

Dream, Imagination, and the Ends of Chapters in the Alexandrian Texts

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Abstract

This study sheds light on the spaces of dream and fantasy at the ends of the chapters of Edwar al-Kharrat's novel *Turābuhā Za'farān/ City of Saffron* (1986). Besides other modernist techniques and artistic styles that characterize this advanced stage in al-Kharrat's works, dream and fantasy in this novel contribute to the structure of semantic dimensions which are represented in: confiscating temporality, contemporizing the story to save passing times from loss, vanquishing mortality, seeking eternity, and propositioning the impossible. The phenomenon of symbolic and linguistic intensity through fantasy and dream at the ends of this novel's chapters represents a distinctive feature of al-Kharrat's novel, *Turābuhā Za'farān*. The scenes of 'dream and fantasy' reveal the character's frustration and its suppressed desires which it could not achieve in real life.

Keywords: *Turābuhā Za'farān, Edwar al-Kharrat, The Late Style, fantasy and dream, Postmodernism.*

Turābuhā Za'farān and "The Late Style"

Edwar al-Kharrat (1926-2015)² occupied a distinguished literary position in the Arab World as the leading pioneer in the art of modern fiction due to the

¹ Al-Qasemi Academy.

² See: Edwar al-Kharrat, "Ṭumūh al-naṣṣ huwa bakārat al-ru'yā wa- ṭufūlat al-tajrīd," *Barīd al-Janūb* 7, June 12, 1995; Edwar al-Kharrat, "An al-ṭufūla wa-l-ṣiba wa-l-lugha wa-'ashyā' 'ukhrā," *Al-Quds al-'Arabī*, London, July 11, 1995; 'Abbas Baydūn, "Al-Riwāya- al-qaṣīda: naṣṣ li-Kull 'ashkāl al-wāqī'," *Al-Shāhid* 32, no. 4 (1988): 85-

experimentation and adventurous characteristics that his works enjoy. His early works were published in a climate that was antagonistic to innovation, and therefore, they were received by a lot of critics and researchers with neglect due to their difficulty and pioneering leadership. Consequently, they did not receive the interest that they deserve. Studies on them started after a quarter of a century of writing and creativity had passed.

The text for al-Kharrat in the later period of his production is a crucible in which literary genres, social and philosophical expertise mix. Besides, the myth, the dream, the imagination, the popular tale, and the daily life reality melt together in a modern context. Edward al-Kharrat succeeded in an early period to liberate himself from the strict rules of realistic style³ and reached the peak later through his novels *Rama wa -l-Tannīn/ Rama and the Dragon* (1980), *al-Zaman al-'Ākhar/ The Other Time* (1985), and *Turābuhā Za'farān/ City of Saffron* (1986), which gained a large interest by the critics in a later period. Al-Kharrat prepared new paths in Arabic writing as a creator and a critic, setting off new artistic potentials through his leadership of fictional writing to the most modernist areas.

In his testimony at Amman Cultural Forum in 1993, al-Kharrat, who was about seventy years old, reviewed the stages of his creative experience in a presentation titled "Alummu al-'āna baqāyā nahār al-'umr,/" "I Am Collecting

88; Maggie Awadalla, "Images of Egypt in Twentieth Century Literature," *A Paper Presented at Cairo Symposium*, November 1989, 2-11.

³ Andreas Pflitsch, "Days of Amber, City of Saffron: Edward al-Kharrat Remembers and writes an Unintended Autobiography," in *Arabic literature: Postmodern Perspectives*, eds. Angelika Neuwirth, Andreas Pflitsch and Barbara Winckler (London: Saqi, 2010), 78-80; Yaseen Kittani, "Edward Al-Kharrat, A Pioneer of Innovative Narrative Prose Writing: Beginnings," *Arab Studies Quarterly* 35, no. 4 (2013): 378-393.

Now the Remains of the Day of My Lifetime". He talked long about the late features that he calls "Tyranny of the Senses", pointing out his fictional works that fall within this period. He mentioned his works *Turābuhā Za 'farān*, and *Yā Banāt Iskandariyya* and spoke about the characteristics of the styles of this late period.⁴

The "Late Style" and all the motives and results that are connected to it drew the attention of critic and thinker Edward Said.⁵ In his book, *On Late Style* (2006), Said analyzes in his book the works of the major writers, artists and philosophers in the late period of their life, and shows how their talk and thought acquires a new idiom and unique qualities of perception and form, which he calls "the late style". In the course of his analysis of several literary and artistic works, Said dwells long at Adorno's thesis about the incompleteness of Beethoven's works in his late life: "Adorno describes the way Beethoven seems to inhabit the late works as a lamenting personality, then seems to leave the work or phrases in it incomplete."⁶

Following Said, we see that al-Kharrat, while collecting the remains of his life on the approach of the ghost of death, makes deep fractures in his late

⁴ Edwar al-Kharrat, "Alummu al-'āna baqāyā nahār al-'umr," in *Alqiṣṣa al-qaṣīra fī al-'Urdunn*, ed. Manshūrāt Wizārat al-Ma'ārif ('Ammān: Manshūrāt Wizārat al-Ma'ārif, 1994), 279-295.

⁵ Said started showing interest in the 'Late Style' in the aftermath of having cancer. His book *On Late Style* was published three years after his death in 2006.

⁶ Edward W. Said, *On Late Style: Music and Literature Against the Grain* (New York: Random house, 2007), 11. Said says in this context at the beginning of Chapter Five: "Adorno speaks of Beethoven's late works as constitutively alienated and alienating: difficult, forbidding works...are repellent to audiences and performers alike both because of their redoubtable technical challenges and because their disjointed, even distracted sense of internal continuity offers no very easy line to follow." *Ibid.*, 91.

creative texts, as if he desired to say his last word through them. His late texts are characterized by contradiction, indeterminacy, dismantlement, non-temporality, pastiche, *'abr al-naw'iyya* "transgeneric writing"⁷. All of these styles are post-modern features that are embodied in the employment of dream and winged-fantasy, specifically at the ends of the chapters. Consequently, his late brilliant texts, including *Turābuhā Za 'farān* become a difficult and daunting task due to their ambiguity and incomprehensibility.

This study focuses on the most important artistic and postmodernist features on which al-Kharrat's narrative world is based in *Turābuhā Za 'farān*⁸, which is a novel that is "close to the biography of the city of Alexandria with its saffron sands and the life of the people who live on them, including Edwar al-Kharrat (Mickael) and his family."⁹

In the texts of *Turābuhā Za 'farān*, al-Karrat establishes a bridge over the real life events in Alexandria, where al-Kharrat (Mickael) lived in the past. The texts of the artistic biography were designed according to a previous reality (which was a life) in which that biography was formulated. Therefore, the process of the artistic creation in these texts is a movement from a specific

⁷ Hala Halim. "The pre-postcolonial and its enduring relevance: Afro-Asian variations in Edwar al- Kharrat's texts," in *Postcolonialism Cross-Examined: Multidirectional Perspectives on Imperial and Colonial Pasts and the Neocolonial Present*. Ed. Monika Albrecht (New York: Routledge, 2019), 87; see also, Hala Halim. "Scope for Comparatism: Internationalist and Surrealist Resonances in Idwār al- Kharrāt's Resistant Literary Modernity," In *Arabic Humanities, Islamic Thought: Essays in Honor of Everett K. Rowson*, ed. Joseph E. Lowry and Shawkat M. Toorawa (Leiden: Brill, 2017): 447.

⁸ Edwar al-Kharrat, *Turābuhā Za 'farān* (Beirut: Dār al- 'Ādāb, 1986).

⁹ Mona Meckail, "Man and the Sea," in *The Arabic Novel Since 1950*, ed. Issa Boullata (Cambridge , U.S.A: 1993), 191.

historical reality to another artistic reality, which introduces something new to the space of reality, which has its special nature; it is the art that did not exist before. This is probably what explains al-Karrat's denial in his preliminary opening, that these texts constitute an autobiography, because "the flights of fantasy, the artifice herein, bear them far beyond such bounds." (*Turābuhā*: 5)

In his description of the circumstances of the generation of the "unintended autobiography", Andreas Pflitsch explains the confusion of time and its fragmentation, besides the dizziness and ambiguity of vision, which are prominent features in *Turābuhā Za'farān*, by the frequency of the movement forward and backward, due to the ascent and descent to the "deep well of memories", from which he keeps drawing in order to return to the present, to his office, to record his memories: "In this way the autobiographer commutes between times, and this perpetual back and forth may occasionally turn vertiginous. This too, so we assume, 'perhaps wraps their view' now and then."¹⁰

Thus, the past and its recollection are not the same, and it is inevitable that "whoever does not dare to go beyond reality will never capture the truth."¹¹ The image of reality, (behind which reality hides) in al-Kharrat's texts is shattered, nightmarish, multiple and unlimited. al-Kharrat's autobiography is a Post-Modernist autobiography that mocks reality and deeply despises any synthesis, and therefore, al-Kharrat refuses the "specific synthesis of traditional autobiography."¹²

The post-modern vision is represented in what al-Kharrat includes in his texts: imaginary winged dreamy reveries through employment of myths and symbols, destruction of the sequential linear temporal context, closure of most

¹⁰ Pflitsch, "Days of Amber," 76.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 77.

¹² *Ibid.*, 83

of the book chapters with scenes of fantasy at the Sea, and employment of a highly intensive figurative poetic language, where the realistic elements exist side by side and intertwine with the mythical and the dreamy, the prosaic with the poetic, the colloquial spoken dialect with the classical standard language which resembles the language of *Maqāmāt*, the single event that is repeated more than one time in a different form with adjustments and modifications, characters that disappear and reappear, the narrator who narrates once as a first-person-singular and once as a third-person-singular, the past tense that exist in the present, disappearance of borders between times, overlapping between literary genres such as the popular tale, the myth and the autobiography, and poetry and the story. Besides, the post-modern vision is also represented in the artistic form that seeks to draw the attention to itself and establish a new type of writing that rebels against the already accomplished and prevalent.

It is possible to summarize the most artistic and post-modern features that this study deals with in the following items:

1. Adoption of the dream and fantasy as a model in which the 'realistic' and the 'non-realistic' or the fantastic, unite. The relationships in the dream mix in such a way that the reader feels that he lives on two different intertwined levels.
2. Adoption of the myth on the grounds that it enables the creator to neutralize the mind, liberate the imagination, and introduce a new vision that penetrates the reality of the haunting social phenomena and lends poetic and symbolical atmospheres to the text.
3. Making a radical change in art, which is represented in the direction of this narrative towards denial of the traditional measurements of time and place in the scenes of 'dream' and 'fantasy', and particularly in the ends of the chapters of the novels, in order to reflect a non-temporal world, and to establish another temporality (the Second Time) that is aligned with his pursuit of the 'absolute'

and 'defeat' of 'mortality'; salvaging memories from loss, overcoming the feelings of loss, and going beyond his existential crisis.

Dream and Imagination

The texts of *Turābuhā Za'farān* seek to go beyond reality and the causal logic by adopting the dream in order to create a new reality, where the borders between reality and imagination, between sleep and awakening, between consciousness and unconsciousness become ambiguous, and where time and place mix, and consequently, the sequential linear narration is disrupted.

The dream in these Alexandrian texts leads to "explosion of the buried desires at the bottoms of the Self among the characters and floating of among the characters and floating of the unconsciousness and the hallucination and fantasy, which widened the gap between the new writing and in its penetration to the human interiority and the traditional writing."¹³ The dream in al-Kharrat's texts resembles what happens in our dreams in their dependence on mixing the elements of reality with fantasy. However, our dreams do not completely resemble what happens in literature; our dreams flow spontaneously and randomly without planning; therefore, it is difficult or even impossible to interpret them, while in literature the writer employs the dream in a calculated and planned way that serves his objectives. Though he consistently tries to connect reality with new unfamiliar relationships, dreams for him are planned, rational, and calculated, and ultimately lead to an indication that, no matter how much enigmatic they look or sound, they want to say something. The question that rises here is: why does al-Kharrat resort to the dream in such an intensive way?

¹³ Khālīd Husayn, *Shi'riyyat al-makān fī al-riwāya al-jadīda: Edwar al-Kharrat namudhajan* (al-Riyad: Mu'assasat al-yamāma, 2000), 274.

The answer is because the dream is the only model in which 'reality' and 'non-reality' logic and hallucination are united. The modernist writer clones these two characteristics in order to make the reader feel that he lives on two different levels and two different intertwined worlds, as if he intends to say that "this situation, despite its strangeness, is a familiar situation, and actually, it is the familiar situation in a universe that is void of any justification and logic,"¹⁴ and because of that, the events of the stories lost in their introduction the elements of justification and causal sequence.

Besides, the dream and the creative imagination establish poetic visions that replace the familiar in order to recreate the world and contain life. The Sufis benefitted from the instrumentality of the dream and imagination in their reconstructing the world in a form that differs from the image which they were used to.

‘Āṭif Naṣr says the following about Ibn ‘Arabī’s description of the 'heavenly earth': "What is remarkable in its description is that what our sight refuses and our mind transmits can exist in it, and this, for him, is one of the peculiarities of the imaginative logic, which allows to conceive various images that are completely different from our sensual realization, perception, visualization and understanding, which makes us reconstruct things in such a way that opposites are combined and parallels are intertwined."¹⁵

The question that rises here is this: what are the unique styles that al-Kharrat employs in his novel *Turābuhā Za‘farān* that help him to employ the dream, and what does he want to say through their artistic formation?

¹⁴ Muḥammad Ghālī, "Taṭawwur al-Shakl al-Fannī fī al-qīṣṣa al-Miṣriyya al-qaṣīra" (PhD diss., Banha University, 1991), 169.

¹⁵ ‘Āṭif Naṣr, *Al-khayāl: mafhūmātuḥu wa- waṣā’ ifuḥu* (Cairo: al-Hay’ah al-Miṣriyya al-‘Āmmah, 1984), 131.

The dreams and visions in the Alexandrine texts emanate from a realistic foundation that is easy to identify. However, that foundation soon moves suddenly and without preparation to the dreamlike or fantastic in order to express the impact of that physical 'realistic' foundation on the psychological depths in the unconsciousness. The physical 'reality' is not introduced in the core of this dream except to the extent in which it constitutes an exit to the intractable psychological echoes.

The employed language in the dream is an inscrutable figurative language, in which the source was destroyed, and differs from the linguistic level that precedes and follows the dream in order to imitate the nightmarish 'smashed reality'. Besides, the focalization of the text on the employment of symbols and motifs corresponds with this shift from the concrete to the abstract and the qualities of the unconsciousness:

1. And I saw the steps slipping away from me, and I was tumbling down through the gloom, alone, feeling nothing brush against me, nothing grazes me as I plummeted down as if I were flying, weightless, towards the bottom; while the mule, tethered to the great grindstone, turned far away in the depth below me, its speed increasing as if it had begun to spin round, weightless in its rotations, faster and faster, until the gloom became a strange, pure, unearthly light.”¹⁶

This section comes immediately after his description of the press to which he went in his childhood in the company of his mother to buy oil from the shopkeeper Awad to make the Angel's Pie before Angel Mickael holiday.

¹⁶ Edwar al-Kharrat, *City of Saffron*, Trans. Frances Liardet (London: Quartet Books, 1989), 17. (References to page numbers of quotations will appear in brackets next to the quoted text).

In the course of his description of the press, the wall and the filled sacks with sesame, and the smell of squeezed oil, and the eye-covered mule that was tied to the press stone, which are clear and detailed descriptions with unambiguous expressions, the quoted section comes suddenly, which is a dreamy, imaginary section that has nothing to do with reality, because the ladders did not slip with him, and he did not roll in the darkness, as the paragraph that follows the dream immediately implies, and continues in its description from the point in which it ended before the dreamlike section; besides, the press stone did not revolve at increasing speed at the time of their arrival at the sesame press as the paragraph that immediately precedes the dream implies: "The great black wooden wheel of the press, which at that moment was still..." (p.17). There are other clear allusions that lead to the dreamlike level: "I plummeted down as if I were flying/ weightless/ with no sound/ the gloom became a strange, pure, unearthly light".

Falling down from a weightless and voiceless state resembles what we feel in our dreams, but how can darkness change into a pure light except in a dream or imagination? Finally, the phrase "unearthly" appears to confirm decisively that what happened in this section did not really happen in the world of awakening.

We noticed that the linguistic level and the non-reality of the events in this section start from what preceded them and what followed them. The shift from the 'real' to the 'dreamlike' in this section is prepared by the verb phrase "I saw", which appears at the opening of the section. Probably, this is the only textual allusion that prepares for the shift to the dreamlike "vision".

In spite of that, the verb phrase "I saw" does not command the dreamlike vision immediately because it also means the sight vision, but when other dreamlike elements arrive we become certain that the scene is a dreamlike scene. However, the more significant question in this context is this: why does the writer

introduce this dream? What is its meaning and benefit here? Is there any feasibility for its employment?

The reader cannot reach any conclusion from reading to any answer at this stage, and only after reading ten pages, and after he has fully forgotten the previous situation, does the following situation reach:

2. She pushed me gently with her hand. She shut herself in behind the iron door, and it suddenly flash through my mind that I had escaped from an ambush. I did not even think of St Michael.

I found myself, panting slightly from fast and anxious walking, in a tram returning to el-Manshiyya. I never saw Iskandar Awad again; but a long time afterwards I remembered, all of a sudden, and I realized that falseness and purity have secret ways.

I had got out of the tram and was climbing up a wooden gangway. It had wooden ridges for me to place my feet securely upon. I was boarding a small boat moored by the quay. [...] And my school friends from the Nile Primary School were far away now; but I hear the clatter of their feet as they climb up the narrow stairs to the upper deck, and their laughter, their shouts, their calls. And I know that this is from a long time ago, and that the boat is completely empty now.

But suddenly I am running along corridors which open out into more corridors with round glass windows through which I can see the waves of the high blue sea, and the great hulls of steamers and their huge smokestacks and mighty towers. I was still running and I found high wooden stairs before me ascending to infinity. I would never get up to the roof of the boat.

I ran still, weightless now, up to the stairs which ascended endlessly with me, wondering, without the least surprise, where the stairs could possibly finish in this small boat which I had thought I could cross length and width in minutes, without becoming breathless, or feeling heavy or weak.(28-29)

Again, the text starts from a reality that we diagnose easily and ends with empty talks of a dream; the section from the opening sentence "She pushed me gently with her hand" till he says: "I had got out of the tram" is a sentence of the 'realistic' level; it is an extension to his story with Iskandar Awad, the fake "patriotic leftist", who drew him to the Karasta Bar; he was hiding his plan to hand him to the police, but the circumvention of Zizi, the bar waitress, saved him from the ambush as the beginning of the quotation points out. The dreamlike atmosphere starts with vocabulary of ascension: "I was climbing up a wooden gangway", and is followed by verbs of ascension: "their feet as they climb up the narrow stairs", and then: "I found high wooden stairs before me ascending to infinity"; and after that: "the stairs which ascended endlessly with me".

Repetition of phrases of climbing and ladders constitutes a symbol of the world of dream. The phrases interlock with other words that we found in the previous passage:

"Weightless/ I do not breathe hard or feel heavy or weak". Besides, the operation of endless climbing, though he thought that he would cross the distance in length and breadth in minutes, and thus, the temporality is cancelled in the dream, and the body becomes weightless; besides, the vocabulary of reality of breathlessness and weakness that accompany the operation of climbing are negated.

Non-temporality is enhanced by another element when the school colleagues from the Nile Elementary School are inveigled into the scene and he refers to them by the phrase: "this is from a long time ago", though the observed period is the period of youth when he was working in the political work that nearly made

him fall into the tricks of Iskanar Awad, but how did these childhood colleagues infiltrate?

Place is also ambiguous, and it is not easy to define it logically; the boat is small and the stairs are wooden and high, and rise endlessly. Besides, he walks around the place running "along corridors which open out into more corridors". This mixture between reality and imagination, and mixture of times with places, and the sharp shifts from one subject to the other cannot be performed except in the world of dream and imagination or inside the depths of the soul within the strata of the unconsciousness, where different times reappear connected with different places and childhood memories, and with the reality of the lived moment.

The sentence "I am running along corridors ..." is a sentence that imitates the nightmare in which the events are organized in a swirling way in which one thing leads to another thing that has no end. If we return to our questions, which were introduced in the course of my analysis of the first passage: Why a dream? and What is its indication? we can say the following: There is a relationship of analogy between the first dreamlike passage, and the second passage. The narrator breaks the sequential consecutive narration in both cases in order to make us enter the labyrinth of the dream. The two situations from which the passages start are related to Iskanar Awad. The first situation took place in Mickael's childhood when he accompanied his mother to the press of Master Awad, Iskandar's father, who introduced his son to the boy Mickael and his mother; the narrator's introduction to the appearance of the boy Iskandar was in harmony with his description of what the treason that he will commit when he becomes a young man: "A boy about my age came out of the interior of the press. His face was sunburnt and expressionless, his *galabiya* besmirched with faded oil-stains. He saluted my mother silently and in a surly fashion,

without looking at me" (p. 18). His description in this way does not hide the attitude regarding what he will be in the second situation.

The Second Situation took place during the period of Mickael's youth, when Iskandar wanted to frame him. The narrator does not finish Mickael's story with Iskandar in the same situation; he returns to it at a later period of his youth and in another textual space that is relatively far away.¹⁷ The reader is surprised when he remembers the connection of the press event in his youth, with Iskandar Awad when he met Mickael in his youth, and is surprised when the narrator says: "In spite of that, I did not remember" because the reader is at a higher rank of knowledge than the character, though this is a device that cannot work on the careful reader because there is a hidden allusion to knowledge despite his denial when he says in the second situation that was quoted above: "I had escaped from an ambush. I did not even think of St Michael".

What does it mean that he did not remember St Mickael? This textual allusion connects the event of survival from Iskandar's betrayal with the event of the press when he went out with his mother to buy oil to make pies for St Mickael's Day. The second text welds with the first despite the remote distance of the time space.

¹⁷ The writer does that in most of his stories: in Husniyya's story, Tuto and Her Mother, Rania, Jaber and others – a constant movement forwards and backward; he repeats the story with some difference and addition. "All of al-Kharrat's texts intertextualize to formulate several mirrors for one text". See: BuShu'ayb Shaddāq, "Al-Kharrat Warihānāt al-kitāba al-ḥadītha," in *Edwar al- Kharrat mughāmir ḥatta al-nihāya*, ed. Markaz al-Ḥadāra al-‘Arabiyya. (Qairo: Markaz al-Ḥadāra al-‘Arabiyya, 2000), 43.; see also: Magda Al-Nowaihi, " Memory and Imagination in Edwar Al-Kharrat's Turabuha Za'faran," *Journal of Arabic Literature* 25, (1994): 35

If we return to the dream, he saw himself fall in the first section sharply and roll in darkness, while he saw himself in the second dream climbing ladders. Ascending and descending a ladder becomes a symbolical objective correlative. Falling is equivalent to his slippery into the world of Iskandar Awad, the informer; his ascending is equivalent to his survival from that snitching, and by that, ambiguity of the dreamlike situation is removed from the two situations. This is al-Karrat's approach in these texts; the same event is repeated more than once and its result is often cut; he cuts the event, and the character disappears but it reappears in different situations, and ambiguity is revealed after we nearly have lost hope in understanding what happened.

Adam Spanos noted the repetition of levels and the relationship between the parts in al-Kharrat's writings: "al- Kharrat's novelistic texts are not discrete units but tend toward auto- intertextuality, or the repetition of characters and events among his many novels."¹⁸ Spanos argues that the structure of recurrence and reiteration in al-Kharrat's fiction, much like his literary criticism, does not conform to sequential linear outline. His accounts lack prepositions of time in addition to further indicators that enable one to recognize whether the narrative is achronous (ageless and dateless) or to determine whether one scene brings time-based relevance to another on the linear timeline as assumed by such narratology. Such structure is linked to al-Kharrat's writing style whereby the generic boundaries are beclouded. That is, such fusions coerce the tremendously time-conscious narrative to moderate its reproofs.¹⁹

¹⁸ Adam Spanos, "The Postcolonial Avant- Garde and the Claim to Futurity: Edwar al-Kharrat's Ethics of Tentative Innovation," in *The Postcolonial contemporary: Political Imaginaries for the Global Present*, eds. Jini Watson and Gary Wilder (New York: Fordham University Press, 2018), 153.

¹⁹ Spanos, "The Postcolonial Avant- Garde," 152,153.

Al-Kharrat expressed that in more than one place in his critical works: "Probably , I was not - in reality – writing except one thing several times endlessly [...] each time new temptations were revealed in order to go further and make new advances"²⁰. He maintains that the structural technique of 'repetition' is "inspired by the classical Arab art of Arabesque, namely, from those formulations and lines that are repeated endlessly. There is no beginning or an end here and consequently, the form here is open, as if there were search for a certain eternity. This is a challenge to temporality, to the imposed restrictions, and the human condition."²¹

Edwar al-Kharrat repeats his ambition to drop the category of temporality and he sees that the law and logic of the subconsciousness and the area of dream, do not acknowledge the chronological time,²² and "it is no more necessary for the past to precede the present or for the future to become forward-looking, and it is possible in this conception and in this type of writing for the past, present and future, to be concurrent times or it is no more necessary that they should have a traditional hierarchy."²³ In the context of *Turābuhā Za'farān*, the return to Michael's childhood is not "a reconstruction of a passing world and forlorn memories; it is in the heart of the world of the childhood knowledge or pursuit of knowledge that are closely associated with the writer now; and probably he is the writer who anticipates also a type of future [...] childhood in this new type of writing is an argues and debates with the reality that we are

²⁰ Edwar Al-Kharrat, *Muhājamat al-mustahīl* (Beirut: Dār al-Madā, 1996), 11.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 22.

²² *Ibid.*, 26.

²³ Edwar Al-Kharrat, *al-Ḥasasiyya al-jadīda* (Beirut: Dār al-'Ādāb, 1993), 341.

living in, the reality that we have lived or the reality that we imagine that it will occur in the future, with the multiple expertise of reality."²⁴

We conclude from this model, which is analysed above, that cutting the sequential and consecutive narrative, and shaking the causal linearity, aims in these texts, among other things, to achieve two things: First: shaking the feeling of the lapse of time, and contemporizing the narrative material by connecting the past with the present in order to save the past times from loss, and as an artistic technical device to overcome the power of time that seeks immortality and eternity. Second, it is a conscious attempt by the writer to destroy the traditional writing and establish an alternative artistic aesthetic structure on its ruins.

3. And the boy carried his schoolbooks, hugging them fiercely to his chest.

He puffed a little from running all the way down *Shari' al-Kurum*, which lay deserted in the afternoon sun. The sandy ground covered with smooth white stones. [...] He went in through the house door into the big entrance hall. The air was damp after the heat outside. And it was dark. He stood before the wiped marble staircase, stock-still and alone, as if challenging all the closed doors, all the torn fragments of flesh, his heart knocking in his chest. He drew his sword.

He brandished it in the air, in front of the door that was shut fast now, after all that time when he had seen it ajar and glimpsed through the crack the form of the thin girl who was burned out by her night journeys, in her limp white shift with its soft nap, when she had called him over to impart to his mouth the sweet melting taste of her tenderness. The sword, iron and solid, stabbed into the void of the world, powerful with pulsing life, gleaming in

²⁴ Al-Kharrat, *al-Hasasiyya*, 343; See also: Spanos, "The Postcolonial Avant- Garde,"

the darkness, fired with crimson. He drew his sword; and put it up again, and mounted the stairs.

Wherever I was, waking or sleeping, you, in your entirety, were ever my desire. There before me was this face – your face, [...] all the torment of existence in your eyes; and your eyes were two emeralds stabbing my heart. The smoothness of this face is grace itself; gone now, but everlasting. [...] The twin roundness of your thighs is cast red-gold. [...] Your breasts are clusters of grapes. My sword still rests upon my thigh, unsheathed against the terror of the night, in my passion's high sea [...] He felt the stab of something sharp, burying itself gently in his side. Painless. He does not know what it is – sword, knife, or thin pointed dagger perhaps, as sharp as a needle? [...] He turned his face sideways. A small clot of coagulated blood spurted from his mouth. He felt it warm and globular; and he felt a sticky thread of blood at the corner of his mouth, clinging to his face. He did not wipe it away.

He said to himself: In the lung. It has pierced my lung. But why do I feel no pain? Why do I still breathe easily?

And he knew that he had been killed.” (127-129).

This section from the chapter of "al-Saif al-brūnziyy al-'akhḍar" starts with a very clear informative narration about the child Mickael; he was breathing hard due to his running on al-Kurum street on his way back from school, and describing the street ground and sand grains, but imagination soon comes climbing the shoulders of reality; the shift from "the afternoon sun" to the "dark big entrance hall" is a surprising entrance to imaginative or dreamlike atmospheres, the symbols follow consecutively through intensive narration; the "stairs" and climbing them in this section are repeated in the section (which was dealt with in the motif of 'stairs' in the second section); the "sword": He drew his

sword / the new solid sword/ he drew his sword and put it up again/ My sword still rests upon my thigh. But, will the speech now be about that same child, who carries the schoolbooks, and who "challenging all the closed doors, all the torn fragments of flesh"? Is he himself the same child "who stabbed with his sword into the void of the world"? and is the monologue that starts with his words "wherever I was" specific to that child?

The answer to these questions is "No"! What deludes the reader that the narration focuses on the child is that narrative flow that comes after the opening that talks about the child on his way back from school, without breaks or preparation for the imaginative or dreamlike shift.

So, what is the factor that leads us to the world of the dream? It is the sudden shift from the sunny afternoon to the darkness; it is also the shift from the reporting declarative clear sentences to the sentences that contain strangeness and have plenty of figurative statements or phrases such as "challenge of the closed doors/ challenge of torn fragments of flesh" and "drawing the sword", - which sword? And suddenly, it leads us to "the form of the thin girl who was burned out by her night journeys ... called him over to impart to his mouth the sweet melting taste of her tenderness"; who is that thin girl? The description of the girl reminds us of the traits of Husniyya, the girl who was living in groundfloor in Ghaiṭ al-ʿInab (4-6), and he felt in his childhood that she "has something that drew him to her and he loved it"; and she was sending him to buy "al-Caramella" and she had sought protection in their home from the moral police.

The form of the thin girl with the short rough hair continued to appear in the texts of *Turābuhā Zaʿfarān*, once in conjunction with her name, and once without it, but we identify her from the description that characterizes her.

The diagnosed person in the narrative now is Mickael, the adult. Different times, characters and desires mix in his dream. Besides, summoning Husniyya is

connected to the symbol of the sword and climbing of stairs. The "sword" for Freud is a symbol for the male sexual organ.²⁵ The illustrative evidence to this symbol is the words (stabbing, powerful with pulsing life, strong in his crowded beating/ gleaming in the darkness / unsheathed it and sheathed it back), and then, the sword is associated with climbing stairs, which is also, according to Freud, a symbol of sexual act.²⁶ The two symbols appear immediately when the talk is about the thin girl who calls him to give him in his mouth the taste of melting sweets of affection.

That is followed immediately, and strengthens what I have said, by his monologue in which he calls his sweetheart mistress after he awakes from his dream: "Wherever I was, waking or sleeping, you, in your entirety, were ever my desire." This is the first clear textual reference or allusion that indicates that, before that he was in a dream, but the dream is the reality/awakening, and the reality is the dream. The two worlds are mixed, and therefore, he, in his monologue, his awakening – he continues with what he started in his dream; he calls her in a live lustful way that reminds us of King David's *Song of Songs* in the *Bible* (Your eyes are the tankering of existence/ the circles of your thighs are crimson gold/ your breasts are clusters of vinegrapes). He also invokes the parallel poetry in colloquial Arabic: "her eyes are the eyes of gazelles; her hair is ear spikes of camels; her jaw is King Solomon's ring; and her breasts are two big cones of pomegranates."²⁷

The suggestive reference to *Song of Songs* and to passionate love and connection, which also refer to a Sufi dimension, denies lascivious sexuality

²⁵ Sigmund Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, Trans. and edited by James Strachey (New York: Basic Books, 2010), 369.

²⁶ Freud, *The Interpretation*, 368, 382.

²⁷ See: Muḥammad al-Nuwayhi, *Qaḍīyyat al-shi'r al-jadīd*, second edition (Cairo-Beirut: 1971), 105.

from the situation, and refers it to the concept of existential sex; the sword stabs "the emptiness of the world"; it is an attitude from the inhuman bored life; a revolution of "a challenge to all closed doors".

On nother indicative level, his earthly passionate love – inspired by *Song of Songs* – is a heavenly love or unity with the whole truth.²⁸ It also unites with the end of Chapter One, and explains the ambiguity that is entailed in the last lines of that situation: "I embrace her with hands pierced by nails, my side stabbed by a lance; and seeping from my wound, a few drops of blood (p. 13).

However, the last lines in Chapter Seven, end in a similar way: "He felt the stab of something sharp, burying itself gently in his side...and he felt a sticky thread of blood at the corner of his mouth, clinging to his face." (p. 129).

So, it is no wonder that that stabbing is without pain: "but why didn't I find pain, or difficulty in breathing?" Though he was killed "and knew that he was killed", because in his unity with the absolute like the unity of the Sufi with God, the relative and the temporal is negated, the pain is negated, and time and life become one thing, and this is the writer's medium for the human being to bridge over his existential crisis; it is the same crisis that is obvious at the end of the chapters.

²⁸ Ghālī, "Taṭawwur al-Shakl al-Fannī," 177.

Ends of Chapters

The ends of the chapters of the novel *Turābuhā Za'farān* are characterised by cut events, sequenatial narration, and openness onto the imaginative or dreamlike level. The end of each chapter in the novel seems to close the whole book, but when we continue reading the following chapter, we realize that a new beginning starts and new parts opens.

The novel of *Turābuhā Za'farān* is considered among the fictional works that demolish the pillars of the dual "open structure" and the "closed structure" through their intensive expression of the dialectic unity between the two structures²⁹.

On the one hand, there is the cruel hard reality of the oppressed and destroyed ones, and the series of loss and death, and the loneliness of man and his tragic destiny. On the other hand, there is an overwhelming desire for eternity and overcoming of extinction by an artistic philosophical device. This dialectic makes the ends *closed* and *open* simultaneously.

Santiyago in Hemingway's novel *The Old Man and the Sea* achieves the impossible when he fishes the Swordfish alone with primitive tools, but, the sharks swallow the fish and the Old Man returns to the shore with the skeleton of the large fish feeling he has won the battle in his conflict with the fish, but he lost it with the sharks. The structure of the end of Heminway's novel is an open-closed end simultaneously.

The chapter of "The Green Bronze Sword", which was analysed above, ends with the openness of the text on the imaginative level. The narrator is stabbed in his side and his blood oozes from him. He "knew that he had been killed" but, in spite of that, he does not feel pain neither does he find difficulty

²⁹ Muḥammad Siwīrti, *Al-Naqd al-bunyawī wa- l-naṣṣ al-riwā'ī* (Al-Dār al-Bayḍā': Maṭba'at Afrīqya al-Sharq, 1991), 126.

in breathing, and nothiomg of the murder symptoms happens to him, and thus, the end remains open-closed. The same thing happens at the end of each of the Alexandrian texts:

4. I found myself in the water, as if I were floating, and then calmly sinking down into the seemingly bottomless depths. The water around me was warm, encompassing me tenderly, infinitely everywhere. I did not scream, nor gasp for breath, nor struggle. I was neither anxious, nor frightened, nor choking as this kindly, heavy element carried me down, supporting me in my timeless descent. The light around me was both mellow and translucent, lowering and radiant; I was in a huge watery room, and through the slats of the windows came successive filmy sheets or light and water mingled together. [...]

The water soaks the vine-trellis, drowns the bursting dark-red clusters of fruit, ripe and round and full and pressed together, [...] And there on the shining wave is her face, between the shadows of the trellis bearing the clusters of grapes and the leaves and the knotty branches. Golden and slender, she looks down on him, illuminated from below by a flare of light ignited in the water's heart, from a great candle in the flood, its burning wick swaying in the water; as if she were an icon of living flesh, and there was another life in her [...] Her eyes stare without expression, but they know me [...]

And the water which cradles me and parts to let me fall unceasing, rocks her this way and that. This plunging down cost me no effort or pain; I breathed without choking; it was as if I resisted it no more – as if I had accepted it utterly, given myself up to it. [...]

Osiris stands in his temple, his arms crossed on his breast, shrouded in white, grape – clusters dangling near his face carved from green diorite, a hair's breadth from his parched lips.

He said: And I knew that there would come to be what must happen; and that I in this Other Time would be granted a taste of the vintage, for now the grapes are ripe". (151/152).

This imaginary section that is similar to a dream is introduced after the narrator had been working on his fishing rod on the seashore; he suddenly asks: "What happened? How did I fall?" This question leads to the imaginative, dreamlike level. The central motif of this section is the sea/ water. What arouses the reader's wonder is that the water was warm and affectionate, but the narrator did not inhale, did not ask for breathing, and was not anxious nor choking.

The Sea in the Alexandrian texts has specific indications, and symbolic dreamlike dimensions, and therefore, it is no wonder that several chapters end or open onto the sea as "it is among the places that dwell in the space of difference and semantic fragmentation that exceed their single familiar indication to multiple indications, and according to the textual contexts that it is represented in them.³⁰ How can he dive into the water of a bottomless depth safely in this way? More than that, "he carried me down, supporting me in my timeless descent" In addition to that, there is another motif, which is the mixture of light with water; "the light and water are mingled together" and this light is mellow, on the one hand, and translucent on the other, lowering and radiant at the same time. What is the indication of this mixture?

In my opinion, this "timeless" diving evokes a world other than the world that we live in, a second world: "*I in this Other Time would be granted a taste of*

³⁰ Husayn, *Shi'riyyat al-makān*, 245.

the vintage" (152), and because it is outside the specifications of time that we know, it is possible that living can unite with the dead, where he meets Rana, the boarding house lady, who died in a car accident, and we meet her in the chapter of "Death by the Sea". The narrator does not specify her by her name, but by her traits and descriptions that are repeated in a lot of the chapters of the novel (45/46, and compare above with the same style of Husniyya), whom he saw in the water that cradles him "rocks her this way and that", but "I did not put my hand out to her. I did not call her. I just knew that she was there." (152)

So, in the Second Time, he can unite with the one he loved and return to life the beloved ones who have passed away, but where does that take place? In the sea that mixes with the light, "flare of light ignited in the water's heart...and there was another life in her"; Mixture between water and light evokes another life that symbolizes immortality and eternity, and in it the lapse of time, death and temporality are negated. The eternal ebb and flow (See their description, p. 31) Retreat and gush of the water movement symbolize death and birth; isn't this what the myth of Osiris evokes?

Osiris is connected to the grape arbor and the cluster of grapes, as he is the god of planting in the myth, and he combines between a lot of contradictions; he represents Haris the god of the dead and represents Dionysius the god of wine and fertility; hence is the allusion to the cluster of grapes. Osiris is a resurrected god; the limbs of his body are torn apart and scattered throughout Egypt till Isis resurrects him and returns him to life.³¹

Maggie Awadallah says: "Osiris was the god of grains and the Nile; he was like the Nile feeding life. Like the Nile, too, which was flooding and then drying, and flooding again, Osiris was also living, dying and returning to life

³¹ See: Samuel Hooke, *Mun 'aṭaf al-Mukhayyala al-Bashariyya*, trans. Ṣubḥī al-Ḥadīdī, second edition (Latakia: Dar al-Ḥiwar, 1995) 55.

again."³² So, water, light and death, which are realistic elements gain by their mixture mythical dimensions that derive from Osiris's myth, considering infinity, regeneration, and eternity the opposites of the transient, the temporal, and the mortal.

It is the same theme that is repeated here, too. Death is one of life and eternity phases, and therefore, it has no pain nor suffocation. The same thought is repeated in other works by al-Karrat, where we find myths about resurrected gods such as: Osiris and Phoenix, which are employed in *Rama wa l-Tannīn*.³³

The Last Chapter, *Raqrāqat al-ḥamām al-mushta'il* (*Wingbeats of the Doves Alight*) ends with the scene of the Sea:

5. I saw bodies which had caught fire falling from high windows, turning in the air, and falling far away into the sea, their heads floating above the waves, open-mouthed in an endless scream. I saw her face, the face of the one I loved, the face which stalks me through recurrent dreams, swimming in the un abating waters of my love, shining and dark golden-brown, in the middle of a frothing tide of heads which crash silently together. And I felt the stab in my side from her wide eyes, the green crest of the wave of her eyes, as I fell into the deep.

When I surfaced, the stabbing lance was still buried in the depths of my being, and my inside melted and burned and flowed over into lava, boiling like the wild billowing seas which themselves roared forth glowing and blazing into leaping flames; and my body drowned in the inferno; and I felt

³² Maggie Awadalla, "Temporality and the Ontological Experience in the Works of Virginia Woolf and Edward al-Kharrat," (master's thesis, The American University of Cairo, 1989), 30.

³³ Edwar al-Karrat, *Rama wa- l-Tannīn* (Beirut: Al- Mu'assasa al-‘Arabiyya li-l-nashr, 1980).

the wings of the doves alight, the tongues of fire, beating around me and lifting me up, up into the pure gentle blue of sky, burning forever".
(173/174)

Duality of death and life is repeated at the end of the final chapter, Chapter Nine and the scene ends at the Sea. The marine ends in these texts enrich their meanings and their infinite openness, which is unlimited by the time and place of the text, as if al-Kharrat is trying by that to equalize between the infinite ambiguous sea and ambiguous-open texts that escape from unilaterality of meaning to horizons of semantic fragmentation.³⁴

However, the Sea that symbolizes eternity or freedom, once, or purgatory that purifies the evils of this world, can also symbolize the end, death, or nothingness. The last quoted section – and the last in the novel itself – comes after an imaginative or dreamlike vision of a bloody demonstration against the division of the system, and the sounds of bullets rise and people fall down and are treaded by their feet, and bodies that were caught by fire thrown from high windows and fall far into the Sea.

Falling into the Sea symbolizes in a way survival, and what supports this is the description of the gun shots: "it was as if they were not real, or harmless." (173) However, he sees the face of the one he loves³⁵; he saw her when she fell in the inundation: "And I felt the stab in my side from her wide eyes, the green crest of the wave of her eyes, as I fell into the deep. When I surfaced, the stabbing

³⁴ Husayn, *Shi'riyyat al-makān*, 252.

³⁵ Rana or Husniyya? All the women combine in "tarnīmat al-nūn": al-sitt Wahība, Randa, the girl on the porch opposite to their house, Haniyya, Mona, Jumāna, Linda, Rāna, all of the girls that he loved, whose names are mentioned in *Turābuhā Za'farān* or mentioned in al-Kharrat's other works).

lance was still buried in the depths of my being, and my inside melted and burned and flowed over into lava".

This description represents the first side of the duality, which is death and the end of life, but the last lines in the chapter and the novel come to erase the tragedy and extend the ladder of rescue: "I felt the wings of the doves alight, the tongues of fire, beating around me and lifting me up, up into the pure gentle blue of sky, burning forever."

The operation of ascension and the blueness of the clear tender sky contain the meaning of survival. As for the burning doves, probably the idea harmonizes with the idea of the phoenix which al-Kharrat described in his novel, *Rama wa al-Tannin*³⁶; the Phoenix, the mythical bird is burnt in order to regenerate. As the writer employed Osiris in the previous chapter, *al-Zill tahta 'anāqīd al-'inab* (*The Shadow beneath the vines*), and made the narrator unite with the bird in order to use it as a tool for regeneration and eternity. In this chapter, the narrator unites with the Phoenix as a tool for the absolute infinite unity, and this is the idea that the last sentence in the novel conveys: "for ever"³⁷. In this way, the endings of the chapters in *Turābuhā Za'farān* turn into closed-open structures to express this dialectic unity between the two structures.

Imagination and Dream that tend to end the chapters of the novel, specifically, are the elements that grant the novel its meaning. Forster says about imagination in the works of the great writers: "the focus of prophesy and imagination [...] if we delete them from Stern or Melville, from Bacon or Max Bernbaum, Virginia Wolf or Walter de la Mare, or William Beckford or James

³⁶ See the chapter: *al-'Anqā' is Born Every day*, 257.

³⁷ See: I'tidāl 'Uthmān, "Tashkīl faḍā' al-naṣṣ fī *Turābuhā Za'farān*," *Fuṣūl* 6, no. 3 (1986), 169.

Joyce, or D.H. Lawrence or Swift, nothing will remain for us."³⁸ We also say that if we delete imagination from *Turābuhā Za 'farān*, or other works by Edwar al-Karrat, nothing will remain for us.

Conclusion

The texts of *Turābuhā Za 'farān* are based on a formula of opposite dualities: destruction/ building; presence/ absence; the relative/ the absolute. These dualities and focuses organize the narrated world in their orbits.

The mother duality formula is: the destruction/ building duality. The writer derives his crude fictional material from the objective historical events that highly overlap with al-Karrat's personal biography, but while he deludes the reader that his biography is the suitable generic frame that is supposed to embrace such experience, he soon disperses this delusion when he breaks all the traditional borders of biographical writing, and when he destroys that system, he establishes on its ruins a new genre of writing that mixes and coexists with several other genres: the novel, the biography, and the popular tale and poetry, which al-Karrat called *'abr al-naw'iyya* "transgeneric writing".

Turābuhā Za 'farān employs the vocabulary and terms of the "objective reality", which occupy 70% of the texts, once in order to introspect the psychological crises of the protagonist and the oppressed human types, and once to describe the political and social reality of a specific critical historical phase in a period of critical change in the city of Alexandria in the fourth and fifth decades of the twentieth century. To achieve his artistic objective, al-Kharrat resorts to the fantastic dimension, which is represented in the miraculous, the weird and the dreamlike techniques, and pushes them into the focus of the text "in order

³⁸ Edward Morgan Forster, *Aspects of the Novel* (New York: Harcourt Brace College Publishing, 1985) 129.

to free his writing from the limits of the mental logic and its full weight, and in order that the imagined thing can take its natural position."³⁹

Opening the text onto the dream, myth, and fantasy at the end of the chapters of the novel is another method to destroy the illusion of "the real" as a tool that absents the events into the nebula or haze of the dreamlike, the mythical and the imaginative stretches to which the ends of the chapters lead. Besides, it is a justified tool to destroy the borders between periods of time, in an aim to give the opportunity to combine between the opposites, between remote times and multiple places, and to exclude hierarchy and causal linearity to the advantage of free associations.

The total indication of these texts is not revealed by extrapolation of the events, as if the gloominess of reality and inhumanity makes it unworthy of representation. The texts are metaphors that reflect the tensions of the modern human being, his alienation, and isolation from the mind and from society in which the presence of the word turns into absence. The texts go beyond the traditional concept of writing, and these are the features of Post-Modernist narration from which al-Karrat benefitted, and adopted it in this stage of his creativity.

³⁹ Husayn, *Shi'riyyat al-makān*, 268.

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