twentieth century.67 While I recognize that this is not a flaw, I want to capitalize on the findings in Yaqṭīne’s examination of the relationship between the novel and al-turāth to corroborate the analytical model I am proposing, one that finds its raison d’être in temporality and historicity and combines political history with literary history. I should note that my approach’s emphasis on historicity as a crucial factor in the trajectory of the Arabic novel is in line with Even-Zohar, who contends that “[i]nterference cannot be divorced from literary history, since it is part of the historical existence of any cultural system,” adding that “[t]his does not mean that the role of interference is always important for literature at any given time of its existence. Rather, it means that interference cannot be analyzed as an issue per se, detached from

66 It is useful to point out that Moroccan novelist-critic Muḥammad Amanṣūr has written a book on the topic of experimentation in the fiction of Maḥfūz. See Al-Tajrīb al-Riwā’ī ‘inda Najib Mahfūz [The Novelistic Experimentation of Naguib Mahfouz] (Cairo: Al-Majlis al-‘A’lā li-Thaqāfah, 2007).

67 In the introduction to the book, Yaqṭīne explains this text-based approach—without explicitly naming it as such—by stressing that “we seek in this work to treat textual adherence [al-ta’alluq al-nassī] within the sphere of textual interaction [al-ta’fā’ul al-nassī] between the novel and the old Arab prosaic heritage”; Yaqṭīne then offers the following four parameters that guide his study: 1- textual adherence [al-ta’alluq al-nassī] ; 2- the textuality of the novel [nassiyyat al-rivāyah]; 3- textual interaction [al-ta’fā’ul al-nassī] ; and 4- the theory of the text [nazarīyyat al-nass]. See Al-Riwāya wa al-Turāth al-Sardī: Min Ajl Wa’y Jadīd bi al-Turāth [The Novel and Prosaic Heritage: For a New Awareness of Heritage] (Cairo: Ru’ya, 2006), 10-11.
the historical context” (54; emphasis added). For Even-Zohar, “interference” does undergo a change of intensity on a temporal plane, which, in a way, corroborates my approach, which posits “intertextuality”—rather than “literary influence”—to be the more dominant matrix in the post-1967, when *al-turāth* became an important vestige for Arab novelists, including the Nobel laureate Maḥfūz himself—particularly in his later work.68 In a direction similar to the one outlined in Even-Zohar’s quote, Moretti contends that “world literature was indeed a system—but a system of variations,” nonetheless, before underscoring that the “pressure from the Anglo-French core tried to make [the system] uniform, but it could never fully erase the reality of difference” given that the “forces in play kept changing, and so did the compromise that resulted from their interaction” (64; emphasis added). Equating Maḥfūz with Dickens or Balzac or shying away from acknowledging the “nativist” dimension of his post-1967 writings definitely goes in this direction of erasing “the reality of difference.”

In the present section, which emphasizes the move towards “intertextuality,” one of my primary goals is to make this “reality of difference” more prominent through examining the factors that have impacted the development and transformation of the Arabic and Moroccan novel in the post-1967 era, taking *al-turāth* (Arab-Islamic heritage) to be a major factor in this transformational process. In fact, *al-turāth* has played an important role in “modern” Moroccan

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68 Allen has also noted that, unlike *The Trilogy*, none of Maḥfūz’s works “in which he follows the more ‘particularizing’ trend […] , by attempting to utilize the styles and structures of more indigenous narrative genres (albeit for the purpose of thoroughly contemporary commentary)—for example, *Rihlat Von Fattūmah* (1983; Eng. *The Journey of Von Fattouma*, 1992) and *Layāli Alf Laylah* (*Nights of a Thousand Nights*, 1982; Eng. *Arabian Nights and Days*, 1995)—none of these translated works has earned a broad readership in European or Anglo-American markets.” Ibid., 208. As noted above, Yaqqīne also refers to these two texts in his study on the relationship between the Arabic novel and *al-turāth*. In a similar vein, Moroccan critic Aḥmad al-Yabūrī, in his examination of in the post-1960s Moroccan novel, avers that the investment in *al-turāth* has relatively liberated Moroccan novelists following in the steps of “Western narrative forms” [*al-‘ashkāl al-sardiyya al-gharbiyya*], and has allowed them “the opportunity to search for a possible authenticity [*aṣāla muhtamala*] in the domain of Arab creativity [*al-ibdāʿ al-ʿarabī*].” See Aḥmad al-Yabūrī, *Al-Kitāb al-Riwāʾiyya* [Novelistic Writing in Morocco: Structure and Signification] (Casablanca: al-Madāris, 2006), 52.
and Arab literary activity; and this reality unsettles the notion of modernity as understood by the
nahḍah intellectuals. Very importantly, given the critiques voiced against the views of Ḥusayn and
al-nahḍah project of literary renaissance glossed above, I want to propose—from the
perspective of the 21st century and the increasing interconnectedness of the world and what that
entails for the countless literary traditions on the globe—a different kind of criticism, one that
aspires to a “way out” and is nested in the idea of “the compromise.” I have to stress that this
term is quite different from Moretti’s “structural compromise,” which is grounded in the matrix
of “literary influence” and “domination.” The notion of “compromise” I am offering seeks to
transcend this operational logic of “influence” in the work of Jameson, Moretti, and Casanova as
well as in the writings of Ḥusayn and the nahḍah figures and the critiques directed against them
by Adonis, al-ʻArwī, and others. This model of “compromise” is weary of the conservative and
isolationist leanings in Al-ʻArwī’s critique in particular, one that questions the very suitability of
the novel genre to Arab life and Arab reality, and goes in the very opposite direction of Yaqţīne’s
argument, which sees the novel as an indispensable literary form for Arab authors. In advocating
for “compromise,” I want to push for a criticism that values reconciliation and interaction, and is
hostile neither to the “modern” Western traditions—in which Ḥusayn and the nahḍah entourage
sought inspiration—not to the Arab-Islamic heritage of the “pre-modern” era. As mentioned
above, this approach is somehow inspired by Moroccan sociologist-novelist Abdelkebir
Khatibi’s concept of the “bilingue” and follows in the footsteps of Muḥammad Barrādah, who
views the novel as increasingly becoming a “universal” art form. Barrādah writes:

أصبح النقاش حول استيراد الشكل متجاوزا، وأسهمت الترجمة في تقديم تنوعات عديدة للشكل
والنقد العالميين، كما تبلور وعي يرى بأن جميع الثقافات أسهمت في بلورة الأشكال التعبيرية
The debate over the importation of form has become outdated. Translation has contributed to bringing about a number of variations in form and criticism worldwide. Also, a consciousness that sees all cultures to be contributing to the formulation and enrichment of [literary] forms has crystallized. [. . .] Along with the employment of universal novelistic forms, the rallying over al-turāth-based Arabic prosaic forms came as a step complementing [the efforts towards] authentication and enriching. (Fadāʿāt, 70)

It is striking that Barrādah downplays the narrative of “influence” and “borrowing,” and instead emphasizes the contributions of both the Arab-Islamic heritage (al-turāth) and the universal literary heritage in enriching the Arabic novel. And elsewhere, Barrādah emphasizes that al-tajrīb (experimentalism) is a literary device that could impart a sense of liberation and perhaps empowerment. He stresses that “embracing al-tajrīb has liberated Arab writers from literally following forms that have developed along the history of the world novel, while allowing them to add other elements related to their heritage and socio-cultural environment” (al-Riwaḥah al-ʿArabiyyah, 49). For Barrādah, the “new novel” within the context of Morocco and the Arab world developed in response to the transformations in the novel genre in other parts of the globe, and therefore one should not talk of a novel having a peculiar Arab(ic) form, a position some Arab novelists and critics have tried to argue for (49). The novel, Barrādah avers, remains an open form, “whose textual and aesthetic constituents transcend cultural and ethnic origin” (49). He adds that these constituents rely on “narration, fiction, plot, and multiple languages and
voices,” and these are “shared elements in the continuously evolving human novelistic heritage” (49). In the footsteps of Roland Barthes69, Barrādah takes writing (al-kitābah) to be the most important domain for investigation, since it constitutes “the element that distinguishes each novelist and uncovers his literary and textual strategy, and is the door that leads to identifying “the newness” (al-jiddah) upon which the Arabic novels of the last three decades are based” (49-50). Literariness assumes a focal point in Barrāda’s approach. It is the text that is the very key to deciphering and interpreting works of literature that venture on al-tajrīb.

• The Novel Debate in Postcolonial Morocco

While this chapter as whole treats the novel genre in both the Arab and the Moroccan contexts and engages critics from Morocco and the larger Arab world, what follows in this section—and in the next chapter—give more attention to the Moroccan novel and the trend of al-tajrīb (experimentalism) that informs its workings in the postcolonial era—i.e. after 1956.

With the dialectic of form and content in mind, Moroccan criticism seems to go in two divergent directions, with one contesting and the other embracing the genre of the novel. These two distinct views could be represented respectively in Abdullāh al-ʿArwī (Abdallah Laroui’s) and Muḥammad Barrādah (Mohamed Berrada’s) positions. In his book al-ʿIdyūlūjyā, al-ʿArwī critiques Arab novelistic writing, including the work of Maḥfūẓ (Mahfouz). He is concerned that the novel, being an “imported” Western form, is not the right medium in which Arab creativity

69 Roland Barthes views the concept of “writing” this way: “Placed at the centre of the problematics of literature, which cannot exist prior to it, writing is thus essentially the morality of form, the choice of that social area within which the writer elects to situate the Nature of his language.” See Writing Degree Zero, 15. Barthes’ impact on Barrādah should not be understated, for the Moroccan writer was the one to translate WDZ into Arabic; see Al-Darajah al-sīf r li-Lkitābah, trans. Muḥammad Barrāda, (Rabat: al-Sharika al-maghribiyya, 1981).
could thrive. He raises the following question: “Is not their [Western literary forms] acceptance as general forms—not subject to any specific social or temporal context and without any preliminary discussion—the very reason for the failure of various efforts and initiatives that seemed promising?” According to al-ʿArwī, literary critics in Morocco and the Arab world have overplayed the “sociology of content” (sūsyūlūjyā al-madmūn) question, and that they did not bother to discuss “sociology of form” (sūsyūlūjyā al-shakl) (234). He underscores that Arab writers, when adopting a particular Western form, miss a fundamental point, namely the correspondence between form and content; thus, in imitating Westerners, the Arab writer “produces extensively and easily, but without excellence or genius” (243). Following al-ʿArwī’s argument, the Arabic novel “naturally gravitates towards abstraction (al-tajrād), affirmation (al-taqrīr), and affectation (al-taṣānnu‘), which is what one notices even in [the work of] Najīb Maḥfūẓ” (242). (Let us remember his strong criticism of Maḥfūẓ’s fiction as outlined above.)

After laying out his critique, al-ʿArwī proceeds to propose an alternative form which, he argues, best suits the Arab context and the Arab condition; he contends that “al-ʿuqṣūṣah”70 is the literary form that fits perfectly the Arab writer. He writes:

إن عمل نجيب محفوظ، رغم ضخامته الظاهرة، يخضع في العميق لمنطق الأقصوصة. إن الرواية العربية في مجملها ولأسباب اجتماعية سابقة على، و مستقلة عن، اختيارات الكاتب، ترضخ لبنية هي أقرب إلى الرمزية منها إلى الواقعية. و هكذا يبدو أن الأقصوصة هي الشكل الأدبي المطلق لمجتمعنا المفتت المحروم من أي وعي جماعي. [...] ليست الأقصوصة رواية مختزلة، وإنما هي الفصل الختامي لرواية استغنى الكاتب عن سردها و تفصيل حوادثها. لذا، تتطلب من القارئ ذهنية

70 “al-ʿuqṣūṣah” is an Arabic word which is the diminutive form of the word “qiṣṣa” meaning story. “al-ʿuqṣūṣah” could thus mean “a mini-story.”
Interesting and original as they are, al-‘Arwī’s views do have an essentializing tendency, one that manifests at two levels. Firstly, this critique assumes the novel to be a static form suitable only for the Western condition and, therefore, incapable of being molded to fit non-Western societies; for this reason, “al-‘uqṣūṣah” seems to be a more appropriate form for the Arabs. This position goes in the very opposite direction to that of Yaqtīne, which sees the novel as an indispensable component for contemporary Arab literary creativity. As discussed above, the fact that Arab writers have used the novel genre to incorporate elements of al-turāth and Arab-Islamic history, peculiar to their “condition,” so much so that this has become an established trend in contemporary Arabic literature, shows the limits of al-‘Arwī’s critique, and renders the novel a most dynamic literary form. Secondly, al-‘Arwī’s remarks presuppose that the Arab
world constitutes one core block and that the Arab peoples—from Morocco to Iraq—share one condition. This presupposition overlooks the myriad differences in the various territories of the expansive Arab world, which became even more pronounced after 1967, the year when Arab armies suffered a major defeat in the war with Israel (as mentioned earlier) and when—what an interesting coincidence—al-ʿArwī’s book first came out in a French version. (As footnoted above, Albert Hourani has pertinently described the period following 1967 as “a disturbance of spirits.”) Additionally, al-ʿArwī’s views on “the Arab condition” mostly focus on a very few canonical figures from one single country, Egypt, sidelining thus the literatures of the other more than twenty Arab countries, which in all likelihood have elements that diverge in varying ways from the Egyptian canon. From this perspective, al-ʿArwī’s critique appears limited in addition to being problematic owing to its essentializing propensity; not surprisingly it has prompted a number of Moroccan and Arab intellectuals to weigh in on this debate over form.

For instance, Barrādah, in his response to al-ʿArwī, gives a more balanced point of view, which I would like to build upon in order to consolidate the model I am offering in this section, a model that embraces “intertextuality” and dialogue between literary texts both in the context of

\[71\] Hourani outlines this “disturbance of spirits” by focusing on a number of parameters, including “ethnic and religious divisions,” (434) “rich and poor,” (436) and “women in society” (439). Regarding the first parameter, Hourani writes:

The conflicts in Lebanon and Iraq showed how easily enmities between [Arab] states could be intertwined with those of discordant elements within a state. In this period [after 1967], some of the internal discords which exist in all states became more significant. In Iraq, there was the opposition between Arabs and Kurds. [. . .] A similar situation existed, potentially, in Algeria. Part of the population of the mountain areas of the Atlas in Morocco and Kabilia in Algeria were Berbers [. . .]. Ethnic differences, then, could give a new depth to differences of interest, and so too could differences of religion. The example of Lebanon showed how a struggle for power could easily express itself in religious terms. In the Sudan an analogous situation existed. The inhabitants of the southern parts of the country were neither Arabs nor Muslims. [. . .] A situation of great danger and complexity existed in countries with large Shiʿi populations: Iraq, Kuwait, Bahravy, Saudi Arabia, Syria, and Lebanon. The Iranian revolution seemed likely to arouse a stronger sense of Shiʿi identity, and this could have political implications in countries where government was firmly in the hands of Sunnis.

See A History of the Arab Peoples, 434-35.
the Arab world and globally. Barrādah gently differs with his fellow Moroccan writer, stating that:

[Perhaps one of the most important critiques directed at contemporary Arab [literature] [. . .] is what Professor ‘Abdullāh al-‘Arwī wrote in [his book] “Contemporary Arab Ideology” (1967). [. . .] Al-‘Arwī attributes the inadequacy of [Arab] literary expression to the absence of a critical awareness with regard to the new expressive forms (i.e., drama, the novel, the story) [. . .]. As a result of this absence, the literary product comes as a distorted image of subjects that have already been tackled in foreign literatures. [. . .] There is no doubt that this critique puts the finger on a cardinal issue. [. . .] However, we probably do not agree with what al-‘Arwī is calling for, namely the supposition of a core “subject” peculiar to each society, which the artist has to discover and follow, because we see in this [position] some kind of standardization which limits the freedom of]
experimentation [al-tajrīb] and adventure before each writer arrives at establishing his vision and the artistic elements he [seeks] to express. (21-22; emphasis added)

Barrādah is unwilling to accept the presence of “a core subject” specific to every society or nation. By contrast, he stresses the necessity of taking into account “the universality” (al-kawnīyya) of literary creativity (23). From the perspective of 2011, when his book Al-Riwaya al-ʿArabiyyah wa Rihān al-Tajdīd (The Arabic Novel and the Challenge of Renewal) was published, Barrādah points out that, more than forty years after al-ʿArwī’s critique, Arabic literary creativity (al-ibdāʾ al-ʿarabī) “has become more and more ingrained in civil society (al-mujtamaʿ al-madani) because it expresses a critical, liberating inclination, and exposes the fissures and contradictions of the State (al-sulṭah), and makes the voice of the rebellious self heard in the face of guardianship and censorship” (23). Needless to say, Barrādah emphasizes the temporal factor, an essential component of my model. Forty years or more after al-ʿArwī voiced his thesis, the literary and critical field in Morocco and the Arab world is no longer the same. Weary of the “stigma” of (blind) imitation, Moroccan and Arab littérature have, particularly in the post-1967 era, increasingly opened themselves up to experimenting with new forms and themes without necessarily repudiating or harboring animosity towards Western literary traditions.

While Yaqţīne highlights intertextuality and “textual interaction” (al-tafāʾul al-naṣṣī) between contemporary and older Arabic texts, Barrādah goes one step further and considers the world literary heritage as an asset which the Arabic novel could draw on and benefit from for the sake of its flourishing; he asserts that:
Throughout forty years, university education has widened; generations of authors have proliferated; [a number of] books have been translated [. . .]; and interaction between Arab authors has tightened and so has dialogue with what the world [at large] produces. [. . .] All these are factors which alerted the authors to [issues] of identity, form, the relation with the Other, and the necessity of taking into account the universality of creativity. (23; emphasis added)

Barrādah values Arab authors interacting not only with each other but also with writers from all over the globe, thus embracing the universal aspect of creativity. Unlike Ḥusayn, who limited his project of modernizing Arabic literature to an imitation of the European models, Barrādah calls for interaction and dialogue, and reaches out to the literary traditions of the entire planet. He brings together such authors as “Joyce, Proust, Faulkner Kafka, Márquez, Najib Maḥfūz, and Kateb Yacine,” citing their works as examples of literary texts that have achieved the necessary “independence that allows writing to go further in interrogating the self, the universe, society, producing thereby new knowledge” (35). Needless to say, this cast of literary traditions—Irish, French, American, Austrian-Hungarian (or Czech), Colombian, Egyptian, and Algerian—speaks volumes to Barrādah’s globally-oriented, “egalitarian” approach to literary creativity. In citing these prominent figures in this fashion, Barrādah affirms the fact that they—and by extension the traditions they stand for—are equals on the world literary stage, a thesis that starkly contrasts with Casanova’s domination-oriented approach.
Barrādah celebrates the progress the Arabic novel has made in the post-1960s period. He asserts that, despite the challenges, the Arabic novel has achieved many accomplishments, for it “has gone beyond mirror-like description or testimony or unveiling and reached a level allowing it to re-articulate sensitive questions related to forbidden subjects and to characterize the conflicts with the self, society, and the state”; very importantly, he adds that it has done so “through aesthetic forms and a language inspired from the vigor and audacity of lived reality” (35). We glean from this that Moroccan and Arab novelists have come a long way and have successfully, albeit in stages, managed to overcome what Moretti calls “a structural compromise” caused by the encounter between the “foreign” form and “local” content. Following Barrādah, one could acknowledge that, some four decades after al-‘Arwī’s critique, the Arabic novel overall has achieved literary freedom and autonomy, and that form and content have reached a state of correspondence and harmony. Thus, whereas al-‘Arwī’s stance points to a crisis in Moroccan and Arabic creativity, Barrādah’s is more optimistic and honors the progress made in the novelistic writings of Arab littérâteurs. The paradigm shift from “influence” to “intertextuality”—or from “domination” to “freedom”—through a strategic and conscious employment of al-tajrīb (experimentalism), therefore, gravitates towards Barrādah’s position. In embracing al-tajrīb, novelists in Morocco and the Arab world could, for instance, make of al-turāth (Arab-Islamic heritage) as the centerpiece of their creative works, thereby innovating both form and content. An engagement with al-turāth in a variety of ways via al-tajrīb serves the double role of, first, innovating Moroccan and Arab literary activity and, second, paving the way for a potential authenticity that might “liberate” Arab novelists from the burden or stigma of imitation.
Chapter Two: *Al-Tajrīb* (Experimentalism), *al-Turāth* (Heritage), and The New Moroccan Novel: Between Innovation and Imitation

The paradigm shift from “domination” to “freedom” with regard to novel writing—as discussed in the previous chapter—is also relevant to the Moroccan context. Some critics have argued that a strategic employment of *al-tajrīb* (experimentalism) has tremendously benefited novelistic writings in Morocco. In his discussion of ‘Abdullāh al-‘Arwī’s writings, Būṭayyib uses the term “*al-tajrīb al-ważīfī*” (functional experimentalism) to describe the Moroccan author’s vision of literary writing (*al-Riwayyah*, 40). Al-‘Arwī has stated that “it is not a flaw for a novel to be experimental; the flaw is when it is only experimental, for it has to be experimental for a certain goal” (qtd. in Būṭayyib 41). Experimentation, following al-‘Arwī and Būṭayyib, is not a haphazard exercise in literary writing, but rather has to have a vision and serve a particular “subject” (*mawdū‘*). In chapters one and five, I investigate in some detail al-‘Arwī’s notion of “*al-mawdū‘*” and how it is contrasted with that of “*al-mawṣūf*” (the described). Briefly speaking, al-‘Arwī—being weary of Moroccan and Arab writers’ imitation of Western forms—stresses that for a literary text to be functional and at the service of a certain *mawdū‘* (subject) “narrative forms must be imploded and mastered until they become capable of reflecting our [Moroccan and Arab] exigencies in the structures themselves” (*Al-‘Idyūlūjyā*, 21). In other words, there must be correspondence between form and content, a fundamental point for al-‘Arwī. The Moroccan author seems to be calling for the authentication of experimental literature, although his views face certain limitations (e.g. their isolationist leanings)—as I detailed in chapter one. Yet I would like to use this notion of “*al-tajrīb al-ważīfī*” (functional experimentalism) in my attempt to investigate the workings of the new Moroccan novel. In two separate sections below, I
offer a critical examination of some of the features of the phenomenon of al-tajrīb to bring to light the links between form and content. Most importantly, I explore to what extent the incorporation of al-turāth (both the Arab-Islamic and universal heritage) serves the consolidation of experimental Moroccan literature. As mentioned in the previous chapter, al-turāth presents itself as a narrative device that has the potential to innovate and supply the garb of authenticity to Moroccan and Arabic literary writings. Put differently, al-turāth seems to go well with the concept of “al-tajrīb al-waẓīfī” (functional experimentalism). In this chapter, I want to intervene in the debate over al-tajrīb’s investment in al-turāth in Moroccan literary activity. While a number of critics welcome this strand (e.g., Aḥmad al-Yabūrī and Muḥammad Barrādah), others (e.g., Muḥammad Amanṣūr and al-Ḥabīb al-Dāyim Rabbī) are cautious—skeptical even—and highlight its shortcomings, as I will elaborate below. By placing al-turāth (the Arab-Islamic heritage) at the center of the discussion, this chapter seeks to complicate the debate over the dialectic of innovation and imitation.

Aḥmad al-Yabūrī has noted the healthy development of “the new Moroccan novel,” (al-riwāyah al-maghribiyyah al-jadīdah) which, like its Arabic counterpart in the Mashriq (the Arab East), has also gained from a strategic investment in al-turāth, a venue that in turn has provided a path for liberation from blindly imitating “the Western prosaic forms” (Al-Kitābah, 52). Al-Yabūrī indicates:

ومن الملاحظ أن الرواية ذات النزوع التراثي يمتلك مبدعوها وعيين مزدوجين: وعي بالمأزق الذي وصلت إليه تجربة الحداثة ووعي ثان بالإمكانات التي يتيحها توظيف محكم للتراث السردي العربي، و الشعبي و العالمى، على مختلف مستويات البناء وطرائق السرد.

[We notice that the authors of a novel that is oriented towards al-turāth have two kinds of awareness: an awareness of the impasse which modernism has reached and a second]
awareness of the opportunities offered by a sound employment of the Arab, popular, and international prosaic heritage on different levels of structure and narrative patterns. (52; emphasis added)]

Like Barrādah, al-Yabūrī embraces intertextuality at the level of Morocco, the Arab world, and internationally. He avers that interaction between Moroccan and Arabic texts among themselves and with planetary texts is bound “to enrich both forms and contents” (150). While he grants that “Moroccan prosaic forms” cannot develop in “closed circles” and in isolation, he does not recognize that these forms copy “Mashriqi and Western models,” but that they rather “develop in a relationship of interaction between internal and external factors—between constitutive elements and elements of influence,” what he calls “al-mukawwināt” and “al-mu’aththirāt” respectively (151). Interestingly however, in al-Yabūrī’s view, the factor of “influence” is not totally absent. This echoes the idea of “a compromise” I am proposing as a new paradigm for the examination of the Moroccan and the Arabic novel in the post-1960s—as I pointed out in the previous chapter. This thesis of “compromise” is, however, not incompatible with that of literary freedom and autonomy. It is, in fact, a signifier of “intertextuality” and “interaction” and not of crisis and imitation. Very importantly, al-turāth, both in its Arab-Moslem and universal incarnations, figures prominently in al-Yabūrī’s remarks regarding the healthy and steady evolution of the Moroccan novel and the current of al-tajrīb (experimentalism) that undergirds its morphology.

I would like to dwell more on the implications behind al-tajrīb’s investment in al-turāth. Here, I would like to refer back to al-Madīnī’s highly experimental novel ZBWWH (Time between Birth and Dream). The intriguing thing about this text is that it uses al-turāth for the very purpose of laying out the foundations of a new kind of novelistic writing, one that finds its
raison d’être in altering the direction of the Moroccan novel. The way al-Madīnī uses the thematic of al-turāth corroborates how he perceives the genre of the novel—as a site of tragedy and rebellion—as I detail in chapter three. In other words, ZBWWH does not celebrate, or at least treat neutrally, the Arab-Islamic heritage the way other well-known Moroccan works, such as Binsālim Ḥammīsh’s al-ʿAllāmah (2001, The Polymath 2004) or Zahrat al-Jāhiliyyah (The Flower of pre-Islamic Paganism) and Aḥmad al-Tawfīq’s Jārāt ʿabī Mūsa (The Neighbors of Abī Mūsa) or Gharbiyyat al-ḥusayn (al-Hussain’s Westerner), do. As I will show, al-Madīnī’s text vehemently attacks al-turāth throughout. The novel constantly reproduces verbatim the Islamic scripture, including the Quran, and it almost always does so in a satirical way, which betrays the novel’s countercultural overtones and by extension the author’s rebellion against the conservative, patriarchal aspects of Arab-Muslim culture and way of life. I argue that the mechanism of overstepping in al-Madīnī’s text operates, in an extreme way, at the level of language (or form) as well as of content. The text’s investment in the Arab-Muslim heritage—regardless of how this plays out and what the author’s intention might be—directly affects the kind of language employed. In other words, I see the archaic religious language utilized throughout the book as a direct outcome of the text’s thematic dimension—which recalls the organizing principle of “al-tajrīb al-waẓīfī” (functional experimentalism).

The experimental impulse at work in al-Madīnī’s text is calculated and serves the author’s literary vision. There is harmony between form and content. Moroccan critic al-Bashīr al-Wadnānī sees a close connection between al-Madīnī’s inclination towards al-tajrīb (experimentalism) and the kind of subject matter treated in his ZBWWH; he states that al-Madīnī:

عمد في روايته (زمن بين الولادة و الحلم) إلى نهج طريقة قرية جدا من طريقة (فيليıp سولير) و بعض الكتاب الفرنسيين المعاصرين فتخلى عن الشخصية الروائية وأطلق العنان للذاكرة تهرق
انسياباتها وتغدق مخزوناتها عن الماضي والحاضر تكيل الشتائم وتدين بلاهوادة أو ترو التاريخ والتراث والحضارة.

[... ] Intended in his novel ZBWWH to follow an approach very similar to that of Philippe Sollers and some contemporary French writers, and so he abandoned the novelistic personality [i.e. the character] and gives free reign to [his] memory to give off its effusions and to bring out its repertoire about the past and the present—pronouncing its relentless denunciation and condemnation of [the Arab-Islamic] history, heritage [al-turāth] and civilization. (Qtd. in Abū Ḥamāla 53)

Al-Wadnānī’s quote is significant in a variety of ways. Firstly, it highlights—in its reading of the workings of al-tajrīb—an important aspect of al-Madīnī’s writing style, namely the near total cancellation of the character, a literary device seen by many as one of the pillars of the “traditional” novelistic economy, at least in the work of Mahfūz and Ghallāb. Secondly, it makes a connection between al-Madīnī’s novel and the French novel tradition of the mid-20th century. This highlights al-tajrībī’s opening up to the universal literary heritage and does not imply a relationship of subservience and imitation. Thirdly and most importantly, it stresses ZBWWH’s agenda to lay bare a “relentless denunciation and condemnation of [the Arab-Islamic] history, heritage [al-turāth] and civilization,” thus striking a correlation between the text’s formal architecture and subject matter or intentionality. This shows that al-Madīnī’s exercise of al-tajrīb—at least in ZBWWH—does straddle the dialectic of form and content. Al-Madīnī’s experimental bent is not limited to form only, but rather extends to content, despite the fact that this latter is presented to the reader in a highly fragmented way. In fact, fragmentation is a mechanism that neatly applies to both form and content. It is important to underscores that the
treatment of \textit{al-turāth} in \textit{ZBWWH} is indeed carried out in fragments. The text does not treat one particular dimension or example of \textit{al-turāth}; on the contrary, it presents the reader with an amalgamation of a broad range of the Arab-Islamic heritage, as I detail in chapter three.

Al-Madīnī is not the only postcolonial author in Morocco who draws on \textit{al-turāth} in his highly innovative works. In fact, there is a whole tradition of \textit{al-`ibdāʾ} (literary creativity) in Moroccan letters that employs \textit{al-turāth} as a significant narrative device, which in some cases becomes the centerpiece of the literary work in question, and in which we can situate some of al-Madīnī’s writings. In this regard, Aḥmad al-Yabūrī in his book on the Moroccan novel devotes a whole chapter to treat the topic of “The New Novel and Heritage” (\textit{al-riwāyah al-jadīdah wa al-turāth})\textsuperscript{72}. According to al-Yabūrī, the new Moroccan novel’s investment in \textit{al-turāth} was solidified in the 1980s and the 1990s (51). He elaborates this point thus:

\[\text{The presence of \textit{al-turāth} in the Moroccan novel has taken the form of scattered fragments or complete narrative structures [. . .] or the biography of a historical personality or brief references to recent or old historical periods. An individual word loaded with a particular religious, political, or philosophical signification could actually} \]

\[\text{توظيف مفردة لغوية ذات حمولة خاصة دينية أو سياسية أو فلسفية، تساهم في توليد مسار سردي صغير يمكن أن يدخل في صراع مع المسار السردي المهيمن.}\]

\[\text{و قد كان حضور التراث في الرواية المغربية على شكل شذرات متناثرة، أو بنيات سردية كاملة [. . .] أو سيرة شخصية تاريخية، أو إشارات سريعة لحقب من التاريخ القديم أو الحديث. بل قد يتم توظيف مفردة لغوية ذات حمولة خاصة دينية أو سياسية أو فلسفية، تساهم في توليد مسار سردي صغير يمكن أن يدخل في صراع مع المسار السردي المهيمن.}\]

be employed and would contribute to generating a small narrative path that could then enter into opposition with the dominant narrative path. (51)]

The purview of *al-turāth* seems to be broad and flexible enough as to allow for the incorporation of a variety of *al-turāth*-oriented elements that vary both in degree and kind. For instance, al-Maḍīnī’s *ZBWWH* draws extensively on *al-turāth* of the religious kind, whereas Abdullāh al-ʿArwī’s *ʿAwrāq* (Papers)—which I will analyze in chapter five—has a tendency to highlight *al-turāth* of the philosophical and historical brand. I should add that these different kinds of *al-turāth* do at times overlap in the two texts. In his remarks on the relationship between *al-tajrīb* and *al-turāth*, Muḥammad Barrādah notes that some novels “experimented with [. . .] renewing elements of heritage-based prose and reinventing the language of old historians and the lexicon of the Sufis,” before adding that “the Arabic novelistic experimentation has drawn on the prosaic heritage and popular narrative or folklore” (*al-Riwayah al-ʿarabiyyah* 37). It is useful to mark the distinction between the two seemingly similar concepts used by Barrāda: a-*al-sard al-turāthī* (heritage-based prose) and *al-turāth al-sardī* (prosaic heritage). The former designates Arabic literary writings that take *al-turāth* as an essential thematic component regardless of genre, while the latter refers to previous works that take the form of prose—not verse—in the Arabic literary tradition. The inclusion of *al-turāth* arguably contributes to endowing a literary piece with depth and density as well as to enhancing its aesthetic value. This could explain the steady growth of this strand in the new Moroccan novel in the postcolonial era, especially in the 1980s and the 1990s. In addition to incorporating *al-turāth* (Arab-Islamic heritage), novels that venture on *al-tajrīb* (experimentalism) display a variety of other features. The next section examines in a critical fashion some of the workings of the trend of *al-tajrīb* which traverse the two poles of the form-content dialectic.
•  *Al-Tajrīb: A Critical Examination of some of its Workings*

With the umbrella notion of “*al-tajrīb al-wazīfi*” (functional experimentalism) in mind, I want to strike a link between the formal aspects of *al-tajrīb* and the socio-cultural milieu. I seek to bring to light the socio-cultural dimensions of experimental Moroccan writings, highlighting in the process the ideological preoccupations of the advocates of *al-tajrīb*. Here I refer to Moroccan critic Hamīd Lahmīdānī’s scholarly endeavors to interpret works associated with *al-tajrīb* through the lens of “generative structuralism,” a move that establishes a connection between the textual workings of *al-tajrīb* and the extra-textual circumstances on the ground. This approach in line with one major parameter of this dissertation, namely that Moroccan experimental writings—at least the three texts under scrutiny in this project—are deeply ingrained in social reality—albeit in their own way—and should not be read as invested in experimentation for its own sake. Indeed, these texts espouse experimentation for a purpose. For example, al-Madīnī has stated that his generation of writers (i.e. those who started their writing career in the 1970s) felt an increasing uneasiness towards “the salafī text” (the nationalist text) and “the Islāhī text” (the reformist text), and, consequently, they sought a different kind of text, one that carries and generates change (*Ru’yat*, 241-242). Indeed, the writers of the 1970s who wanted to move beyond “the traditional” mode of literary writing viewed the text (*al-naṣṣ*) to be the battlefield for their then unorthodox approach to literary writing. In what follows, I seek to examine some of the workings—formal or otherwise—of *al-naṣṣ al-tajrībī* (the experimental text). As mentioned in the Introduction, al-Madīnī argues that *al-tajrīb* is what gives literary works the stamp of legitimacy, since only “the continued practice of *al-tajrīb* justifies and legitimizes writing” (‘*al-Khiṭāb al-riwā‘ī*,” 73). The following quote gives an idea of how al-Madīnī envisions the phenomenon of *al-tajrīb*:
The quote combines questions of aesthetics with those of the world we live in. The advocacy of “the partial” in lieu of the whole and of having “the individual”—rather than the collective or the community—assume a position of centrality reflects al-Madīnī’s socio-cultural anxieties. Al-Madīnī, together with his generation of writers, wanted to take risks and experiment with a new imaginary and new linguistic and literary formula. For these young writers, experimentation—sometimes in its most extreme or transgressive form—presented itself as the only way out of what they perceived as literary and cultural stagnation. On the aesthetic front, al-Madīnī draws our attention to an important feature of al-tajrīb writing, namely the experimental space of the dream. This is a rhetorical device that augments the non-mainstreamness of literary texts through
well-crafted aesthetic play; the deployment of the dream device, among other things, increases
the feature of ambiguity, shatters linearity and verticality, invokes and then blurs the dream-like
with the “real,” and intentionally makes the text both confused and confusing, with an eye on
“establishing an extra-realistic relationship with the everyday life.” The use of the term “extra-
realistic” is very telling; it directly contrasts with the social realistic mode of literary writing in
the works of Ghallāb and Binjillūn. Al-tajrīb thus presents itself as a response to “traditional”
 novel writing, seen as inadequate to truly speak to the new concerns and worries of the
Moroccan subject.

Speaking to this, Ḥamīd Laḥmīdānī views al-tajrīb as the shelter that soothes the
suffering of the new generation of writers, “who look for alternative values in a worn-out world;
want to get rid of the old techniques; and delve into an alternative novelistic world that creates its
own standards, ones that are reflective of ideas generated under new circumstances” (418).
Laḥmīdānī adds that “thorny social relations by necessity create corresponding literary forms,
for when one loses all chances of being reconciled to one’s reality and existence, all values—
including those of time and place—get confused” (419; emphasis added). He cites al-Madīnī’s
first novel ZBWWḤ as a typical example of this confusion (419). Laḥmīdānī acknowledges the
value of al-tajrīb writings, and suggests that they could be interpreted through the lens of
“generative structuralism” (71-72). In other words, there is a deeper “structural homology [. . .]
between mental structures that constitute the collective consciousness and the formal structures
and aesthetic choices that make up a literary work” (72). The apparent “chaotic” form of
ZBWWḤ and other experimental texts could be read as an outcome of the frustration felt by a
large segment of the population in the years following the country’s political independence.
Laḥmīdānī’s “generative-structuralist” reading of al-Madīnī’s ZBWWḤ is reminiscent of Lucien
Goldmann’s Marxist, structuralist reading of Robbe-Grillet’s works. Both critics take a sociological approach that situates these “experimental” works within their respective societies and the ideological concerns that circulate therein. From this viewpoint, *al-tajrīḥ* shares the “realist” novel’s preoccupation with social reality—although in a different way as shown in the Introduction. Just as Maḥfūẓ and Ghallāb explicitly depict the difficulties that face the “small bourgeoisie” in their respective social arenas, al-Madinī, al-Tāzī, ‘Allūsh and others portray implicitly—through a deeper structure—the disappointments of the intelligentsia in the aftermath of the historic, long-awaited event of decolonization.

Other critics have also attempted to diagnose the workings of *al-tajrīḥ* and the literary vision they serve. As noted in the Introduction, Saʿīd Yaqtīne emphasizes that the feature of *al-tajāwuz* (overstepping)—which I will treat in some detail below—is a constant in the experimental writings of the 1970s and 1980s (*Al-Qirā’ah*, 287). In a text-based reading of some examples of “experimental” writings, he unpacks key characteristics marking *al-tajrīḥ*, such as the overlap of various discourses, the shattering of narrative linearity, and the inclusion of elements of the fantastical (293-96). Importantly, Yaqtīne stresses that *al-tajrīḥ*, as a noticeable trend in “the new novelistic experience” in Morocco, came to reflect “the shift in the cultural activity in our country,” adding that it helped raise “new questions about the novel, criticism, culture, and society” (288). It is useful pondering this four-fold list, which combines the textual (the novel and criticism) with the extra-textual (culture and society). The advent of *al-tajrīḥ* pushed for the consolidation of two brands of consciousness, one literary and the other cultural.

This fusion is even more pronounced in Muḥammad Barrādah’s dissection of the workings of *al-tajrīḥ*. In examining “the new novel” in Morocco and the Arabic-speaking world, Barrādah pinpoints four recurrent features. Firstly, we have “fragmentation of form and writing
in its most minimal configuration” (*Al-Riwa‘yah al-‘Arabiyyah*, 51). That is, there are steadfast attempts to violate “linearity” (*khaṭṭiyyah*) in the narration as well as an aspiration to capture “reality” (*al-wāqi‘*) “in its detailed ramifications and visual logic” (51). Barrādah notes in particular the role psychoanalysis has played in destabilizing the concept of “reality”; it has made possible speaking of “the multiplicity of the self and the I” (*ta‘addudiyyat al-dhāt wa al-‘anā*) and the cohabitation between spoken discourse and different layers of internal monologue (51). These revelations have inspired novelists to opt for fragmented language that attempts to approximate the complex reality of the human-being. Secondly, the text of *al-tajrīb* is marked by “the hybridization of language” (*taḥjīn al-lughah*) (54). This manifests in the invention of new words as well as in “emptying words of their meanings” and giving them new layers of signification (54). Barrādah draws on Bakhtin, who views national language to include, among other categories, “social dialects” and “professional jargons” (qtd. in Barrādah 54)73. The hybridization of language seeks to highlight “the multiplicity of voices and levels of speech”; it also allows the inclusion of “foreign terms in addition to expressions that relate to daily life and technological intermediaries that replace the traditional mediums of communication” (55). There is a strong tendency to mix the standard and the colloquial forms of Arabic in an attempt to approximate the linguistic reality on the ground (55). This second characteristic of the experimental text is, like the first, rigidly formal, although it has a strategic purpose with regard to the social arena. Fragmentation and multiplicity of language are meant to account for the convoluted ramifications of social life.

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73 I should point out that Barrādah translated some of the work of Bakhtin into Arabic. See *al-Khīṭāb al-riwa‘ī*, trans. Muhammad Barrādah, (Cairo: Dār al-fikr, 1987).
Moving to the third and fourth properties, we notice a shift from the domain of form to that of content. Regarding the third, the new novel that ventures on *al-tajrīb* explores the prohibited “trinity” of *sex, religion, and politics*, thereby defying the inherited traditional dictates, which the state strives to keep intact in order to maintain its control and power (57). The new generation of novelists in Morocco and the Arab world wanted “to reveal the contradictions and gaps between” what is allowed and what is silenced (57). Barrādah is invoking here a classic critique of Moroccan—and Arab-Muslim—culture regarding the suppression of topics like sex and religious critique from the public discourse despite the fact that these topics—especially sex—have a significant presence in the daily life of the Moroccan and Arab subject. The new novel thus attempts to divest the three topics of sex, religion, and politics of their quasi-sacredness, with a view to liberating the body and the mind of the Arab individual. The fourth characteristic of the experimental novelistic text—namely “making the self the centerpiece of writing” (67)—is in a way related to the third. Barrādah contends that the writers of “the new novel” take every step to insure that their personal experiences and subjective views of the world permeate and inform the writing they produce (67). Thus, the new novel borders on the genre of the autobiography (*al-sīrah*) (67). However, “the new novelist” maintains an interactive relationship between the writing and the novelistic world, based on “interpretation, vision, and recreation,” and not on a mechanical reproduction of the proceedings of everyday life (68). I should emphasize that these last two features of *al-tajrīb* highlight the “commitment” dimension of experimental literature. As shown in the Introduction, *al-tajrīb* should not be viewed as the opposite of *al-‘iltizām* (commitment). In fact, the three texts selected for study in this dissertation all display, in a variety of ways, commitment undertones.
To shed further light on the formal workings of *al-tajrīb*, I would like to conclude this section by drawing on the contribution of Moroccan critic Binʿṭsa Abū Ḥamāla. In his attempts to outline “the stylistic peculiarity” and the “rhetorical investments” of al-Madīnī’s experimental writings, Abū Ḥamāla, who underscores that the name al-Madīnī comes up whenever “the affair” (*masʿ alat*) of al-tajrīb is brought up in the Moroccan literary scene, highlights three significant formal features that underpin the text of *ZBWWH*: 1- “segmentation” (*al-taqāṭṭu*), 2- “destruction” (*al-tadmīr*) or “retention” (*al-ḥājz*), and 3- “the pre-poetic sentence” (*al-jumla mā qabl al-shiʿriyya*) (53-54). “Segmentation” manifests in the use of “a linguistic economy” that breaks the flow of language and cancels any “harmony between the components and levels of the discourse” (54). On the other hand, “Destruction” refers to “the annihilation of a number of components that give the narration legitimacy,” while “retention” means “disabling the narrative flow and slowing down its dynamism” (55). Regarding the third feature, Abū Ḥamāla emphasizes that al-Madīnī’s prose is filled with “a poetic spirit” (*rūḥ shiʿriyyah*) (57). Drawing on Tzvetan Todorov and Jean Cohen, Abū Ḥamāla points out that “a prosaic utterance could be adopted as a poetic one,” and adds that there is “a big flexibility” that allows for these two entities to interpenetrate (57). Abū Ḥamāla, whose analysis of *ZBWWH* is in line with how al-Madīnī himself envisions novelistic writing, concludes that the text of *ZBWWH* diverges, in such a stark way, from well-known Moroccan novels like al-*Muʿallim Ali* (Master Ali) by ʿAbdelkarīm Ghallāb, ʿ*Iksīr al-ḥayāt* (The Elixir of Life) by Muḥammad Azzdīn Laḥbābī, and *Al-Ţayyibūn* (The Good) by Mubārak Rabīʿ by virtue of its “avant-gardist form” (53). The text’s avant-garde quality reflects its ideological predilection, one that manifests in its tragic vision and rebelliousness. In adopting *al-tajrīb* a strategic choice, al-Madīnī seeks to upset the political and socio-cultural structures of postcolonial Morocco. As I will detail in the next chapter, *ZBWWH*
reclaims the voice of the self, and crafts a discourse of urgency that flouts various forms of authority in Morocco post-Independence. By relying predominantly on the structure of uttering, al-Madinī’s text demonstrates its disregard for the workings of the plot and gives free reign to metafictional discourse. The novel traces, albeit in fragments, the existential journey of the protagonist as he articulates what I would like to label as a *poetics of dissent*.

The features of *al-tajrīb* examined in this section could all fall under the broad notion of *al-tajāwuz* or “overstepping,” a frame that I would like to investigate in the next section. This concept of *al-tajāwuz* further illuminates the workings of *al-tajrīb*, and it bears significance to the frame of continuity-discontinuity, an important matrix of this dissertation. By continuity-discontinuity in this context, I mean the extent to which a literary piece keeps within the fold of, or departs from, the literary tradition(s) of its territory, past or present.

- **Al-Tajrīb, Overstepping, and the Continuity-Discontinuity Dialectic**

While I highlight the fact that “the new novel” in embracing *al-tajrīb* sought to overstep the “traditional” mode of writing, I underscore that the new novelists do borrow from and build upon the literary oeuvre of their predecessors, including—and not limited to—Ghallāb, Binjillūn, and Maḥfūz. In this regard, Al-Madinī emphasizes that “taking down a previous art system only comes about ‘legitimately’ through acknowledging it in an artistic manner still and through setting up different reception conventions,” adding that this has nothing to do with “the model (*mūdīl*) of ‘*al-tajrīb*’, which could any time turn into—following the French expression—a ‘Coquille vide,’ but is indeed an uninterrupted process of creativity that, like a lizard, never ceases to shed its shells as it gets filled with meaning” (“*al-Riwāyah wa al- ‘Idyūlūjyā*”). Al-
Madīnī is critical of the tendency to abuse the “loose” parameters of *al-tajrīb* as a concept and a literary phenomenon. He is weary that *al-tajrīb* could lose sight of its functionality and vision and turn into “dysfunctional” experimentation. (Let us keep in mind the frame of “functional experimentation” advocated by Būṭayyib and al-‘Arwī.) He is adamant in his argument that literary writing must be viewed as “an uninterrupted process,” arguing henceforth against rigid periodization approaches and most importantly highlighting the *continuity* aspect of Moroccan literary activity. He proceeds to elaborate this significant point thus:

على كل من يستحضر مفهوم ومسار قضية التجريب في الفن عموما، وفي الرواية مجال انشغالنا
خصوصا، أن يستحضر دائما أنها ذات طبيعة تراكمية، أي أنها، ويا للمفارقة، تراثية بقدر ما هي
نزاعة باستمرار إلى صوغ قوالب مغايرة، وابتداع رؤى منشقة. هذه التي لا تتحقق وتتميز إلا بوجود
الفرق، التراث الكلاسيكي، سواء السابق، الموازي والمحايث.

[Anybody who invokes the concept and trajectory of the affair *qadiyya* of *al-tajrīb* in art in general, and in the novel—the subject of our investigation—must always be mindful of the fact that it is of a *cumulative* nature; in other words, it is—how ironically—*turāthiyya* [heritage-based or heritage-oriented] as it continuously aspires to develop different ways and create schismatic visions; and these cannot be fulfilled and cannot stand out without the presence of a contrastive entity—i.e. the classical *turāth* [heritage]—be it antecedent or contemporaneous. (“*al-Riwāya wa al-‘Idyūlījā*”; emphasis added)]

Al-Madīnī’s position is invaluable, for it stresses that the trajectory of novel writing is a cumulative process and any “experimentation” that takes place within this process is based on and builds upon both what was written in the past and what is being written in the present. Al-
tajrīb is thus an uninterrupted undertaking and should not be seen as staging a total divorce with previous or contemporaneous literary trends. Al-Madīnī asserts that any new or innovative trend in literary writing should be an “addition” (‘iḍāfah) and an “enhancement” (tatwīr)—never a “cancellation” (naqd)—of previous trends, and that “the history of literature is full of examples and proofs—on the condition that it should not be read periodized or divided or partitioned, but instead [be read] as an interconnected textual process,” one in which the past, the present, and the future feed off one another simultaneously to form a complete, unified aesthetic whole (“al-Riwwāyah wa al-‘Idyūlūyā”). Thus, no matter how extreme the mechanism of overstepping is within an experimental literary piece, continuity and connectedness persist. This is the big paradox that Roland Barthes underscores in his classic Writing Degree Zero, as I will discuss below.

Given its relevance to my discussion of literary experimentation in Morocco, I would like to put pressure on the concept of al-tajāwuz (overstepping). Al-tajāwuz is also important to the binary frame of continuity-discontinuity, since it has an inclination to bring about some sort of change in literary writing, which could arguably make it at odds with the continuity part of the binary. Saʿīd Yaqṭīne makes a direct link between al-tajāwuz and al-tajrīb; he remarks that “excess” (ifrāṭ) in executing the mechanism of “overstepping” (al-tajāwuz) in literary writing in Morocco is usually labelled as “al-tajrīb” (al-Qirāʾa 287-288). This notion of “overstepping” is useful to my analysis of al-tajrīb, as viewed against the backdrop of novel writing considered “traditional” or “classical”—e.g., the work of Ghallāb. I want to point out that a rigid periodization approach of literary writing—such as the one endorsed by Būṭayyib and touched upon before—views the idea of “overstepping” generationally, i.e. in terms of historical evolution, and thus leans towards a historicist approach. Following this line of investigation, one
could draw the conclusion that the roots of “the period” of *al-tajrīb* are by necessity located in the previous period(s). Therefore, the moment of *al-tajrīb* does not stage—and should not be epistemologically perceived as—a total break from the previous moment(s). With that said, literary moments, no matter how different they sound or claim to be, are to be construed as phases or stations along a vertical line marked by a general, overarching law of continuity. I should stress that my preference of the term “moment” to that of “period”—despite their semantic relatedness—answers to the controversy surrounding the concept of “periodization” within critical circles.

With the dialectic of continuity-discontinuity in mind, an important question arises: should we read the difference(s) between these moments in terms of *degree* or rather in terms of *kind*? This question is helpful in guiding my analysis of the complexity of *al-tajrīb*. Moroccan critic Nūr al-Dīn Darmūsh makes an interesting point with regard to this question; he writes that *al-tajrīb* is “a creative force” (*fāʿiliyyah ʿibdāʾiyyah*) whose efficacy materializes when writing interrogates its product and recreates its tools anew, which shows its [i.e. writing’s] consciousness of itself and its capabilities” (12). Following Darmūsh’s stance, the mechanism of “overstepping,” characteristic of *al-tajrīb* writing, appears as though it forms an intrinsic “force” that operates within the very sphere of writing (i.e., in the text), independently of any preoccupation with historical lineage or linkage. This interpretation pushes the debate over the nature and contours of *al-tajrīb* from the realm of *degree* to that of *kind*. It also seems to gravitate towards the episteme of discontinuity or rupture. In other words, the moment of *al-tajrīb*, following this line of analysis, is understood more to be staging a total—or near total—break from previous, or even contemporaneous, moments. This assessment seems to go against
the views of Roland Barthes, and how he envisions different “modes of writing” in his WDZ.

Barthes states:

Thus the choice of [. . .] a mode of writing point[s] to the presence of Freedom, but this Freedom has not the same limits at different moments of History. It is not granted to the writer to choose his mode of writing from a kind of non-temporal store of literary forms. It is under the pressure of History and Tradition that the possible modes of writing for a given writer are established; there is a History of Writing. [. . .] Writing is precisely this compromise between freedom and remembrance [. . .]. True, I can today select such and such a mode of writing, and in so doing assert my freedom, aspire to a freshness of novelty or to a tradition; but it is impossible to develop it within duration without gradually becoming a prisoner of someone else’s words and even of my own. A subtle after-image, which comes from all the previous modes of writing [. . .], drowns the sound of my present words. (16-17; emphasis added)

Following Barthes’ thesis, there is no escape from History and Tradition, regardless of how experimental or revolutionary a mode of writing or even an idea professes to be. Certain elements of (a) past or contemporaneous mode(s) or idea(s) would have to be reenacted once again, hence the big paradox which Barthes seeks to bring to light; this is how the very last paragraph of WDZ goes:

There is therefore in every present mode of writing a double postulation: there is the impetus of a break and the impetus of a coming to power, there is the shape of every revolutionary situation, the fundamental ambiguity of which is that Revolution must of
necessity borrow, from what it wants to destroy, the very image of what it wants to possess.” (87)

The act of borrowing thus figures as essential to any counter act. Any action that proclaims rupture and discontinuity would under scrutiny yield constituents that point to elements of continuity. There is always some sort of “compromise.” Overstepping as an allegedly revolutionary tactic would fall under this category. In the context of Moroccan experimental writing, “overstepping”—which I have thus far adopted as a correlative to the master concept of *al-tajrīb*—must not be construed as some magic tool that functions in such a way as to render a certain literary piece “new” or “revolutionary” or “ruptural” in its entirety. There is no doubt that “overstepping” is a force that does enhance the innovating efforts of a certain text, and has the potential to bring in memes that might sound new and original and leave their mark on the work as a whole and thus affect the mode of its reception. Also, “overstepping” has the ability to take the text into utterly uncharted territories and unforeseen scenarios—and there lies its aesthetic value. For it pushes the boundaries of literature in general, and a literary tradition in particular, further towards areas outside its comfort zone.

Nevertheless, “overstepping” does act in a *conservative* way in the sense that it treats an old or traditional meme in a way that makes the reader view it in a different light. It goes without saying that “experimental literature” is not invested *only* in new themes, but can allow a place for the old or the traditional to coexist with the “new” and the “avant-garde.” As mentioned before, a number of experimental Moroccan novels make use of *al-turāth* (Arab-Islamic heritage). For

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74 This is reminiscent of my proposition of a model of “compromise” in chapter one that seeks to transcend the operational logic of “influence” in the work of Jameson, Moretti, and Casanova as well as in the writings of Husayn and the *nahdah* figures. This model of “compromise” advocating for a criticism that values reconciliation, interaction, and intertextuality. Although it was made in a different context, this notion of “compromise” bears some significance to how Barthes uses it. It highlights connectedness and conversely undermines the idea of rupture.
example, al-Madīnī’s novel *ZBWWH*, while relying on the mechanism of overstepping, treats *al-turāth* in a way so transgressive that it shocked many readers and critics and created controversy. The inclusion of *al-turāth* in the new Moroccan novel is one example that highlights the conservative side of overstepping, which corroborates my claim that the moment of *al-tajrīb* does not stage a complete break with previous literary moments. The presence of *al-turāth* in Moroccan experimental writing, including the three texts selected for analysis in this dissertation, further complicates the dualistic frame of continuity-discontinuity that attends *al-tajrīb* and arguably any “new” trend in literary activity. Interestingly, *al-turāth* could be seen as a double-edge device that, on the one hand, contributes to the efforts of innovating the Moroccan novel and bringing about a new literary trend, but on the other hand it brings to the fore a text’s reliance on old or traditional themes and tropes. In other words, *al-turāth* seems to navigate, perhaps seamlessly, the seemingly oppositional entities of *al-tajdīd* (innovation) and *al-taqlīd* (tradition). As far as I am concerned, the value of *al-turāth* lies in this ability to straddle these two poles and generate the possibility of a third way, marked by a general aspect of continuity.

It goes without saying that only a rigorous engagement with and close-reading of the very texts in question could thoroughly illuminate this debate over continuity-discontinuity in the Moroccan novel tradition post-1956, taking into account the fact that the execution of the mechanism of “overstepping” could take on a variety of hues by different writers, hues that could straddle both sides of the *degree-kind or continuity-discontinuity* dialectic. Indeed, the three central texts to be analyzed in the subsequent chapters could at times display completely different workings of overstepping, and might thus be seen as different manifestations of the trend of *al-tajrīb*. I argue that the version of *al-tajrīb* in al-Madīnī’s *ZBWWH* is heavily invested in the rebellious, countercultural domain, whereas in Barrādah’s *Lu’bat al-Nisyān* (The Game of
Forgetting), *al-tajrīb* appears to be preoccupied more with the question of narrativity by virtue of a- its employment of various narrators (in addition to the chief narrator) and b- its recurrent recourse to metanarrative discourse. And in al-ʿArwī’s *ʿAwrāq* (Papers) still, *al-tajrīb* of the intellectualist and elitist brand seems to predominate, although the novel also manifests a preoccupation with narrative techniques. I seek to highlight that the phenomenon of *al-tajrīb* could be diverse, and that the mechanism of overstepping—its very bedrock—could operate in a variety of ways. I want to propose that the moment of *al-tajrīb*, at least as exemplified in these three texts, comprises elements of the kind as well as of the degree range. Put differently, this moment of *al-tajrīb* is neither completely different from nor completely the same as (the) previous or contemporaneous moment(s) of twentieth-century Moroccan novel tradition, but rather oscillates, in a plethora of ways, between the opposing spheres of experimentation and repetition, innovation and imitation, modernism and tradition, continuity and discontinuity, etc. This is consonant with my proposition of “a compromise,” touched upon in chapter one.

I have to stress that I see this idea of “a compromise” as a positive thing. Within this framework of “a compromise,” the new Moroccan novel could explore the horizons of freedom and autonomy. Despite its “compromised” nature—given that it arguably oscillates between the two oppositional entities of *al-tajdīd* (innovation) and *al-taqlīd* (tradition) as mentioned earlier—the element of *al-turāth* could open new territories for the postcolonial Moroccan novel, territories that could transfix Moroccan experimental literature along the matrix of literary independence. In this respect, al-Yabūrī avers that the investment in *al-turāth* has relatively liberated the new Moroccan novel from following in the steps of “Western narrative forms” (*al-ʿashkāl al-sardiyyah al-gharbiyyah*), and has allowed it “the opportunity to search for a possible authenticity (*ʿašālah muḥtamalah*) in the domain of Arab creativity (*al-iband ʿal-ʿarabī*) [. . .]”
An engagement with *al-turāth* serves the double role of innovating and enriching literary language and at the same time laying the foundations for a potential authenticity that could relieve Moroccan novelists from the hegemony of the West and its literary modernity. *Al-Tajrīb*’s incorporation of *al-turāth*, I want to argue, should be seen as part of this effort to explore “a possible authenticity” through its push for a “new” brand of writing that traverses both sides of the continuity-discontinuity dialectic. This is consonant with al-Madīnī’s vision of the broader question of cultural production in a postcolonial Morocco and a postcolonial Maghreb, a vision he outlines in his 1985 book *Fī al-‘Adab al-Maghribī al-Mu‘āṣir* (On Contemporary Moroccan Literature) when discussing the effects of the French colonial enterprise in Morocco and the Maghreb. Al-Madīnī states:

إنها هذه الوضعية التاريخية التي ستخلق ظرفا جديدا غير مسبوق سيعمل على التصدي لما هو قائم و راسخ عبر السنين و الاجيال سيتم التصدي له بالعلم الأوروبي، بالفكر و الثقافة الليبرالية، و لكن قبل هذا و ذاك باللغة الفرنسية.

هنا سيخترق الخارج الداخل [...] ليديمه و من هذه اللحظة التي ستتصبح تاريخية و حاسمة سيحدد موقفان خطيران و ستبرز ثقافتان في المواجهة يمكن أن تنضاف إليهما ثقافة ثالثة، المستقبل هو الذي سيحدد سماتها و سيكون مضامينها و هي التي ستشكل أيضا و في ما بعد وجه الثموج و مسرب الانعتاق من سلفية عتيقة و من تبعية عمباء الى الغرب للتوجه نحو تأسيس هوية لا تلتقت بالغرب و لكن لا تعادي كما لا تقطع الصلة بالتراث و لكن تستفتح و تغزله و اذا كانت هذه الطريق الثالثة إحدى الاختيارات الكبرى التي انتهجها الفكر العربي الحديث و المعاصر فانيا في بلدان المغرب العربي ستكون نهجا أساسيا لمشروع ثقافي طموح.
[It is this historical condition which would create a new and unprecedented circumstance that would confront what was already in place [. . .] and [firmly] rooted throughout years and generations. [This] would face the challenge of a confrontation with the European science and the [European] liberal thought and culture through the French language. At this juncture, the exterior would penetrate the interior [. . .] in order to destroy it. From this moment—which would be historic and crucial—two critical positions would emerge and two cultures would come to the fore, to which we could add a third culture. Only the future will specify the characteristics and content of this third culture, which will afterwards also form the aspiration for liberation from an antiquated Salafism and a blind imitation of the West, thus laying the ground for building an identity that is neither fascinated by nor in enmity with the West. [This identity] does not sever the link with heritage [al-turāth], but instead provokes and scrutinizes it. And if this third path turns out to be one of the big options coming out of the modern and contemporary Arab thought, it would in the countries of the Arab Maghreb constitute an essential course for an ambitious cultural project. (18-19)]

The experimental mode of literary writing—especially one that invests in al-turāth—could be seen as an important articulation of this postcolonial, “ambitious cultural project.” Moroccan literary activity’s strategic use of al-turāth thus figures as an important dimension of Moroccan modernism. I should reiterate that this broad notion of modernism (ḥadāthah) does not stand in a symmetrical opposition with the other broad notion of tradition (al-taqlīd) in its literary and cultural incarnations. I argue that al-taqlīd—with its subset of al-turāth—could serve well Moroccan and Arabic modernism. The literary success of (some of) the works that treat the Arab-Islamic heritage and history mentioned by Barrādah and al-Yabūrī above supports this
thesis. Both Barrādah and al-Yabūrī display a positive attitude with regard to the healthy evolution of Moroccan novelistic writings in the latter half of the twentieth century. Yet, there are other critics who are skeptical, as the next section will detail.

- The Moroccan Novel and the Ontology Debate

Not everyone shares al-Yabūrī and Barrādah’s optimism with regard to the view that the Moroccan novel has gained autonomy. In fact, some critics even debate the validity of the construct “the Moroccan novel” (al-riwāyah al-maghribiyah) itself. Among those who see the novel tradition in Morocco as suffering from a crisis there is the novelist-critic Muḥammad Amanṣūr, who goes so far as to question the very nomenclature “the Moroccan novel”; he critically points out:

فَالحديث عن مستقبل الرواية المغربية يوحي -ضمنيا- كما لو أن هذا الجنس الأدبي المستحدث محسوم في وجوده ضمن منظومة أدبنا المغربي المعاصر، و الحال أن السؤال الذي يفرض نفسه هو: هل ما يسمى عندنا بالرواية المغربية المعاصرة، لها ماض و حاضر حتى يكون لها مستقبل؟

[Speaking of the future of the Moroccan novel implies that the existence of this newly-fashioned literary genre is well established within the system of our contemporary Moroccan literature. The question that poses itself is: Does what is called among us the contemporary Moroccan novel have a past and a present [in the first place] so that it could have a future? (“Al-Ghāʾib,” 237)]

Amanṣūr contests the assumption that Moroccan literature has a novel tradition, to begin with. He underscores that “the real birth of the Moroccan novel has not yet come” (240). Unlike al-
Yabūrī, Amansūr does not accept the thesis that the novel in Morocco has attained literary freedom and autonomy, even when it employs al-turāth; he writes quite regretfully:

فلماذا تبحث الرواية المغربية عن حداثتها في تراث و تاريخ المشرق العربي؟ فتعامل هذه الرواية مع التراث المغربي [...]. لم يسجل ما يستحق الذكر [...]. لقد فهم منه دائما الخلفية المشرقية التي تحل على ألف ليلة وليلة و المقامات و كليلة و دمنة و نثر الجاحظ [...] إلخ. بينما ظل تراث ساكنة المغرب الأقصى محط إهمال و إنكار، و لا أدل على ذلك من سطحية الخلفية التراثية للمغرب في أعمالنا الروائية.

[Why does the Moroccan novel search for its modernity in the heritage and history of the Arab East? This novel’s treatment of Moroccan heritage [...] can barely speak of something worth mentioning. [...] It always meant the Mashriqi background, one that refers to The Arabian Nights, The Maqāmāt, Kalīlah wa Dimnah, the prose of al-Jāḥiẓ [...]. etc. The heritage of Morocco’s inhabitants, however, remains subject to negligence and denial, and the evidence [for this] is how superficial the background of Moroccan heritage is in our novelistic works. (243)]

It seems to me that Amansūr’s critique regarding the “Moroccan novel” is a miniature, or perhaps an adapted, version of Al-‘Arwī’s, which instead targets a much larger unit, the Arabic novel. In fact, Amansūr does refer to al-‘Arwī’s notion of “the subject” (al-mawdū‘), which the Moroccan or Arabic novel has to treat (242). We have seen in chapter one that, in his response to al-‘Arwī, Barrādah disagrees with the idea of a “core subject” peculiar to each society and nation. Yet, Amansūr’s concerns—like those of al-‘Arwī before him—are not entirely invalid, for the presence of the Moroccan literary and cultural heritage remains underrepresented in the “novel tradition” in Morocco. Amansūr raises an interesting issue, for he seems to allude to the
fact that even al-turāth—which al-Yabūrī sees as a liberating force from literary domination and dependency—is “borrowed” in Moroccan writings in that it is not integral to the Moroccan imaginary and consciousness.

Interestingly, the majority of the Moroccan novels analyzed in al-Yabūrī’s study draw, in varying degrees, on cultural and historical elements outside the parameters of the Moroccan nation(state). For instance, in Mubārak Rabī’’s Badr Zamānih (1984), al-Yabūrī remarks that the novel’s “narrator puts us in the atmosphere of the prose heritage of A Thousand and One Nights and the popular biographies” (57). Moroccan critic Nūrdīn Saddūq points out that The Arabian Nights is echoed in Badr Zamānih at the level of the proper name: Shahramūsh, Hamshīr, and Shīhūk (“Alf Laylah”). These are three characters that appear in the stories of The Arabian Nights. Al-Yabūrī also touches upon the work of Binsālim Ḥammīsh, a prominent Moroccan novelist who is famous for his employment of “al-turāth al-tārīkhī” (historical heritage) (61). For example, his novel al-‘Allāmah (1997)75—which was translated into English by Roger Allen as The Polymath (2004)—gives a fictionalized account of the formidable Tunisian-born scholar Ibn Khaldūn. Ḥammīsh’s other novels that make an appearance in al-Yabūrī’s book, Majnūn al-Ḥukm (1990; The Theocrat, 2005) and Zahrat al-Jāhiliyyah (The Flower of the Pre-Islamic Era), treat the historical heritage of medievalist Egypt and pre-Islamic Arabia respectively, thereby, together with The Polymath, sideling the historical and cultural heritage of Morocco. From this perspective, Amanṣūr’s critique seems justified, but only to a certain extent. Nonetheless, this criticism faces the same limitations as that of al-ʿArwī’s, namely its isolationist and esssentializing tendencies. It goes against the model of compromise, intertextuality, and interaction I am adopting, and tends to constrain the freedom and creativity of the Moroccan

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75 This novel received the “Grand Atlas Award” based in Rabat and the “Naguib Mahfouz Medal for Literature” based in Cairo.
writer. It does not seem to recognize or foster the universality of creativity, which Barrādah and al-Yabūrī embrace and encourage. Also, this critique, whether intentionally or not, has nationalist and chauvinistic undertones, which could hurt, rather than help, the national literature.

With these reservations aside, Amanṣūr’s critique raises another issue of utmost importance: Where and how the Moroccan novel stands vis-à-vis literary modernity. Amanṣūr asks very cardinal questions, such as: 1- “What allows us to say that this novelistic text is traditional and that [one] is modernist?”; 2- “Is it possible to bring about a modernist novel in a traditional society and culture?”; and 3- “What makes us certain that any talk about the future of literature (or the novel in particular) necessarily leads to modernism or modernization?” (238).

By bringing these complicated questions to light, Amanṣūr unsettles a key binary that circulates in Moroccan literary and critical circles, namely traditionalism-modernism. He takes issue with the very discourse of modernism in Moroccan novel writings, given that “our [Moroccan] traditional novel barely exists” in the first place (239). Amanṣūr questions the very premise of this model of traditional vs. modernist in the realm of the novel in Moroccan literary activity, since he argues that this binary applies to the Western novel and, to some extent, to the Mashriqi (Arab Eastern) novel (239). According to Amanṣūr, it is absurd to speak of a modernist novel tradition in Morocco for two reasons: firstly, Moroccan literature lacks a solid model of classical novel writing and, secondly, Moroccan society and culture is overall traditionalist. He criticizes the modernist pretensions in a number of novelistic writings by Moroccan authors, calling for:

الاقرار بالحاجة إلى إماطة اللثام عن كثير من الأوهام السائدة في وعينا الأدبي، والتي يتمثل [..]

بعضها في سعي بعض الكتاب الروائيين عندنا [..] إلى تبني الحداثة الروائية من منظور تقني، و
Taking the discourses of modernism and traditionalism in the Moroccan context as focal points, Amanṣūr takes us back to the model of influence as tackled by such critics as Jameson, Moretti, Even-Zohar, and Casanova, a model premised upon the notions of imitation, domination, subordination, and interference within the sphere of literature—as detailed in chapter one. According to Amanṣūr, this paradigm of influence is triadic, where Moroccan literature is pitted against the literatures of the West and the Mashriq. From this perspective that questions the very existence of an “authentic” novel tradition in Morocco, one could make the conclusion that (quasi-)novelistic writing in Morocco is—in addition to imitating and being subordinated to—consolidating the Western novel and the Mashriqi novel rather than the Moroccan novel per se. Following this line of reasoning, for Moroccan novelistic writing to be “authentic,” it has to start all over again after a sound and critical assessment of past narrative works. In this regard, Amanṣūr advocates for “building the lost past of the Moroccan novel” (239). He calls for a reassessment of Moroccan literary history when it comes to the genre of the novel, which necessitates a rethinking of literature on epistemological and ontological levels. That is, the very
concepts of modernism and traditionalism, which are deeply rooted in the European novel tradition, need not be taken for granted and be applied to Moroccan writings that emulate the novel genre. Furthermore, critical work need to be done to read anew early narrative works and pinpoint their novelistic aspects and potential and not just cast, in an automatic way, the garb of “novelisticity” on them. Interestingly, Amanṣūr rejects the claims that the text of Al-Zāwyah (The Brotherhood, 1942) by Thāmi al-Wazzānī, which is seen by many critics as the “first Moroccan novel,” to be “the standard and to fill the category of the classical novel” (239). Like Al-Zāwyah, other pioneering well-known texts, such as ‘Abdilmajīd Binjillūn’s Fī al-Ṭufūlah (In Childhood, 1957), ‘Abdilkarīm Ghallāb’s Sab’at Abwāb (Seven Doors, 1965) and Dafannā al-Mādī (We Buried the Past, 1966), and Muḥammad ‘Azīz Laḥbābī’s Jīl al-Ẓama’ (Generation of Thirst, 1967) cannot claim the status of “the classical novel” (al-riwāyah al-klāsiyyah) (239). In fact, this cast of works includes some of the most important foundational texts for the novel genre in contemporary Moroccan criticism. Amanṣūr’s intervention is conducive to shattering this very premise of “foundationalism” with respect to the novel as a viable form within the Moroccan literary context.

In light of this skeptical stance, Amanṣūr proposes two distinct categories that diverge from both the “classical” and the “modernist” versions of the novel genre in the West and in the Mashriq: a- “the pre-classical novel” (al-riwāyah al-māqabl klāsiyyah) and b- “the pre-modernist novel” (al-riwāyah al-māqabl ḥadāthiyyah) (240). It is worthwhile noting that in this figuration the work of al-Wazzānī, Ghallāb, Binjillūn, and Laḥbābī appear in the first category (239), whereas that of Aḥmad al-Madīnī (especially his novel Zaman bayna al-Wilādah wa al-Ḥulum) and ‘Azzūn al-Tāzī—which is most prominently associated with the trend of al-tajrīb—appear in the second (240). I would like to put pressure on these categories at two levels. Firstly,
it is curious how Amanṣūr, who earlier contests in the most explicit fashion the very existence of the novel in contemporary Moroccan literature, retains the word “al-riwāyah” (novel) in his proposed categories. Secondly, the prefix “pre-”—which is generally a temporal marker—keeps these two types discursively within the realm of the “classical” and the “modernist” novels, only it puts a chronological barrier between them. This betrays a teleological vision that, while questioning the legitimacy of “the classical novel” and “the modernist novel” in Moroccan writings due to their Western and/or Mashriqi “roots,” takes these subgenres as goals and destination points. From this angle, the two categories of “the pre-classical novel” and “the pre-modernist novel” do not differ qualitatively from, and remain within the same epistemological logic of, “the classical novel” and “the modernist novel” respectively. Even though Amanṣūr’s skeptical and contestational stance could appear to some extent justified, the terminology used in his categorization of Moroccan novel writing might undermine his arguments.

With that being said, I would like to dwell on what Amanṣūr calls al-riwāyah al-māqabl ḥadāthiyyah (the pre-modernist novel) given its relevance to the debate over the reception of al-tajrīb in Moroccan criticism. Let us remember that Amanṣūr dismisses al-Madīnī’s novels, particularly ZBWWH, as well as those by al-Tāzī as “pre-modernist.” That is, he sees the works of these two figures as being modernist only at the technical level, hence their modernist superficiality. Critiquing the writings of al-Madīnī in particular, he contends:

أحمد المديني ينجح في نصوصه إلى تغليب الوظيفة اللغوية في النص الروائي [. . .] باختزال الفعل الحداثي الروائي في التمرد العنف ضد اللغة و معمارية الجنس الأدبي، و جعل الانقلاب ضد كل القواعد مدخلاً لخلق أجواء من التعتيم و الغموض و الالتباس في العلاقة بالقارئ و منظومة الأدب السائدة، فهل كان هذا المنحنى [. . .] دخولاً للرواية في زمن الحداثة؟ هل يجد إنجاز مشاكس من هذا
[In his texts, Aḥmad al-Madīnī succeeds in making the linguistic function dominate the novelistic text [. . .] through reducing the event to a [mere] violent revolt against language and the architecture of the literary genre and making rebellion against all rules a gateway to creating an atmosphere of obscurity, ambiguity, and confusion in relation to the reader and the prevailing literary system. Was this trend [. . .] [an embodiment] of the [Moroccan] novel entering the age of modernism? Is a polemical [move] of this kind justified in its radical divergence from a novelistic standard that is non-existent to begin with [. . .]? Is modernism a mere destroying of language [. . .] or exploding the narrative structure of the characters and emptying them of any social or psychological depth or blurring the line between prose and poetry [. . .]? (240)\(^76\)

This is perhaps one of the strongest critiques directed specifically at the work of al-Madīnī, who is seen by many, including Amanṣūr\(^77\), as a leading figure in the trend of \(al\)-\(tajrīb\) in Moroccan novel writing. In fact, al-Madīnī, in alluding to \(ZBWW\), has himself admitted the extreme

\(^{76}\) Like Amanṣūr, Moroccan critic al-Habib al-Dāyim Rabbī expresses reservation with regard to the modernist pretensions of Moroccan novel writing; he writes:

[It is perhaps premature to speak of a modernist novel in Morocco given that modernism, in its simplest definitions, is a break with and opposition to one’s history. How then could the novel in Morocco break with its proper history and it has not written it yet?]


\(^{77}\) In his book \(Kharā’īt al-tajrīb al-rivā’ī\) [The Maps of Novelistic Experimentation, 1999], Amanṣūr has stated that trend of \(al\)-\(tajrīb\) in Moroccan letters debuted in the mid-1970s, with the publication of two texts, Saʿīd ʿAllūsh’s \(Hājjīz al-thalj\) [The Frontier of Snow] in 1974 and al-Madīnī’s \(ZBWW\) in 1976. See Amanṣūr, \(Kharā’īt\) (Fes: Anfoprant, 1999), 15.
The rebelliousness of his early novelistic writing. Strong as it is, Amanṣūr’s critique is not blinded to, and indeed acknowledges, al-Madīnī’s “success” in making language a dominating force in the text, only he finds this “achievement” to be out of place, and therefore unjustified, in contemporary Moroccan letters. And most importantly, he takes this rebellious linguistic “triumph” in the writings of al-Madīnī and al-Tāzī to be a marker, not of literary innovation and experimentation, but rather of imitation and subordination; he avers:

إِنَّ التَقْلِيدِ [...] هُوَ فَهْمُ التَجْدِيدِ أوِ التَحْدِيْثِ الرَوْانِيَّ على هَذَا الْمَنْوَالِ، وَهُوَ فَهْمٌ مُغْلُوِّطٌ يُضَلِّع عَنَّ الْاِشْكَالِيَّةِ-الْإِمْ لْصَنْعَةِ الْكِتَابَةِ الرُوَانِيَّةِ، وَالَّيْتِي نَصْطَلِحُ عَلَى تَسْمِيَتِهَا بِالْاِشْكَالِيَّةِ الْتَصْوِيرِ المُرْجِعِيَّ.

[Imitation is indeed an understanding of novelistic innovation and modernization along this line; this is a skewed understanding which strays from the core problematic of the craft of novel writing, one that we would like to call the problematic of referential depiction. (241)]

Amanṣūr’s quotes above raise a number of key issues and difficult questions, which he sees have not been fully treated in contemporary Moroccan criticism. These issues and questions all boil down to one key point: the relationship between Moroccan literary writings (especially in the hegemonic sphere of the novel) and modernism. Following Amanṣūr, the writings of such “innovative” figures as al-Madīnī and al-Tāzī are caught up in the modernist “trap” because of a misguided understanding or application of what modernist literature means or entails, a faulty understanding that skips or overlooks the key problematic of “referential depiction.” By way of clarifying, Amanṣūr states that the nature of the relation “between the process of depiction (‘amaliyyat al-tašwīr) and the extra-textual reference—i.e., between representation and the

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things of the world [. . .]—is what determines the modernism or traditionalism of novelistic writing” (241). By highlighting the object of representation (“the things of the world”), Amanṣūr critiques the disregard for al-ḥikāyah (the story) that has become a characteristic feature in a number of “modernist”—or pre-modernist following Amanṣūr—writings in Morocco. For modernism “also lies in finding a suitable novelistic subject,” asserts the Moroccan critic (242). From this perspective, modernism’s reach turns out to be not only formal or methodological but conceptual and topical as well. Thus the question of the how becomes intricately related to that of the what. Indeed, Amanṣūr, by taking cues from al-ʿArwī, contends that “How to narrate?” and “What to narrate?” are one single question that reflects the key issue of “referential depiction” (242). Within this formulation, al-ḥikāyah (the story) assumes an important, if not a central, role in the diegesis—thereby constraining the free reign of the discourse. Equating the how with the what is a move that aims at providing balance in a narrative as it manages the two elements of al-ḥikāyah (story) and al-khiṭāb (discourse.) These two could therefore be seen as working together and enriching one another to the point where the line between them is completely blurred. The harmony between al-ḥikāyah (story) and al-khiṭāb (discourse) appears to be a necessary step for the overall harmony of a bigger binary: form and content.

Other critics have also weighed in on the question of al-ḥikāyah (the story) and its significance from the point of view of the innovation-imitation dialectic. For instance, critic al-Ḥābīb al-Dāyim Rabbī views the cancellation of al-ḥikāyah on the part of the “new novelists” in Morocco to be a move that puts the novel genre in a “real impasse” (“Suʿāl al-Ḥikāyah,” 124). Rabbī draws our attention to an extremely important point, namely the fact that “most [Moroccan] writers of the novel are themselves its critics, and most of these critics are university professors” (124). Rabbī underscores that these writers are “more readers of Western theories
than novelists,” adding that the novel is “a complementary shelter” for them to experiment with such theories (124). Thus, al-tajriib (experimentation)—Rabbī warns—could turn into al-takhrīb (destruction), pun intended in the Arabic terms (122; 124). In the name of “modernism and modernization,” the “new novelists” in Morocco produce “novels of the nothing” (riwāyāt al-lā-shay’) (124). Following Rabbī’s reasoning, novels that “destroy” al-ḥikāyah are doomed to self-destruction and nothingness. Rabbī’s stance alerts us to an issue of utmost importance, for it hints at the influence the mid-20th-century nouveau roman trend in France exerted on a number of “experimental” novel writers in Morocco. Yaqṭīne—in his discussion of Moroccan experimental writing—states that the mid-1970s witnessed the emergence of a new generation of writers, who experimented with form and ignored al-ḥikāyah before adding that “the new Moroccan novel” developed at a time when the novel genre witnessed major transformations in France and the Arabic-speaking world (Su’āl,” 26). In France, Yaqṭīne continues, such appellations as al-lā-riwāyah (the non-novel) and al-riwāyah al-jadīdah (the new novel) started to circulate in literary circles (26). Amanṣūr also mentions in passing the Moroccan novelist’s fascination with “the French nouveau roman” and “the new sensitivity novel” in Egypt in the mid-1970s (240). The discovery of these foreign trends, Amanṣūr continues, coincided with “the sudden dwindling” of the “pre-classical novel” and by contrast “the rise” of the “pre-modernist novel” (240). By referencing this model of influence, Amanṣūr indirectly questions the seriousness as well as the “authenticity” of some experimental writings that erupted in the mid-1970s and shaped the direction of other novels that soon followed.

With the views of Rabbī, Yaqṭīne, and Amanṣūr in mind, one is drawn to conclude that the absence of al-ḥikāyah (the story) in a number of Moroccan “modernist” novels is indicative of a skewed understanding of modernism, an understanding that is fixated on the question of the
how to the detriment of that of the what or to a sound combination of the two. Such a conception of literary creativity is not only suspect, by virtue of its imitative urge, but also problematic, given its shallow view of modernism, one that finds its raison d'être predominantly in the formalist or technical aspects of modernist literature. And here it is pertinent to quote the Syrian critic-poet Adonis, who concludes his book *Introduction to Arab Poetics* on a highly significant note:

The essence of this is that modernity should be a creative vision, or it will be no more than a fashion. Fashion grows old from the moment it is born, while creativity is ageless.

Not all modernity is creativity but creativity is eternally modern. (100-101)

There appears to be an affinity between what Amanṣūr calls “the pre-modernist novel” and the idea of “fashion” in Adonis’ quote, for these two concepts are placed in opposition to true literary creativity and innovation because of their over-valorization of form and technique (borrowed or adapted). For Adonis, “creativity” or “creative vision” is the most effective criterion or standard to test or weigh the modern(ist) value of a literary work. Following this logic, a work that is creative or has a creative vision by necessity carries the stamps of modernism and innovation at bottom and not just on the surface. Such a work, furthermore, earns the mark of authenticity. Unfortunately, Adonis does not say what he specifically means by “creativity” and “creative vision,” although he touches upon the convoluted question of authenticity. He avers that authenticity is “constant capacity for movement and for going beyond existing limits towards a world which, while assimilating the past and its knowledge, looks ahead to a better future” (90). In other words, in tandem with authenticity, true literary modernity maintains a solid link between the past and the future within a certain Arab literary tradition.

Thus, pursuing modernism via a foreign route—for example, the French *nouveau roman*—is a
“short-cut” that defeats the very idea of the modern(ist), the innovative, the creative, and the authentic. Such a route is also detrimental to what Amanṣūr labels as “referential depiction,” which posits that there be a solid match between the text and the extra-text or what lies outside the text—things of the world. So conceived, the novelistic text is bound to exert an impact on “the Moroccan reader” and the “Moroccan people” as a whole (243); and this kind of reception suffices to endow the literary product with authenticity and perhaps legitimacy. We glean from Adonis’s and Amanṣūr’s views that the literary craft, in order to maintain its authenticity while aspiring to innovation and creativity, must establish a connectivity network on a vertical and horizontal plane. That is to say, the text must not—in the name of modernism—totally divorce itself from the literary heritage it belongs to but must seek instead to find innovative ways to incorporate this heritage—or literary archive—in a variety of ways. On the horizontal level, the text should find ways how to communicate, in a most meaningful way, with its local readership through a creative investment in local elements that bear significance to the people. While I have to admit that this approach’s emphasis on locality makes it sound oppositional to universality and perhaps to the idea of “world literature,” I acknowledge, in part nonetheless, its rationale.
Chapter Three: *Zaman bayna al-Wilādah wa al-Ḥulm*\(^79\): Writing the Self and Flouting Systems of Authority

This chapter argues that al-Madīnī’s novel *Zaman bayna al-Wilādah wa al-Ḥulm*—or *ZBWWH* for short—(Time between birth and dream, 1976) is a highly subversive text that simultaneously flouts two distinct but interrelated forms of authority, one textual and the other extra-textual. In the context of my discussion of *ZBWWH*, *textual* refers to the sphere of aesthetics and literary conventions, whereas *extra-textual* evokes cultural and sociopolitical issues. As I will discuss at length, both of these spheres are embodiments of authority, broadly defined. The novel stages its dissenting voice against the extra-textual aspect of authority in an explicit—albeit fragmented, disrupted, and less obvious—fashion through the deployment of a panoply of utterances that directly criticize, question, command, and ridicule cultural and political symbols of authority, such as the father, the grandfather, and the Islamic scripture. The novel’s dissenting tactic against the textual dimension of authority, however, comes as more implied—although in a more obvious manner—through a language that is intentionally molded to flout existing literary conventions. I argue that the singularity of *ZBWWH* is the outcome of two theses I would like to propound. Firstly, by combining these two forms of subversion—the textual and the extra-textual—the novel performs, in a most noticeable way, its experimental impulses, and radically diverges from common trends in novelistic writing in Morocco in the 1970s and the previous decades. Secondly, as the novel executes its experimental thrust, it risks creating a sense of alienation in the reader, one that perhaps reflects the author’s own alienation.

It is important to situate the novel in its historical and socio-political context. The dark pictures that ZBWWHING paints could be construed as an *allegory* for the state of affairs in Morocco post-1956—when the country obtained its political independence from France and Spain—and in the Arab world post-1967—when Arab armies suffered a crushing defeat in the six-day war with Israel. Critic Hamīd Lajmīdānī has indicated that al-Madīnī’s novel is a prosecution of “Arab history, including Moroccan history” as well as of “the political reality within the same social framework in its broad and narrow sense” (421). There is no doubt that the 1960s and 1970s is such a crucial period in the modern history of Morocco and the Arab world. Although the scope of this chapter does not allow for a detailed treatment of this fascinating topic, suffice it to say that Moroccan consciousness was greatly shaken by the psychological impact of the 1967 Arab defeat against Israel as well as by the repercussions following the two failed coups d’état against the monarchical regime of King Hassan 2nd in what came to be baptized as “the years of lead” (sanawāt al-raṣāṣ). This designation—“the years of lead”—speaks volumes to the political climate in postcolonial Morocco, one marred by power struggle between the monarchy and the opposition.80 Al-Madīnī has explicitly stated that his vision for literature, which informs the writing of ZBWWHING, developed at a time of “general failure [‘ikhfāq ‘ām], characterized by national losses and [pan-Arab] nationalist defeats and individual disappointments” (Ru’yat, 242).81 For his part, Najīb Al-ʿAwfī underscores that ZBWWHING expresses al-Madīnī’s frustration...
not only with the regime but also with Morocco’s intelligentsia and small bourgeoisie, a group portrayed as being in deep crisis (336). He affirms that al-Madīnī:

[Depicted the crisis of the small bourgeois accurately and obtrusively. [...] Perhaps the intellectual is the one who best represents the small bourgeoisie’s crisis and hidden contradictions [...] Al-Madīnī had had some settling of accounts with and [voiced] condemnation of the intellectual [...] He penetrates this explosive type from the inside; opens the windows on his tragic night that is full of sorrow and disappointments; and provokes his miserable consciousness unsparingly. (337)]

Following this thread, al-Madīnī sees Moroccan Leftist forces as being part of the problem, for they have failed to carry out their historical role of standing up to and challenging the dictatorial rule of King Hassan 2\textsuperscript{nd} and have thereby betrayed the cause of democracy and true liberation. It is important to point out that al-Madīnī was himself one of Morocco’s intelligentsia.\textsuperscript{82} He is indeed an intellectual who lived under the Franco-Spanish colonial system (1912-1956) and witnessed the unfolding of the historic event of independence. Al-ʿAwfī does mention that al-

\textsuperscript{82} Like so many others who started writing in the 1960s and 1970s, al-Madīnī was part of the Moroccan Left and was briefly involved with the well-known Leftist journal Souffles (1966-1971) as he himself admits. See Ruʿyat, 237-38.
Madīnī takes credit for his unsparing self-critique (337). Yet, we have to acknowledge that the Moroccan novelist distanced himself from the Marxist camp in Morocco, and his novel *ZBWWḤ* perhaps signaled and expressed, in a most powerful and indirect way, this distancing. It provided a terrain for al-Madīnī to voice his dissenting voice and his feelings of alienation.

Al-Madīnī’s *ZBWWH* traces, I would like to propose, the existential journey of its nameless protagonist as he crafts, via the medium of the enunciation, a poetics of dissent that operates spontaneously in the present moment and thus finds its way to the reader directly without intermediaries. However, due to its formal features of ambiguity, fragmentation, and disruption—especially when it comes to the seemingly random use and mixing of the pronouns opted for—the novel displays its tendency to alienate the reader. This potential readerly alienation would appear to be the result of two different writerly strategies. One is linguistic and has a propensity to disrupt the conventions of literary writing. The other, however, is ideological, critiquing a number of paradigms of power, both political and socio-cultural, in Morocco post-independence. I content that alienating the reader would in the final analysis be a necessary step on the part of al-Madīnī as he works towards establishing a new vision and new horizons in the writing of literature. As I discussed in the Introduction and Chapter Two, al-Madīnī was one among a small number of pioneering figures in the 1970s Moroccan literary scene to experiment with new ways of literary writing, ways that veered away from the then-dominant social realist trend associated with the influential ʿAbdulkarīm Ghallāb.83 His novel *ZBWWH* (Time between Birth and Dream) played a critical role in opening up the horizon of literary experimentation in

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83 Al-Madīnī locates the realist trend in prose writing in Morocco post-Independence within the larger school of realism in Western literature and Mashriqi literature; he adds that Moroccan writers at the time either copied literally or imitated or were inspired by the works of Western and Mashriqi figures. See al-*Kitābah al-Sardiyyah*, 25. Refer especially to chapter two (261-295) for his critical analysis of the writings of Ghallāb and Rabī’. See also Abdelʿali Būṭayyib, *al-Riwāyah al-Maghribiyah*, 14-15 for his examination of Moroccan realist writers, including Zafzāf, Ghallāb, Rabī’, and Shukrī.
Moroccan literature in subsequent decades, and here lies the value of al-Madinī’s contribution to renewing the literary craft in Morocco. Al-Madinī, who has remained loyal to his vision of literary writing to the present day, surely deserves credit for his role, as writer and critic, in reinvigorating contemporary Moroccan literature.

I should underscore that his debut novel ZBWWH crafts a discourse of urgency and immediacy that flouts, satirizes, and rebels against various forms of authority in postcolonial Morocco. By relying predominantly on the structure of uttering and creating a sense of urgency through a language shrouded in the here and now throughout the seven chapters of ZBWWH, al-Madinī demonstrates his utter disregard for the story (al-ḥikāyah) or the plot in favor of metafictional discourse. Interestingly, the discourse of immediacy and urgency that dominates the entirety of ZBWWH via the structure of uttering is, ironically and strangely, reminiscent of the language of the Qur’an, the sacred text which Moslems generally regard as the pure and unmediated speech of God (or Allah in Arabic) directed at the Prophet Muḥammad and by extension all adherents of the Islamic faith. Stylistically speaking, the texts of ZBWWH and the Qur’an intersect and share the traits of urgency, immediacy, and an authorial voice emanating from a single speaker, who monopolizes the power of the word or the elocution. I contend that al-Madinī, through the incessant monologue of his anonymous narrator-speaker-utterer, imposes on his reader—knowingly or not—a linguistic or stylistic authority originating from a protagonist, whose non-stop flow of direct speech that incorporates, in abrupt and sharp ways,

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84 Critic Sīdī ‘Umar ‘Abbūd writes that the negative critical reception of al-Madinī’s ZBWWH and “al-ʿUnf fī al-Dimāgh” (situated within the first wave of Moroccan experimental writing) paved the way for the positive critical reception of the second wave of “the experimental novel” in the 1980s, a period that witnessed the consolidation of the trend of al-tajrīb in the Moroccan literary scene. See Sīdī ‘Umar ‘Abbūd, “al-Ḥadāthah wa al-Talaqī” [Modernism and Reception], aljabriabed.net, n.d. Web. 3 March 2015.

85 It is useful to reiterate that al-Madinī was shortlisted for the 2015 International Prize for Arabic Fiction (Booker).
the gestures of commanding, interrogating, and critiquing almost paints him as an authoritarian figure or a powerful deity even. According to Moroccan critic Binʿīsa Abū Ḥamāla, al-Madīnī in his ZBWWH “has indeed fallen in the same moralizing trap” he had criticized in his critical studies, for he resorted to “wrapping a lot of elocutionary sentences [jumal khitābiyyah] in lyrical, emotional cloth [. . .] and to [adopting] moralizing, instructive sequences” (59). The stylistic affinity between al-Madīnī’s novel and the text of the Qur’an could be read as corroborating the thesis of alienation put forth in this chapter. In order to accomplish its textual and ideological agendas, ZBWWH would have to upset and unsettle a readership still accustomed to the social realist paradigm of Ghallāb in Morocco or Maḥfūz in Egypt, a paradigm that privileges the story and does not venture on metafiction. In this regard, Saʿīd Yaqtīne remarks that the new Moroccan novel, as conceived and executed by such writers as Aḥmad al-Madīnī, Azzdīn al-Tāzī, and al-Mīlūdī Shaghmūm, adopted the motto of “innovation” (al-tajdīd), and sought to overstep “the realist Arabic novel” (al-riwāyah al-ʿarabiyyah al-wāqiʿiyyah) established by Najīb Maḥfūz (“Suʿāl,” 25). And importantly, Yaqtīne adds that the trend of al-tajrīb (experimentation) in the new Moroccan novel did not show interest in communicating with “qāriʿ jāhiz” (a ready-made or traditional reader), since the goal was to seek qāriʿ jadīd (a new reader) (27). As I will outline below, ZBWWH was coldly received by critics when it made its first appearance. It was seen as extremely transgressive at two levels, form and content. In two separate sections below, I investigate the text’s transgressiveness, particularly its poetics of dissent, which targets the two spheres of authority, the textual and the ideological.
• **ZBWWḤ: An Experiment in Explosive, Insurgent Aesthetics**

Al-Madīnī’s *ZBWWḤ* (Time between birth and dream) reclaims the voice of the self and its ability to generate and maintain the flow of speech. The novel seems to be set on crafting a discourse of urgency and immediacy via the medium of, what I would like to call, the *utterance*. In the context of this chapter, I take the notion of the utterance to mean a linguistic unit that differs from a sentence or a clause. In contrast to these two grammatical units, the utterance is freed from the constraints of grammaticality, and has the tendency to maintain the flow of speech and highlights its spontaneity and urgency. Also, the utterance emphasizes the *repetitiveness* of speech segments, notably ones that take the garb of urgency and immediacy. As we will see, *ZBWWḤ* relies to a large extent on repetitions. The utterance, as a linguistic tool, fits well the literary economy and literary vision of al-Madīnī. Its strategic deployment enables the text of *ZBWWḤ* to experiment with an explosive, insurgent aesthetics meant to flout existing norms and conventions of literary writing. Let us consider this opening passage from the novel:

*...*

[The moment crushes me, the vanishing of the soul crushes me, the I and the other crush me, the pins crush me as they cut through the face [and] between the legs. The moment crushes me, I wander in its vacuum here, its emptiness here, the nothing-like melting, the melting of the frost between besieged lands, oh siege of the world, oh besiegers of the*]
forgotten world, come [and] let me show you how you possess the capacity to besiege us, how you steal the pure smiles and sow in their place worn out laughs [. . .]. (5)]

Casting a quick look at the opening passage from ZBWWH above, one is struck by its unorthodox aesthetics. In the context of the 1970s Moroccan literary scene, this passage seems at odds with the label “riwāyah” (novel) that appears on the front cover of ZBWWH. In sharp contrast to the social realist paradigm associated with ‘Abdulkarīm Ghallāb in Morocco or Najīb Maḥfūẓ in Egypt, one that gives critical importance to setting (time and place), plot, and characterization, this passage—and the novel as a whole—gives free reign to the flow of speech. The passage is one small fragment of a long monologue performed by the novel’s nameless protagonist. One could imagine the surprise, shock even, of a 1970s Moroccan readership, accustomed to the writing trajectory of Ghallāb and Maḥfūẓ and its privileging of al-hikāyah (the story or plot), when encountering al-Madīnī’s debut novel. The nameless protagonist keeps telling the reader of his being crushed by an assortment of seemingly unrelated factors: “the moment,” “the vanishing of the soul,” “the I and the other,” and “the pins.” And abruptly, the passage moves to the “siege of the world” and the “besiegers of the forgotten world.” That is, the passage takes us, without any warning, from the realm and supposed suffering of the self to that of the entire world. Interestingly, the stream of uttering embedded in the passage seems to have an addressee, the “you” in “let me show you how you possess the capacity to besiege us, how you steal the pure smiles and sow in their place worn out laughs.” I should note that this is the second person plural “you,” which means that the nameless protagonist is directing his “shouting utterances” towards—in addition to the reader—a group of characters, whose identity also remains unknown. The passage thus has an unsettling effect, and it foreshadows the novel’s poetics of dissent. Let us examine how it continues:
Come [and] let me narrate to you about me, about him, about the others, defeated, floating, lost between dream and wakefulness, between doubt and certainty, between being you or not being [. . .].

The moment crushes me while I am in the midst of the moment. It crushes me that the cup is dried of me, of drops that shine in order to stare at my cut off nose [and] at my features shrunken in a face pervaded by smallpox, we the [smallpoxed] progeny, o fathers and grandfathers, o freaks of history. (5)

The promise of the first-person narrator to tell a story – “Come [and] let me narrate [‘akhī] to you about me, about him, about the others” — proves to be a sham, for there is no story whatsoever in the traditional sense of the word. Instead, there is an obsession with language itself and with a metafictional discourse that keeps the promised story (al-ḥikāyah) hostage and indulges in endless rambling speeches. This second passage adds more nameless “characters” (“him,” “the others,” “fathers,” and “grandfathers”), intensifying thereby the sense of confusion and ambiguity that mark the first. With these two passages in mind, it is not surprising that, following its publication, ZBWWH was met with criticism and rejection by a large number of
critics in Morocco and beyond, as pointed out above. The prominent Moroccan critic Najīb al-
ʿAwfī for one expressed his views on al-Madīnī’s novel in these terms:

أرى مغامرة أحمد المديني في روايته "زمن بين الولادة و الحلم" بالغة التطرف و التحرر، حين
استهتر بقواعد اللعبة الروائية مطلقا، و مزق العلاقات بين الرواية و الشعر و القصة القصيرة،
فجاءت خلطة فنية يصعب تحديد انتمائها إلى أحد من هذه الفنون الثلاثة.

[I see the adventure of Aḥmad al-Madīnī in his novel ZBWWH extremely excessive and
liberal. He despised completely the conventions of the novelistic game and ripped apart
the relationships between the novel, poetry, and the short story, and so [ZBWWH] came
as an artistic mix that is difficult to specify to which one of these three arts it belongs.

(Darajat al-Waʿy, 326)]

Al-ʿAwfī’s remarks alert us to a critical point, namely the generic instability of ZBWWH by
virtue of its total disregard for “the conventions of the novelistic game.” It is true that ZBWWH,
in the context of the 1970s, appeared excessive to a large degree, given that it debuted al-
Madīnī’s experimental novelistic project, one that sought to overstep the social realist paradigm
of Ghallāb and Maḥfūz—as pointed out before. With this in mind, I want to underscore that the
logic of the poetics of dissent running from start to finish in ZBWWH imbues the text with unity
and consistency regardless of whether or not the text is “an artistic mix” of three different genres.
The novel’s “insurgent aesthetics” is meant to defy the conventions of the novelistic craft and
how it was perceived and performed by Moroccan and Arab littérateurs, at least those advocating
the social realist school. Being mindful of ZBWWH’s “insurgent aesthetics,” I want to suggest
that generic labelling would, in the final analysis, turn out to be biased, subjective, and perhaps
even irrelevant for two main reasons. Firstly, it is daunting, if not impossible, to define what a
novel is exactly or specify how it should look like. The novel remains an ever elastic and evolving genre. Secondly, while the rejection of *ZBWWH* by critics including al-ʿAwfī and Abū Ḥamāla is based on a certain conception of novel writing, one that views the social realist trajectory adopted by Ghallāb and Binjillūn in Morocco or Najīb Maḥfūẓ in Egypt to be the norm, it is useful to be reminded that social realism, not to say the novel genre, was itself a recent, few-decades old literary phenomenon in Moroccan and Arabic letters. Indeed, the social realist trend in Moroccan literary activity is, as mentioned previously, most prominently associated with the expansive oeuvre of Ghallāb, whose first work *Sabʿat ʿAbwāb* (Seven doors, 1965) made its appearance less than a decade prior to the publication of *ZBWWH*. What this helps to show is that al-Madīnī’s experimentation with a textual poetics of dissent in *ZBWWH* was meant to target a novelistic field still in formation, not one that is firmly established as al-ʿAwfī’s remarks would have us believe. In this regard, al-Madīnī was digressing from a recent strand of the novel—popularized mostly by the Egyptian Maḥfūẓ and adopted by other Arab writers including the Moroccan Ghallāb—rather than from a fully-fledged tradition. This is

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86 In his introduction to Mikhail Bakhtin’s *The Dialogic Imagination*, Michael Holquist writes: “‘[N]ovel’ is the name Bakhtin gives to whatever force is at work within a given literary system to reveal its limits, the artificial constraints of that system. Literary systems are comprised of canons, and “novelization” is fundamentally anticanonical. It will not permit generic monologue. Always it will insist on the dialogue between what a given system will admit as literature and those texts that are otherwise excluded from such a definition of literature.” See Michael Holquist, Introduction to *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays* by Mikhail Bakhtin (Austin: U of Texas P, 1981), xv-xxxiii, xxxi.


88 In his book *The Postcolonial Arabic Novel*, scholar Muhsin al-Musawi underscores that:
how al-Madinî reflects on his literary debut from the position of a critic in his 2012 critical study *Tahawwulât al-Naw'î al-Riwayah al-'Arabiyah* [Genre transformations in the Arabic novel]:

و نحن الذين أدركتنا حرفةَ الأدب منذِ نهايةِ العقدِ الستيني [ ... ] اتجهنا وجهةً مختلفةً بحكم ثقافة عصيائية اكتسبناها بأنفسنا [ ... ] كنت من البداية أرشح بالكلماتِ الحارة والمفخخة، ولا أعرف كيف أمشي إلا في طرقِ المجاز، ولذا لا عجب أن أول عمل قصصي لي عنوانه "العنف في الدماغ" (1971) و حمل أول بيان عن تصور مغاير للقصة القصيرة و إبداع الكتابة الفنية عموما عندنا و أبعد منا، تعامت عنه الأنظار و سقط عمدا من ذاكرة النقد مليً بالثقوب.

[We—who have caught up with the craft of literature since the end of the 60s [. . .]—took a different direction commensurate with a culture of disobedience we ourselves acquired. [. . .] From the beginning, I would exude sharp and explosive words, and I don’t know how to walk except in the streets of metaphor; it is no surprise, therefore, that my first work [of short stories] was entitled “Violence in the Brain” (1971), and it carried the first demonstration of a different vision for the short story and creative writing in general for us [in Morocco] and beyond, [but] was met with disregard and was intentionally removed from the memory of a criticism replete with holes. (352; emphasis added)]

In his critical writing, al-Madinî takes the poetics of dissent at work in his literary writing, a step further and attacks Moroccan criticism in the 1970s, a criticism he dismisses as being “replete with holes.” Al-Madinî’s adamant remarks lay bare his vision for a new brand of literature marked by an experimental and creative energy. Grounded in “a culture of disobedience,” this

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Since fiction in the Arab world had not acquired a full critical corpus until late in the 1950s, realist conventions of the second half of the twentieth century emerge as perhaps the only available achievement worth challenging, digressing from, and, ultimately, discrediting. While poets since the late 1940s have a formidable tradition and a poetic to contest or engage, novelists and practitioners debate a recent realist trend, with its conventions, practices and varieties.

literature relies for the most part on the enunciatory force of the utterance, a medium that enables or at least facilitates the literary text’s discharge of “sharp and explosive words.” The enunciatory energy that marks al-Madīnī’s highly experimental \textit{ZBWWH} is conducive to the discourse of urgency, immediacy, and spontaneity at work in the novel’s seven chapters. Also, metaphor figures as an extremely important literary device in al-Madīnī’s experimental project. The reliance on metaphors could be construed as an aspect of al-Madīnī’s divergence from the social realist strand, and its endeavors to mimic or mirror the proceedings of everyday life. Moreover, embracing metaphoric language brings the novelistic text of \textit{ZBWWH} closer to the realm of poetry, as I will detail below. As we shall see, the novel is pregnant with metaphoric language.

This new brand of literature that espouses experimentation disobeys the dictates of a “flawed” criticism, and aspires to open up new territories for the expansion, evolution, and growth of the literary wor(l)d. It is inventive, innovative, and obsessed with experimentation, qualities that most critics back then were blinded to. Al-Madīnī continues his 2012 reflections, and adds with an air of indignation and vindication:

هو النقد ذاته الذي لم يجد مناصرا من الاعتراف بأن نصي المعنون "زمن بين الولادة و الحلم" (1974) يمثل الرواية التجريبية الأولى بامتياز في أدب المغرب الحديث، مطلقا قواعد النوع المعهودة، قواعد أرسطو و فورستر، مغامرا برؤية و تشخيص مختلفين بأقل توصيف ممكن.

[This same criticism could not but admit that my text \textit{Zaman bayna al-Wilādah wa al-Hilm} [Time between Birth and Dream] (1974) constitutes the first experimental novel par excellence in Morocco’s modern literature, [a text that] repudiates customary genre conventions of Aristotle and Forester and ventures on a different vision and
characterization using the least amount of description possible. (352-53; emphasis added)]

Al-Madīnī sounds vindicated that literary critics in Morocco finally “came to their senses” and granted his *ZBWWH* the status of “the first experimental novel par excellence” in contemporary Moroccan literature. Putting this citation in juxtaposition with the previous one, one gets a sense of the poetics of dissent mantra espoused by al-Madīnī. While the previous citation highlights the deployment of “sharp, explosive words” and “metaphors,” this one emphasizes two additional tactics: a- the repudiation of genre conventions and b- the use of “the least amount of description possible.” This last tactic (minimal description) is in line with the discourse of urgency permeating the novel. In fact, the use of descriptive language could slow down the novel’s fast pace as it traverses a variety of seemingly unrelated themes. Also, it could weaken the enunciatory force embedded in the novel’s “sharp, explosive words”, which are key constituents of the structure of the utterance operating in al-Madīnī’s text.

If anything, these four features outlined in the two citations above highlight al-Madīnī’s disregard for *al-hikāyah* (the story) and the abundance of descriptive, mimetic language that goes with it, conventions he deems outdated and constraining literary innovation and creativity he so reveres. In place of narration, description, and mimesis, al-Madīnī opts for metaphors and sharp, explosive words. His conception of literature unsettles larger units, such as story, plot, character development, etc., and puts more weight on smaller units: words, phrases, and especially the utterance. After writing more than ten novels, manifesting the same experimental impulse, al-Madīnī underscores that his goal has always been:
Ere taking the center stage of the voice of the self (“a voice of unmasking”) combined with the use of metaphors and the generation of sharp, explosive words meant to leave an immediate impact and impression on the reader, al-Madīnī’s literary economy unleashes its poetics of dissent against the hegemony of al-ḥikāyah (the story), with a view to producing a quasi-poetic language that conveys a sense of pressing urgency and a state of “spontaneous bewilderment,” reminiscent of the insurgent, passionate discourse of the manifesto genre. It is no coincidence that from start to finish ZBWWH relies almost exclusively on the present tense and the imperative mood, linguistic tools that aid the text to maintain an atmosphere of urgency and spontaneity, and at the same time radically digress from the linguistic conventions of al-ḥikāyah (the story), including the use of the past tense and descriptive language. For instance, in the novel’s opening passages cited above, the entirety of the cast of verbs is in the present tense (“crushes,” “crush,” “cut through,” “I wander,” “you possess,” “you steal,” “sow,” “I am,” “is,” “shine”) with a few cases in the imperative mood (“come [and let] me show you” and “Come [and let] me narrate to you”). The narrator calls on the readers in a direct fashion, getting them out of their comfort zone; giving the impression that there is something—maybe a message—that he very urgently needs to deliver in the present moment; and asking for their complete attention. The imperative mood, together with
present tense verbs, creates a(n) (quasi-)interactive atmosphere, pushing the reader to mentally engage in an imaginative dialogue with the narrator or perhaps with al-Madinī himself.

There is indeed a strategic deployment of the structure of the utterance (the “voice of unmasking”) throughout the text of ZBWW[H], with the nameless narrator-speaker deeply immersed in a discursive performance, and taking the perfection of the act of uttering and enunciating, not narrating, as a primary goal. The novel’s opening paragraph proceeds as follows: “The moment crushes me [. . .].” It is worth noting that the word “moment” is repeated four times; this indicates that the narrator is generating his utterances in this very moment, in the here and now, while attempting to make the reader aware of the “presentness” of his utterances. The insertion of the word “moment” in different places in the opening passage enhances the structure of uttering, and supplements the reliance on the present tense and the imperative mood. In fact, repetition in itself constitutes a prominent rhetorical device in the text. The reiteration of certain words and at times entire chunks of words help the text reach two important effects. On the one hand, it draws the language closer to the realm of poetry—aiding the text’s shattering of generic conventions—and, on the other hand, it emphasizes the forcefulness of the unfolding stream of uttering, an effect that maintains the climate of urgency surrounding the wor(l)d of the narrator. For example, the verb “vanish” and its derivative “vanishes” are repeated a total of seven times in the opening passages cited above. Other repeated words include “melting” and “come.” Let us consider another quote from ZBWW[H]:

دعوا الناس يمرحون

دعوا الناس ينتحرون

دعوا الناس يسكرون يضاجعون يخاتلون

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Let people rejoice
Let people commit suicide
Let people get drunk, have sex, cheat
Let people read
Let people get out to the street . . . (88)

From a formal point of view, this passage manifests a variety of features worth unpacking for a number of reasons. Firstly, in terms of generic labelling, the lines appear in the form of a poem, consisting of five lines, four of which end in a two-letter rhyme—the letters wāw (W) and nūn (N) combined together. Secondly, every single line starts with the formula “Let people,” which highlights the text’s investment in repetitions. Thirdly, all seven present-tense verbs appear in the third-person plural and begin and end with identical letters, the yā’ (Y) and the nūn (N) respectively. This creates a poetic, musical effect, and betrays al-Madīnī’s meticulous attention to the sounding dimension of the words chosen. Of course, the English rendition of the passage cannot relay this phonological effect. Fourthly, we note the high frequency of the imperative mood, which enhances the urgency aspect of the utterance. Put together, these formal traits, if anything, strengthen the structure of uttering and emphasize the poetics of dissent on the level of textuality. Al-Madīnī goes a step further in blurring genres and at the same time unleashes his, at times, singing and, at others, shouting narrator-speaker. The musical and poetic garb of the
linguistic economy of ZBWWH surfaces in rather unpredictable ways. Let us examine this passage immediately following the one cited above:

[Reality has so many bifurcations; the incidents have magnificent dimensions; the enclosures must be bombed; the brains you must explode; and I say and say the saying of truth until we make untruth perish and truth is erected. We are obliged to raise the world on them, to empower the contradictions, to bother those sitting and straighten the conduct of those standing, to fight with our world, “the base”; without [doing all this] we would fall in the trap and in the cage, [ending up as] a savory meal for the monkeys . . ! ! (89)]

Needless to say, the aesthetic aspect of the passage is lost to us in the translation, which can only give a sense of the semantic dimension and by extension the ideological message driving ZBWWH. Let me shed some light on the textual workings of this passage. One cannot help but notice the frequency of two particular letters, the qāf (Q), recurring twenty six times, and the ʿayn (ʿ), recurring thirteen times. In one instance, the letter qāf appears in four successive words [أقول وأقول قول الحق] (I say and say the saying of truth), and in another the letter ʿayn appears in three words in succession [نقارع عالمنا "القاعدة" (to fight with our world, “the base”). It is remarkable that in the former series, the structure of uttering is embedded in the phonological, lexical, and grammatical layers of this excerpt. In other words, we have a- the reiteration of the sound or phoneme /q/ as well as the repetition of the verb “I say” and its derivative “the saying”
(phonology) b- a lexicon denoting “to say” or “to utter” (lexis) and c- the use of the present tense
(grammar)—which speaks to the unity underlying al-Madīnī’s experimental project in ZBWWH.
While the narrator-speaker is saying things, he tells us that he is indeed doing so, a textual
feature we might label as meta-metafictional. Even as this kind of lexically performative
language in the citation above eschews descriptive prose, it does at the same time function in an
“authoritative” way, and at this level the novel intersects with the authoritative discourse of the
Qur’an—which interestingly also incorporates a meta-narrative component, notably in chapters
(or suwar in Arabic) relating the stories of past prophets and their communities. Appealing as it
is, the scope of this chapter does not allow for a detailed treatment of this topic.

It is good to be reminded that ZBWWH is delivered in a metafictional mode with the first-
person narrator supposedly delivering his speech directly to the reader about the story of his life,
thereby making the discourse dominate, in a most pronounced way, an alleged story given only
in small fragments, hints, and allusions. From this angle, the above utterance [أقول وأقول قول الحق]
(I say and say the saying of truth) could be seen as another layer of the narrator’s metafictional
discourse. This utterance illustrates yet another interesting feature in al-Madīnī’s writing style,
namely the frequent use of derivatives, which is, in a way, related to the repetition devise. Note
the verb “I say” and its derivative “the saying.” Other examples in the quote include: [الواقع]
(reality, incidents) and [نقوم، نقيم، نقوم] (is erected, we raise, we straighten). In the opening
passages of the novel, one notices the same sensitivity towards derivation, for we have a series of
four derivatives [محاصرتنا، محاصري، حصار، محصورة] (besieged, siege, besiegers, to besiege us) in
one single utterance [دوبان الصقيع بين بلدان محصورة، يا حصار العالم، يا محاصري العالم المنسي، تعالوا أريكم كيف]
(the melting of the frost between besieged lands, oh siege of the world, oh besiegers of the forgotten world, come [and] let me show you how you possess the capacity to
besiege us). In his efforts to experiment with literary writing, al-Madinī consistently manifests a preoccupation with generating a poetic or quasi-poetic language, a move that signals his attempts to unsettle or maybe break the hierarchy and authority of literary genres. It is no surprise that the last section—not to say chapter—comes in the form of a poem in its entirety (from page 129 until the conclusion of the “novel” on page 143.)

A number of critics have noted the poetic aspect of al-Madinī’s writings. For instance, al-ʿAwfī extricates the following characteristic feature in al-Madinī’s works, including ZBWWH:

[The liveliness of the imagination and its ability to fly in expansive poetic climes, [and] the penetration of ideas, emotions, and things in order to comprehend and [then] generate them through images that have very strong links to the world of poetry. (324; emphasis added)]

Following al-ʿAwfī, al-Madinī’s fecund imagination and frequent employment of images make the distance between prose and poetry shrink, if not disappear completely. As I noted earlier, al-Madinī has admitted to his fascination with “sharp and explosive words” and to his literary navigation “in the streets of metaphor.” Indeed, metaphor, a classic constituent of poetic language, permeates the novel ZBWWH. Here is an illustrative example:

و أخرج أنا و هو الى العراء، العراء يا شمس الجياد الراكضة. أنا أمتص الضوء من عين... [ ..]
[He and I go out to the open air, the open air, o sun of the riding horses. I suck the light from the eyeball of the sun, [. . .] I milk the flame from fireplaces extinguished by this age of weeping and the frost. (11-12)]

Such metaphoric images—sucking the light from the eyeball of the sun and milking the flame from fireplaces—are supplemented by personification, a figure of speech that augments the poetic quality of the novel in addition to rendering abstract entities concrete. For instance, “light” is perceived as an abstract component, yet it is concretized by being assigned a specific location (the eyeball of the sun), from within which the narrator consumes it in an explicitly materialist fashion, i.e. through sucking. A similar scenario unfolds with the metaphor of milking the flame. Let us consider one more passage:

[. . .] The pregnant woman was walking down the street shouting: I am pregnant with snakes and scorpions, with bacteria and insects that spoil tillage and progeny, [. . .] with the jingle of defeated knights’ swords, with the blood of chained feet, pregnant with whirlwind and nostalgia wrapped up in sand. (70)]

Although short, this quote includes a number of powerful metaphors; each one of the items the nameless woman is pregnant with (snakes, scorpions, bacteria, etc.) constitutes an example of metaphoric language. These images generate an ambiance of violence and decay, and they remind us of al-Madīnī’s literary vision, one that finds its raison d’être in a strategic deployment of “sharp and explosive words,” aimed at stirring the reader’s emotions and generating a
spontaneous emotional response—somewhat like poetry. Al-Madinī wants the reader’s imagination to dwell on these images that intentionally blur the lines between the human and the bestial on the conceptual level (as well as between the prosaic and the poetic on the generic-aesthetic level.) The woman’s pregnancy is accounted for using words that are pregnant with connotations. Interestingly, the metaphoric images render the novel’s language symbolic rather than descriptive. This is consistent with the author’s statement that his ZBWWH “ventures on a different vision and characterization using the least amount of description possible.” The cast of metaphors are, therefore, part and parcel of the novel’s symbolist economy and its endeavors to “reach out” to the poetic wor(l)d. In this respect, Abū Ḥamāla contends that there is an overlap in ZBWWH between “two expressive economies,” (‘iqtiṣādayn ta’bīriyayn) one “prosaic” (nathrī) and the other “poetic” (shi’rī) (58). And he wonders:

هل يتعلق الأمر بهوس لغوي طاغ؟ أم يتعلق بوهم شعري [. . .] هل يتعلق الأمر بتفنن الطموح الشعري بغلاف روائي؟

[Does this have to do with an excessive linguistic obsession? Or with a poetic phantasy [. . .]? Is this a matter of masking the poetic ambition in a novelistic cover? (59; emphasis added)]

Abū Ḥamāla strikes a direct link between al-Madinī’s “obsession” with language, deemed excessive, with the question of genre. He suspects that the Moroccan writer is abusing the category of “the novel,” given that his goal is perhaps the construction of a poem or a set of poems, and hence the label al-riwāyah (novel) that appears on the book cover remains questionable and only serves the function of masking the generic identity of the text, a

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89 In stating his divergence from realist, committed literature, al-Madinī accepts being labeled a Romantic; see Ru ’yat, 243.
“deceptive” move on the part of the “novelist” (or novelist-turned-poet). In a similar vein, Moroccan critic Aḥmad Laḥlū rejects altogether the generic label al-riwāyah (novel) put on the cover of ZBWWH; he avers:

[In sum, the “novel” [ZBWWH] [. . .] is downright poetry, confirming that al-Madinī is more of a poet than a [short] story writer and that his soul is closer to the soul of the poets; in the folds of his styles, he reminds [us] of building the modern poem. (72; emphasis added)]

I want to stress that to what end the text of ZBWWH approximates, borders on, or is an example of the genre of poetry is more important, and more interesting, than whether or not it is a poem or an amalgam of prose and poetry. It is important to put ZBWWH in its historical context. Al-Madinī’s predilection to blur the line separating literary genres is a critical aspect of an experimental project that embraces a poetics of dissent meant to target a 1970s novelistic field still in formation. Novel writing in the mid-1970s did not constitute a fully-fledged tradition, as emphasized before. Thus, al-Madinī’s intervention should be seen as part of the endeavors to build a novelistic project freed from the pressures of influence and the “burden” of imitation, especially with regard to the realist novel either in the West or in the Mashriq (the Arab East).

Moreover, given that literary genres, notably the novel, are—as mentioned above—flexible and constantly evolving, the task of defining or determining, once and for all, the features of a certain literary type becomes daunting, if not impossible. With that said, settling this debate of whether ZBWWH is a poem or a novel or a collection of short stories could easily
become a losing battle. Blurring or exploding genres should be seen as a significant aspect of al-Madīnī’s aesthetic insurgence or insurgent aesthetics, which boosts the poetics of dissent operating in ZBWWH in particular and in the Madīnīan œuvre more broadly. Al-Madīnī can himself offer us some insight into his own vision of literature in the context of postcolonial Morocco; he writes:

ماذا نفعل إذا نحن الذين رغنا حقاً في كتابة الرواية بينما كنا نعيش في مجتمع غير روائي. لقد تفرقت السبل بالكتب العرب في كيفية قياس هذه المعضلة، ما نتج عنه إما التقليد أو الاستحسان أو التجريب المحض [...]

[What are we to do then, we who really wanted to write the novel when we lived in a non-novelistic society? Arab writers have taken different paths in how to measure this dilemma, which resulted in either imitation or copying or pure experimentation [...]

(Taḥawwulāt, 354)]

Al-Madīnī raises an issue of utmost importance: the notion that the condition of Moroccan society—and Arab societies in general—in the aftermath of political independence was not yet conducive to nor receptive of the novel genre, which was deemed instead as a foreign import.90 Due to the fact that it does not constitute a well-established tradition, as al-Musawi remarked earlier, novel writing in Morocco and the Arab world remains a relatively new, perhaps even inauthentic, practice, particularly when it replicates or imitates the “realist novel,” the hallmark of Euro-American modernity. For this reason, al-Madīnī opted for the third route (“pure

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90 With regard to the question of whether the novel is part of the Arabic prosaic heritage, Saʿīd Yaqṭīne asserts that “prose is not the novel” and that we have to let go of those ideas that still insist that “the novel is present in Arab history.” See Saʿīd Yaqṭīne Qadāyah al-Riwaḥ al-ʿArabiyyah al-Jadīdah: Al-Wujūd wa al-ḥudūd [The issues of the new Arabic novel: existence and frontiers] (Cairo: Ruʿya, 2010), 20.
experimentation”); he stresses that his experimental and innovative work, which takes divergence from the hegemony of the realist school as its motto, is characterized by:

[A psychological outburst and an eager aptitude to speak the self in a language that swamps everything [coming] in its way, without paying much attention to the rules of a genre whose foundations are found in other literary traditions [...] The dormant society, in which we were born and which has for decades wallowed in [...] smooth clashes despite the manifestations of violence, has witnessed neither a profound conflict nor significant problematic shocks, conducive to the realist novel, the terrain of the unfolding of destinies and of the disputatiousness of reality. (354; emphasis added)]

Al-Madinī questions the very suitability of the realist novel to the Moroccan and Arab condition,91 and he does so on ontological grounds. Following the Moroccan writer, it is absurd to write a realist novel in a “dormant society” yet to undergo major “shocks” that could pave the way for serious historical and socio-cultural transformations, comparable to those experienced by Western societies, shifts that rendered the emergence and then the flourishing of the realist novel possible and desirable. From this ontological angle, one can get a sense of the rationale behind

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91 This is reminiscent of ‘Abdullah al-‘Arwī’s position, advocating “al-‘uqṣūṣah” (story or mini-story) in place of “al-riwāyah” and symbolism in lieu of realism. See Al-‘Idūlāyī al-‘Arabīyāh al-Mu‘āṣirah [Contemporary Arab Ideology] (Casablanca: al-Markaz al-Thaqāfī al-‘Arabī, 1995), 243.
al-Madînî’s experimental gymnastics, including, but not limited to, generic blurring. Also, his focus on and fascination with the voice of the self, through a structure of uttering which, at the textual level, does not take into account generic conventions, should be viewed from this extra-textual dimension of whether or not the realist novel is compatible with the cultural and socio-economic conditions in a recently independent Morocco. When there is no profound movement or change in society, unleashing the shouting or singing voice of the self becomes one of only a few viable options, or so al-Madînî believes.

Through his poetics of dissent, al-Madînî sought to shake not only an acquiescent Moroccan subjectivity but also a stagnant literary activity and criticism, seen as numb to any endeavors for innovation and renewal—which in a way explains Moroccan critics’ rejection of ZBWWH following its publication. Al-Madînî asserts:

لا توسط في الإبداع، ومبدأه الأم هو الخرق، أي الهتك و الفتق للمألوف، المستقر، المقروء باطمئنان.

وأما واحد ممن نذروا [. . .] لمهمه الخرق هاته، في أعرس وقت عندما اطمأن الجميع تقريبا إلى أوفاق استقلال البلاد [. . .] إن أصوات التحديث المبكرة في أدبنا قبل الاستقلال [. . .] ضاعت في زحام الناجز و الطلب المستعجل [. . .].

[There is no moderation in creativity, for its core principle is contravention, i.e. the tearing apart and the ripping of the customary, the stable, that which is read with assurance. I am one of those who vowed [. . .] for this task of contravention, in a most difficult time when almost everyone was content with the accords [following] the country’s independence [. . .]. Indeed, the early voices of modernization in our pre-Independence literature [. . .] were lost in the congestion of the ready-made and a rushing demand [. . .]. (352; emphasis added)]
It seems that al-Madīnī, in the early 1970s, did elect himself as a “prophet,” carrying on his shoulders the mission of innovating Moroccan literature, albeit in his own right. And he manifested a rebellious spirit, which he considers an essential component of the very morphology of art and creativity. In adopting the principles of immoderation, contravention, explosiveness, and shock, al-Madīnī finds his “salvation” in two terrains he holds so dearly, the word and the self. That is why the structure of the utterance (or of uttering) occupies such an important place in *ZBWWH* as detailed above. Al-Madīnī energizes the self by granting it the power of the word (speech), a tool that enables it to assume its long-lost functions of speaking, yelling, commanding, opposing, contradicting, rebelling, and so forth. Here are a few instances of such impassioned elocutions that permeate *ZBWWH*:

يا جدي، ما كل هذا؟ لم أفهم شيئا
مهما لاتندهش! لا ترتعب!
[O my grandfather, what’s all this? I didn’t understand a thing.
Wait, don’t get astonished! Don’t get scared! (13)]

احك احك ايها الجد الشمعي . . .
[Tell, tell o waxen grandfather . . . (14)]

لا، لم تتل مني شراستك . . .
[No, your savagery didn’t get to me . . . (17)]

اصنعوا اهراما جديدة لعاهاتنا و اوبنتنا . . .
[Make new pyramids for our deformities and epidemics . . . (59)]

ما رأيكم في رجل يحمل في دماغه مواخير العالم . . .

[What do you think of a man carrying in his brain the brothels of the world . . . ? (79)]

وانا لم أخسر ولم أربح، لكنهم تاجروا بأعضائي . . .

[I did not lose and did not win, but they traded in my body parts . . . (120)]

While these utterances increase the narrator-speaker’s agency, they nonetheless paint him as exercising monopoly over the sphere of language. The alliance between the self and the word is here taken to the extreme and risks turning this narrator-speaker (supposedly a victim of oppression, persecution, silencing, censure, etc.) into a dictatorial figure maintaining total control over speech and denying it of others. It is important to reiterate that the novel as a whole is written in the form of a monologue, the incessant flow of the narrator’s stream of consciousness, delivered in the mode of uttering. As critic Aḥmad Laḥlū pointed out, the novel “imposes its content through one voice\(^2\) originating from the protagonist without us seeing him”; he adds that the element of “argumentation” (al-jadal) is lacking in ZBWWH (72; emphasis added). This oneness of the voice strikes the reader as emulating or being in affinity with the oneness motif in Arab-Moslem culture and worldview, including the oneness of the Islamic god (Allah) deemed as an essential component of the Islamic tenet of al-tawḥīd, a motif strongly critiqued by al-Madīnī himself, who writes:

And in a society where there is only the one ruler, the one creed, the one [political] party, the one junta, the one forced culture, this [experimental] text suggested the formula of the self [. . .]. (Ru’yat, 242-43; emphasis added)

Ironically, this adopted formula—the one speaking self—replicates the oneness trope. By monopolizing the power of the word, this one and only nameless, invisible narrator-speaker, in a way, transforms into an almighty god, reigning supreme in the dominion of the utterance. He is exercising, knowingly or not, linguistic authoritarianism and totalitarianism. In the manner of an all-powerful deity, he denies the few other anonymous voices in the novel (the grandfather, the father, the pregnant woman, etc.) the opportunity to speak freely and argue their position without constraints. The reader only gets a mediated version of the speech of these “characters,” one that is filtered through and coopted by this one voice of the narrator-speaker. This appropriation of the speech of others further draws the text of ZBWWH to the realm of poetry, especially one verging on Romanticism. (Let us remember that al-Madini has accepted to be labeled a Romantic, as footnoted above.)

Interestingly, the oneness of voice motif, when combined with the ambiance of urgency and immediacy running throughout the novel, has some affinity with the sacred language of the Qur’an, viewed by Moslems to be the pure word of the one true God. From a stylistic point of view, ZBWWH and the Qur’an intersect on a number of levels. Like ZBWWH, the Qur’an could be considered as a long monologue delivered by an invisible, authorial figure/voice. Also, both ZBWWH and the Qur’an make ample use of the imperative mood, a technical device that carries
the speaker’s orders, commands, interjections, reprimands, ridicules, praises, etc. It is very
telling that al-Madinī’s novel coopts the Qur’anic style of address yā, ayyūhā, yā ayyūhā, or yā
ayyatuhā (“o” or “o you” in English) in addition to incorporating myriad Qur’anic verses. Let us
briefly consider a few examples:

إنها لحظتك أيها الجد لتتبين، لتشرح.

[It is your moment, o grandfather, to clarify, to explain (14; emphasis added)]

السم السم يا جدي [...] السم أيها الجد الملعون.

[The poison, the poison, o my grandfather, [...] The poison, o damned grandfather. (19)]

أيها الناس، اسمعوا عو ولا تعو.

[O (you) people, listen, comprehend or don’t comprehend. (61; emphasis added)]

أيها الناس اعطاءني صمتا، اعطوني طينة جديدة، اعطوني حبا حبا نعم حبا!!!

[O (you) people, give me silence, give me new clay, give me love, love, yes love!!! (104;
emphasis added)]

لكن مذبحتي في عينيك أيها الوطن الموت الولادة.

[But my slaughter is in your eyes, o homeland, death, birth. (125; emphasis added)]

While employing archaic forms of address similar to classical Qur’anic Arabic, these quotes
highlight the assertive voice of the narrator-speaker as he commands (quote 1 and 4), swears at
(quote 2), commands and ridicules (quote 3), accuses and contradicts (quote 5), yells at (all
quotes), and so forth. The aesthetic affinity of ZBW WH with the text of the Qur’an reaches a
higher level when entire Qur’anic verses are integrated into the monologue of the narrator. Here is one interesting instance:

لإيلاف قريش إيلافهم رحلة الشتاء والصيف فليعبدوا رب هذا البيت الذي أطعمهم من جوع اننا محترفون لقد حرفنا كل شيء [...] وادهبو فلا خوف عليكم ولا انتم تحزنون وأمنهم من خوف

[For the taming of Qureysh. For their taming (We cause) the caravans to set forth in winter and summer, So let them worship the Lord of this House, Who hath fed them against hunger and hath made them safe from fear, and go for you there is no fear this day, nor is it ye who grieve—we are distorters, we have indeed distorted everything [...] (57)]

Because there is no explicit story or plot in the novel, it is difficult to decipher the meaning or significance of this particular passage that copies verbatim the Islamic scripture in this particular place in the novel. Nevertheless, this sheds further light on the unorthodox construction of the novel’s aesthetic make-up and shows that al-Madīnī’s poetics of dissent—a poetics that is not inhibited by the aura of awe surrounding the sacred terrain of the Qur’an—does capitalize on the textual component of Islamic scripture to enhance the quasi-poetic, musical, and urgent dimension of the text of ZBWW. Also, there is no distance or distancing between the Qur’anic and non-Qur’anic parts in the quote above, for it all comes to us (the readers) as the voice of the narrator, a move that could be interpreted in two different ways: a- either the voice of the protagonist is uniting with God’s, thus rendering him as a supra-powerful deity or b- it is

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93 The Qur’anic portion in this quote consists of a combination of one entire chapter (sūrah Quraysh 106:1-4) and a line from sūrah al-Zukhruf (43:68). For these Qur’anic portions, I have opted for the English translations by Muhammad Marmaduke Pickthall rather than provided my own renditions. See Muhammad Marmaduke Pickthall, The Glorious Qur’an: Arabic Text and English Rendering (Chicago: Kazi Publications, 1983).

94 The text of the Qur’an does overall have a musical, poetic dimension; it is also dominated by a discourse of urgency.
competing with it, making him (the protagonist) in this case a rival deity of God. In the following quote, however, there is some distance between the Qur’anic and non-Qur’anic portions, a distance marked by placing the referenced Qur’anic verse between parentheses.

وقال وقالوا وقيل وقلنا وقلتم وقلت و (سمع الله قول التي تسائلك في زوجها) [. . .]

[And he said and they said and it was said and we said and you [all] said and you said and (Allah hath heard the saying of her that [inquired] with thee concerning her husband) [. . .]. (119; emphasis added)\(^95\)

In this passage, the link between the Qur’anic and non-Qur’anic portions seems to be purely linguistic. I have indicated earlier that al-Madīnī manifests a fascination with the use of derivatives. It appears that in this instance, derivation is the linchpin that connects the two portions; the word “saying” [qawl] makes the Qur’anic portion cohere on the lexical level with its derivatives “he said” (qāla), “they said” (qālū), “it was said” (qīla), “we said” (qulnā) “you [all] said” (qultum), and “you said” (qulta) or (qultī). I should underscore that this play with derivatives is more prominent in the Arabic original, and does not translate well when rendered into English.\(^96\)

I would like to conclude this discussion of ZBWWH’s affinity with the Qur’an by considering one final quote that illustrate a different pattern at work in the novel’s appropriation of the Islamic scripture and discourse.

\(^95\) The Qur’anic portion in this quote appears between parentheses and taken from sūrah al-Mujādilah (58:1)

\(^96\) The transliterations can help non-speakers of Arabic get a sense of this play with derivation, a significant aspect of al-Madīnī’s textual poetics of dissent.
قابلني الرجل الذي يصارع النوافد، تُفتح تُغلق فلا يعرف كيف يواجه التيار، النوافد تُفتح و اليد مبتورة وربك الغالب [..]. احتار الرجل في الأمر و في امره و صلى صلاة استخارة فما نفعت، و ناجى عشيقته فما أفادت النجوى، وقال يا سماء أفلئ، ولكن العاصفة دامت. ولم يقر له قرار، جفا النوم عينيه و حاصره الارق، فلم تنفع العقاقير أو المخدرات [..]. ماذا أصاب مولانا [..].

[I met the man who struggles with the windows, they open, they close, and he does not know how to deal with the current; the windows open and the arm is amputated and your lord is the victor [..]. The man was in a dilemma regarding the case and in his case, and he said a guidance-seeking prayer but in vain, and he invoked his mistress but in vain, and he said O sky, withhold [your rain], but the storm subsisted. He could not settle on any decision; sleep forsook his eyes and he was besieged by insomnia as neither pills nor drugs proved useful [..]. What happened to our lord? (70-71; emphasis added)]

In this passage, we get a vague and fragmentary account of this man with an amputated arm who is attempting in vain to close the windows in the midst of a bad storm. We are also told elsewhere that the man is a feudalist. Interestingly, the quote stands in an intertextual relationship with the Qur’anic story of Noah;⁹⁷ the storm the man is dealing with corresponds to the deluge that Noah has to face. In fact, the man uses language taken directly from the Qur’anic version, namely the utterance “yā samā'u 'aqli'ī” (O sky, withhold [your rain]). Also, the quote makes use of the typically Qur’anic “nājā” (he invoked), a verb that is normally reserved for the Prophets when making an intimate prayer or invocation to Allah. Al-Madīnī unsettles and inverts Qur’anic scripture, a gesture that achieves the effect of satire. Whereas in the Qur’an Allah’s

⁹⁷ The story of Noah and the deluge appears in various places in the Qur’an. The quote uses Qur’anic language from Sūrah Hūd (11:44)
command to the sky to withhold its rain produces an immediate result with the sky complying with the divine order, this same exact command (O sky, withhold [your rain]) coming from the man in the form of a prayer has no effect whatsoever. Satire also manifests textually in the clause “wa nājā ‘ashīqatahu” (and he invoked his mistress), which parallels the Qur’anic “wa nājā rabbahu” (and he invoked his Lord), except that al-Madinī substitutes “his mistress” for “his Lord,” which creates a satirical, farcical ambiance. The quote’s referencing of religious discourse is further corroborated by an intertextual relationship with the Ḥadīth; the nomenclature “ṣalāt al-‘istikhārah” (guidance-seeking prayer) is an important Islamic principle and practice rooted in Prophet Muhammad’s tradition. Al-Madinī seems to be ridiculing this practice in two different ways: Firstly, by splitting the feudalist man’s source of guidance equally between Allah (“the sacred”) and the mistress (“the profane”), and, secondly, by highlighting the uselessness of this guidance-seeking prayer, for all his efforts were in vain. Blurring the line between “the sacred” and “the profane” is accentuated when drugs—a substance which the Islamic religion emphatically forbids—come in the picture, being another resort for the handicapped man besides Allah and the mistress. Thus, the quote borders on sacrilege, and it is safe to assume that al-Madinī is seeking to expose the triviality of religious dogma. It is no surprise the passage ends on a note questioning or ridiculing the Lord, the figure of authority by excellence. The passage illustrates most powerfully the poetics of dissent operating in ZBWWH at the textual as well as

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98 Ḥadīth stands for the tradition of Prophet Muhammed incorporating his sayings, deeds and affirmations.
99 The “guidance-seeking prayer” appears in a Ḥadīth in the book of the well-known Islamic scholar al-Suyūṭī. The hadith reads as follows:

غُنِّى جابر وعن سعد بن أبي وقاص أن النبي قال: «من سعادة ابن آدم استخار الله، ومن سعادة بني آدم رضاه بما قضى الله، ومن شقاعة ابن آدم تشرك استخار الله، ومن شقاعة ابن آدم سخطه بما قضى الله»

[Narrated by Jabir and Sa’d ’Abi Waqqāṣ the Prophet said: “for the happiness of the son of Adam seeking guidance from Allah and for the happiness of the son of Adam being happy with what Allah has decided, and for the misery of the son of Adam abandoning guidance from Allah and for the misery of the son of Adam being unhappy with what Allah has decided.” See al-Suyūṭī, al-Jāmi’ al-Kabīr, number 8252.]
the ideological levels. Moroccan critic Ḥamīd Laḥmīdānī aptly captures this correlation when he underscores that:

إن رواية "زمن بين الولادة والحلم"، وهي تعبر أيضا عن معاناة الجيل الجديد و عن أزمة البورجوازية الصغيرة المولعة بالتجريب، والباحثة عن قيم بديلة في عالم مهترئ، تتخلص بدورها من التقنيات القديمة، وترتاد عالما روائيا بديلا أيضا يخلق مقاييسه التي تتلاءم مع التعبير عن المضمات المتولدة في الظروف الجديدة.

[The novel “Zaman bayna al-Wilādah wa al-Hulm”—as it also expresses the suffering of the new generation and the crisis of a small bourgeoisie enamored with experimentation and in search for alternative values in a worn-out world—discards the old techniques, and explores an alternative novelistic world which creates its criteria that fit the expression of contents generated in new circumstances. (418; emphasis added)]

Indeed, the poetics of dissent at work in ZBWWH has two aspects that are intricately interrelated and complement each other: form and content. These aspects intersect with regard to al-Madīnī’s ultimate goal of shattering authority, be it textual (literary) or extra-textual (political and socio-cultural). Laḥmīdānī strikes a direct link between the novel’s formal experimentation and its articulation of “the suffering of the new generation,” thirsty for change and “alternative values.” The next section investigates in some detail the novel’s ideological dimension and digs into the book’s content with an eye on excavating al-Madīnī’s message or lack thereof.
• **ZBWWḤ: A Condemnation of Arab-Islamic Heritage?**

This passage is such a strong renunciation and denunciation of the narrator’s nameless grandfather, the patriarchal figure par excellence symbolizing the archaic, centuries-old Arab-Moslem heritage that still maintains a tight grip on twentieth-century Moroccan culture and way of life. The novel’s countercultural overtones showcase al-Madīnī’s rebellious spirit, one that lashes out at the conservative, reactionary aspects of Moroccan society and by extension Arab-Moslem societies. Laḥmīdānī points out that every single chapter in *ZBWWḤ* is a “passionate speaking journey” that depicts the pain of the narrator’s self and other selves caught in a similar condition before stressing that the novel lays out a “condemnation of the [Arab] past and present” (409). Laḥmīdānī adds that the figures of the father and the grandfather—the Arab-Moslem patriarchs—are indeed allegories for all the negative sides of Arab history (416). In a similar vein, Aḥmad Laḥlū underscores that al-Madīnī’s novel articulates a complete “rejection of *al-turāth* [Arab-Islamic heritage],” and that the author “depicts contemporary Arab reality” as being in utter ruin and that “Arab land is one of death replete only with backwardness and
sterility, for there is nothing except falling” (73; emphasis added). The above passage from the novel demonstrates this vision in violent language and gruesome imagery. It is good to keep in mind that al-Madīnī’s lexical repertoire is meant to shock and unsettle the reader and rob him/her of any sense of assurance. Here comes the readerly alienation discussed at the start of the chapter. The metaphor of blood flowing and covering the dust and the corpses speaks volumes with regard to the novel’s ideological dimension. The quote can be deconstructed as comprising two sets of clashing constituents; we have the narrator’s camp (the present moment; the flowing blood; the forthcoming moment) facing the grandfather’s (the lost time, useless delirium, nonsense, corpses). These opposites boil down to a basic dialectic of life (the first camp) and death (the second camp). The flowing blood is shown to be full of life and thus takes on a positive attribute; its unstoppable energy is such that it overwhells and floods the symbols of tyranny and oppression (the patriarchs and their tyrannical time) already being rendered as corpses. The flowing blood image could also be construed as an act of revenge on the part of the narrator, who appears to not be satisfied with his foes (his grandfather and his tyrannical time) being corpses buried in the dust, but seeks to have his robust blood stream totally shatter them.

At times, however, the line separating life and death or victory and defeat with regard to these two clashing camps is blurred or made unclear, and due to the novel’s features of ambiguity, fragmentation, and disruption there is a lot of overlap between opposite states, either imaginary or actual. The following passage illustrates this kind of mixing, and the reader is left uncertain of whether the narrator is relating actual events or is merely hallucinating and giving free reign to his imagination:

هل تسمعني أنت يا قاتلي ... يا مصاص دمي ... هل تسمعني، اللحظة لي و الأمس في ذاكرة
النسيان، الغذ لي لابنائي للوهج في حنجرتي و دماغي ... وأنت ماذا تملك غير نشوتك

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[Do you hear me, o my killer [...] o sucker of my blood [...], do you hear me? The moment is for me and yesterday is in the memory of oblivion, tomorrow is for me, for my kids, for the children, for the flame in my throat and brain [...] And you, what do you own other than your sick pleasure. [...] What do you own other than a slumbering island of sick dreams in which you can bury your head, your sorrow, your smashed glories [...] Bring the guillotine [...] And let the violence shout everywhere. (7-8)]

This passage contains a number of contradictions if we are to judge it using logical reasoning. The narrator, who is doing the act of speaking or rather shouting, appears to be killed, yet he is addressing, in an assertive voice, his killer and the sucker of his blood (presumably his grandfather.) (The image of the grandfather sucking the narrator’s blood stands in sharp contrast to the earlier image of his corpse being shattered by this very same blood.) This contradiction of a speaking subject who is also dead could be alleviated by interpreting the scene as taking place in the “underworld of the dead.” This explanation soon loses sway when we learn that the narrator is taking concrete steps to bring his tormentor to the guillotine for execution and looking forward to the following day when he and the children are triumphant. By asserting his presence in this new forthcoming phase (the following day), the narrator seems to transcend or oscillate the worlds of the dead and the living. From this angle, he appears to partake, albeit figuratively, in the realm of deities and gods. His god-like posture is corroborated by him assuming the role of a maintainer of justice as he revels in the execution of his killer, establishing an eye-for-eye type of punitive system, reminiscent of the Islamic law of al-qīṣāṣ, which dictates capital punishment.
for the intentional act of killing a human-being.\textsuperscript{100} Through this interpretive lens, al-Madīnī could be seen as replicating the same system of authority/authoritarianism he is critiquing. By executing his own killer, regardless of whether this plays out literally or figuratively, the narrator is emerging as another killer, reproducing thus the same machine of death he is otherwise rejecting. Only this time the degree of violence is magnified and its impact “shout[s] everywhere.”

Having said that, the passage remains ambiguous and confusing, and one cannot ascertain which one of the two camps is harnessing victory. This epistemological instability and uncertainty goes hand in hand with the novel’s aesthetic dimension as Laḥmīdānī has remarked above. The novel seeks to establish new aesthetic criteria commensurate with a new content. According to Laḥmīdānī, there is greater temporal instability in \textit{ZBWWH}, for the moment of the past appears to be that of the present and “during the two moments the \textit{dream} seems to express the aspiration for the \textit{future}” (419; emphasis added). Al-Madīnī has explicitly mentioned in his critical work the importance of “the experimental space of the dream” accompanied by “aesthetic play” (\textit{Ru’yat}, 158). The dream trope is of utmost importance to the formal and conceptual dimensions of the novel. Given that it transcends being fixed on a temporal, spatial plane, the dream becomes a tool that gives the incidents related in the novel epistemological instability and at the same time enhances the disruptive, fragmented, ambiguous characteristics of the novelistic discourse. In fact, the quote above could also be construed as a moment of dreaming. One could argue that a significant portion of the novel—if not the novel as a whole—is a dreaming moment experienced by the narrator. This proposition could be supported by the fact that the text of \textit{ZBWWH} in its entirety is a monologue uttered by one individual, the narrator. The title of the

\textsuperscript{100} The Qur’an, \textit{Sūrah al-Baqarah} (2:179)
novel (Time between Birth and Dream) seems to hint at the reasonability of this interpretation. The concept of “the dream” does surface in various places in the novel. In chapter one, the narrator, presumably addressing the reader, says:

بعلاوا أحكي لكم عنني عنه عن الآخرين المهزومين العائمين التائهين بين الحلم و اليقظة بين الشك و اليقين
بين ان تكون انت او الا تكون [ .. ]

[Come [and] let me narrate to you about me, about him, about the others, defeated, floating, lost between dream and wakefulness, between doubt and certainty, between being you or not being [ .. ]. (5; emphasis added)]

The dream-wakefulness binary corroborates the other two binaries, doubt-certainty and being-non being. The narrator, together with the others who are being crushed and oppressed, is lost between these two opposite spheres or states. The epistemological instability embedded in the second binary (doubt-certainty) moves one step further and turns into ontological instability (being-non-being). Thus, uncertainty becomes the only certainty one can excavate from the novel’s mixing of a variety of discursive spheres: literal, figurative, allegorical, imaginary, dream-like, etc. There appears to be a strong bond between the novel’s conceptual uncertainty and its formal instability. Both form and content are compromised, and there lies the gist of al-Madînî’s vision for an experimental literature informed by a poetics of dissent.

The ontological binary of being and non-being takes an interesting twist at the end of chapter one. The dialectic of life and death seems to no longer be figurative and takes on a literal sense. We now learn that the grandfather is indeed dead and his funeral is underway; his corpse is being carried away by men in the form of “powder” (rufât) (23). We also learn that “the clergy” (fuqahā’) and “the powder of men” (rufât al-rijāl) have all arrived in the cemetery,
leaving children only in the city (23). Another significant binary surfaces here: the cemetery-the city. The spatial aspect of this binary serves to complement the dialectical picture of life and death or being and non-being al-Madīnī is trying to paint. The cemetery, a place of death par excellence, becomes the abode for the “corrupted” and “oppressive” adult males, whereas the city turns into a utopic space for the innocent children who will bring about change and a better life. As the narrator is tightly closing the city doors, the distance between the city and the cemetery is steadily increasing (23). The chapter ends on this note of victory for the narrator and his camp:

[When men’s powder returned from the cemetery, it found all doors locked. They weren’t able to dig holes as the fingers and nails had fallen. They shouted, asked for help, got scared, went back finally, finally went back to where they came from.

I don’t demand anything after this

I only demand that we be

Yes that we be (23)]
The last two lines in this citation (“I only demand that we be /Yes that we be”), however, remain ambiguous, which is hardly surprising. After laying out the seemingly complete defeat of the camp of the adults, who retreated to the cemetery, the sphere of death, in humiliation, since they have already lost their bodily composition and turned into powder, the narrator still demands that he and the children be granted being (“I only demand that we be”), an utterance that could be interpreted in two different ways: a- either the narrator is making a celebratory post-victory statement to himself, an utterance that merely repeats, for the sake of repetition, his initial demand of being given the right to be and to live or b- the narrator has not yet been granted his demand and is addressing his foes, an interpretation that is supported by the use of the subjunctive “that we be,” which conveys a state that has not yet been fulfilled. With the knowledge that plot and events are secondary in al-Madīnī’s literary economy, achieving certainty on what actually happened or is happening in the novel remains ever illusive, and we would have to concede that uncertainty and instability would continue to dominate the novelistic world of ZBWWH. The novel intentionally evades closure, and the narrator’s battle for being remains unresolved.

That the novel is an existential journey for the narrator (al-Madīnī’s spokesperson) and other victims of oppression is indeed a valid proposition. As we proceed to chapter two, we see the narrator reverting back to his initial ramblings and accusations, only this time his targets are both his grandfather and his father. His struggle for life and liberation starts all over again, and the reader gets the sense that the narrator and his camp are thrown back to a state of defeat, which points to the cyclical nature of the ordeal of the oppressed. Yet, knowing that the novel manifests, time and again, utter disregard for temporal linearity and spatial coherence, it is no surprise that chapter two does not build up on chapter one. In this regard, Laḥmīdānī notes that
“is not a novel of events, but rather an intellectual journey” filled with the voice of “protest” (*al- ihtijāj*) (412). The novel shows greater preoccupation with subjects seen as victims of oppression and suppression, both cultural and political. Following Laḥmīdānī, there is a dialectical relationship between the oppressed and the oppressor throughout (414), and that the various pronouns that surface in the text subdivide between “pronouns of suffering” (*ḍāmāʾir al-muʿānāt*) and “pronouns of oppression” (*ḍāmāʾir al-qahr*) (417). While I agree that the novel could be read as “an intellectual journey,” I tend to see it more as an *existential* battle. The narrator is less preoccupied with knowing and stimulating his intellect than he is with sheer being, existing, living, surviving, etc. Interestingly, chapter three is titled “A Barefoot Cogito” (“*kūjītu ḥāfī al-qadamayn*”) (49) and chapter four “Voices in the Suffocating Air” (“ʾāśwāṭ fī al-hawāʾ al-khāniq”) (85), titles that seem to accentuate the existential nature of the narrator’s struggles. In chapter three, the narrator wonders: “The calamity is that you are a barefoot cogito” (77). This is an interesting metaphor and, in a way, combines the existential and intellectual dimensions of the narrator’s crusade. Being barefoot connotes a number of negative properties, including lack, flaw, deformity, dissatisfaction, unfulfillment, and so forth. The “barefoot cogito” metaphor seems to have a correlate elsewhere, in chapter five:

* لقد تاجروا في جثتي بالتقسيط، عضوا فعضوا، [... ] اني منارات محروقة اضواها مزروعة في كل الموانئ التي طورد فيها الضوء، أود لو أكون، لو كنت، هل أكون? ![They have traded in my body piecemeal, member after member [. . .] I am the burned lighthouses whose lights are sown in all the seaports where light was expelled. *I’d want that I am, that I was, will I be?* (99; emphasis added)]*
The italicized part of the quote clearly shows the existential concerns of the narrator, and sheds some light on the “barefoot cogito” image he has drawn earlier. Like the novel itself, the narrator’s existential battle demonstrates a disregard for temporal linearity, given that the quest for being and for life seamlessly oscillates the three temporal planes of the present, the past, and the future. The focus in the quote and in the novel as a whole appears to be on relaying certain ideas rather than on the novelistic circumstances surrounding such ideas. In other words, the novel’s abandonment of descriptive language serves to enforce its ideational and ideological significance or message, but at the same time uncovers its predilection for (excessive) abstraction, reminiscent of lyric. By deliberately not providing descriptions and characters’ names, al-Madīnī shows an inclination to create character types and courts a language of urgency and immediacy that brings to mind the manifesto genre.
Chapter Four: Berrada’s *The Game of Forgetting*: Experimental Multiplicity, Ludic Memory, and Sexual Politics

The novel as a whole is a phenomenon multiform in style and variform in speech and voice. [. . .]

The novel can be defined as a diversity of social speech types (sometimes even diversity of languages) and a diversity of individual voices, artistically organized.

--Mikhail Bakhtin ¹⁰¹

- Multiplicity and the Experimental Impulse

With the very first page of Mohamed Berrada (Muḥammad Barrādah’s) *Lu’bat al-Nisyān* (1987, *The Game of Forgetting*, 1996) the reader is introduced to the text’s unorthodox narrative design, one that takes the novel’s narrative recourse to multiplicity and fragmentation as strategic choices in order to lay out the author’s literary and extra-literary vision. The novel¹⁰² begins by outlining two smaller sections entitled “First Project of a Beginning” and “Second Project of a Beginning” before adding another section that reads “Then the ‘Beginning’ became thus” (Berrada 16).¹⁰³ The text’s self-reflexivity and meta-fictional language is foregrounded from the


¹⁰² This literary work takes the generic label “*naṣṣ riwāʾi*” (novelistic text) rather than “*riwāyah*” (novel). Commenting on this label, Magda al-Nowaihi writes that “Berrada asserts the unconventionality of *The Game of Forgetting* when he calls it ”narrative text“ (*naṣṣ riwāʾi*) instead of a novel”; she adds that the author’s “refusal to confine the work within the limits of traditional genre [. . .] and instead to give it an ambiguous, indefinable status is an attempt [. . .] to escape the fetters of history into the freedom of new forms.” See Magda al-Nowaihi, “Committed Postmodernity: Muḥammad Barrāda’s *The Game of Forgetting*” in *Tradition, Modernity, and Postmodernity in Arabic Literature*, ed. Kamal Abdel-Malek and Wael Hallaq (Leiden: Brill, 2000), 367-88, 383.

¹⁰³ Mohamed Berrada, *The Game of Forgetting*, translated by Issa J. Boullata (Austin: U of Texas at Austin P, 1996). Unless otherwise indicated, all quotations and page citations are from Boullata’s translation. I have kept Boullata’s rendering of the writer’s name as Mohamed Berrada; in his introduction, Boullata writes that this is how the writer himself “writes his name in the Latin alphabet.” See page 11.
outset. The reader is being made privy here to the writing process of this “novelistic text.”

Having the reader gain access to the inception—and, as we shall see afterwards, the construction and development—of a work of fiction betrays the modernist and postmodernist overtones of *The Game of Forgetting*. According to Moroccan critic Aḥmad al-Yabūrī, one cannot analyze Berrada’s novel without taking into account the intellectual and literary trajectories of its author, who “from the 1960s has stood out regarding his modernizing disposition and his audacious vision towards the position and function of literature” (*Dīnāmiyat*, 56; my translation). The novel’s self-reflexivity and meta-fictional discourse do not preclude its worldly political commitment. In this regard, Egyptian critic Magda al-Nowaihi writes that unlike “western texts where postmodernity and commitment often seem to be mutually exclusive,” Berrada’s work is “a narrative that is postmodern in sensibility and structure, but is also fiercely concerned with the here and now and committed to struggling for its improvement” (388).

As I pointed out in the Introduction, the trend of *al-tajrīb* (experimentation)—in which we can situate Berrada’s novel—is not necessarily antithetical or detrimental to commitment to questions of justice, social equity, and so forth. *The Game of Forgetting* should not be reduced to being a mere exercise in formalistic gymnastics, divorced from its historical and socio-political context. Even as it advocates formal experimentation, Berrada’s text is deeply ingrained in social reality. It is a (post)modernist text that offers the reader a window into pressing socio-cultural questions in postcolonial Morocco. One could argue that the book is, in a way, a commentary on the state of affairs in Morocco both in the pre- and post-independence periods. Berrada has remarked that *The Game of Forgetting*, being his first novel, did offer him the opportunity “to reflect on what we lived—intertwined, overlapping, and clouded” (Introduction, 3). The Moroccan writer makes use of quintessentially experimental techniques, such as multiplicity, fragmentation, and
metanarrative in order to account for lived experience. These techniques serve well Berrada’s vision of literature, one that seeks to unsettle and interrogate the political and socio-cultural structures of Moroccan society. It is worthwhile to mention that Berrada sees (post)modernist literature as having a “tendency to break up the social, political, ideological, and mental structures and their discursive centers of gravity” (qtd. in al-Kharrāṭ 23; my translation). *The Game of Forgetting* is a seminal work in contemporary Moroccan literature, and is arguably a major addition to the (post)modern(ist) Arabic literary canon.

The novel’s compelling experimental quality and efficacious engagement of cultural and socio-political issues have turned it into an appealing read for the public and littérateurs alike. It is a significant contribution to the endeavors of innovation and modernization in Moroccan and Arab literary activity in the latter half of the twentieth century. Moroccan critic al-ʿAmīn al-ʿUmrānī asserts that *The Game of Forgetting* represents “a turning point in the history of the Moroccan novel,” adding that “it was normal that it raised much debate in the critical circles” (211; my translation). Al-ʿUmrānī contends that two factors help explain the “buzz” following the publication of Berrada’s novel: firstly, the status of Berrada himself as a prominent figure known for his “dynamism, audacity, and constructive interaction with modernist theses and theories”; and, secondly, “the unique experimental feature” of his debut novel that incorporates at once the two dimensions of theorization and creative writing (211). Before he turned to writing fiction, Berrada was well-known in Morocco and the larger Arab world as a prominent literary critic. In a way, *The Game of Forgetting*, which signaled his venturing on novelistic writing, came as a surprise to some observers. Yet the text’s highly experimental predilection, coupled with a dominant metafictional discourse, was not completely surprising to critics and
readers familiar with Berrada’s critical work, hence al-Yabūrī’s remark on *The Game of Forgetting* mixing “theorization” with “creative writing.”

The alternative beginnings that the novel offers foreshadow multiplicity and fragmentation, two literary devices that become increasingly prominent as the text moves forward. Interestingly, each one of these beginnings adopts a different narrative voice, with the first making use of the first-person singular narrator (I), the second the second-person plural narrator (we), and the third the third-person, omniscient narrator. This speaks to the influence of Mikhail Bakhtin’s theories of the novel on Berrada’s conception of this art form. The Moroccan author invokes the Bakhtinian influence in these terms:

وبالنسبة لي، أنا لا أنحو الى اعتبار اللغة كلمات وملفوظات تنتمي الى قاموس لغوي شامل يحيل
على دلالات مجرد أو استعمالات موصوفة; وإنما أنطلق من منظور باختين الذي يعتبر الرواية نسقا
لغات، وأسلوبها تجميعا لأساليب.

[For me, I don’t consider language to be words and enunciations belonging to a comprehensive language dictionary denoting abstract meanings or described usages. Rather, I proceed from Bakhtin’s view that takes the novel to be a thread of languages and its style a collection of styles. (*Al-Riwa’iyah: Dhākirah*, 116) (My translation)]

Even beyond its multiple beginnings, *The Game of Forgetting* presents its narrative by relying on numerous narrators, including “the chief narrator”\(^{104}\) (*rāwī al-ruwwāt*) and the implied or real author (*al-mu’allif*), who all partake and, at times, clash in the act of narration. Berrada has stated

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\(^{104}\) Whereas Boullata rendered “*rāwī al-ruwwāt*” as “The Narrators’ Narrator,” I opted for “the chief narrator,” which I think is closer to the original.
elsewhere the importance of incorporating a variety of narrative voices in modern fiction; he states:

يمكن أن نعتبر تعدد الساردين و تعدد الأصوات في الرواية الحديثة، استجابة استتيقية لمقتضيات تنسيب الحقيقة، و ترجمة علاقة الشك والارتياب التي باتت تطبع موقف الإنسان من ذاته، ومن الآخر، ومن العالم.

[We can consider the multiplicity of the narrators and voices in the modern novel to be an aesthetic response to the exigencies of relativizing truth and reflecting the [kind of] doubt and suspicion which now mark the human-being’s relationships with him/herself, with the other, and with the world. (Faḍāʾat Riwā’iyah, 39) (My translation)]

The deployment of a relatively large number of narrators is undoubtedly a conscious aesthetic choice on Berrada’s part. It is a prominent aspect of the novel, being arguably the most defining feature of the text of The Game of Forgetting. As I will discuss below, the proliferation of narrators and voices gives the reader the opportunity to see a variety of accounts and viewpoints. It is a tactic that reacts to the authoritative voice of omniscient narration that marks the traditional or social realist novel. By presenting myriad truth claims, the text unsettles the very notion of “truth.” Interestingly, the novel’s cast of narrators could be seen as falling under two different categories: internal narration (the distinct narrative voices of characters, such as al-Hādī, al-Ṭāyya‘, Si Ṭayyib, Si Ibrāhīm, and a group of women, most of whom are anonymous) and external narration (the voice of “the chief narrator” and that of “the author” (real or implied). Commenting on the novel’s “modes of narration,” Issa Boullata writes that Berrada’s text “has some of the most creative narrative modes in modern Arabic fiction,” adding that:
It is worth analyzing the narrative modes of this novel in order to highlight what may be considered its postmodernist features that lend it a great measure of richness in the fictional representation of reality. They are at once creatively complex and technically challenging. (5)

Taking Bakhtin’s notion of “heteroglossia” one step further through a robust use of metafictional discourse, the Moroccan author exteriorizes the heteroglossia (i.e., the manifold languages, dialects, voices, styles, viewpoints, etc.) unfolding in his novel, corroborating thereby the novel’s vision of giving value to the diversity of viewpoints. The reader is given access to the construction and development of the writing process and the representation or misrepresentation of the various characters and their respective traits, beliefs, perspectives, idiosyncrasies, and so forth. This dynamic is best captured at the level of the external narration, namely in the occasional disputes between “the chief narrator” and “the author.” The former interrupts the latter on a number of occasions throughout the novel. The disagreement between “author” and “chief narrator” reaches its peak in Chapter Six, when the “chief narrator” tells us that his “relationship with the author became so bad that we boycotted each other and ceased to cooperate and coordinate” (126). And later on in the chapter we learn that the chief narrator “threatened to submit [his] resignation” (131). It seems as though there is an additional plot developing within the novel’s metafictional dimension, one that enfolds and impacts the unfolding and interpretation of what is being narrated at the fictional level. That is, the text’s

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105 In discussing the concept of heteroglossia, Bakhtin writes: “When heteroglossia enters the novel it becomes subject to an artistic reworking. The social and historical voices populating language, all its words and all its forms, which provide language with its particular concrete conceptualizations, are organized in the novel into a structured stylistic system that expresses the differentiated socio-ideological position of the author amid the heteroglossia of his epoch.” See Bakhtin, The Dialogic Imagination, 300.
metafictional layer unsettles, as well as keeps in check, the various accounts of the narrators, the chief narrator, and the author.

One could argue that in Berrada’s novel the literary meets the ideological. The novel’s unorthodox narrative design betrays elements of the political. The reader is given the privilege of observing the construction and “constructedness”\(^\text{106}\) of the novel, but not without a cost. Following al-Nowaihi, *The Game of Forgetting* discusses its “constructedness” within itself, and consequently the “reader is never allowed to indulge in the fantasy that s/he is the recipient of [. . .] a report on a fixed world,” and adds that the s/he is pushed to assume “the role of witness, and participant, in the creation and recreation of the text [. . .]” (383). Rather than presenting one authoritative report or account by a single narrative voice, the novel opts for multiple and fragmentary accounts and points of view, a move that questions the legitimacy of unidimensional narration and problematizes the notion of realism in literary writing. This gesture speaks to Berrada’s cultural and/or political anxieties in the context of postcolonial Morocco. Let us, for instance, consider this passage—one of the “chief narrator’s” interventions:

> The writer said many things but I acted decisively in this regard [. . .] and I determined that the distance between what is lived and what is imagined, between what is written and what is told confirms always that events and life generally run on more than one level, intermeshing and interlocking… Understood? Therefore to try and delude the reader and make him believe the reality of our narration will be a lost effort. (57-58)

This citation reads like an excerpt from a critical or theoretical piece, and reminds us of al-ʿUmrāni’s observation above that Berrada’s novel has a unique experimental quality that

\(^{106}\) Al-Nowaihi, “Committed Postmodernity,” 383.
combines both theoretical and creative writing. Al-Yabūrī has also noted the overlap between “the prosaic and the theoretical” in the different chapters of *The Game of Forgetting*, and has pointed out that a number of critics in Morocco saw the novel “as some sort of theorization” (*Dīnāmiyat*, 56). It is fair to say that Berrada took the opportunity of writing his debut novel to experiment with, and put to the test, his views of the genre of the novel that reflects his vision of the role of literature in a “third-world,” postcolonial nation. When reading or studying this novel, one cannot help but think of Berrada the critic and his advocacy of the novel being the site of a multitude of languages, registers, voices, dialects, discourses, styles, and so forth.

Playing out not only among narrators and “author” functions but also between text and reader, the novel’s meta-narrative multiplicity extends to the territory of the self, I argue, rendering it multiple and fragmented rather than unitary and compact. Thus, “subjectivity,” insofar as we will witness the narrative or narrators’ disagreements about dis-remembering, becomes “forgotten.” It might be tempting to propose that “the chief narrator” represents the side of Berrada the critic, given that his interventions are often technical—like the one cited above—and that “the author” (the character in the novel) stands for Berrada the novelist. Following some critics107 who have argued that *The Game of Forgetting* is an autobiographical text, drawing parallels between the character al-Hādī and the individual Mohamed Berrada, one could make the point that Berrada the person takes on a variety of subject positions in the narrative. A potential triangular relationship could emerge, linking the characters of “the chief narrator,” “the author,” and al-Hādī together in one fragmented, three-dimensional subjectivity, to which we might assign the name Mohamed Berrada. What is interesting—and perhaps unique—about this

thesis of a shattered subjectivity is the fact that it traverses the fictional and metafictional layers of the text, with al-Hādī occupying the former and the “the chief narrator” together with “the author” occupying the latter. This thesis gains some credence when we learn that Berrada, in his capacity as critic, has made the following statement:

يرجع تشظي الشكل الروائي إلى اهتزاز الشكل الواقعي الكلاسيكي المعتمد على سرد خطئي، والتزام منظور أحادي [. . .] لكن عوامل معرفية جديدة زحزحت هذا المفهوم للواقع، وفي طليعتها إثبات التحليل النفسي لتجددية الذات والأن، وتعايش الخطاب الملفوظ مع طبقات من الحوار الداخلي (المونولوج) تنازع الكلام المعلن، وتمت تحت الكلام المكبوت واللابد في مناطق النفس السرية...

[The fragmentation of the novelistic form is ascribed to the quivering of the classical realist form, which relies on linear narration and a strict unidimensional outlook [. . .], but new cognitive factors have shaken this conception of reality. At the forefront of these factors comes psychoanalysis and its demonstration of the multiplicity of the I and the self and the cohabitation of the spoken discourse with layers of internal dialogues (monologue), disputing declared speech and drawing on speech that is suppressed and placed in the soul’s secretive territories… (al-Riwāyah al-ʿArabiyyah, 51; emphasis added) (My translation)]

It is noticeable how these remarks are reminiscent of the passage voiced by “the chief narrator” cited above. In both citations, there is a contestation of the “reality” or “realism” of classical narration, one that relies almost exclusively on one authoritative voice. In overlooking the multiple layers of life events and the fragmented nature of the self, traditional narrative techniques produce a highly flawed account. Narrative multiplicity and fragmentation have direct bearing on a key dialectic in the novel: remembering and forgetting. They relativize the truth
claims of the traditional, omniscient narrator and undermine the reliability of narrating. The memory question is rendered fragmentary, and the act of remembering borders on that of misremembering and forgetting. The multiple narrators in *The Game of Forgetting* are all implicated in this game of remembering and forgetting.

Drawing on Theodor Adorno’s study “The Position of the Narrator in the Contemporary Novel,” Berrada underscores that “modern narration has fulfilled ‘internal transparency’ more than” any of the other “artistic forms of expression,” for the “modern narrator” has taken issue with the “traditional narrator’s” claims to absolute knowledge of the details of the world and has undertaken the task to narrate “while putting a distance between himself and his narratives in order to expose what is hidden under the surface and to allow the fragmented, fractured self to doubt the cohesiveness of reality and to present it with its holes, gaps, din, and silence” (51; emphasis added) (My Translation). It is telling that Berrada (the critic) draws on Freudian psychoanalysis to make the case for the multiplicity and/or duality of the self. Al-Nowaihi has underscored that Freud’s theories of “the unconscious” and their shattering of “the unity of the self” have exerted a big impact on Berrada’s writing trajectory (373). In order to articulate its vision of a multidimensional (or fractured) subjectivity, the novel presents a number of characters with contradictory behaviors, attitudes, and traits. This is perhaps the most prominent in chapter two, entitled “Si Tayyib”—which takes the name of al-Hādī’s uncle. The chapter consists of four parts, including sections entitled “Illumination” (*The Game*, 29), “Obscuration” (32), and “The Narrators’ Narrator” (or “Chief Narrator”) (36). The four parts are respectively

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109 In fact, the novel makes a number of references and allusions to Freud and Freudian concepts. For explicit mention of Freud by name, see pages 100, 104, and 135. Also, in chapter three, aptly titled “Our Prehistory,” we read that al-Hādi’s “memory retained many words and poems from [his childhood] period and his heart was full of love for everything that echoed them in his unconscious” (*The Game*, 43; emphasis added).
voiced by “the author” (real or implied), a group of anonymous women, al-Hādī, and the “chief narrator.” This multiplicity of narrative voices serves to provide different accounts and viewpoints with regard to the person and character of Si Tayyib. It helps the reader see him from different angles. Seeing from different angles helps the reader detect any contradictions, gaps, or holes in the personality of Si Tayyib. Also, it corroborates the thesis of a fragmented, fractured self—a key aspect of the novel’s literary vision.

The most interesting section is perhaps the one voiced by the “chief narrator,” in which he comments on the accounts given by “the author” and al-Hādī. He writes:

Those who spoke to you about Si Tayyib knew him for shorter or longer periods. They tried to recall memories as well as scenes and conversations they had in common. They did that with a concern to understand his personality. Perhaps the word “understand” does not denote what is meant here, because, in the final analysis, we do not understand those with whom we live, and especially those we love. (36)

The “chief narrator” finds the author’s, the anonymous female narrators’, and (especially) al-Hādī’s respective portrayals of Si Tayyib to be lacking, on account of the temporal distance between their recollections and Si Tayyib himself; they all “knew” him based on memories of times spent in his company or conversations they had with him. These memories, the chief narrator contends, are tinged with forgetting, and thus remembering verges on mis-remembering. The chief narrator seems to take on the role of exposing the gaps in these narrators’ versions, stressing that they only “knew him through his actions and sayings, and through the image others have formed of him and, perhaps, the one he formed of himself through people” (36). In other words, the reader is given an insufficient depiction of Si Tayyib’s subjectivity through these
narrators’ remembrances or mis-remembrances. In the final section of the chapter, voiced by the “chief narrator,” we are made to understand that the other narrators, including “the author,” missed a significant aspect of Si Tayyib’s character, namely “that relation between Si Tayyib and himself, between himself and his body, between himself and things” (36). As I will discuss below, Si Tayyib’s complicated relationship with “space” is overlooked by the other narrators. The chief narrator wants to provide a different—perhaps unique or comprehensive—account of Si Tayyib, one that explores his subjectivity (or subjectivities) independently of his dealings with other people and the impressions they have formed of him. He wants the narrative gaze to turn inward rather than outward, zooming in on Si Tayyib’s interiority and taking a keen interest in the question of the self. Assuming the role of a “modern narrator” with an eye on achieving “internal transparency,” he seeks to highlight the various and, at times, contradictory subject-positions occupied by Si Tayyib. The chief narrator tells us that he sometimes “embark[s] on ‘an interpretation’ of Si Tayyib, using the physiological, social, and religious dimensions in search of a thread that ties those scenes and places of his life, including contradictions” (36; emphasis added). Although such endeavors on the part of the chief narrator seem thorough, they fail to produce a coherent, non-contradictory account of Si Tayyib’s person.

Highlighting the element of contradiction is consonant with a representation of “reality” with “its holes, gaps, din, and silence.” This rhetorical move could have a subversive aspect, given its predilection towards contesting and destabilizing the coherence of lived experience. It is in line with Berrada’s vision for modernist literature as it attempts “to break up the social, political, ideological, and mental structures and their discursive centers of gravity” in Morocco post-independence. The trope of contradiction aids the narrative achieve its “internal transparency,” which speaks to Berrada’s critique of the lack of transparency in the socio-
political milieu. It is worth dwelling on the representation of Si Tayyib in the novel with regard to this thematic of contradiction. One element that seems to shed some light on Si Tayyib’s contradictory self is his relationship with place. He is one person in his native old Fez, but quite another in Rabat or Casablanca; “outside Fez he seemed to be ‘shrunken,’” and he would “lose a lot of his presence, even a lot of his impudence,” but inside “Fez [he] used to help things be” (37). Taking full advantage of his privileged position as “chief narrator,” he takes liberty to quote passages from sections previously narrated by al-Hādī in order to expose any gaps, silences, omissions, contradictions pertaining to Si Tayyib’s personality, which he felt were brushed aside by both al-Hādī and the author. The section includes segments such as:

I would like to mention here—is that not my right as [chief narrator]?—what the writer recorded in his draft about Si Tayyib and in Hadi’s words: [. . .] (37)

After several pages in which Hadi spoke of his visits to Si Tayyib in the last few years before his death comes the following paragraph: [. . .]” (37)

Ultimately, the “chief narrator” sees his contribution to the narrative to be one of uncovering this “game of forgetting” assumed by al-Hādī and the author, whom he views as complicit in playing a game that keeps the reader in the dark with regard to certain crucial details. Following the “chief narrator,” forgetting is nothing but a pretense or pretext, which al-Hādī and the author resort to in order to avoid divulging a number of secrets they wish to remain suppressed and hence inaccessible to the reader. He therefore takes upon himself this task of exposing the game of forgetting and exerting pressure on al-Hādī and the author to confess their remembrances in full to the reader. In a rhetorical move that traverses the fictional and metafictional layers of the novel, the “chief narrator” declares: “Between Hadi and the writer, there are many more things, I
feel, which I could narrate once more, which I could arrange as spoken by the other narrators, with the purpose of *lengthening* the session of *remembering* what I think still remains deep in the hearts of these two men” (37; emphasis added). Such a role is consonant with the views of Berrada (the critic), especially his valuation of literary writing that “allow[s] the fragmented, fractured self” to assume a prominent position in the text, thereby giving the reader the opportunity to observe “reality [. . .] with its holes, gaps, din, and silence”—as pointed out above. Stretching that “session of remembering” a bit longer serves well this purpose, and is an act that counters the suspect maneuver of forgetting. Equally important vis-à-vis the frame of “commitment” is the “chief narrator’s” endeavors to bring to prominence the idea of “accountability.” By putting the accounts of al-Hādī and “the author” under scrutiny, the “chief narrator” holds these two narrators accountable, corroborating thereby the novel’s vision of narrative transparency at the textual level and its commitment to socio-political transparency at the extra-textual level.

Si Tayyib’s contradictory personality at the textual level character is further augmented when we learn a few details about “his love adventures” and “his passion for life” from the account given by the anonymous female narrators, who themselves have had sexual fantasies of him (31) and embody another kind of multiplicity. According to their account, Si Tayyib “enjoyed all the pleasures of wine, *malhoun* evening concerts, and Andalusian music” (31). Also, he would allow himself sexual pleasures, “away from his slender, blond wife,” and he was obsessed with the adventurous “Jewish woman who had plump hips, a bronze complexion, and hazel eyes” (31). The reader is not made privy to this interesting aspect of Si Tayyib’s life in the accounts given by the other narrators, including al-Hādī and even the chief narrator. Si Tayyib’s illicit habits—wine drinking and sexual affairs with the Jewish woman and possibly other
women—contrasts in a most pronounced way with his regular attendance of “mosque prayers and circles of mystics and eulogists” (31) given that Islamic jurisprudence prohibits alcohol consumption and sexual relations outside marriage. Si Tayyib’s split, discontinuous subjectivity seems to reconcile within its fold religiosity and the illicit pleasures of the flesh. This has ideological undertones; it could be construed as an indirect critique—or satire—of religious discourse and religiosity in Moroccan society.

Indeed, Si Tayyib’s contradictory traits are not random occurrences in the text; they rather serve the overall vision of the novel in laying out the self’s multiplicity, duality, fragmentation, incoherence, illogicality, and so forth. This has a point of reference—or perhaps an analogue—in the political and socio-cultural landscape. To corroborate its vision of a conflicted self, the novel includes other characters that manifest contradictory behaviors, pushing for the thesis that contradictions in the socio-political paradigm are more widespread and common. One good example in the novel is al-Hādī’s brother-in-law Si Ibrāhīm, who takes on, albeit briefly, the role of narrator and gets to narrate one section in chapter four entitled “Si Ibrahim Speaks” (60-66), in which he recounts his life story using first-person point of view. His narrative is peppered with religious references, and we get the sense that he is serious with observing his Islamic faith despite the fact that he works in a bar and delightfully serves alcohol to his French customers at “Henri’s bar” (62). When this biographical section concludes, al-Hādī takes up the narrator role in the section “Obscuration,” (66) which serves as a commentary of sorts on Si Ibrahim’s narrative. Through al-Hadi’s account, we get to know more details about Si Ibrahim’s religiosity, since at one point they all lived under the same roof. Al-Hādī relates that Si Ibrahim would do his daily “prayers and invocations” and then sit “on a soft sheepskin with the rosary in his hand”; also, he would, upon his return from work at Henri’s bar, wear “a robe and
slippers, [repeat] the name of God, and [recite] the Qur’an aloud” (68). And this is how Si Ibrahim came to be known to the neighbors as “a model of good sense, reason, piety, diligence, and continuous work” (68). This is of course the image Si Ibrahim projects to his household as well as to the public. It is perhaps the same image al-Hādī formed of him when he was a child living in his [Si Ibrahim’s] place, but now after so many years have passed al-Hādī, the mature adult, “cannot fathom the secret of the [projected] unity of [Si Ibrahim’s] life journey, for he continuously lived in diverse and contradictory situations” (69; emphasis added). In fact, Si Ibrahim’s ability to reconcile for decades two diametrically opposed life styles—one at Henri’s bar serving the French and adjusting to their liberal, transgressive way of “life during work hours” and another that is strict and upright “within the home”—has always baffled al-Hādī (68).

Si Ibrahim’s contradictory personality and his capacity to occupy a multiplicity of distinct subject-positions are further enhanced by one additional detail made accessible to the reader in al-Hādī’s account. Si Ibrahim had a secret habit which he finally came to confess to al-Hādī thirty years after the time when they lived in the same household in Rabat; he admits that “[f]rom time to time, [he] used to go to the cinema without telling [his wife] Lalla Najiyya” (70). This detail divulged in the section voiced by al-Hādī and is curiously entitled “Obscuration” helps the reader see Si Ibrahim in a different light. It unsettles the image of religiosity, uprightness, and seriousness he projects inside, in his private home, and outside for the neighbors in the public space. It is quite interesting that the novel—through the various accounts given—seems to avoid making any definitive conclusions with regard to Si Ibrahim’s personality. The text throws a few details here and there and, most importantly, gives the reader both the liberty and the responsibility of forming those conclusions—or abstaining from doing so. The reader also gets an account of Aziz, one of Si Ibrahim’s eleven children, one that includes an interesting detail. In
lieu of “falling in love” and having a stable relationship with one girl, Aziz “preferred to have temporary relations [involving many girls] with well-studied consequences”; interestingly he seems able to reconcile his ‘playfulness’ with “his regular performance of prayers” (114). Here again the dichotomy of illicit sexuality and religiosity comes in the picture, and it is safe to conclude that this binary is no mere coincidence but is rather a conscious rhetorical choice that enhances the novel’s vision of the self being a site receptive of, or marked by, fragmentation, duplicity, and/or multiplicity. This dichotomy could also be construed as an allegory for social hypocrisy, reminding us of the ideological bend of Berrada’s (post)modernist fiction. Moreover, this shows one more time the impact of Freud and the school of psychoanalysis on Berrada, in his double role as novelist-critic. Indeed, Freudian theories of sexuality assume a prominent position in the novel; the next section investigates this topic by shedding light on the protagonist al-Hadi’s sexual encounters, adventures, fantasies, fears, reminiscences, and so forth.

- **Sexuality and the Game of Forgetting and Remembering**

 ولأننا تعودنا على النسيان، فإننا لا ننتبه كثيرا إلى تغير الأشياء من حولنا و إلى تغير علاقاتنا وزواجنا. ولكن، يكفي أن تنبثق بعض اللحظات من منطقة النسيان فينا، لتبدأ دينامية التذكر وليبدأ الخيال في نسج ماهو كامن في اللاشعور وفي الذاكرة الغائبة. هكذا انتقلت في كتابة "لعبة النسيان" وكأنني أمارس لعبة، لكنها لعبة قادمتني إلى أجواء و مناطق تختلف فيها الابتسامة بالألم والسخرية بالمرارة.

[Because we are used to forgetting, we do not give much attention to the change in things around us, in our relationships, and in ourselves. But once some moments spring out of the territory of forgetfulness inside us, the dynamic of remembering takes shape and the]
imagination starts to weave together what is hidden in the unconscious and the slumbering memory. This is how I proceeded in writing *The Game of Forgetting* as if I were playing a game, but it is a game that led me to atmospheres and regions where smile is mixed with pain and irony with bitterness.\(^{110}\)

This excerpt from the author’s introduction to his novel outlines some of the major parameters of *The Game of Forgetting*. It could provide some guidance to the reader as he or she navigates the book’s various chapters and sections. In addition to the key binary of forgetting-remembering that casts a large shadow on the novel as a whole, there are other key words one could glean from the quote above; these include “our selves,” “hidden,” “the unconscious,” “slumbering memory,” “game,” and others. Although it does not make an appearance in the passage cited above, the question of sexuality can be traced to each one of these critical terms in addition to the dialectical binary of forgetting and remembering. I want to argue that sexuality is at the heart of the game of forgetting and remembering, and is a major motif behind the novel’s deployment of narrative multiplicity—both at the technical level (i.e., the inclusion of a variety of narrators, including the “chief narrator”) and at the level of the self or the psyche. As underscored above, “the chief narrator” professes to take on the task of exposing “the game of forgetting” as played out by “the author” and al-Hādī, since he is in possession of a number of secrets which the author has exclusively shared with him; chapter four, “The World Grows in Our Eyes,” opens with this interesting monologue issuing from the “chief narrator”:

I am supposed to be an element of balance on whom the writer can depend to dissipate any obscurity. But I cannot claim that I find any clarity on the part of the one who has sought my help and given me command over his narrators. [. . .] I am supposed to know more than all the other narrators do, and [. . .] I have knowledge of the backgrounds and of some of the details that the writer has confided to me, knowledge which I can use to undermine what the others have narrated.

Who knows? Perhaps by divulging his secrets to me, the writer is only using me in a bigger game with the purpose of falsifying or embellishing what is already distorted. (*The Game*, 56; emphasis in the text)

The “chief narrator’s” remarks in the above citation, while highlighting the privileges he enjoys within the diegesis, bring to light his skepticism towards his supposedly advantageous position in the task of narration. At one time, the “chief narrator” rejoices in his superior knowledge in comparison to the other narrators, but at another time he becomes a skeptic and muses on himself being used by the author in “a bigger game” beyond his grasp, a game that ultimately doubles the extent of distortion in the narrative. The chief narrator indirectly alerts the reader to the allegedly flawed nature of the text in its entirety, and that he or she should not take things at their face value, since—if we are to take the chief narrator at his word—all the accounts narrated are falsified, embellished or distorted, including his very own. This rhetorical move seems to shatter the truth claims of the various narratives in the novel, and to leave the reader in doubt. Thus, uncertainty and instability reign supreme. This reminds us of what Berrada, the critic, said earlier in relation to the necessity of the “modern novel” incorporating a number of narrators and voices in order to demonstrate, in an aesthetic fashion, that truth is relative and that “doubt and suspicion” are constitutive elements in the way people perceive themselves, others, and the
world at large. The only certainty in the text turns out to be this very component of uncertainty. Interestingly, doubt is a quality that the protagonist al-Hādī holds dear. In a heated conversation with his brother al-Ṭā‘ya‘—who has now turned to religion after a disappointing twenty-year career with a political party—al-Hādī criticizes him for having had complete faith and trust in the party and not having entertained any doubts in those he worked with (87-88). Al-Hādī thinks his brother is replicating the same mistake when he turned to religion, for he is merely switching his loyalties from the party to God. In frustration, al-Hādī says: “If, during twenty years, you doubted nothing, why can’t you bear now to face the shaky edifice and rush to [. . .] [religious] certainties [. . .] you thought to be unassailable by doubt?” (88; emphasis added). Doubt emerges as an important motif both on the fictional and metafictional levels of the novel. It is in line with the text’s reliance on multiplicity, duplicity, and fragmentation—features that shatter any authoritative claims to truth and certainty.

Interestingly, it is the chief narrator’s skepticism of the author that leads him to uncover some of al-Hādī’s “embarrassing” sexual experiences, which al-Hādī, the author, and the other narrators would rather remain locked in the sphere of forgetfulness and not spring to that of remembrance. The chief narrator seeks to expose this game of forgetting and remembering played by the novel’s narrators, who are seen as complicit in censoring the discussion of certain, and not any, aspects of al-Hādī’s sexual life. The chief narrators tells us that he takes pride in his role as “the troublemaker, the rebel, who does not abide by the instructions of the writer,” adding that his “rank” gives him the right “to correct what the others narrate [. . .] even if I have to divulge secrets or misrepresent the image that the writer wants to pain of his characters and universe” (56). To execute his rebellion against the writer, he proceeds to provide the reader with some of these secrets; he declares:
For example, all the narrators have said nothing about certain details concerning Hadi’s childhood. These are details related to sexual inducements attempted by some boys and young men. For Hadi was handsome [. . .]. He was a “chick,” according to the popular expression common in his neighborhood at that time. The grocer next to the big house [. . .] used to treat him pleasantly and invite him to play ball on the roof of his house. Attempts at seduction would start there, but they never succeeded in winning Hadi over, because his company with the girls at the house and with his female relatives had determined his sexual inclinations earlier on. (56-57; emphasis added)

In exposing these uncomfortable (homo)sexual details unanimously suppressed by the other narrators, the chief narrator uncovers one significant dimension of the game of forgetting, and thereby adds some balance and a certain degree of transparency to the novel. Although he does not elaborate on these “sexual inducements,” we get a sense that they were not out of the ordinary and were regular occurrences in al-Hādī’s neighborhood involving boys as well as young men amongst each other. The chief narrator divulges one specific detail about how al-Hādī, as a child, was occasionally seduced by the grocer while on the top roof of his house. If we, as readers, are to trust his account, al-Hādī never succumbed to the grocer’s seductions because of his early heterosexual orientation. However, we are not certain as to whether or not al-Hādī had any other sexual adventures with other males given that his handsome look earned him the reputation or stigma of “chick” in the neighborhood, which would suggest that these seductions might have been frequent. It is likely that the chief narrator is only carrying out his staged rebellion to a certain degree, not daring to cross certain red lines. From this angle, the chief narrator is not completely transparent in his narration, and in a way partakes in the same game of forgetting he is otherwise exposing and critiquing. His shying away from giving away
more specific details and limiting his report to general allusions could paint him as complicit with the other narrators. Yet, we should acknowledge that, in the context of a postcolonial Morocco under the tight grip of the dictatorial regime of King Hassan 2nd, writers—including novelists—only had a limited space to carry out their “rebellion.” Writers had to resort to certain tactics in order to outmaneuver the regime’s censorship of the triangle of sexuality, religion, and politics. As I mentioned in Chapter Two of this dissertation project, an important aspect of the experimental novel, following Berrada (the critic), is its attempts to penetrate or explore the prohibited trinity of sex, religion, and politics, a move that seeks to defy inherited traditional dictates, which the state strives to keep intact in order to maintain its control and power (al-Riwa'yah, 57). *The Game of Forgetting*’s treatment of sexuality—as well as of religion and religious hypocrisy—should be situated within this political and socio-cultural context. The chief narrator’s taking on the role of the rebel unmasking sexual secrets within the text are curbed by the vigilant eye of the regime and society. The novel’s attempts via the chief narrator to tackle—albeit in a measured fashion—taboo topics, such as sexuality and homosexuality, demonstrate its commitment to the question of free speech.

Let us consider another rebellious move in the novel regarding the uncovering of sexual secrets; the chief narrator assumes the “rebel” cloak and declares: “I can also dig up an event that happened in a hotel in Fez on the second night after Si Tayyib’s death when Hadi, deeply engulfed in sadness and painful sorrow, was with a girl friend from Tangier he had just met by chance” (57). This is quite an interesting detail that would embarrass Hadi and possibly the other narrators, and that is why it was omitted from their accounts. This incident appears scandalous and taints Hadi’s reputation, since spending the night in a hotel room with a girl and reveling in the pleasures of the body on the “second night” of his uncle’s death, is distasteful and
disrespectful to the late Si Tayyib—especially when knowing that Si Tayyib had loved him excessively and brought him to live in his home for a period of time. On his part, Hadi also loved his uncle endlessly. The adult, mature Hadi reflects nostalgically on his departing uncle: “It has been thirty years since I left you and the big house, provided with endless self-confidence, courage, and love of adventure. Never have you suppressed the desires of my childhood, even if they were foolish. With that great love of yours, I felt I was able to do anything” (34). This shows how strongly Hadi’s love and admiration for his uncle was and still is even after the passage of three decades. Leaving the funeral home and the crowd of mourners and choosing to have a night of love making with a girl in a hotel room appears utterly unacceptable, at least to the Moroccan sensibility. The chief narrator here deserves some credit for including this significant detail that sheds more light on the character of Hadi. Although he does not elaborate on this sexual incident between Hadi and the girl from Tangier, the chief narrator alerts us to the fact that Hadi, just like his dead uncle, also has the capacity to occupy different subject-positions. That Hadi manages to indulge in sexual pleasures while feeling extreme grief, sadness, and pain highlights the duality of his self and the tension residing therein.\footnote{A Freudian reading would suggest that a libidinal reaction is common and normal in moments of intense grief. In this regard, Carolyn Ambler Walter and Judith McCoyd write:}

Freud allowed for the possibility of psychotic (turning away from reality) thoughts, feelings, and behaviors as an understandable (and normal) reaction to loss. \[\ldots\] In many ways, his was a task-based theory predicated on the idea that the mourner must de-cathect from the lost entity. Freud’s theory of behavior states that the psyche “cathects” people and loved entities with libidinal energy that must be withdrawn for a mourner to heal after loss. He believed people experiencing melancholia \[\ldots\] had not successfully withdrawn the libidinal energy (cathexis) and needed help to do this. In Freud’s understanding, the next task was to transfer cathexis to a new love object.

subjectivity. I would like to dwell more on the sexuality thread as it plays out in Hadi’s life journey. The question of the sexual does feature prominently in Hadi’s attempts to capture the essence of his existence. His attraction to the female body, ever since he was a child, is at the very core of his recollections, which speaks to the novel’s Freudian dimension. In one of his sessions of remembering, Hadi says:

I remember childhood and immediately remember youth. I recall adolescence and instantly recall sucking mother’s nipple and [the nipple] of the sweetheart. Even when I was far away from you—Are you now really far away?—I took for granted that you were a part of me which would never disappear until I did.

It is very telling that when Hadi reflects on his adolescent years his memory immediately goes to that territory of the psyche that is intricately attracted to the female body, regardless of its identity, be it the body of the mother or that of the sweetheart. Hadi—or at least his unconscious—does not put a distance between these two bodies. He is sexually attracted to both women and fondly recalls sucking their respective nipples. The fact that he makes a direct link between his adolescence and his experiences of sucking the nipple of his mother and that of his sweetheart emphasizes the sexual dimension of his remembrances of the two female bodies. Hadi has a strong connection to his mother, and there are various places in the novel when he ties his remembrances of her with his sexual life. Addressing his late mother, he says: “A vast endless space wraps us both and your face, wherever it looms, gives me exaltation (al-zahw) and awakens hidden forces (al-kawāmin) within me. And so I desire (fa ‘ashtahī) the whole world, all at once, and my latent passion (al-ragbah) gushes forth, and I say I now begin to live” (22; emphasis added). Although Boullata gives a fine translation of this passage, I feel that his rendition, especially of the italicized words in the quote, downplays the forceful sexual imagery
created in the Arabic original. The Arabic words in brackets, which appear in the source text, have strong sexual connotations in the context of this quote. And in the last chapter, aptly entitled “Who of You Remembers My Mother?” Hadi tries to chase a “mental image” of his mother: “I close my eyes trying to capture it: a nebulous memory in the midst of which is the image of a woman of fragile beauty, with delicate facial features and body curves, appearing like a specter of light [. . .]” (134; emphasis added). The specter of his mother, which seems to haunt him, is once again tied to his sexual being; the quote continues thus: “Yet she is more corporeal a woman than all the women I have known, a woman who digs up one’s dormant lusty desire [. . .]. With closed eyes, I embrace the image of the specter for a few moments, then I briskly jump out of bed and rush to the bathroom” (134; emphasis added). The motherly specter awakens his dormant sexual appetite; also, his remembrance of the physical body of the mother is put in juxtaposition with other female bodies he has known—in all likelihood through the various sexual adventures he has had. The quote ends on an ambiguous note; his brisk jumping out of bed and rushing to the bathroom can be read as carrying sexual allusions, since they immediately follow the awakening of his “lusty desire.”

It is important to point out a critical detail repeated twice in the passages cited above, namely the manner in which Hadi’s sexualized recollections of his mother are carried out, i.e., with his eyes closed. This is an indicator that Hadi’s sessions of remembrance venture out of his conscious self, seeking the nebulous territories of his unconscious. Closing the eyes enables one to leap out or transcend—albeit temporarily—the visible, physical world and its social, cultural, and religious norms, and seek the liberty and transgressiveness of that invisible, nebulous sphere accessed only through “the eyes” of one’s imagination, a sphere that lies in proximity to the realm of the unconscious. This is in line with what Berrada has stated earlier in relation to his
conception of his novel *The Game of Forgetting*—that “the dynamic of remembering” collaborates with the imagination as it “weaves together what is hidden in the unconscious and the slumbering memory.” In this respect, al-Yabūrī makes an interesting point when examining the text’s treatment of Hadi’s sexual connection to his mother; he writes:

[The reader encounters [Hadi], in his attempts to recall the image of the mother through *dreams*, *day dreams*, and poetic images, as if he was no longer tied to the narrative world, but rather to scattered fragments of that world, embodied not in things, but in the words that furnish the space of the text, seen as a “compound dream” of the hallucinations revolving around the mother [. . .]. (Dīnāmiyat, 58; emphasis added)]

In commenting on Hadi’s simultaneous recollections of his sucking the nipple of his mother and the nipple of his mistress, al-Yabūrī has this to say: “This identity between the mother and her substitute, the mistress, often takes place only in the *dream-text*, not in the narrative world, the territory of consciousness, where the authority of social laws dominate and the voice of the super-ego suppresses the voice of desire” (59; emphasis added) (My translation). Following al-Yabūrī, the text of *The Game of Forgetting*, just like Hadi’s subjectivity, is two-fold. And the element of the dream is what causes the split in both the text and Hadi’s self, creating in the process a third space: “the dream-text.” Al-Yabūrī contrasts this dream text with “the narrative world,” of which it serves as a double. Whereas the narrative world is the site of consciousness

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and is constrained by social and cultural norms, the dream-text is, in a way, the repository or reflection of bodily desires suppressed in the unconscious. Hadi’s sexual recollections of his mother thus occur, and are only allowed, at this second site of complete freedom from the dictates of law and culture. This is, therefore, compatible with the fact that Hadi would close his eyes before getting transported to this nebulous dream-realm and dream-text to be alone with the specter of his mother. Engrossed in his recollections of his mother’s figure, Hadi says that he “found out that the questions which her returning face posed were disturbing and [. . .] raised doubts” (135). He does not clarify what these questions are and what they entail in the narrative world and the sphere of consciousness. It seems that Hadi’s source of trouble is that he falls in the trap of conflating the two spheres, the dream-like and the real, transferring what transpires in the first sphere into the second. In his dilemma, he cries out: “What does it mean to have a mother? Answer, without going back to Freud or to sacred texts. Answer, [. . .] without resorting to analytical reason and to computers” (135). It appears that Hadi is here addressing the reader, while assuming his double role as narrator-character, switching to yet another dimension of the novel: the metafictional. His reference to Freud regarding the question he presents to the reader about the meaning of having a mother, although made in the negative, does illuminate the Freudian dimension of the mother-son relationship as it plays out in the novel. It is revealing that the name Freud makes an appearance at this particular juncture, although it might seem odd that Hadi places him (Freud) in the same context alongside the “sacred text,” “analytical reason,” and “computers.” If anything, Freud’s theories regarding what he calls “the Oedipus complex”\textsuperscript{112}, for

\textsuperscript{112} Freud coins the term “Oedipus complex” or “Oedipal complex” in his 1899 book \textit{The Interpretation of Dreams}. According to \textit{Encyclopedia Britannica}:  
Oedipus complex, in psychoanalytic theory, [is] a desire for sexual involvement with the parent of the opposite sex and a concomitant sense of rivalry with the parent of the same sex; a crucial stage in the normal developmental process. [. . .] Freud attributed the Oedipus complex to children of about the ages three to five. He said the stage usually ended when the child identified with the parent of the same sex and repressed its sexual instincts. If previous relationships with the parents were relatively loving and
the most part, seem to clash with religion, on one hand, and with reason, on the other. Perhaps, Freudian psychoanalysis is here contrasted with the views of certain religions—particularly the monotheistic ones—as well as with rational principles. Freudianism is arguably in conflict, if not incompatible, with (monotheistic) religion and reason, two entities that human societies in general seem capable of reconciling with an eye on regulating human life.

Hadi’s commanding the reader not to resort to Freud only establishes the centrality of Freudianism in the novel. Here, negation betrays affirmation. On this point, al-Nowaihi asserts that “Hādī analyses in primarily Freudian terms his relationship with his own body and with the women he has desired and loved, wondering whether he wished that his mother was with him on his first encounter with sexual pleasure” (369). This first sexual adventure of Hadi actually took place in Cairo with an Egyptian woman. After the session of love making has concluded, Hadi bid her goodbye and “rushed into the street and plunged [himself] among the people and the voices, in a lonely search for [his] imagined pleasure” (The Game, 96). While reflecting on this first experience with sex that had just transpired, Hadi immediately thought of his mother: “Did I wish that my mother was with me on my first encounter with sexual pleasure?” (96). This longing for the mother’s company in a sexual context points to the dominance of the Freudian construct of the Oedipal complex. Elsewhere in her article, al-Nowaihi states that “Berrada’s ideas [. . .] seem to be influenced by Freud,” particularly his “formulation of the unconscious” (373). Also, we know that Hadi is an avid reader of influential Western figures, including “Freud nontraumatic, and if parental attitudes were neither excessively prohibitive nor excessively stimulating, the stage is passed through harmoniously. In the presence of trauma, however, there occurs an “infantile neurosis” that is an important forerunner of similar reactions during the child’s adult life. The superego, the moral factor that dominates the conscious adult mind, also has its origin in the process of overcoming the Oedipus complex. Freud considered the reactions against the Oedipus complex the most important social achievements of the human mind.” See “Oedipus complex,” Encyclopedia Britannica. Web. 23 Aug. 2015.
and Hegel” (*The Game*, 100). Interestingly, Hadi was introduced to these two giant Western thinkers through his sexual affair with a “rebellious” Moroccan girl he met in Madrid (97), known to the reader by her initials F.B. (106). In her letter to Hadi, F.B. talks about how she “lived the rebellion of May 1968” while she was attending school in Paris, and that at “gatherings in the yards of the Sorbonne, [she] debated and quoted Sartre, Marcuse, and Freud,” adding that she was “attracted to attempts at synthesizing Marx and Freud” (104). The impact F.B has exerted on Hadi combined with the confessions she made in her letter underscore the importance, if not the centrality, of Freud in the novel. Like his mother, F.B. and the Egyptian woman become other specters that haunt Hadi’s memory, other bodies that cannot be disentangled from his. Hadi wonders, “How can one live without storing up many other bodies in one’s own?” (97). These various female bodies, including those exposed in Hadi’s remembrance sessions and those that remain hidden and suppressed in the sphere of the unconscious until another recalling episode brings them back to the realm of consciousness, give Hadi comfort and take him back on a nostalgic journey to the early years of his childhood—what he calls his “pre-history” (39), a period strongly marked by incidents having strong sexual connotations.

Hadi’s “pre-history,” presented to the reader in the second chapter “Our Prehistory” (39), exposes yet another “illicit” sexual attraction for Hadi, one that can be added to that for the mother, namely the body of his aunt—the wife of Si Tayyib. The adult Hadi admits that he has “a conviction bordering on obsession that my earliest childhood memories are those in which I see myself, not yet *four* years old, walking in utter bafflement and fascination, attracted mysteriously toward the *body* of my uncle Si Tayyib’s wife” (50; emphasis added). The language is this quote is very powerful and evocative, and is pointedly sexual. The images which Hadi excavates from his childhood memories belong to that period of time when he was brought to
live in the home of his uncle Si Tayyib and his wife. In this context, the four-year-old Hadi saw Si Tayyib and his aunt as parents. It is worthwhile noting that his infantile physical attraction towards his aunt (or adoptive mother) parallels that towards his biological mother. Like the image of his mother, that of his uncle’s wife “is inseparable from [his] early childhood, which [he] spent overwhelmed by her love” (50). His attachment to his aunt, which seems to approximate his attachment to his mother, has, not surprisingly, a sexual dimension. Hadi mentions one significant incident, one that involves his aunt’s naked white body: “I had never seen her naked, although I had often slept in her lap next to my uncle. [. . .] I stepped toward her laid-out body, extending my hand toward her breasts. I did not realize she was dead” (50). Hadi emphasizes that he was not aware his aunt was dead when he touched her naked breasts. Following Freud, this move would appear to spring from that active territory of infantile sexuality. The child Hadi’s going after the breasts, of all other parts of the body, is indicative of the heightened sexual nature of his behavior, and reminds us of his adult recollections in relation to sucking his mother’s and sweetheart’s respective nipples. The correspondence between the specter of the mother and that of the aunt in Hadi’s memories reaches another level of forcefulness when we learn that the image of “the white, laid-out body” of his aunt came to haunt him “after more than twenty years” while he was about to make love to “a foreign woman [he] met in a library” (50). Hadi reveals that when the woman “took off her clothes, I suddenly felt I was the child I had been at the threshold of that room, looking at [my uncle’s wife’s] white, laid-out body” (51). Being overwhelmed by the memory of his aunt’s naked body while embracing another woman’s naked body is reminiscent of that incident when Hadi wishes his mother was by his side on his first experience with sexual pleasure. In a way, the female strangers that he engaged in sexual relations with could be seen as substitutes for the mother and the aunt.
The novel’s Freudian dimension underscores an important aspect of the novel: the duplicity and fragmentation that mark Hadi’s self as he desperately pursues that secret which makes one’s life complete, meaningful, and worthwhile. Hadi is constantly reflecting on the nature of time and whether it is unitary or multiple. His struggle to understand time reflects his struggle to understand his own self, to find out if he is one or a multitude of subjectivities, if his life journey is marked by continuity and oneness or by discontinuity and ruptures. This is hinted at in the title of chapter two—“Our Pre-History”—which suggests a contrastive category, History. The chapter’s title seems to refer to the protagonist’s Hadi’s own personal pre-history, despite the use of the plural possessive pronoun “Our.” Referring to Hadi, the chapter opens with this paragraph:

He was past thirty years of age and yet he looked full of childhood. He did not divide time into periods and stages and instants. He was rather intent on making it a single, uninterrupted continuum, even if in moments of anxiety and difficulty, he had an overwhelming feeling of disintegration that transformed him into atoms. (40)

Hadi’s childhood period—his pre-history—seems to have a lasting impact on the later episodes of his life—his history. He is torn within this dialectic of history-pre-history. He seems unable to reach peace and serenity as he oscillates between his childhood and adult life through this game of remembering and forgetting. His going back and forth in time as he undertakes those endless recollection and reflection sessions makes him feel disintegrated, fragmented, incomplete, and unfulfilled. In his quest for unity, he can only find multiplicity. And as al-Nowaihi puts it, “tension between the self’s essential and unavoidable multiplicity, and its basic need for unity, and continuity, is at the core of the conflict between the games of forgetting and remembering”
One could say that Hadi is embarking on an impossible goal—reconciling all the contradictions of the self as it navigates the myriad opposing forces of human life.

The Freudian overtones of *The Game of Forgetting*—namely the incestuous allusions discussed above—are in line with the book’s subversive and rebellious spirit. They speak to Berrada’s audacity and readiness to bring to the surface topics that society and the state are complicit in keeping buried deep in the territory of silence. Let us keep in mind Berrada’s remarks, in his critical study, that the new experimental novel is a discursive space for treating the taboo “trinity” of sex, religion, and politics. It is no coincidence that these three are grouped together in one bloc. They are arguably the most important terrains that postcolonial regimes in the Arab-Moslem world seek to control. It is also not coincidental that the novel *The Game of Forgetting* devotes a lot of attention to the themes of sexuality and religious hypocrisy, and makes forays into the sphere of politics. Thus, the Moroccan writer’s fictional writings seem to be in line with his critical work, and Berrada the novelist meets Berrada the critic. In either capacity, Berrada pushes for a rebellious literature in an effort to shake the Moroccan consciousness and lay out the foundations for freedom of expression, a right he cherishes dearly.

In this regard, Berrada the critic writes:

(374-75).
We can say that Arab creativity is one of the effective elements in the endeavors to surpass the existing consciousness and substitute it with a possible consciousness that lies [...] in the forces of civil society [...] In other words, no matter how widespread deterioration becomes, the dictatorial regime cannot contain or deactivate all the capacities of citizens, for there always remains sites of an oppositional consciousness, resisting what suppresses [people’s] breaths and opposes the citizen’s freedom and rights. And [literary] creativity, despite the diversity of its forms and means, objectively intersects with the forces of opposition and refusal that looks to formulating a new consciousness. (Al-Riwayah, 23)"

There is no doubt that the novel The Game of Forgetting partakes in this effort to explore and formulate a new consciousness, one that is not hampered by either the regime’s or society’s vigilant eyes and censorship. Berrada seems to have hope that the forces of civil society—in their quest for real freedom, democracy, and human rights—will ultimately triumph in face of the dictatorial regimes. And most importantly, in the context of this chapter, he sees literature as a vital force in the pursuit of such goal. One could say that Berrada cannot imagine literature being divorced from commitment. Can Arab writers have that luxury?

**Conclusion:**

*The Game of Forgetting*’s reliance on metanarrative language as well as on the strategic narrative devices of multiplicity and fragmentation not only exposes its textual “constructedness” (al-Nowaihi 383) and the “ludic quality of fiction” (Boullata 10), but also highlights this notion of tension as a key element embedded in the various layers (fictional, metafictional, technical, etc.) of Berrada’s text. The novel advocates, in a variety of ways, for plurality and multidimensionality to the detriment of unidimensional discourses, and this kind of
democratizing and relativizing move is bound to generate disputes and disagreements. Perhaps the most explicit manifestation of tension comes at the novel’s metafictional level, namely with the numerous arguments between the “chief narrator” and “the author,” as pointed out earlier. The contentious relationship between these two in particular is meant to add some balance to the narrative and give a sense of relativity and democratization. It engages the reader in meaningful ways, stimulates his or her cognitive faculties, and stirs his or her emotions.

Multiplicity and fragmentation are not merely formal modernist features forced on the text, but rather they serve a strategic goal, namely laying out the author’s vision for the role of literary writing as it attempts to shake, unsettle, and problematize the different layers of the mental and socio-cultural structures of Moroccan society and its imaginary as well as the political paradigm that makes sure these structures remain intact for the sake of its survival. As al-Nowaihi has pointed out above, Berrada’s postmodern(ist) novel is deeply committed to the immediate cultural and sociopolitical questions of its Moroccan context. It would be useful to see how Berrada himself views modernist literature; he asserts that modernism in poetry, the novel, and the short story is no more than “an attempt to capture the change in, and awareness of, relationships through language, form, and fictionalization [al-takhīl],” before adding that:

[Another aspect of the endeavor towards modernism [. . .] manifested in the tendency to break up the social, political, ideological, and mental structures as well as their discursive centers of gravity, the goal being the displacement of the unidimensional theological]
background, the consolidation of rationality, the problematization of the issues, and the removal of the illusionary masks of unity within the culture and society. (Berrada qtd. in al-Kharrāṭ 23)

Berrada’s endeavors in *The Game of Forgetting* to shatter the unidimensional voice of a one and only narrator that exercises monopoly over the act of narration through the deployment of a variety of narrators betrays his cultural anxieties with regard to the “unidimensional theological background” of his society’s mindset. The conflicting accounts given by the novel’s multiple narrators are meant to unsettle and destabilize what is being narrated, and most importantly to push the reader to engage in a more meaningful way with the novel and take on a more active role by thinking critically and weighing each one of the accounts given and then making a (sound) decision on what to accept or reject. This literary vision neatly applies to the novel’s social context, for Berrada aspires for a plurality of viewpoints in the Moroccan and Arab contexts and his expectations of his reader would in the final analysis be in line with those he does his fellow Moroccan or Arab subjects.
Chapter Five: Abdullāh al-ʿArwī’s Awrāq: Writing the Mise en Abîme or Writing as Mise en Abîme

• Awrāq and the Subversion of Form

ʿAbdullāh al-ʿArwī (Abdullah Laroui’s) Awrāq: Sīrat Idrīs al-Dhihaniyyah (1989, Papers: Idriss’ Mental Autobiography) is a text that contributed in significant ways to the consolidation of the phenomenon of al-tajrīb (experimentalism) in the Moroccan literary scene in the last quarter of the 20th century. Alongside Barrādah’s novel Lu’bat al-Nisyān (1987, The Game of Forgetting, 1996)—published two years prior—and a few other texts, al-ʿArwī’s Awrāq brought Moroccan experimentalism to a whole new level. With the publication of these two important works by two figures of high eminence in the literary, critical, and cultural scene in Morocco and the larger Arab world, al-tajrīb (experimentalism) moved from being a mere marginal trend to becoming more of a normative practice. As noted in chapter two, Moroccan critic ‘Abdelʿali Būṭayyib uses the term “al-tajrīb al-waẓīfī” (functional experimentalism) to account for al-ʿArwī’s writings (al-Riwaḥah, 40). Al-ʿArwī has emphasized the necessity of having experimentalism serve a particular purpose if it was to be taken seriously (qtd. in Būṭayyib 41). According to the Moroccan historian-novelist-critic, experimentalism is not a random formalist exercise, but rather constitutes a way of expressing or consolidating one’s vision of the world. Within the literary economy of al-ʿArwī, writing serves a particular “subject”—what he calls (al-mawdū’ in Arabic. As I will discuss below, al-ʿArwī contrasts this notion of “al-mawdū’” with that of “al-
mawṣūf\textsuperscript{113}—which literally means “the described.” Al-ʿArwī—being wary of Arab writers’ entanglement with Western ideas and literary models—stresses that experimentalism in the context of Morocco and the Arab world should assert its functionality by probing a particular “subject” (mawdūʿ); after a brief discussion of “Western” literary forms (drama, the novel, and the short story) and the extent to which they fit the Arab writer, al-ʿArwī states:

إن الموضوع ليس هو الموصوف. لكي يصبح الموصوف موضوعا لابد من تحوير وتطويع الأشكال السردية حتى تصبح قادرة على عكس أغراضنا في البنية نفسها. [...] يصف نجيب محفوظ القاهرة، الأحياء العتيقة، البورجوازية الصغيرة، المثقف الفقير، إلخ إلخ.. هذا هو الموصوف [...] لكن ما هو الموضوع؟

[The subject is not the described. In order for the described to become a subject, narrative forms must be imploded and mastered until they become capable of reflecting our [Arab] exigencies in the structures themselves. [...] Najīb Maḥfūẓ describes Cairo, the old neighborhoods, the small bourgeoisie, the poor intellectual, etc. etc. This is the described [...], but what is the subject? (21-22)]

In other words, form becomes a critical site for showcasing experimentalism’s political exigencies. In chapter one, I have treated in some detail al-ʿArwī’s views in relation to “realist” novel writings in the Arab world in the first half of the twentieth century, and I have outlined in particular his critique of Maḥfūẓ’s oeuvre, or at least that which predated 1967, when al-ʿArwī’s seminal book Al-ʿIdyūlājīyā al-ʿArabiyyah al-Muʿāṣirah (Contemporary Arab Ideology) made its first appearance in French. I should mention that al-ʿArwī (b. 1933- ) is a leading intellectual in

\textsuperscript{113} It is hard to translate the word “al-mawṣūf” into English. To be faithful to the original, I opted for “the described”; I think the only way to keep the intended meaning of this word and still have a smooth translation would be to use an explanatory clause, such as “what is being described.”
the contemporary Arab world. He is better known in the Arab world—as well as in France—as a historian and a cultural critic than as a writer of fiction and a literary critic. Although his *magnum opus* *Al-‘Idyūlūjyā al-‘Arabiyyah al-Muʿāṣirah* (Contemporary Arab Ideology) overshadows his literary contributions, al-‘Arwī is a key figure in the transformations of Moroccan literary activity in the decades following national independence in 1956. His first literary work *al-Ghurbah* (The Estrangement)—published as early as 1971—is seen by many critics as exerting a big impact on the trajectory of the postcolonial Moroccan novel.\(^{114}\) Al-‘Arwī’s *al-Ghurbah* (The Estrangement, 1971) marked a divergence from the (social) realist model of ‘Abdulkarīm Ghallāb in Morocco or Najīb Maḥfūz in the larger Arabic-speaking world. Following al-‘Arwī, realism is a literary mode that is continuous with European history and is therefore not conducive to “the subject” within the Arab framework. Realist form has to be surpassed, and a new formal configuration that would best reflect Moroccan and Arab exigencies in the socio-political sphere should be opted for. As I emphasized in the Introduction, the form-politics relation undergirding the phenomenon of *al-tajrīb* is key in any endeavors to discern experimentalism’s *raison d’être*. The subversion of narrative forms becomes a desirable—if not necessary—course of action that could pave the way for the creation of conditions amenable to the emergence or flourishing of a new type of subject (*al-mawdūʿ*). The reader gets a glimpse of a facet of this subversion in al-‘Arwī’s introduction to *Awrāq*:\(^{115}\):

قول الراوي قول من؟ قول شعيب قول من؟ ايهما قول المؤلف؟

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\(^{115}\) ‘Abdullāh al-‘Arwī, *Awrāq: Sīrat Idrīs al-Dhiḥmiyyah* [Papers: Idriss’ Mental Biography] (Casablanca: al-Markaz al-Thaqāfi al-‘Arabī), 1996, 1989. This work was first published in 1989 and went through a number of editions. It was translated into French in 2007 as *Les carnets d’Idris*. Thus far, it has not been translated into English.
للقارئ أن يفصل. له الحق أن يختزل الكِتاب في أوراق ادريس فقط ويستقل بالكلمة دون الراوي
وشيعب [ ... ] له الحق أن يرفض التمييز بين مؤلف كتاب "أوراق" وأدريس كاتب أوراق والراوي
جامعها ومرتبها وشعيب المعلق عليها وصاحب الكلمة الأخيرة في تأويلها.
إذا قرر أن يحكم على الجميع حكما واحدا فلاضر أن أجاب على السؤال التالي: ما غرض المؤلف
من هذه التعددية، من "انعكاس الصورة في مرايا متقابلة" [ ... ].

احدى نتائج الإكتار من الوسائط التضييق على الناقد. لم يعد في وسعه أن يكتفي بالتحليلات
المضمونية أو الشكلية [ ... ] لأنها مصممة في النص نفسه. فهو مدعو إلى الذهاب إلى الأبعد
والأعمق، وربما الأبسط.

الأبسط هو فتح الطريق إلى الاستمتاع.

[Whose say is the Narrator’s say? Whose say is Shu‘ayb’s? Which of the two is the
author’s say?

It is up to the reader to judge. He has the right to reduce the book to Idrīs’s papers only
and to have a say independently of the Narrator and Shu‘ayb. [...] He has the right to
reject the distinction between the author of the book Awrāq and Idrīs (the writer of the
papers) and the Narrator (the collector and organizer of the papers) and Shu‘ayb (the
commentator on the papers and the one with the final say on their interpretation.)

If [the reader] decided to cast one judgment on them all, it would be fitting to raise this
question: What is the author’s goal behind this multiplicity, this mise en abîme [...]?
One of the outcomes of multiplying intermediaries is to constrict the critic. He can no longer limit his inquiry to analyses of content or form [. . .] because these are parts of the content of the text itself. He is invited to go further and deeper, and perhaps [opt for] the simpler.

The simpler is to open the way to pleasure. (7)\textsuperscript{116}

With the dialectic of “al-mawdū’-al-mawṣūf” (the subject-the described) in mind, it is worthwhile dwelling on the word “qawl” (say) in the above-cited passage. A “say” is in a way related to the idea of authority, and thus stands in contrast to, for example, the word “speech.” Al-‘Arwī unsettles the idea of an authoritative narration or narrator by resorting to narrative multiplicity shrouded in the key tactic of mise en abîme, undermining thereby any one-sided authority claims in the book Awrāq. Al-‘Arwī deforms realist form in two different, but related, ways. Firstly, in presenting a cast of narrators (Idrīs, the Narrator, and Shuʿayb), al-‘Arwī destabilizes the notion of a reliable omniscient narrator. Having a multitude of narrative voices contributes to breaking unidimensional truth claims, and brings to light the idea that a viewpoint is a better option than a say. Secondly, the use of the mise en abîme technique pushes this notion of breaking or deforming even further by shattering and blurring narrative subjectivities with the hope of creating new subjectivities conducive to the emergence of a new subject (al-mawdū’)—or new subjects. As I will discuss, the narrative device of mise en abîme permeates the entire book, and, through the reflexive structure of mirroring, it serves as the mechanism and the figure for both the loss of subjectivity and the opening up of a new subjectivity in search of the

\textsuperscript{116} Unless otherwise indicated, all English translations of the quotes from Awrāq and from other critical works are mine.
subject(s). In other words, the *mise en abîme* figures as both eradication and condition for the new.

The subversion or deformation of form comes to play with the very title of al-ʿArwī’s book, a title that unsettles the notion of genre. The term “mental biography” in the title—*Awrāq: Sīrat Idrīs al-Dhihniyyah* [Papers: Idrīs’s Mental Biography]—alerts us to the formal and political stakes running through the book. This generic nomenclature, “mental biography,” is in line with the aspiration to forge or excavate “the subject” (*al-mawdū‘*). Before going into a detailed analysis of this work in the next sections, let me pose this simple question: What kind of book is *Awrāq*? It is useful to inquire about the generic label of any piece of literature, supposing this information might be helpful in its analysis and in deciphering its overall significance. Although the cover of al-ʿArwī’s work does not include a generic label, the subtitle *Idrīs’s Mental Biography* (*Sīrat Idrīs al-Dhihniyyah*) is revealing. The book’s experimental impulse is foreshadowed—or mirrored—in its very title and subtitle, which respectively refer to a- the archive left by the main character Idrīs (who is actually dead) in the form of a stack of papers of various sorts (journals, commentaries, letters, fictional stories, articles, etc.) and are now in the possession of the character Shuʿayb and b- the arrangement and rendition of this archive into a (mental) biography of Idrīs by the character of the Narrator [*al-rāwī*], although Shuʿayb still reserves the right of having the final word on the interpretation of the papers. Whereas the title *Awrāq* (Papers) appears to be an objective designation of Idris’s documents, the subtitle *Sīrat Idrīs al-Dhihniyyah* (Idrīs’s Mental Biography) is more of a subjective assessment of those documents by the Narrator and Shuʿayb.

But the question remains: How do we go about categorizing al-ʿArwī’s book? Should we take the title and subtitle at their face value and view the book as a “mental biography” of a real
person named Idrīs? What does a “mental biography” even mean? To what extent is it similar to or different from a biography or autobiography? Based on al-‘Arwī’s above-cited passage, could this unusual nomenclature (“mental biography”) be a rhetorical guise for what we would normally call autobiography? In his book Shi‘riyyat al-Sīrah al-Dhihniyyah (The Poeticness of the Mental (Auto)Biography), Moroccan critic Muḥammad al-Dāhī contends that al-Sīrah al-Dhihniyyah (mental auto/biography) is “a literary genre” with specific features that “characterize certain texts—old or new, local or universal—that have not been studied as forming one category” (18). He adds that this genre subdivides into a- a mental biography (18) and b- a mental autobiography (20). Elaborating on the latter, al-Dāhī writes:

[In his/her mental autobiography, the writer recalls the phases of his/her intellectual and cultural life, outlining the stages s/he has gone through, the obstacles and difficulties s/he has faced, the hesitations, vicissitudes, and tribulations s/he has lived, and the contrastive cultural streams and intellectual and ideological currents s/he has drawn from. (20)]

Al-Dāhī proceeds to provide a long list of works that fall under the category of “the mental autobiography”; examples, besides al-‘Arwī’s Awrāq, include: al-Munqidh mina al-ḍalāl (Deliverance From Error) by the medievalist scholar Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī (b. 1058–d. 1111 C.E.); Sijn al-‘Umr (The Prison of Life) by Tawfīq al-Ḥakīm; La Mémoire tatouée (Tattooed Memory, 1971) by Abdelkebir Khatibi; Les Mots (The Words, 1963) by Jean-Paul Sartre; and Voyage to a Beginning (1969) by Colin Wilson (20–21). Interestingly, al-Dāhī’s definition of the
“mental autobiography” genre or subgenre does have some intersections with al-‘Arwī’s remarks in the introduction to his book Awrāq:

عندما خامرتني فكرة وصف الجو الثقافي الذي عاش فيه الجيل الذي أنتمي إليه وجدت نفسي أمام عمل نصف منجز. كان لا مفر لي من أن أخذ ادريس رمزا لذلك الجيل.

[When the idea of describing the cultural [or intellectual] environment in which the generation I belong to lived, I found myself facing a work that is half-done. I could not but take Idrīs as a symbol of that generation. (5)]

Al-‘Arwī hints at the likelihood of Awrāq being “an intellectual journey” (rihlah fikriyyah) undertaken by the main character Idrīs (6). As we shall see later on, the book is pregnant with intellectual materials (philosophical, artistic, literary, political, cultural, etc.) The book’s intellectual predilection and oscillation between fiction and criticism is consonant with its attempts at deforming narrative forms and laying the ground for a new subject or subjectivity to emerge. The deformation of genre becomes a medium that foregrounds the text’s cultural and socio-political stakes. The protagonist Idrīs’s papers highlight the extent to which Morocco—and by extension the Arab World—suffer from deep cultural crisis. As I will discuss, this crisis manifests in the idea of loss of the subject, which implies the loss of subjectivity or identity. The search for a new subject via a new mode of literary writing, therefore, presents itself as a remedy for—or at least as a way of alleviating—the crisis.

The question of genre does bear on this question of crisis as it relates to the loss and recuperation of the subject. Should one entertain the idea that al-‘Arwī might just be pushing for the consolidation of a new genre, one that best mirrors, and perhaps complements, his work as a historian, thinker, and critic in pursuit of forging a critical consciousness in Moroccan and Arab
subjectivity in the latter half of the twentieth century? It is curious that the last chapter of Awrāq and the segment that follows it—which are respectively titled “al-Ta‘bīr” (Expression or Writing) and “al-Ta‘bīn” (Commemoration)—thematically intersect with a large portion of al-‘Arwī’s most famous critical work Al-‘Idyūlūjyā al-‘Arabiyyah al-Mu‘āṣirah, especially the last chapter that takes the title “al-‘Arab wa al-Ta‘bīr ‘Ani al-Dhāt” (Arabs and Writing about the Self). To highlight just one thematic link between Awrāq and Al-‘Idyūlūjyā, there is the treatment of the key binary of “al-mawdū” (the subject) and “al-mawṣuf” (the described). It is very telling that al-‘Arwī, in treating the al-mawdū‘-al-mawṣuf dialectic, attaches a footnote to the above-cited passage from his critical work Al-‘Idyūlūjyā, in which he asks the reader to refer to page 240 of the 1989 edition of Awrāq. In the 1996 edition I am using the referenced page is 235, in which Idrīs (the hero or anti-hero of the book Awrāq) also inquires on the al-mawdū‘-al-mawṣuf dialectic. In his quest to become a writer, Idrīs despises al-mawṣuf (the described)—or the details of his daily life—and pursues al-mawdū‘ (the subject) (Awrāq, 235). Idrīs ultimately fails to find or grasp or bring to fruition “the subject” in his experiments with literary writing, and the reader is left to wonder if this was the cause of his premature death. (In the last section of this chapter, I will examine in detail Idrīs’s relationship with literature and literary writing.) The thematic connection between Awrāq and Al-‘Idyūlūjyā illuminates the debates over the subject or the loss thereof, and helps us parse out al-‘Arwī’s literary vision. The two texts could be seen as complementing or supplementing one another. In emphasizing the al-mawdū‘-al-mawṣuf binary, the two works show how questions of form within the sphere of literature apply to the social milieu, corroborating in the process the form-politics relation that undergirds Moroccan and Arab experimental writings. Let us consider this quote from Al-‘Idyūlūjyā:
Our subject could [just] exactly be the *loss of the subject*, albeit in circumstances peculiar to us [Arabs]—and there is no creativity without specificity. And it could be another thing, a positive one. All doors are then in front of us, but none will open unless we pursue *rigid criticism*. [. . .]

And isn’t the search for the subject another face of the search for the *self*, the core of this book? (22; emphasis added)

Al-‘Arwī’s remarks are helpful in guiding our reading of *Awrāq* and our investigation of the genre into which it seeks to position itself, although they were made more than twenty years prior. With these remarks in mind, I would like to argue that the idea of “loss of the subject”—which is another facet of the loss of the self—is at the heart of the book *Awrāq*. As I will detail in the last section of this chapter, Idrīs’s struggles with what place he occupies in society—both during French colonial presence in Morocco and during the first two decades of independence—are transferred to his experiments with literary writing. His existential and intellectual journeys are strongly echoed in his papers—not only in his literary attempts but also in the letters, journals, commentaries, etc. he has drafted. Writing becomes a site that carries both negative and positive aspects of Idrīs’s life journey. On the one hand, it helps in diagnosing the loss of the subject or of identity, but on the other hand it creates a space for a new kind of subject(ivity) to
emerge. The way the character Idrīs is presented in *Awrāq* speaks to al-ʿArwī’s pushing for a new mode of subjectivity, one prominent aspect of which is the concept of criticism, which augments the deformation of narrative form or genre. It is important to underscore that *criticism*, an extremely critical notion and practice which al-ʿArwī holds dearly, features quite prominently in the Idrīsian archive as well as in the commentaries provided by the Narrator and Shuʿayb on this archive. Moroccan critic Amīn al-ʿUmrāni notes that the structure of *Awrāq* includes two entities: Firstly, “a narrative” [*al-sard*] (i.e., the papers of Idrīs themselves) and “a meta-narrative” [*mā warāʾa al-sard*] or [*al-sard al-wāṣif*] (i.e., “the commentaries, debates, and dialogues between the Narrator and Shuʿayb in relation to the papers”) (338). Al-ʿUmrāni adds that Idrīs’ papers fall under “creative and critical prose” [*al-sard al-ibdāʾī wa al-naqdī*], whereas the Narrator’s and Shuʿayb’s portions of the narrative (i.e., their commentaries on the papers) could be seen as “scientific, critical prose” [*al-sard al-naqdī al-ʿilmī*] (338). In a similar vein, al-Dāhī asserts that in *Awrāq* al-ʿArwī combines a “modernist writing” [*kitābah ḥadāthiyyah*] marked by unstable or malleable generic contours and “deceptive characterization” [*khudaʾ al-tashkhīṣ*] with a technique from the Arab heritage of old, one that first presents the body of the text and then provides critique and commentary (150). In this regard al-ʿArwī states:

[This book is like the book of al-Ṣūlī; it could be considered as a critical book or a critical study on a text. The text is Idrīs’s papers, and then there is a critical study undertaken not just by one person but by two. (Qtd. in al-Dāhī 157)]
The work referenced by al-ʿArwī in the quote is that of *al-Awrāq* (The Papers) by the medievalist literary scholar Abū Bakr al-Ṣūlī (d. 946 CE). Al-ʿArwī not only adopts the formal design of al-Ṣūlī’s book but adapts its title as well. Thus, al-ʿArwī’s *Awrāq* (Papers) stands in a strong intertextual relationship with al-Ṣūlī’s *al-Awrāq* (The Papers). What I want to underscore here is the critical bedrock undergirding the two works. The critical urge or critical sensibility is put at a pedestal in the said texts. In a section entitled “al-Naqd wa Naqd al-Naqd” [Criticism and the Criticism of Criticism], al-Dāhī asserts that in being “a critical, imaginative experiment” *Awrāq* produces “a critical consciousness,” (173) adding that al-ʿArwī’s book houses within its folds two types of critique, ideological (174) and artistic (177). (This corroborates the connection between *Awrāq* and Al-ʿIdyūlīyā.) The former type includes Idrīs’s critical papers reacting to a range of issues, such as “historiography, religion, politics, and society” in the pre- and post-Independence periods (174), and to the writings of “Sartre, Nietzsche, Descartes, and Marx” (175) in addition to the critiques voiced by the Narrator and Shuʿayb reacting to Idrīs’s critique (174). Al-Dāhī points to the rationale behind the use of a two-fold or two-dimensional critique. He writes that the difference between “criticism” (Idrīs’ papers) and “the criticism of criticism” (the commentaries by the Narrator and Shuʿayb) “is that the first interacts with the incidents spontaneously, [. . .] whereas the second treats Idrīs’s critique after [enough] temporal distance has been achieved, making it possible to look at the incidents and the topics being critiqued [. . .] objectively” (174; emphasis added). Thus, the way *Awrāq* is structured allows for this differentiated criticism to take place; the book’s formal aspect seems to be in harmony with its ideological content. By presenting a multi-layered critique, al-ʿArwī pushes for the consolidation of a critical consciousness in the reader and in society at large, and in so doing pushes for the emergence of a new subject and a new subjectivity. In grounding his experimental writing—and
the form deformations that ensue—in the idea of criticism, al-‘Arwī outlines one important route leading to the subject—i.e. the reshaping of Moroccan and Arab consciousness in a way that critically engages questions related to history, culture, politics, ideology and so forth. In his critical book *La Crise des intellectuels arabes: traditionalisme ou historicisme?* (1974, *The Crisis of the Arab Intellectual: Traditionalism or Historicism?*, 1976), al-‘Arwī makes the case for an issue of utter relevance to this discussion. He writes that “the concept of history—a concept playing a capital role in ‘modern’ thought—is in fact peripheral to all the ideologies that have dominated the Arab world till now” (viii). Al-‘Arwī calls for a critical reevaluation of Arabs’ understanding of their history or histories, a necessary step towards the efforts of a better future for Arab societies.

One could argue that the three narrators in *Awrāq* (Idrīs, Shu’ayb, and the Narrator) are performing this role of reassessing and reevaluating in a critical fashion within their respective socio-political milieu. In addition to its ideological critique, *Awrāq* contains artistic critique, connecting thereby questions of form—and narrative deformations—with their political exigency. According to al-Dāhī, one encounters in al-‘Arwī’s book extremely important critical passages regarding “the awareness of the self,” a question that came to dominate “all the arts of the twentieth century”—what al-‘Arwī calls “Doubled Romanticism” (*al-Rumānsiyyah al-Muḍā’afah*) (177). These passages discuss, among other things, the morphology of the novel and that of the short story and how the two differ (177). A key point tackled by *Awrāq* is no other than the binary of *al-mawdū’* (the subject) and *al-mawṣuf* (the described). It appears as though al-‘Arwī’s privileging of the critical sensibility or consciousness or inquiry serves in *Awrāq* the major goal of leading up to *al-mawdū’* (the subject), while undermining *al-mawṣuf* (the described). Let us remember that the Moroccan author has emphasized that the only way to get
to al-mawdū’—which in the final analysis comes down to finding one’s true self—would be through the pursuit of “a rigid criticism.” I would like to argue that al-‘Arwī’s book revolves around these main goal-areas: the search for al-mawdū’ (or writing), the search for the self (or identity), and the pursuit of a critical spirit (or ideology). Whereas the first two diagnose a problem, the last one prescribes a cure, ideological as it might be. That is, only through the application of rigid criticism could the Arab collective find resolutions to the big challenges facing it.

The Narrator’s and Shuʿayb’s endless endeavors to capture or excavate Idrīs’s true image or personality or identity from within the remains of his stack of papers are in tandem with the book Awrāq’s quest for its best form, one that comes to play in a deformation that fuses narrative autobiography with criticism. The motif of the quest—which connotes loss or unfulfillment—casts its shadow on the entire book, striking thereby harmony between form and content. This quest is a figure that serves the goal of shattering a fixed subject and opens up to forging a new subjectivity. To this effect, Muḥammad Amanṣūr underlines that the search for the image of Idrīs’s intellect or mind that is undertaken by the Narrator (and I would add by Shuʿayb also) is by extension an adventurous search for “the time of Moroccan and Arab history, a time which the [Arabic] novel—being lost to its consciousness—is missing” (Kharāʾīṭ, 76-77). In other words, in Awrāq al-‘Arwī is searching for “the time of the novel that is missing in Arab consciousness and Arab writing” (77). This relates to al-‘Arwī’s statement above regarding the marginal place the concept of history occupies in contemporary Arab ideologies. The character Idrīs in the narrative becomes a figure of speech that illustrates the sense of loss and the sense of crisis besetting Arab life in the 20th century. And this brings us back to al-‘Arwī’s point that the loss of the subject might be our [i.e., the Arabs’] subject. From this angle, the book Awrāq could
be seen as another articulation of the same core questions treated in Al-‘Idyūlūjyā. And for now, the generic identity of Awrāq would remain unresolved. We would continue to ask: Is it fiction or nonfiction? Is it purely a book of criticism as al-‘Arwī himself claims in the last quote above? Could it be a novel, an autobiography, or a biography? Linking the book to any of these categories would meet a number of complications. And al-Dāhī’s suggestion that the book be seen as a “mental autobiography” of the person al-‘Arwī in the guise of Idrīs would face a number of challenges, the most obvious of which is that Idrīs dies at the age of forty while al-‘Arwī is still alive. In the final analysis, one has to concede to the proposition that Awrāq blends various genres in order to blur generic distinctions and make a broader commentary on Moroccan and Arab history and ideology and their relationship to the sphere of “writing” or “expression”—what he calls in Arabic “al-ta‘bīr.”

- **Mise en Abîme or Who Could Stop the “Cloning” Effect?**

The title and subtitle of al-‘Arwī’s book *Awrāq: Sīrat Idrīs al-Dhihniyyah* (*Papers: Idrīs’s Mental Biography*) are structured in such a way as to mirror the structure of the entire book, which consists of two basic substructures: first, the various writings of Idrīs and second, the commentaries on these writings provided by the Narrator and Shu‘ayb, who at times end up debating the meaning and significance of certain pieces. I should note that the reflexive narrative disagreements in *Awrāq* are reminiscent of the narrative devices of reflexivity and narrative multiplicity at work in Muḥammad Barrādah’s novel *Lu’bat al-Nisyān* (*The Game of Forgetting*.) It is useful to point out that the Narrator’s and Shu‘ayb’s commentaries on the Idrīsian archive far exceed Idrīs’s own papers in terms of length, which speaks to the importance
al-ʿArwī places on criticism and critical engagements. One could therefore speak of at least two prominent narrative levels—as well as two narrative times—in al-ʿArwī’s work, one pertaining to Idrīs’s stack of papers and the other to the almost endless discussions between the Narrator and Shuʿayb. It is important to reiterate that this structuring is hinted at on the level of the title and the subtitle, which helps us uncover how significant and, as we shall see later on, deeply rooted the *mise en abîme* motif is in the different narrative layers of al-ʿArwī’s book. I propose that the reflexive structures of mirroring and the reduplication of images it entails constitute the most significant, if not the defining, feature of the book’s experimental form. Reflexivity and mirroring derive their significance from the fact that they become mechanisms and figures for both the loss of subjectivity and the recuperation of a new subjectivity. Thus, *mise en abîme* serves the double role of eradicating and building. Al-ʿArwī has himself already alluded in the passage quoted from his Introduction to *Awrāq* cited above to the importance of the *mise en abîme* device in the book’s narrative play with regard to the three main characters, suggesting thereby that the trio—Idrīs, Shuʿayb, and the Narrator—could be interpreted as mirroring one another and forming ultimately one single character, who in turn mirrors the person Abdullah al-ʿArwī, the real author of the book *Awrāq*. Indeed, there are few instances in the book pointing to the overlap or identity between the three characters amongst themselves, on the one hand, and between them and al-ʿArwī on the other hand. In the book’s preliminary section, curiously entitled “The Ghost of Shuʿayb” (*Shabhaṭ Shuʿayb*), we have the first round of discussions and debates between Shuʿayb and the Narrator, in which we learn that this latter is in fact an experienced writer. Shuʿayb addresses the Narrator saying:

هذه أوراق أدريس، خذها، أنت أقرب الناس إليه [ . . . ] الكتابة حرفتك. إفعل بها ما تراه نافعاً.
[These are the papers of Idrīs. Take them. You are the closest to him. [. . .] Writing is your profession. Do with them [i.e. the papers] what you see fit. (Awrāq, 9)]

The Narrator initially shows some hesitation to Shuʿayb’s request regarding the composition of a biography of Idrīs based on the stack of papers he had left behind. He remarks that Idrīs’s papers are not in order and incorporate diverse styles, adding that if he were to arrange the papers as he wished he could give them meaning other than the one intended by Idrīs himself (9). And then he makes this revealing addition:

وإذا نشرت كل ما فيها على حاله ربما ألحقت به الضرر. قد أعطي عنه صورة أقل وفاء من تلك التي خططتها عندما جعلت منه شخصية خيالية.

[If I were to publish [the papers] as they are, I could probably do him harm. I might give an image of him less faithful than the one I put together when I made of him an imaginary character. (9)]

These remarks are left unsubstantiated and leave the reader somewhat perplexed and prone to make certain provisional conclusions such that the Narrator, who takes writing as a profession, has already begun a piece of fiction revolving around an imaginary character named after and based on the real individual Idrīs, the late friend of the Narrator. Shuʿayb also seems surprised about this revelation; he says:

استعملت اسمه وأقواله وحوادث حياته بدون إذن منه. الآن حان الوقت أن تؤدي له حقوقه.

[You used his name, his sayings, and his life incidents without his permission. Now is the time to pay him back his dues. (9)]
Shuʿayb is implying that the Narrator should take on the task of arranging Idrīs’s papers and turning them into a biography. Before agreeing to honor Shuʿayb’s request, the Narrator remarks that he is “convinced that the biography is an elusive concept” (9), given that “the individual is constant creation and constant fragmentation” (10). In other words, capturing an individual’s true or core self is ever evasive because of the constant change one’s self goes through. This comment could be read both literarily and philosophically. The Narrator then proceeds to disclose more details about his past relationship with Idrīs as well as about his fictional project that takes Idrīs as its main character:

[kنت أظن أنني أعرف إدريس. فتى من بلدي وحيي، عاشرته طول سنين الدراسة. [. . .] كنت أرى أنه مرآة تنعكس فيها روحي وأنا مرآة تنعكس فيها روحه. [. . .] غاب عنى رسمه ولم يفارقني فكره. شرحته وحننته وجعلته بطل قصة. ملأت ذهنه ببعض أفكاري واستعرت منه آراء ومعتقدات دون أن أعني نسبتها إليه. إختلطت الأمور على غيري وظن كثيرون أنه صورة مني. أتصفح الأوراق فأكتشف شخصاً آخر. أيهما أقرب إلى الواقع? (Awrāq, 11-12; emphasis added)]

[I thought I knew Idrīs, a youth from my village and neighborhood whom I accompanied throughout the years of [our] studies. [. . .] I used to believe he was a mirror reflecting my soul and I a mirror reflecting his. [. . .] His figure is lost to me, but his intellect has kept me company. I dissected and mummified him and made of him the hero of a story. I filled his mind with some of my thoughts and borrowed from him opinions and beliefs without being aware of their belonging to him. I and others got confused, and many [people] thought he was an image of me. I leaf through the papers only to discover a different person. Which one is closer to reality? (Awrāq, 11-12; emphasis added)]
This is a fascinating passage, pregnant with hints and allusions as to the identity of the two characters (the Narrator and Idrīs) and to the nature of the narrative game at work in the book *Awrāq*. The *mise en abîme* motif is quite powerful in the metaphor of the mirror, which makes the two unite not just at the level of the soul but at that of the body as well. We are told that the Narrator used to see his soul reflected in Idrīs’s, and that Idrīs in turn used to see his soul mirrored in the Narrator’s. This serves the thesis of identity at the spiritual and intellectual levels.

(Let us remember that the Narrator says that Idrīs’s *intellect* was his companion, which entails that the two share the same faculty of thinking and the same thought processes.) The corporeal level then comes in, albeit in the fictional realm, to complement the other two levels, the spiritual and the intellectual; the Narrator asserts that a number of people have held the belief that Idrīs, the character in the Narrator’s fictional writing, was indeed an image of him, his look-alike or double. It is important to underscore that we are led to this conclusion—i.e., complete identity between the Narrator and Idrīs—only through a two-dimensional inquiry that weaves together two narrative times (and two narrative discourses): first, the time of the uttering of the above quote, which presupposes the physical presence of Shuʿayb as the Narrator’s interlocutor and second the time of the fictional piece the Narrator has been composing about the half “imaginary,” half “real” character Idrīs. One is justified to follow this line of inquiry that aims at synthesis, at putting together the various pieces with regard to Idrīs’s fragmented, scattered self or selves. This is in line with the very procedure of the Narrator and the literary vision of Abdullāh al-ʿArwī himself, a vision that sees value in mixing, doubling, multiplying, and overlapping, with an eye on that ultimate goal of opening up the way for pleasure in reading or reading as pleasure. There is an echo of that literary-philosophical motto of the Narrator’s, that the force of “creation” and “fragmentation” is ever at play (10). As one thing begets another, its
identity as a unitary entity is by default impacted. The quote above draws attention to the fiction within the fiction or, in other words, one story begetting another, thereby highlighting the forces of creation and fragmentation at work. The Narrator dissects the person of his late friend Idrīs, rendering him “the hero of a story.” In order to create a story (something new) revolving around Idrīs, the Narrator cannot do without dissecting his person into bits and fragments. Put differently, for construction to take place deconstruction becomes a necessity. In this context, deconstruction and mise en abîme are ultimately one and the same procedure. This connects figurally with the thesis of breaking a fixed subject(ivity) as a first step for forging a new one. It highlights the ways in which al-'Arwī’s experimental literary work serves his broader project of stirring and engaging critically contemporary Arab thought and ideologies.

As the conversation between Shu‘ayb and the Narrator moves along, mise en abîme gains in prominence, and the reader finds additional clues with regard to the hazy, unstable, and constantly shifting identity of the characters navigating the multiple narrative layers of the book. There is one key piece of information one gleans from this quote uttered by the Narrator:

لا أسأل: من كفّن ودفن إدريس؟ أقول أنه مات ميتة أستاذه وأستاذي الذي اقتبست منه بعض ملامح شخصية يوليوس [..]

[I am not asking: Who wrapped and buried Idrīs’s body? I am saying that his death is similar to that of his teacher and my teacher, from whom I borrowed some of the features of the character Julius. (10; emphasis added)]

A set of questions ensues: Who is Julius? What do we know about him besides the fact that he was the teacher of both Idrīs and the Narrator? What role, if any, does he play in the book
Awrāq? Fortunately for the reader, the quote above is accompanied by an endnote\textsuperscript{117}, in which we learn that Julius is actually one of the characters in al-ʿArwī’s novel al-Ghurbah\textsuperscript{118}, and that he is based on a real person with the name of François Gottland, who worked as “a teacher of French Literature in Moulay Youssef High School” during French colonial presence in Morocco (Awrāq, 245). The autobiographical overtones of this endnote are noteworthy. Putting the Narrator’s words in line with the information provided in the endnote, one is drawn to conclude that the Narrator is indeed the author of the novel al-Ghurbah, meaning that he and al-ʿArwī constitute one and the same person. This is further corroborated by the fact that the main character in al-Ghurbah is no other than Idrīs. Having said that, Julius emerges as another double of Idrīs, at least at the technical, “meta-fictional” level; just as the Narrator borrowed some of the characteristics of his “imaginary” character Idrīs from the “real” person Idrīs, he borrowed some of the features of the character Julius from the real person François Gottland. This trope of mirroring and reduplication is maintained through the flow of the Narrator’s revelations.

Although he does not imply identity between Idrīs and Julius, the Narrator alludes to what might make the two alike and how their respective destinies appear to mirror each other. He muses on Julius’s death as follows:

\textsuperscript{117} It is interesting that al-ʿArwī provides endnotes to his book, a practice that is quite unorthodox in fictional writing. These endnotes amount to 139 in total. Commenting on this practice, al-ʿArwī explains: “The references that I included in Awrāq were meant to make things easier [for the reader], and they are justified [. . .]. [Awrāq] is a critical book or a critical study on a text. . . Thus, each one of these two people (the Narrator/Author and Shuʿayb) would try to show to the other the source of what he finds in the text. [. . .] The way in which this text—which is a text on a text—was written justifies this procedure [. . .].” See Muhammad al-Dāhī, Shiʿriyyat al-Sīrah al-Dhihniyya [The Poeticness of the Mental Biography] (Cairo: Ruʿyah, 2008), 160.

[They said: depression, neural and mental breakdown. Because of France’s failure?
Because of his own failure professionally? Politically? Emotionally? I don’t doubt that he had also left some papers, and that some people intend to make them public in order to answer the question: Why? Why? (11; emphasis added)]

It is telling that the kind of questions the Narrator raises in relation to the death of Julius are similar to and parallel the questions he and Shu‘ayb are asking with regard to Idrīs’s death. The juxtaposition of Idrīs’s and Julius’s destinies highlights an important period of Morocco’s modern history, colonial time. Al-‘Arwī draws on the French colonial enterprise in the country to illuminate and give more context to Idrīs’s existential and intellectual journeys.

Having said that, it appears as though the most important reason why Shu‘ayb and the Narrator are discussing and debating the papers left behind by Idrīs is to figure out what caused his premature death at the age of forty. On the first page of the section entitled “The Ghost of Shu‘ayb” we learn that Idrīs lived “twenty years in the darkness of [French] colonialism and twenty years in the light of [Morocco’s] independence” (9), which helps the reader pinpoint the exact historical period of Idrīs’s life: 1936-1976. In the section following the last chapter of Awrāq—which takes the title “commemoration” [al-ta‘bīn] (234-42)—the Narrator and Shu‘ayb engage in a heated debate regarding a final say on what caused or led to the death of Idrīs. The Narrator speaks first:
I did not know what Idrīs had written about himself, and so I imagined that the cause of his affliction was Māriyyah’s infidelity. [. . .] And now [. . .] that I have read and arranged his papers I can see that he only saw himself in the context of failure and disappointment. He never believed that literary success could make up for the bitterness of life, and he decided that his failure would be the true expression of the collective failure. (234; emphasis added)

The Narrator unsurprisingly maintains the game of mixing and overlapping different narrative layers and narrative times in this passage. He splits Idrīs in two, the “imaginary Idrīs”—who takes the role of the hero in the novel al-Ghurbah [Estrangement]—and the “real Idrīs”—who wrote the papers under investigation in the book Awrāq. This move is by no means made explicit in the quote, but is a logical conclusion to critics and readers familiar with al-ʿArwī’s previous literary works (namely, the following novels: al-Ghurbah, al-Yatīm119 [The Orphan], and al-Farīq120 [The Team]). The passage mentions in passing Māriyyah, who is in fact a major character in al-ʿArwī’s first novel, al-Ghurbah—a work that is also claimed by the Narrator, as we have seen earlier—and second novel al-Yatīm. The Narrator makes a comparison between the two images of Idrīs, the one originating in al-Ghurbah and the other springing from the papers, which Awrāq treat as true, historical documents. As the Narrator would have us believe, the

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literary (the novelized Ḣdrīs of *al-Ghurbah*) is adjacent to, and interacts with, the extra-literary (the real Ḣdrīs). It is curious—and remains unaccounted for—why the Narrator would mix up these two levels in the quest for what precipitated the death of the “historical” Ḣdrīs. With that being said, the idea of “failure” occupies a prominent position in the Narrator’s assessment of the papers, and is taken as a critical factor in the death of the “historical” Ḣdrīs. This notion of “failure” brings to light not only Ḣdrīs’s “private” and internal struggles with literary writing but also gives the reader a sense of Ḣdrīs’s outside world, highlighting thereby the dialectic of the private and the public. Ḣdrīs sees himself as an extension of—maybe the embodiment of—his society’s failures. This connects to al-‘Arwī’s thesis of the state of crisis and loss of “the subject” assailing Moroccan and Arab societies in the 20th century, as noted above. The Narrator continues his concluding remarks on the late Ḣdrīs thus:

> حكم على نفسه باليأس القاتل. لم يكن في مستوى طموحه كما لم يكن مجتمعه في مستوى آماله. مات كما مات غيره من العجز والحزرة.而现在 جاء الوقت لأقول كلمتي الأخيرة:

> الكتابة انسلاخ وانتحار، استجابة لإخفاق الحياة الجماعية.

[. . .] He took fatal disappointment as his [final] verdict. He did not live up to what he had aspired to, and *his society* did not meet his hopes. He died of impotence and agony, just like the other(s). [. . .] And now comes the time for me to say my final word:

> *Writing* is detachment and suicide, a response to the *failure* of the life of the *collective*.

(236-38)

This passage can be read as painting a triangular relationship involving three interconnected entities: Ḣdrīs, his society, and literary writing. As I will discuss in some detail in the next
section, Idrīs has had a long struggle with becoming a “good” writer, producing fine literary writing. But as we are made to understand, he ultimately failed on that front for a number of reasons, including the encroachment of reality and the factual incidents taking place or having taken place in his society—i.e. “al-mawṣūf” (the described)—in his literary writing and literary world(s). What I want to stress at this juncture is the very notion of “failure” in relation to the collective in order to underscore the mirroring (or mise en abîme) motif running throughout the book of Awrāq, and in this case bringing together the destinies of Idrīs and Julius. As we have seen, the quote about Julius above inquires on his death, whether its cause could be located in any one of the following failures: professional, political, emotional, etc. These probable causes oscillate between the two sides of the private-public binary. They could be looked at in juxtaposition to the reasons behind Idrīs’s passing. At the professional level, Idrīs failed to fulfill his dream of becoming a successful writer despite his constant efforts and the concrete steps he took towards that end. In one of his papers, Idrīs writes:

إتفق أعضاء الأسرة ونصحوني أن أختار مهنة الطب. سئموا حياتهم التعسة وظنوا أن الطب يفتح لي ولهم أبواب النعيم. تظاهرت بمسايرتهم مدة رغم قناعتي ان اقتراحهم يعاكس ميولي. منذ صباي وأنا أحلم ان أكون كاتبا.

[My family members came together and advised me to choose the profession of medicine. They were fed up with their miserable life, and thought that medicine could open the doors of bliss to me and to them. I pretended to be in agreement for a while despite my conviction that their suggestion goes against my inclination. Since childhood I have dreamed of becoming a writer. (90; emphasis added)]
Idrīs passionately wanted writing to be his primary profession, not just a hobby. He could not imagine himself being anything other than a writer. And that is why he went against his family’s wishes and took the bold step of “enrolling himself in the department of letters” (41). We also learn that he “refused to take teaching as a profession” (41). Commenting on Idrīs’s “rebellion” against his family, the Narrator notes that this behavior perhaps shows the extent to which he was influenced by “the enemies of [the institution of] the family (Nietzsche, Gide, and Sartre)” (91). Interestingly, in the discussion between Shuʿayb and the Narrator regarding Idrīs’s paper, in which he reflects on his family’s pressuring him to opt for medicine and his final decision to join “the department of letters” instead, we get a few hints on how Idrīs’s career choice has a political dimension. In fact, the paper consists of two paragraphs, the first treating his professional career and the second disclosing his political awareness. It is revealing that Idrīs concludes this paper on a political note; reacting to the misery of a young boy selling meat sandwiches on the street, he says: “This is what France has done to us” (91). The two commentators take up this reference, providing the reader with additional information. On his part, the Narrator states that Idrīs wrote this paper when he was residing in Paris in “the Morocco House” on campus and “hearing and reading a lot on the Moroccan crisis [al-ʿazmah al-maghribiyyah]” (91). We learn afterwards that this refers to the August 20th crisis of 1953 (93), when the French colonial authorities sent King Mohamed V of Morocco in exile to Corsica and then to Madagascar. The Narrator is forthcoming in showing the contradictions in Idrīs’s personality, especially in respect to the private-public dialectic. He remarks:

Française [..] [فارغ عائلته الصغيرة ثم تحرر من أستاذه ليعون إلى أحضان أسرة أوسع وذلك في قلب باريس. سمع جيد يقول: إني أكرهك يا أسرة! [..] ألقى بتعاليم جيد وراه ظهره [..] لكن

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[Idrīs [. . .] left his small family and was then liberated from his [attachment to his] teacher [Julius] only to return to the bosom of a larger family in the heart of Paris. He heard Gide say: ‘I indeed hate you, o family!’ [. . .] He threw Gide’s teachings behind [. . .], and instead of screaming, ‘I despise you, o family,’ he said: ‘I hate you, o France.’ And that was the headline of his return to the folds of the greater family. (92)]

The greater family here refers to the Moroccan nation, and speaks to Idrīs’s nationalist feelings. He could not liberate himself from his external attachments, which would negatively impact his literary ambitions, and would ultimately lead to his professional downfall, his failure as a writer (237). And here we see how intricately related the professional and political dimensions of Idrīs’s life journey are. It is interesting that the quote makes an allusion to the character of Julius, who is also taken as being part of the external world that tightened its grip on Idrīs’s soul and intellect. The parallels between Idrīs and his former teacher Julius at the professional and political levels did not prevent the two from standing on the opposite sides of the political spectrum. Julius is a supporter of French colonial presence in Morocco, and he takes part (and probably pride) in the “mission civilisatrice” by becoming a settler and taking a high school teaching job on Moroccan soil. His nationalism mirrors that of Idrīs. As we have seen in an earlier quote, the Narrator muses on whether Julius’s death was caused by “France’s failure,” in reference to the Nazis’ occupation of French territories. Just as Julius could not stand seeing his homeland becoming a German colony, Idrīs was irritated by Morocco being a French colony.
The mirroring motif reaches its height when the Narrator notes that Julius has probably, just like Idrīs, left a number of papers, and that some of his people might be considering their publication.

The Narrator’s musing on a possible emotional cause behind Julius’ passing could be seen as mirroring Idrīs’s emotional failure, namely the devastating effect of the infidelity of the woman he loved dearly, Māriyyah—an aspect of Idrīs’s life journey that is treated at length in al-‘Arwī’s previous novels al-Ghurbah and al-Yatīm. I should add that Idrīs’s other love debacles do make an appearance in Awrāq. In chapter seven, aptly titled “Emotion” (al-‘ātifah), we come to learn of how Idrīs, while living in Paris, met a German girl, and their relationship ended after only a few weeks (149). The Narrator comments that, in Idrīs’s behavior with the girl, it became clear that “his emotional education” (tarbiyatahu al-‘ātifiyah) was not on a par with “his intellectual education” (tarbiyatahu al-fikriyyah) (149). After they parted ways, Idrīs continued to draft letters to the German girl for an entire year, although we are not sure if he took the step of mailing any of them. As we come to know afterwards, “Idrīs lived with the ghost of the German girl throughout the year 1957 until he met another girl, a Frenchwoman this time, whom [he] also treated like a ghost” as their relationship once again ended in failure (161). This period in Idrīs’s life coincided with the time when he was deeply immersed in reading Marcel Proust, from whom he learned that literary writing is “deception” [khud’ah] (166). Proust seems to have penetrated the ghostly love life of Idrīs through infiltrating the letters he has drafted to both the German and the French girls. When drafting those letters, “Idrīs was in fact addressing himself” (165), and at the same time experimenting with (literary) writing. In response to this, the Narrator asserts:
This shows the extent to which Idrīs’s misfortunes in love affected his adventures with literary writing. The letter served as a linchpin bringing his emotions to bear on the literary wor(l)ds he is constructing or wishes to construct. It appears that the notion of failure—professional, political, emotional or otherwise—figures as a significant trope that ties together the characters of Idrīs and Julius, and most importantly serves as a reminder of how deeply ingrained the *mise en abîme* effect is at work in the book *Awrāq*. Before I move on to the next section that examines Idrīs’s attempts at literary writing, I would like to mention that *mise en abîme* does run through some of the pieces he has himself written. In the early excerpts from Idrīs’s writings that we encounter in chapter one (cf. pages 15–19), we see that Idrīs has taken the character of al-fatā (the youth) as the protagonist in what he drafts about, or based on, incidents that have actually happened to him. Here are just two quotes from Idris’s writings:

ودّع الفتى مرافقيه على رأس الدرب وتابع طريقه نحو باب المنزِّل العائلي الذي كان يبعد بعشرة

أمتار عن الطريق الذاهب إلى البيضاء.
The youth said good goodbye to his friends at the end of the alley and continued his way towards the family house that was ten meters away from the road to Casablanca. (15) كان الفتى وحده في الحافلة جالسا على مقعد خشبي يتألم من البرد. [. . .] وجد نفسه في مدرسته الجديدة أكثر عزلة [. . .] لم يتذوق حياة الداخلية النظامية الرتيبة.

The youth was alone on the bus, sitting on a wooden seat and in pain of the cold. [. . .] He found himself more isolated in his new school [. . .]. He did not enjoy the boring life of the boarding school. (17)

These passages are part of Idrīs’s very first attempts with writing, and they date back to the time when his family sent him to a boarding school far away from his hometown; we would later on learn that the school is in the city of Rabat (28). It is interesting that Idrīs, although still a teenager, demonstrates a precocious literary consciousness or sensibility, for, instead of writing about himself in a direct fashion using the first person, he has opted for creating a pseudo-imaginary character with the nomenclature of “al-fatā,” (the young boy) experimenting thereby with the technique of mise en abîme. This could be the first sign of his journey towards creative writing, towards fulfilling the dream of becoming a successful writer. In his capacity as commentator and critic, the Narrator exposes Idrīs’s employment of mise en abîme; he affirms that “from the start Idrīs lived on two levels,” adding that “he dissolved in the character of al-fatā” so that he could “contemplate its features and inspect its conduct” clearly (16; emphasis added). After examining more passages in which Idrīs strives to depict literally the character of al-fatā, the Narrator makes an assessment of utmost importance; he tells Shu‘ayb:
I note a flaw in the composition resulting from targeting objectivity. Idrīs wanted to be separated from his self so that he could see it reflected in a mirror. And so he planned for a life different from his, only he could not withstand the attack of reality. The protective barricade dissolved and the mirror broke. [. . .] Clearly, Idrīs tried to remove specificity from the scenes surrounding our youth, but he didn’t find success. Reality penetrated the wall of the imagination. (19-20; emphasis added)]

Following the Narrator, Idrīs could not handle well the mise en abîme technique, and therefore his attempts to craft a literary piece of writing that gives priority to the imagination to the detriment of reality were not very successful. He could not maintain good and convincing distance between the two levels of his own self. The mirror metaphor went to pieces, and the literary effect of mirroring followed suit. Idrīs’s imaginative faculty faces limits with the encroachment of reality in his literary realms. He could not rid himself of the heavy toll of everyday life. In short, he finds himself unable to go past al-mawṣuf (the described), and thus his goal of grasping al-mawdū’ (the subject) and transcribing it in his writing remains unreachable, hence the lingering sense of loss and crisis that mark the book Awrāq. The next section investigates this dilemma of Idrīs’s further, and highlights Awrāq’s forays into literary criticism and theory, an important facet of the book’s narrative subversion or deformation.
Idrīs and the Pursuit of the Secret(s) to the Literary Word: Failure or Success?

[Idrīs wondered: What am I to do with my experience? How can I frame, divide, arrange, color, and organize it? Lived experience is what is gathered, what is described; it is not the subject, not the goal. [. . .]]

He despised what is described, content in all its meanings, be it from nature or from history. And after a while he despised the craft: the architecture, ornamentation, and beautification. He says: Style is not arranging words; style is the aura surrounding the words [. . .]. Style is indeed the echo that words and passages leave behind after they have been read and forgotten.
Experience, architecture, decoration, none of this is the subject [or] the goal. It is necessary to look behind these things for an expression peculiar to the emotion, to the color of the described. The emotion is a movement, the color is a movement, and the tone is a movement; let us unite these three movements: that is the goal. (Awrāq, 235)

Indeed, inquiry into literary writing, including discussion of the binary of form-content and the dialectic of *al-mawdūʿ* (the subject) and *al-mawṣuf* (the described), features as an extremely significant facet of the different narrative layers of the book. Literary inquiry also figures as a key preoccupation on the part of Idrīs, whose ultimate goal as an aspiring writer is to go beyond the details of his daily life experiences and capture “the subject,” the core of the literary wor(l)d. The question poses itself: What does Idrīs—and by extension al-ʿArwī—mean exactly by “the subject” (*al-mawdūʿ*) in the context of the book *Awrāq*? The above-cited passage offers a few clues: “the aura surrounding the words,” “the echo,” “an expression peculiar to the emotion,” “the color,” and “the tone.” Following this quote, these qualities leading up to “the subject” appear to occupy an area outside of a work’s content and architectural design. In other words, “the subject” cannot be pinned down solely in how a work is written or in what a work is saying. A literary work’s content and form do not by themselves guarantee the work achieving or yielding “the subject.” As we learn from the passage above, Idrīs despises content in all its manifestations, whether historical or nature-based, in addition to deriding the literary craft in the sense of “architecture, ornamentation, and beautification.” To reach “the subject,” it is incumbent upon one to dig deeper and search behind and beyond both one’s personal and/or collective life experiences (content or *al-mawṣuf*) and the architectural design of a piece of writing (structure or form); one must strive for that expression that is “peculiar to the *emotion*, to the *color* of the described.” One must search for the magic to the literary word. But what is this magical impress
that makes a work of literature shine and captivate? How can one get to it? How did Idrīs, as an aspiring author, go about attempting to grasp it and make it manifest in his writings? Did his endeavors ultimately end in failure or success?

It is important to underscore that Idrīs (the spokesperson of al-ʿArwī) feels contempt for form and content only in so far as they are devoid of that third element (“the aura,” “the echo,” “the color”) that gives the writing a touch of “magic.” That is, form and content are not necessarily negative entities. In fact, they are indispensable to any work of literature. It is hard to imagine a work that is “contentless” or formless. It might be useful at this point to refer to how Marcel Proust’s experiments with literary writing are characterized in the book. In Awrāq’s chapter eight, aptly entitled “al-dhawq” (Taste), the reader finds out that “Idris’s taste was indeed formed in France’s capital,” (172) when he started frequenting movie theatres more than he did in Morocco. Idrīs’s attachment to and fascination with the cinematic art increased dramatically while in Paris, and played a major role in how he envisioned the art of literary writing. It was inside the dark movie theatres where his awareness of the questions of “form” and “expression” increased (173). He learned more about the arts of “the epic, the tragedy, the song, the drama, the novel, etc.” from the writings of movie critics, namely “Georges Sadoul, André Bazin, Henri Agel—the heirs of René Clair and Elie Faure” (173). Idrīs’s immersion in the cinematic art while residing in France opened up his literary horizons and led him to envision that core quality of writing without which a work of literature remains lacking in one way or another; and most importantly it prepared him to finally learn “the lesson of Proust” (174). It seems that Idrīs did find in Proust that the literary word—or more precisely al-lafdh (the [literary] enunciation)—could indeed metamorphose into “melody” (naghmah) and “color” (luwaynah) (174). Elaborating on this point, the Narrator states:
[Idrīs] understood why Proust spent all those years unable to write, thinking he was searching for a content while he was [in fact] looking for the right form, a comprehensive form that synthesizes and bypasses Bergotte’s style, Elstir’s brilliance, Vinteuil’s melody [. . .], a form that resembles in the final analysis the cinematic art in its comprehensiveness and fullness. (174; emphasis added)

In Proust, Idrīs discovers that very often one’s quest to find a particular content is no other than the search for a suitable form, a discovery that would deepen his literary sensibility and awareness. It follows then that as long as the (aspiring) writer lays his/her hand on that third element (“the aura,” “the echo,” “the color,” “the melody,” etc.) the distinction between, and the barrier separating, what we normally call form and content fades away. Idrīs realizes that the fascinating thing about Proust’s genius is the fact that his À la recherche du temps perdu has managed not only to bring together but also to transcend the three arts of a- literary writing (Bergotte), b- painting (Elstir), and c- music (Vinteuil). Ultimately, Proust, with only the power of the word in his disposal, succeeded in designing a literary product that is as comprehensive and whole as the cinematic product. In doing so, Proust brought about “a separation between the world of literature and the world of [cinematic] art,” and thwarts the efforts of the biggest film directors “who tried in vain to turn his long piece into a convincing film” (174). In other words, the work that Proust produced proved superior to cinema, and the literary wor(l)d that he

121 In the Arabic original, this passage appears with a footnote, in which al-‘Arwī explains that in Proust’s À la recherche du temps perdu the writer Bergotte is based on the real person Anatole France, the painter Elstir on Claude Monet, and the musician Vinteuil on Charles-Camille Saint-Saëns. See Awrāq, 251.
managed to construct turned out to be more forceful than the visual world crafted by movie directors. In *À la recherche du temps perdu*, form and content reached complete harmony, and the magic of the literary word is resurrected.

In reading Proust’s literary work while being consumed by the cinematic art, Idrīs becomes obsessed with the novel, for that is the art form that he ultimately wants to excel at. Yet he does not seek to write any novel; rather he aspires—in the footsteps of Proust—to create a novel with “an echo” and “an aura” (236), a novel where form is in perfect harmony with content. He thought that if he were to construct “a sentimental education” type of novel, the literary world he would devise would end up being limited to a specified “time and place” and his endeavors would lack “the magic” that pulls the reader to the writing, “the echo that titillates the emotions days after the novelistic work has been read” (236). That is, he would not be able to go past *al-mawṣuf* (the described), the mundane details of everyday life, and the magic, the aura, the color, and the echo of the literary wor(l)d would be non-existent. But what is exactly this magic, this aura, this melody, this third element that makes a novel stand out and seduce?

Reflecting on this question, Idrīs makes an interesting analogy, and takes us back to the realm of cinema and its audio-visual dimensions: “He remembered photographic music, the melodic aura that enfolds the scenes” (236). Idrīs puts the sequence of scenes that makes up a certain film in juxtaposition with what he calls “*al-mawṣuf*” (the described or what is being described in a piece of writing.) For him, the two parallel one another, only that the former, in sharp contrast to the latter, includes a third element that endows it with a seductive force: *the photographic music.*

While pondering the significance of this “external” audio-aural component (“the melodic aura”) to the “internal” visual element of the cinematic product, Idrīs draws an important conclusion with regard to the novel. He becomes convinced that within the novel the melodic aura “could
only be generated from a sentiment that is synonymous with the meaning of al-ḥanīn (nostalgia)” (236; emphasis added). The Narrator explains that this sentiment is not “particular” in the sense of “being mentioned in the novel alongside other sentiments like anger, joy, sadness, or satisfaction”; it is indeed “a general sentiment that accompanies the novel without being part of its content” (236). That is to say, nostalgia is a literary effect that goes beyond al-mawṣuf; yet its presence alongside al-mawṣuf makes it generate al-mawdūʿ. Elsewhere in Awrāq, we learn that Idrīs’s only obsession became “the pursuit of the time of the novel, not its style or its language or its content,” what Idrīs calls “its form or accompanying melody,” which then led him to “the concept of al-ḥanīn (nostalgia)” (211). Nostalgia is the color and the melodic aura that gush magic into the veins of the literary piece. It is the impress that elevates the literary work in question to the heights of literary genius and perfection.

It appears as though Idrīs has finally put his finger on the secret to the magic of novelistic writing, but does that translate into a successful execution thereof? Following the Narrator, Idrīs was incapable of “capturing the accompanying melody and this inability freshened all his past failures” (236). The Narrator adds that Idrīs initially thought of “al-ʿihbāṭ” (failure or disappointment) as “one of the components of al-mawṣuf,” (his as well as his surroundings’ everyday life incidents), but afterwards “it turned in his mind into a personal failure, into an artistic way to unite form and content” (237; emphasis added). This is an interesting twist in the literary trajectory of Idrīs. He turns something that is negative (failure or disappointment) into a positive value, a literary tool through which he could strike harmony between form and content, thereby getting closer to his ultimate goal of imbuing his writings with that melodic aura and echo. This is reminiscent of al-ʿArwī’s argument in his critical book al-ʿIdyūlījyā al-ʿArabiyyah al-Muʿāṣirah (Contemporary Arab Ideology) that “the loss of the subject” on the part of the Arab
peoples—which is a negative designation—could just be their “subject” (22). This further corroborates the parallels between al-‘Arwī’s two works, Awrāq and al-‘Idyūlājū, and shows how the two texts mirror and complement one another, giving unity to the Moroccan author’s literary and critical work.

I would like to dwell on this interesting proposition of failure being a linchpin that unites and renders harmonious a literary text’s form and content. The intriguing thing about this proposition is that it destabilizes the concept of failure so much so that failure becomes a positive value that borders on success. This seems to unsettle the entire premise of Idrīs’s literary writings being dismissed by the Narrator as failed endeavors. After all, the reader is only given access to a fraction of Idrīs’ papers, not to the entire archive. Also, our perception of Idrīs is formed primarily through the mediation of the Narrator and secondarily through that of Shu‘ayb. What I want to propose here is a reconsideration of the Narrator’s assessment of Idrīs’s literary journey as a failure in the negative sense of the word. Departing from the Narrator’s very own statement that Idrīs turned failure “into an artistic way to unite form and content,” I would like to highlight the bright side of Idrīs’s struggles with the literary word. In this regard, I want to stress that after Idrīs’s obsession with Proust has subsided he opened up to another major literary figure, Hermann Hesse:

هذا التجاذب بين النغمة التي يصبو إليها إدريس وما تتطلبه من اعتزال، هو الذي ينمي في ذهنه الوعي بحتمية الفشل. فينفتح فكره من جديد لدرس هرمان هس. [ . . ] أصبح إدريس يلتزم بفكرة بكلمة، بشعور الإخفاق. جعل من الإخفاق قيمة أخلاقية يتبعذ بها من رتابة الحياة اليومية.

[This affinity between the melody that Idrīs strives for and the isolation it necessitates has made the awareness of the inevitability of failure grow in his mind. And so his thought}
opened up to the lesson of Hermann Hesse. [. . .] Idrīs started to relish the idea, the word, and the sentiment of failure. He turned failure into an ethical value in which he sought refuge from the monotony of everyday life. (215; emphasis added)]

According to Moroccan critic al-’Amīn al-ʿUmrāni, “failure” in the general context of al-ʿArwī’s and Hesse’s respective philosophies “is a positive concept” which, contrary to common usage, provides an incentive to continue being productive and hard-working, and not “lean on” and be satisfied with “the ready-made” (351). Put differently, failure offers great lessons in life, and enriches the intellectual and emotional aspects of one’s personality regardless of how one is seen or judged by the outside world. Failure becomes an intrinsic positive value that perhaps only the individual who has lived it is in a position to relish the horizons and opportunities it offers. Al-ʿUmrāni then poses the crucial question with regard to “Idrīs’s existential, mental, and artistic experience”: Did he actually fail or succeed? (352) Let us go back to Awrāq itself. At the very end of the book, there is a heated debate between Shuʿayb and the Narrator regarding the assessment of Idrīs’s journey. Shuʿayb, who keeps “a low profile” throughout the book compared to the dominating presence of the Narrator’s voice, declares in such a defiant tone:

تقول: أخفق بشهادته هو. أقول: انتصر بشهادته من هو أعلى من ذاته في ذاته. [. . .] كلما قلت أنت السخط فهمت أنا المحبة. كلما قلت الثورة فهمت الوفاء. كلما قلت الغضب فهمت الولاء.

[You say: He failed according to his own testimony. I say: He triumphed according to the testimony of he who is higher than his self in his self. [. . .] whenever you say rage I understand love. Whenever you say revolt I understand fidelity. Whenever you say anger I understand loyalty. (242-43)]
It is noticeable that at the very conclusion of the book, Shuʿayb stands at the exact opposite side of the spectrum from the Narrator. He comes at Idrīs’s defense, arguing for his ultimate success and triumph. He corroborates his position by referring to the testimony of “he who is higher than [Idrīs’s] self in his self.” This is a vague and confusing statement, and sounds more like a riddle. The *mise en abîme* motif could provide an answer, inconclusive as it might be. This character or person that attests to Idriss’s victory and seems to play the role of his double is no other than Shuʿayb himself. Let us keep in mind the discussion in the previous section, that the trope of mirroring and the reduplication of images it presupposes are at the heart of the book *Awrāq*. We should also remember that al-ʿArwī has himself suggested in the Introduction that the three characters of Idrīs, Shuʿayb, and the Narrator could be seen as mirroring one another and forming ultimately one single person. The *mise en abîme* comes back once again to unsettle not just the characters themselves but the book’s meaning and significance, and brings to light al-ʿArwī’s vision of literary experimentation in the context of Moroccan and Arabic literatures. *Awrāq* is a work that blurs the boundaries between fiction and criticism, destabilizes the notion of genre, and showcases al-ʿArwī’s experimental inclinations. It is a text that, to borrow Amanṣūr’s words, has contributed to moving Moroccan novelistic writing from “spontaneous experimentalism” to “an experimentalism that is conscious of its strategies” (*Kharāʾīt*, 25). The *mise en abîme* is no doubt one major strategy underlying the book’s experimental impulse. It is a well-crafted technique that shows the workings of “al-tajrīb al-ważīfī” (functional experimentalism) in the text, and sheds light on al-ʿArwī’s vision of the nature and role of literature. In probing the binary of “al-mawdūʿ” (the subject) and “al-mawṣūf” (the described) and its entanglement with European ideas in such a way that involves formal and generic deformations, the book *Awrāq* asserts its relevance to—and “functional experimentalism” with
regard to—the socio-political milieu both in Morocco and the larger Arab world, this being one major matrix of this dissertation project. The book’s formal experimentalism also bears on the other parameter that informs the dissertation, the anxiety of Moroccan experimental literature over the question of influence, especially one coming from the West, and its endeavors to autonomy and specificity. Indeed, *Awrāq* is a text that does not miss the opportunity to draw on and make use of *al-turāth* (Arab-Muslim heritage). As noted above, al-‘Arwī’s book *Awrāq* (Papers) adopts the formal design—as well as adapts the title—of *al-‘Awrāq* (The Papers), a text by the medievalist literary scholar Abū Bakr al-Ṣūlī (d. 946 CE). Al-‘Arwī’s text demonstrates a strategic investment in *al-turāth* as it attempts to innovate and give specificity to Moroccan novelistic writing.
Conclusion

As I have attempted to show throughout this dissertation project, experimentalism in the Moroccan novel tradition ushered a shift in literary activity in the latter half of the twentieth century, in which novelistic writings pursued a direction that diverged in significant ways from the realist model of Nobel laureate Najīb Maḥfūz (Naguib Mahfouz) and ʿAbdulkarīm Ghallāb as well as from the traditional, realist model of the 18th- and 19th-century European novel as researched by Ian Watt. The experimental current in the Moroccan novel does not value the linearity of the narrative. As it discards the pursuit of verisimilitude, the trend of al-tajrīb (experimentalism) does not place much emphasis on figural time and place or on characterization. In experimental writings the cast of characters might not be easily identifiable, and at times they are not even assigned proper names—as in Aḥmad al-Madīnī’s novel Zaman bayna al-Wilādah wa al-Ḥulum (1976, Time between Birth and Dream), which I examined in chapter three.

It is worthwhile reiterating that, generally speaking, experimental writers in Morocco and in the Arab world—including two authors studied in this dissertation, Aḥmad al-Madīnī and Muḥammad Barrādah—do not necessarily reject the realist novels of Maḥfūz or Ghallāb, only they sought to overstep their formal, realist qualities. Interestingly, this shift coincided with a state of anxiety among Moroccan littérateurs with regard to the notion of influence. Moroccan experimentalism manifested a sense of wariness in relation to literary trends or modes imported from foreign literatures, and therefore it sought to disentangle literary activity from the pressures of external influence—either from the Arab East (the Mashriq) or from the West—while forging
ways that could set Moroccan literature (especially the novel) on a path towards more autonomy and specificity.

I tried to argue that the shift from the matrix of domination to that of autonomy manifested through a strategic investment in literary experimentation—what ‘Abdullāh al-‘Arwī calls “al-tajrīb al-ważīfī” (functional experimentation). I explored how, for instance, the incorporation of the element of al-turāth (Arab-Islamic literary and cultural heritage) has served well the flourishing and consolidation of Moroccan—as well as Arab—experimentalism. Through my analysis of the inclusion of the Arab-Islamic heritage in writings associated with the trend of al-tajrīb, I highlighted the conservative dimension of experimentalism in its Moroccan and Arab contexts. I argued that the incorporation of al-turāth contributes, in significant ways, to building the foundations of a new brand of novelistic writing, one that finds its raison d'être in altering the direction—rather than the essence—of the Moroccan novel. In so doing, I attempted to unsettle the experimentation-tradition binary in addition to complicating the debate over legitimacy and authenticity that attends the phenomenon of al-tajrīb.

Through my investigation of al-tajrīb (experimentalism) in the postcolonial period, I sought to reassess the trajectory of the novel tradition in Morocco in the latter half of the 20th century. I wanted to put pressure on the episteme of “the new” in such constructs as “the new Moroccan novel” and “the new novelistic discourse,” labels that are tied to trend of al-tajrīb. I explored the implications of this shift in literary activity to the broader question of politics and cultural production in postcolonial Morocco. I researched how the formal aspects of al-tajrīb have had a bearing on the socio-cultural milieu. I sought to bring to light the socio-cultural dimensions of experimental Moroccan writings, highlighting in the process the ideological preoccupations of the advocates of al-tajrīb. The experimental impulse that undergirds the
Moroccan novel is part of a larger transformational dynamic that affected Moroccan society and its imaginary in the post-decolonization era, and, therefore, al-tajrīb cannot be dismissed as a mere exercise of formalistic gymnastics, divorced from its historical and socio-political context.

In investigating Moroccan experimental writings’ links to social reality, I showed how the relationship between al-tajrīb (experimentation) and the concept of realism is extremely complex. I tried to argue that the two should not be seen as diametrically opposed—despite the widespread belief that al-tajrīb runs counter to the social realism of Maḥfūẓ (Mahfouz) and Ghallāb. I discussed how al-tajrīb could be construed as a mechanism that expands the purview of realism. That is, writers who embrace al-tajrīb as a horizon for their literary investments should not be dismissed as non-realist or anti-realist. I attempted to probe a new definition or articulation of realism, one that emerges out of the practices and discourses of experimental fiction. Instead of proposing “realism” as a mimetic literary mode based on descriptive prose, I tried to push for the idea of a politics of form and a formalization of politics that work through the fusion of multiple narrative voices and layers, a reliance on the technique of fragmentation, the inclusion of a metafictional discourse that interrupts the narrative in order to reflect on the nature and goal of literary writing, and so forth. In highlighting experimentalism’s political exigency—and its recourse to al-turāth—I posited that the demarcations between the “experimental” and “traditional” modes are far from static. I wanted to emphasize that al-tajrīb, even in its most radical articulations, cannot be dismissed as a moment of utter discontinuity or rupture, in the sense of a complete divorce with other literary trends in Morocco, previous or contemporaneous.
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