

Narrative Levels in Son'allah Ibrahim's *Sharaf*¹

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Abstract:- This study examines the narrative levels in Son'allah Ibrahim's *Sharaf*, where the novelist employs an experimental art of fiction. The novel's structure tends to create aestheticism capable of representing the distortions of the different levels of reality. It is based on the harmony between the different narrative units and the documentary recording within the collage that selects scenes from reality together with its contradictions and disappointments. Moreover, the harmony is achieved within a presentation of fiction where characters are deprived of their features and where reality is distorted. The novel is simply distributed into varied narrative levels that frequently become tangled or separate. Every so often, these narrative levels are fused within the structure of the novel from which rough crests and apexes appear in the wake of the novel's stumbling and slipping into some failures. These probably occur because of the accumulation of information, reports and direct portrayal of the novelist's ideology, creating a loose narrative structure intensified by other thematic difficulty in spite of the fact that the novelist is endowed with soberly modern consciousness and endorses different narrative tools to create an experimental structure.

Key Words: Son'allah Ibrahim, *Sharaf*, narrative levels, experimental art of fiction, modern Arabic fiction and social history.

I. INTRODUCTION

Son'allah Ibrahim is considered one of the major pioneers of the Arabic novel. He resorted to experimentation to create a fictional form that is appropriate to the weirdness of reality and that could express his visions, perceptions, attitudes and views about what was happening in reality on the political, social and cultural levels. To attain this goal, Son'allah depended on his ideology, rich culture and technical skills in linking between what was happening in reality through leaning on press' clippings that molded the fragments of the outside world and events related to his fictional heroes. Importantly, he managed to achieve this mixture within a modernist and inspirational fusion. Ibrahim did not only write a novel, but also chronicled in his historical consciousness a specific question: "For every historical era, there is a suitable text of fiction. This is so because the text does not belong to a text previously written, but to a variable social history" (Darraj Faysal, 1987 311). Thus, Ibrahim sought to create a model of fiction that is able to monitor the movement of the daily life in detail within the context of political and economic events affiliated with the sweeping penchant for Americanization and globalization and the resulting human mutants suiting the irrationality of the current events. According to Ibrahim, "The moment of the writing activity explains, justifies and allows [the writer] to understand reality and the possibility to change it" (Yomna Al-Eid, 1988 193). Unfortunately, the circumstances did not give Ibrahim the opportunity to publish his first novel in his country. Worse, his first novel, named *That Smell (Tilka al-râ'ihah)* was confiscated in Egypt in 1966. It was the first literary confiscation done after the July Revolution. Therefore, it was published in Beirut. Likewise, he was forced to publish his novel *The Star of August* in Damascus in 1973, which was followed by his *The Committee* in 1981, *Zaat* 1992, *Honor*, the focus of this research, in 1997 and *Americanli* in 2003 (Esam Mahfouz, 2000 33). Examiners of Ibrahim's novels soon discover that the novelist did not present stories as much as he presented a project of fiction. Readers also find out that every novel denoted another novel and that his six novels referred to a huge project of fiction that is not yet complete. It seems that his novels were meant to be read as if they were one ongoing novel (Darraj, 287).

Therefore, *That Smell* chronicles the history of Egypt in the mid-1960s, and *The Star of August* talks about building Egypt's High Dam and Nasser's departure. *The Committee* (1981) discusses the issue of modernism within realistic symbolism while *Zaat* (1984) shows how people are reduced to things. And *Honor* sees foreigners as the side that starts crime whereas *Americanli* depicts the West as the place of its messages. Furthermore, all Ibrahim's novels have apparent similarity of style and structure that combines documentary reference and imaginary narrative through different narrative levels. Ibrahim's novels also contain basic sayings

¹. All quotations from Arabic sources including the titles of cited sources were translated by the writers.

that record the daily life of the dictated man in addition to ridicule and severe criticism conveyed through documents, confessions, blogs and speeches of human freaks who are at times featureless and at others nameless. *Honor* is an experimental art of fiction whose artistic structural strategy seeks to create an aesthetic work that relies on cognitive-mental fun. The confusion between the narrative units and the documentary recording units is achieved through what the world of cinema calls the collage technique. According to Salaj Fadel, the collage "is an updated cinematic technique that depends on re-pasting of rough fragments taken from initial life material in order to go into a new configuration of beauty so that all the stuck remains of the first use will be wiped away to employ them in the new whole context" (1992, 205). Hence, the resulting context has the ability to fuse reality with its contradictions, disappointments and reflections. This is reflected through the blending of press cuttings and anecdotal events related to the movement of characters and their life stations within the street hustle and movement of outward life. As a result, the inside seems a reflection of the outside and the outside is a reflection of the inside.

Ibrahim presents his edifice of fiction confined in a spatial focus that is characterized by narrowness and spatial ugliness that is fused with psychosocial and moral decadence of the characters' lives represented by the closed prison space. This space helps detect the nastiness of the social, political and economic realities of Egyptian society in particular and the Arabs' reality in general. This space is also intermingled with the movement of the external world powers dominating the Middle East. The importance of the place, therefore, comes into sight "not only because it represents a background for the event. Rather, because it also comprises one of the factors that shape the characters since the place is a tool or a means of perception, achievement of justice and learning about the outside world" (Butrus Sim'an Enjeel, 1987 40).

The art of fiction is based on a structure or linguistic formation that intermingles with other arts without losing its privacy. Therefore, we find *Honor* to be reliable on different, tangled narrative levels that join in order to present the visions and thoughts of the novelist through the movement of his characters in the structures of time and space within the escalation of events. In so doing, Ibrahim seeks to offer good literature "as good work of art can change our view of life, and can expose weaknesses and shortcomings of this reality, and force us to change it" (Enjeel, 73). This research adopts a methodology of analyzing the text in such a manner that describes the rich narrative levels within this novel with an attempt to be open to all ideas derived from the sphere of varied narrative techniques. One such essential source are Gérard Genette's *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method* and Mahmoud Amin Al-'Alem's grouping of narrative levels. An attempt is made to embrace flexibility in the research to permit the blending of these levels, or devising others that are in one line with the structure of the novel and its implications. There are many studies dealing with Son'allah Ibrahim's works. Some focused on contents while others examined the structure of his works but none of these studies looked into the narrative levels in Ibrahim's novels in general or in *Honor* in particular despite its richness and diversity. Mahmoud Amin Al-'Alem was perhaps the only one who studied Ibrahim's narrative styles. In his *Trilogy of Rejection and Defeat*, Al-'Alem talked about the narrative levels in Ibrahim's *That Smell*, *The Star of August* and *The Committee* in 1981 according to perceptions and standards that at times become comparable with this study, and at other times quite different in indications. What makes this study useful in enriching the scope of critical studies about Ibrahim is the fact that it highlights aspects of structure and content borrowed from the awareness of knowledge of the techniques of narrative. These aspects are also fit with the social and political realities along with the alienation, disappointment and defeat perceived by the novelist's ideology and disclosed by the tongues of the novel's characters and through their movement in the novels' spatial and temporal spaces.

In Gérard Genette's opinion, every event told by a story is placed on a level higher than the level that is intended by the act of narration generating this story (Genette 1997, 240). He believes that passage from one level of narration to another can be contained by nothing but narration. Hence, an act that functions to insert a knowledge of a situation into another through discourse (225). *Honor* contains multiple levels of such diverse and interwoven narratives that it becomes difficult to discuss a single level independently. In fact, such an attempt makes the process of examining the topic rough and reduces its objectivity. The novel is also linguistically rich and stylistically vivid considering the novel's intellectual, political and social density and its length that reaches five hundred and forty-five page split into three sections. In these sections, the novelist tried to create some relationships whose development and arrangement were not aptly done. The novel is characterized by structural rigidity and precise language that is fond of transferring details presenting the facts without resorting to metaphors and metaphors. Besides, the language is distributed into various narrative levels. Very frequently, these levels portray dramatic, detailed and expressive level offering critical irony and excitements felt behind the lines and the representative movements of the characters. At other times, these levels move to the analytical level through which the author seizes the opportunity to give his analysis or mock or to demonstrate his point of view about what is going on in reality of political, social and economic events or anecdotal events. What completes these levels is another one based on confessions and flashbacks, which make the present seem as an extension of the past and its result. The past becomes the cause for the degradation of the present and the deterioration of its people. In addition, there is the recording, documentary level that melts with

the structure of the novel. Although this level appears dominant and independent, it is nonetheless contained in one section split into two that encompass journalistic fragments and economic analysis throughout one character's biography. This character seems to have all the knowledge, which Ibrahim has about statistics and scandals revealed by the novel. However, these ideas are abstract and can ruin the artwork largely. Ibrahim should have retained these ideas in a different place or molded in a different shape. No doubt when ideological attitudes interfere with the art of fiction, they deprive the novel of its liveliness. This is exactly what happens in *Honor* (Wadi Taha, 1989 230). Readers find in the novel an informational level of communication that emerges through news bulletins, speeches of Friday prayers and religious lessons inside the prison and is interwoven with the novel's crowdedness with commercials with which the main character seems to be obsessed. In addition to this level, readers meet the level of associations split into two types: the scenic and the linguistic. Both allude to future events and unmask the ugliness that the novel seeks to expose. Furthermore, the expressionistic level based on discerning the inside completes the task of the previous level. It reveals the hideousness of the inward spheres through dreams, nightmares and description of places and details, as seen by the characters. All these details, figures and reports that pack the novel are merged. In spite of this, the novel does not seem crammed with irregular bumps. There are many studies dealing with Ibrahim's works and analyzing the content and structure. Apart from Mahmoud Amin Al-'Alem, very few approached the narrative levels in his novels in general or *Honor* in particular despite its richness and diversity. In his *Trilogy of Rejection and Defeat* Al-'Alem discussed the narrative levels in Ibrahim's *That Smell*, *The Star of August* and *The Committee*.

II. THE DRAMATIC LEVEL

Sharaf (Honor) is the protagonist of the novel. The narrator introduces him at the outset of the novel as "Ashraf Abdel Aziz Suleiman; his mother, who sees him as the apple of her eye, calls him Sharaf" (Son'allah Ibrahim 1997). The name has many overtones, targeting human and physical honor of the individuals and the nation. Hence, the need to claim a free existence becomes an urgent matter. From the beginning, Sharaf is created to be ready to bear the tragedy of the novel and the reality of which he sees the surface only before undergoing the prison experience. Then he is transformed into an eye that spots and reveals everything around it. He watches the prisoners and listens to them while following the movement of the narrator, helping the omniscient third person narrator. This combination allows the exposure of ugliness and tragic reality through a bitter life experienced by Sharaf and others. Perhaps Sharaf's dependence on the first person speaker, which integrates with other characters' voices in their conversations and confessions, helps the disclosure of the self and the understanding of its insides. Through showing its bright and dark spots, he becomes able to know as much as the speaker. He penetrates deep into the self, stripping it naked. At the same time, he "refers the third person speaker to the outside, thus losing the power to govern the self's mysteries and the soul's enigmas" (Mortadh Abdul Malik, 1998 131). While the narrator's employment of the first person speaker's technique authorizes Sharaf to tell about his experience in spoken language, the narrator's endorsement of the third person speaker gives the narrator (and behind him Sharaf) the opportunity to comment on events and characters. Without this combination, Sharaf would not have been able to perform this task or would have disrupted his role as a protagonist (Yomna Al-'Eid, 198). So, we, the readers, see Sharaf comment on events and explain things within cultural, psychological informational levels that do not match his social and cultural composition. It is not very strange that Ibrahim starts his novel by talking about the shoes of Sharaf, who loves tracking brands from behind windowpanes and haunted by deferred desires. Readers see him walk the streets looking for the disclosure of a feminine body that can provoke a hideous masturbation at night within a society that does not allow children of the poor to express their wishes and views. These desires are dictated and formed by his spatial environment represented by a poor house and a father ever complaining of the burdens of life and insistent on creating a gap between him and his son confined within his world. Sharaf flees into streets packed with humidity and choking hustle. His mother, however, is keen to entertain him. Sharaf recognizes what people of his type are entitled to see in the market of luxurious clothing and attractive shoes that charm lookers to maintain their brands but he does not realize the depth and causes of limits: "He was programmed through his internal and external genes owing to events he underwent. The shortness of the road that led from Kochi to Johnor from the latter to other holes doesn't make any change anything" (Yomna Al-'Eid, 7). John represents Sharaf's first shock that leads him to multiple spots of torture. This foreign character with all its negative connotations tries to rape Sharaf exploiting his suffering from anguish, poverty and deprivation. Attempting to defend himself, Sharaf hits John and kills him. As a result, he is pushed into an experience that allows him to see the contradictions and nastiness of reality away from decorative veils. In prison, things are complicated. The internal aspects of characters are mixed with external occurrences justifying Sharaf's link with boots and his obsession with their brands. His shoes become the threshold for his fate in prison with its spatial and psychological indications: "The reason is that Kochi was green-colored. While he was entering the black phase, the window panes showed two other things: Astronomical prices for other brands with black engraving from Ascot to Adidas through Nike opposite feminine structure..." (7). In jail, Sharaf experiences several times what he frees himself from and rejects

outside. He embodies the outlet releasing the suppressed desires of prisoners that become alien zombies much uglier than those outside the prison. This indicates that Ibrahim presents sex as an act that deviates from proper conduct. At best, it is associated with homosexuality and at worst, it is a deficient practice. Therefore, sex is a damage that makes the possibility of igniting of a better life difficult. This explains why throughout the novel Sharaf along with other characters is unable to satisfy his desires or becomes a victim of rape outside and inside prison. In Sharaf and the other characters especially their movements and integration within the events and places, readers examine the dramatic level and the expressive and representative details it presents. In Greek the word "drama," means "movement" because it transforms the intellectual issue or the abstract human problem or issue into a substantial movement through a group of actors who perform various roles and impersonate multiple characters (Raghib Nabil, 1998: 87). The novel creates its dramatic scenes depending on a variety of techniques like the dialogue, though the novelist can create a dramatic scene relying on techniques other than the dialogue (Percy Lubbock, 1981: 46). Dramatic language possesses power and immediacy, but its task is to create the scene or the world where the event takes place.

The dramatic factors unfold through the characters or the acts and statements that create the event rather than through external comments given by the omniscient narrator (Elam Keir, 1992: 32). Drama takes upon itself the task of creating human conditions and relations (Yusuf Ash-Sharoni, 1976: 205). The dramatic scene seems present in the novel through Sharaf's movement in the crowded streets of Cairo, where he watches girls and shoes, looking for what might gratify his hunger and quench his thirst for female bodies so that he can store their images. The narrator said, "Soon Sharaf found himself at the head of a large crowd fulfilling the call of the two well-tightened pieces of the shorts of the girl. He was forced to use his elbow to maintain his leadership position" (7). So language takes the readers from one detailed scene to another making the readers feel they witness a dramatic scene fostered by tiny gestures of acting which expose the interior movements of Sharaf. Like others, Sharaf is obsessed by women but he cannot come close to them. The tourist sees him as a beggar only. She opens her purse and gives him a bill. But Sharaf discards it and goes away. The western "other" seizes the attention of this generation, becoming the cause of its destruction. When the Narrator leads us to Sharaf's home, we are given the opportunity to witness a dramatic scene where the traditional father has a serious problem with his son. The former insists on creating a gap between him and his son spoiling his son's joy in watching TV by delivering his daily speech about his effort to provide for his family. The scene blends the dramatic level with the analytical level because the narrator intervenes and offers his comments on the event (9). The various elements of fiction are intricately interwoven in the rape scene where they create the most dramatic scenes via detailed movements of the characters. Sharaf meets John featured as a foreign blonde character who seduces Sharaf by showing compassion and affection for the young man deprived of minimum requirements. John initially invites Sharaf to the movies and then takes him home where he offers him a string of gold then tries to rape him. While trying to escape Sharaf attacks him by hitting him with a bottle causing his death. Subsequently, Sharaf's situation changes from bad to worse. He is charged of murder and sent to prison which represents the spatial space opposite reality along with its nastiness, dirt and deformation. As a result, Sharaf is obliged to face the depth of reality that he has recognized its exterior only. This dramatic scene is strewn with its spatial and mobile details that intensify its expressiveness. The readers are told that the host "went immediately to the kitchen and returned with two cans of Heineken and a bucket of ice cubes... Then he went to the other side of the apartment and returned with a small metal box the size of a pack of cigarettes..." (16). After a number of minor scenes, the events of the novel become more intense. The narrator justifies its force by saying

, ...and because it's the first time he faces a blatant enemy of this kind. He has exhausted all his energy. He had lost control over his lower half. Sharaf realized he had lost the battle and then he caught a glimpse of the wine glass. And he hit the temple of his attacker. Sharaf didn't notice the blood that dropped on his attacker's face. (21)

This scene is the turning point that leads Sharaf to several other spots. Sharaf becomes the card driven by the novelist to monitor what goes on inside the bars and to awaken his other personalities via multiple dramatic scenes consistent with the narrative levels. Sharaf or Ashraf is a personality of a follow-up excuse that invokes infinite similar personalities whose reference is an illusion stored at storehouses where goods generate other goods (Darraj 291). His companions in prison show excretion caused by the material which pollutes the human being and takes away his value. Each character tells its featureless story showing a character that is damaged, dull, incapable of all actions and surrounded by filth, perversion and flies. The dramatic level emerges while congested with agitation and connotations and packed with kinetic details to indicate cynical critique of deteriorating reality whose shadows become clear inside the prison. It also creates Sharaf's shock because this level looks deep into the heart of the political, social and economic realities. The narrator says,

The Sergeant handed me in silence to a guard who confirmed my receipt by signing in a notebook then Sharaf followed him into a long corridor. From its sides a strange smell rose. It was a combination of chemical liquids and urine. We went down to the ground floor, where the guard took out a huge key ring and held a key with which he opened one gate of rails. (22)

The Sergeant delivered him to a guard who led him through a long corridor. In it the self is filled with a sense of anticipation of what awaits him inside. Then the smell of urine leaking from the scene becomes vivid within an expressive form that continues to trap Sharaf. His spatial and human location will be determined near the urine bucket and so Sharaf is confronted with dirt in the most blatant image. The prisoners are ranked according to their social level and criminal class, and so the inside becomes a reflection of what goes on in the outside, albeit now the small spatial space is narrow making filth clearer and uglier. The dramatic scenes follow up. Soon Sharaf, who enters prison after his rejection of nudity, finds himself face to face with nakedness in prison. He rejects nakedness by refusing to take a shower with a group of prisoners under the control of the guard's eyes who like the others watches Sharaf's manhood within dynamic hand's movement that Sharaf tries to ignore. The interrelated physical movements of the characters and the reactions of Sharaf appear to be a harmonious dramatic scene loaded with associations. Through this initial confrontation with reality, Sharaf begins to spot more unfair and painful situations. When attention heads dramatically to Sharaf's manhood represented by his naked body, Ibrahim intends to hint at the next events and push the readers to anticipate what is coming. Some prisoners talk about Sharaf's male organ, affirming its presence or the lack of it, while others endorse his nakedness to fill their night dreams. It instigates them and generates scenic shots in which multiple attempts are done to abuse him under repeated movements within the narrative construction of the novel (118, 31, and 531). Among the important dramatic levels that shape the novel's characters is the scene where Ashraf submits to torture. He is forced to say what he did not say. Describing the scene, Ashraf says, "One of them pulled my panties down. My horror doubled. He tied it with my foot. I shouted: mercy!" (32). Since the first moment, his male organ has been targeted as we understand from the details of the dramatic scene saturated with whining and dramatic physical movements. Our perception is also fueled by the dramatic dialogue that seems like a sound answered by the echo between the prison and jailer. Significantly, Sharaf picks up in this scene the act of narration from the third person narrator because he is better able to explain the varying degrees of pain and its details. The dramatic level of scenes dealing with prisoners taking food is worth referring to. One might refer to the movement of a bucket's image that is similar to urinary buckets filled with black liquid distributed to each prisoner in his cage. There the psychological impact begins especially when the prisoner finds himself eating beans in a plate full of swimming worms and dry bread that does not fit human level versus tables of the rich in prison. The scene is conveyed through a close snapshot that monitors the features of Sharaf, who is hungry and thirsty and who stares at the rich prisoners' meals voraciously. As the events step up, the dramatic scenes increase dynamically in shots distributed to two important sections in the prison. These sections are inhabited by Al-Malakey and Almearey, both of whom give bribes to maintain their social level they enjoyed outside the prison. These shots let the inside of the prison seem an intensive microcosm of frayed administrative and social reality outside. By making the prisoners' reality inside the prison similar to their situation outside, the writer aims at showing man's deteriorated moral attitudes emphasized by the urine bucket next to him. What helps Ibrahim intensify the dramatic scenes is his dependence on what is known in cinematic language as props and accessories. Readers see how Sharaf awakes from his sleep and imaginations after being pinched by a flea. Obviously, the flea represents this cinematic accessory that reinforces the intensity of dramatic level and moves Sharaf from his illusions to reality where he sinks in purgatory again (34, 23). The dramatic level appears while it is packed with many representative characters and crowded with minute details that indicate the narrator's knowledge of what's going on inside the walls of the place equivalent to what is going on outside. One example is the scenes of drug preparation, blending and smuggling from one cell to another, accompanied by security personnel. The scenes become more expressive and emotional in accordance with the character's personal sense. Sharaf presents things as he feels them. As evidence, one may examine the scene of Shoqi's injection with drug. The scene is teeming with movements and sounds of characters who rush to save Shoqi from death. The scene is depicted within a fictional imagination that makes human characters alien zombies. They rush to deliver themselves to death pushed by the political power and capitalism targeting them. Among the emotional, representative and dramatic scenes is the court scene where Sharaf meets his mother. Her face looks yellow. His sister continuously weeps. Although the dialogue deepens the snapshot, it monitors the features and gestures of other characters next to him on the stage of the court granting Sharaf the opportunity to conjure women's images amid one of the most fateful moments. In order to create new social models that deepen the unpleasantness of reality, the novelist resorts to the dramatic level employing cynical and critical sense that is manifested by tracking Ashraf's meditation on shoes and details of women instead of being preoccupied with the execution verdict that stalks him. The novel with its large size has become a theater for the dramatic level. Wherever the readers look, they hear the characters' whispers, whining, motions and

dialogues after the language of fiction succeeds in drawing the spatial space through which they move. Consequently, the landscape becomes complete and its implications grow obvious. Readers see Salem's hand extending between Sharaf's legs, an act through which Salem attempts to compensate for the Sharaf's inhumane sexual deprivation. Readers also are confronted with the scene of a calf lying on the kitchen table around which Sharaf and his friends gather to watch the chef distributing the pieces of meat in accordance with class levels. This scene highlights how the readers' attention is attracted by the scenic movement of Sharaf's hand which slots a piece of meat into his pants before he gets the traces of the beef as part of bad meals that fit his likes of prisoners. The dramatic narrative level reaches its conclusion within the final scene that presents an unexpected revelation. Sharaf is seen physically and psychologically exhausted. So are the readers whose minds are filled with details, scandals and information about what goes on inside and outside the prison. He lifts his leg while holding a knife with which he slowly cuts the extra hair on his body in a helpless attempt to erase filth and dirt in the most precise places. The act is in one line with the sense of deterioration and full decay that relaxes its dominion over man slowly. Interestingly, this dramatic scene is reminiscent of the final scene that concludes Ibrahim's *The Committee*, which also ends in an unforeseen manner. The protagonist who is exhausted by the forces of imperialism and oppressive, internal powers holds his injured hand then he starts eating it. Perhaps this ending which is far removed from logic is harmonious with the absurd and distorted reality pervading the novel. Perhaps it is a pattern of condemnation of the Arab reality that puts into practice Esam Mahfouz' claim that "the artistic construction of the novel is nightmarish. And that one condition of the nightmare is exaggeration and inflation" (2000, 56). Indeed, *Sharaf's* ending demonstrates the extent of frustration and dejection that hit the hero representing the generation of that period. Sharaf decides to enter the circle of decay and filth. He uses an Israeli razor to trim the body hair thus becoming subject to the notions of Salem that homosexuality is customary within the circle of irregular reality despite the appeals of Dr. Ramzi. So, Sharaf has become a featureless freak who holds the razor revealing his organ and his body dirt indicating his deterioration.

III. THE NARRATIVE, REPRESENTATIVE LEVEL

The employment of the narrative, representative level present the world as it is seen by Sharaf's psyche. The places described are portrayed just as they appear from his inside and while consistent with the political, social and economic violations that take place in the real world. This level, therefore, seeks not only to present the inner reality but also to unveil it. What allows this to happen is the narrator's movement inside the place and through dreams, nightmares and monologue that reflect Sharaf's contradictory thoughts and feelings driven by real events outside him. The representative level is based on seeing the existence through a certain psychological situation (Yusuf Ash-Sharoni, 1976 213). Mahmoud Amin also relates to this situation and calls it in his *Trilogy of Rejection and Defeat* the language of memories, dreams and meditation (1985, 49). A good example which illustrates this point is the scene where Sharaf describes his new environment in prison: "I saw myself in a big room whose walls are smeared with ink, blood stains and various writings. Its ground is covered with tar and a mixture of spit and urine" (22). Clearly, the narrator feels the place and senses its details. He monitors what scares him and raises his distaste and sense of decadence. Afterwards, what he sees and feels mixes with coming events. Blood and ink are symbolical. They have covered the walls of history, but today they were replaced with sputum, urine and asphalt. The representative level is evident when it is employed to describe women whom Sharaf encounters (94, 11, 19), and the language that describes the urine bucket preoccupying and exhausting Sharaf's mind and self. In the dramatic scenes, the representative level of expressionism bears special implications. It becomes a refuge next to which Sharaf hides to escape assaults on him. Ironically, the dirtiest places become a shelter when reality becomes decayed and deteriorated indicating that the natural course of things has been turned upside down. Similarly, this level appears when the details of prisoners are presented in the way Sharaf feels them, allowing his senses to be engaged in analyzing their garments, their bodies and their physical appearance. It is known that description slows down the narrative movement but it helps create spatial atmosphere, contributes to the formation of characters increasing the possibility of interaction to create a narrative-structure integrated with other narrative elements, and paves the ground for better understanding of the internal sides of the characters. The representative level is most manifested in dreams and nightmares which create various types of freaks. In one dream, Sharaf describes how a freak is forced into his cell,

I catch him in his hair, make him drop his pants down, force him to bend his head then screw him. Afterwards, I find myself holding a knife which I stabbed into his back. In the beginning, I dreamt of naked women with big breasts... (537)

Dreams often come while packed with oppressed desires and feelings of enmity and malice because of persecution that people confront. Moreover, descriptions of dreams are conveyed through extended discourse reminiscent of hallucination to reflect the bitterness that fills the inside of the character. The word "*sakhmatah*"

(suggesting distortion) in the novel connotes masturbation and physical harassment and it signifies corruption and political and economic abuse outside the prison (125, 156, 157 and 227).

IV. THE CONNOTATIVE NARRATIVE LEVEL

This level takes two courses: a linguistically signifying course and a complete scenic course. This level at times intertwines with the dramatic level and at others with the representative level. From this level, the intensity of linguistic expression that Ibrahim enjoys emerges. His usual language says more than its external appearance seems to indicate. One fine example is, "We have been doomed to eat shit since we are born" (103). The expression emphasizes the crushed class's fate but also their social, economic, political and economic persecution. Furthermore, it hints at social and economic scandals that caused this fate as the novel proclaims afterwards. Another example is the narrator's talk about Sharaf that points at the coming fate and the appropriate class assigned to him. The talk which signifies the double standards used by the prison authorities and which distorts reality matches Ibrahim's linguistic abilities. He briefly says, "and that his place was assigned next to the urine bucket" (128). The connotative linguistic level exhibits the reality of some Islamists in a very ironical manner. Ibrahim's purpose is to state his intellectual attitude towards them. Describing how one of them performs his prayers, Ibrahim says, "He then took his position towards the *Qibla* and the angels lined up behind him" (133). What makes the scene uglier is the wretched physical image Ibrahim renders. The connotative scenes are brought to hint at some political events for the sake of criticizing them. One example is Ibrahim's description of the Batsha, the dungeon's major official, as one of sultans and Caliphs. The purpose is to criticize political figures and people of authority in the outside world. Ibrahim says, "He ascended his throne in strategic corner, the same position taken by his predecessors of Governors and Caliphs" (54). Ibrahim makes the act of making tea a dramatized scene for negotiations on the political tables (72). It links between the world inside the prison and outside. His implication is the outside world is no less dirty and decayed than the interior of the prison. As a result, the prison becomes a hole where the deficits of the outside world are restricted and manifested; "I went ahead barefooted towards the toilets.... And I remembered the day of the *transh* when the car gathering waste comes to empty the well. He enters our house" (74). The narrator then presents a detailed description of a scene when Batsha empties his urine then shakes his "cock" dirtily with the view to suggest a lack of manly power amongst people of authority who use violence to cover their weaknesses (65). Then follows the scene disclosing the sectarianism violence between Muslims and Christians inside the prison. The scene that happens in the wake of one prisoner's wearing of shorts not only refers to the extension of the secretarial violence outside but also asserts and therefore condemns its superficial cause (110).

V. THE INFORMATIVE NARRATIVE LEVEL

Ibrahim is very keen to enrich his novels with informative narrative levels so as to connect life inside the prison with the outside world. In so doing, he hopes to place a ladder that can update him with the political situation dominating the scene. He also intends to establish a channel of communication between prisoners and the different political currents within prison. Convicts are known to be thirsty to get news of other cells, learn about the names of released prisoners and get echoes of their activities. As for Sharaf, such a level satisfies his obsession with grand names and brands that are cynically introduced. What intensifies the sense of cynicism is the fact that he can never attain his goals. This narrative level appears through reclining on news bulletin tracing the names of released prisoners. An announcer who adopts a popular comic tone and who gets cigarettes regarded as the prison's dollars and vital veins presents the news Bulletin. There is also anew bulletin for Islamists who bring the political events in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Palestine. Then, there are some recorded clashes between Islamists protesting against the political system and security people (28, 61, 82, and 502).

This level also brings speeches of *Sheikh* Omar Abdel-Kafy, who, as the novel seems to indicate, intends to tighten his grip on his subjects in prison and captivate new personnel depending on his talk about sex and women in this world and the hereafter. Ibrahim aims at showing that the *Sheikh* deals only with the thin crust of religious things without referring to the core. Therefore, Ibrahim manages to suggest that this class represents a part of reality (177). This level is practiced through the letters written by prisoners on the personal level to their parents, as Sharaf and Abdul Fattah As-Saidi do. It is also practiced through the level of protests, criticism and condemnation of the policy of the prison authorities like when one of the Islamists has done using Sharaf as a means to perform his goal. The novel, in short, reveals the flaws and violations that this level manages to expose. It should be pointed out that the novelist creates this level in an attempt to empty the cyst crowded with statistical and reporting detail and the huge amount of information. His purpose is to focus the light on political, economic, social and health corruption portrayed by Dr. Ramzi Nasif's hysterical speeches especially those given after the protest and the hunger strike. Oddly, Ramzi's speeches do not profoundly affect the prisoners who have just responded with curses and accusations directed at his deficient manhood. By this means, the novelist manages to strip the outward circle within which the prisoners restrict themselves. Importantly, the detainees start with curses related to the body- that same part which the authorities often

first humiliate him, discarding the serious issues that Dr. Ramzi seeks to make them aware of. These very issues are the real factors behind their presence in this closed and nasty space. Dr. Ramzi shouts at the detainees, "Why do you accept this bestial treatment? Why do you let them rob and persecute you?" (414). Awareness, according to Dr. Ramzi starts by asserting man's fundamental rights and clarifying the flaws of the inner world in preparation for opening the external reality. He says, "Do you know that there are 30 thousand Mercedes cars in Egypt? The average price per car is 70 thousand pounds, i.e. 210 million pounds enough to pay a third of the budget deficit" (474). These speeches are filled with the language of dry statistical reporting and dull economic analyses demonstrating the writer's diverse education that is committed to presenting the pure reality as it is, without resorting to the decoration. Therefore, this level avoids exaggeration and rally because the novel is not a place for preaching. Besides an excessive treatment of a certain issue becomes a burden on the novel. As Mahmoud Amin Al-'Alem says, "Immortality of a character can never be achieved through its positions or ideological rhetoric but through its humanitarian richness and effectiveness in moving the world of fiction" (1986, 61).

The Retrospective Narrative Level (Confessions)

The novel is condensed to combine the past and the present through retrospective narrative levels more similar to confessions. Every prisoner tells his story highlighting his motivation and the circumstances that have pushed him to perform his crime within details that alleviate the suffering of the characters and help him to overcome part of the torture congested in the chest. The novelist depends greatly on these stories to enrich other aspects of his story to demonstrate the tragic reality inherent in the daily economic, social and political life of the people. All the convicts' confessions and flashbacks together with the details presented by the documentary level illustrate the real causes for the characters' comprehensive deterioration. Retrospection is based on "shedding light on mysterious or unknown facts of the character's past or what happened to the character during the absence of narration" (Lateef Zaytoni, 2002 14). More often than not, retrospection may appear in the form of delirium. Take for example the moment of Sharaf's separation from reality into hysterics at John's house. At that moment, he confesses the truth of his circumstances and physical status creating a situation that looks like retrieving of pain. He says, "The moment of confessions has come... How he used to lie, and that he could not buy anything... and the smell of jasmine which he mentioned cited when he talked about his house is the permanent odor of our shit" (19). In the confessions of Shawqi, who murdered his niece by throwing her into the kerosene stove, there is a discharge of tension, exhaustion and cramped work, and poverty he faced at home. The confession is done within a dramatic scene dominated by his cries. The same goals are also attained in the confessions of Abdel Fattah, who is involved in a revenge case and in the confessions of Dr. Ramzi revolving around his initial upbringing, masturbation acts, and frequent visit to the church for confession. Izzet Bey's confession about his failure with his wife and the confessions of Sharaf about his conditions at home including his relationships with his sister and friends, his first experiences with Sally, his story with Huda and the pains deriving from the gap between him and his father play the same role. Perhaps the most painful and dramatic flashbacks occur when a Palestinian young person remembers his suffering rising from confronting his death sentence which he submits to its performance five times, then is deferred five times on account of the absence of the officer in charge. From his flashback, one can sense the young man's ir retrievable whines and cries of bitterness caused by disrespecting human life and dignity (126). In short, in this level based on confessions the past is resurrected in the present to reveal the inner sides of the characters and the ugliness of their communities and their circumstances in the very voice of the speaker who is capable of clarifying his soul and memory.

VI. THE ANALYTICAL NARRATIVE LEVEL

The novel is simply crammed with this analytical level which loudly sounds the narrator's comments and different interventions. The language employed forms an awareness that rejects, challenges and criticizes reality. This level comes to explain the language of the narrator more deeply, to make fun of something, or express the writer's point of view towards issues that should be recognized (Al-'Alem, Mahmoud Amin, 1994 200). This level often appears in the process of narration between brackets amid the context of narration or the documentary level and greatly dominates all sections. See the following example:

Hesurrendered to intermittent dozing during which he entertained himself by listening to the last news bulletin having an opera construction, consisting of snores (Batsha dominates him while he was sleeping) that wavered between whining and rattling in accordance with the type of the accompanying image. (97)

Readers notice that this level is overflowing with parentheses containing brand names so as to satisfy Sharaf's mania and to make fun of a type of reality ruled by European and American goods. Such a reality has constituted characters that become the cause of all the nastiness of this reality. Furthermore, the bracketed

information contains the narrator's voice sharing Sharaf the task of telling the events of the story. Readers also glimpse the crowdedness of punctuation marks, commas and periods which provide the narrator with the opportunity and time to comment on events. The second part of the novel is controlled by the documentary, journalistic level. This documentary feature that has become a distinctive nature of many contemporary Arabic novels particularly distinguishes Ibrahim's novels. This feature initially appears in his first novel *That Smell*, then in *The Star of August*, *The Committee* and eventually in *Beirut... Beirut*, a film script about the civil war (Al-Alem, 1994 207). This level is frequently entwined with the structure of the novel although it sometimes appears separate in an independent section in the form of press clippings. To give credit to these clippings, the narrator has created the figure of Dr. Ramzi Nassif, the pharmacist, who worked with leading global pharmaceutical companies. That position has granted him access to many records, and allowed him to travel to most parts of the world, where he has confronted a lot of frauds and deceptive acts practiced by business investors and freeloaders thus revealing hotbeds of corruption and opportunism which set him in prison. Dr. Ramzi combines the clips on his stomach in prison thus becoming the obsession of his existence. Later they become the reason for his tragedy and frequent hallucination. Knowing the significance of these clippings, the authorities employ Sharaf to photograph them.

VII. THE DOCUMENTARY JOURNALISTIC LEVEL: Dr. Ramzi Nassif's Press Clippings

The second part of the novel focus on Dr. Ramzi Nassif's press scraps composed of a group of Arabic and foreign daily newspapers' clips with different dates. They also contain some essays printed on a typewriter highlighted by red lines to bring out some of the names and addresses of people engaged in cases of financial and administrative corruption in addition to some articles cut of some economic and political books. In the end of some clippings, one might find some hand-written comments in which Ramzi explains or highlights some points. These comments take into account the importance of the issue dealt with. One clear example is the scandal related to the issue of spoiled foods linked to Qassem Beh now in the cell. Ramzi's clippings, therefore, create a clear bond between the characters and contents of clips. Another example is associated with the cement company scandals, whose agents are represented by Dr. Thabet. Dr. Ramzi's scraps also relate to some ads for luxurious English schools for the children of the ostentatiously rich people and the exploiting class, while the corresponding bottom clip is linked to the news of the death of a child in a shelter because of neglect and illness. Dr. Ramzi (and the narrator) hints at the extent of the deterioration of reality. Through printed scraps, Dr. Ramzi keeps reports packed with details and numbers based on Environmental Association's reports. He details the pollution levels in addition to the number of deaths while another clip containing a photo of Health Minister confirms that the tolls are phenomenal. There are also handwritten data from pharmaceutical companies operating in Egypt and worldwide. These data indicate paradoxes about countries endowed with rich resources such as Niger and Somalia contrasted with other scraps talking about the starving children of these same countries (214). Ramzi also provides a list of the richest men in the world, headed by Islamic and Arab characters. Finally, in handwriting he gives lists of major corporations that rule the world, and promote their products in third world countries (229-35). Despite the significance of these scraps, the insertion of a long informative text within the novel is likely to lead to a turbulent position. Although the act has an experimental attribute, it nonetheless may bore the readers. Moreover, the presence of multiple texts complicates their fusion within the structure of the novel, connects loosely with the characters and leaves large peaks that can be omitted in spite of their value. However, these documentary scraps seem to be consistent with the conversational, reporting language employed by the novelist within a puppet theater in possession of some touches of the dramatic level. The novelist employs it to satisfy his hunger to reveal oppressed information and to empty his avaricious anger concerning the great attempt made to distort the human and degrade man's world so as to gratify the greed of evil individuals and great states. Though the puppet theater is closer to the dramatic level including its characters, dialogues, representations and excitements, the language of Ramzi Nassif is sometimes symbolical. He brings brides carrying figures of forms of Arab, Israeli and American characters known as exploiters of political and economic wars. Some viewers and commentators are given the opportunity to take part in the scene. They can comment on events, accuse figures of various issues or simply show their anger. In so doing, the novelist manages to strip naked scandals of history and events such as the wars of Yemen (386-7), the Six-Day War, Nasser, the October War, Sadat's role in the American-Zionist network (367), scandals of banks, exploitation and scandals of social and health corruption.

a. CONCLUSION

Sharaf is undoubtedly a rich, innovative and experimental novel. After tracing its structure and its narrative levels, and after examining its fictional signifiers, I have attained some major findings. There is a strong sense of harmony between the narrative and documentary levels in the novel presented within a collage

that creates a mosaic portrait consisting of different stones varying in their aesthetic appeal as well as dryness. The novel offers extremely high culture and creativity, congested information, insights and entwining of complex levels of narration, drama, association and connotation, analysis, representation, introspection, media, reporting and journalism and documentation. It nonetheless requires a concentrated mental effort to link between its documentary level among and the rest of the novel. The readers are unlikely to catch up with the line of development that creates a mixture between the different units of the novel. Although the clips have high cognitive value, they remain dispersed press clippings dealing with different topics. Worse, sometimes these topics can be ignored. Perhaps the drowning of these clippings with reporting language, numbers, names of companies and managers has given the novel elements of monotony and burden that tire the readers because journalistic fragments do not feed the readers' imagination and the visual sense of the recipients.

The novel is founded on the overlapping of a variety of narrative levels disclosed within a modernist narrative construction employed to create a fictional reality that reflects an external distorted human reality. In this ugly reality, man was turned into a thing pulverized by the wheels of global economic and political power co-working with the internal authority.

Ibrahim has shown in *Sharaf* a sharp sense of modern awareness and a skill at employing experimental structure capable of inserting into the text various means of communication. He also combines between the imagined narrative and other texts. As a result, he falls in the trap of repeating his structural model that he adopted in other novels. In consequence, his text is burdened with data accumulation, traditional tools and structures. Ibrahim has found himself standing in front of fragmented texts some of which can be dropped without affecting the novel structure. These fragments are difficult to melt within the structure and resist smooth connections with each other thus constructing a collage whose colors are intertwined. The texture of the novel becomes coarse.

Ibrahim's ideology has sprung from wide beliefs and various intellectual concepts reclining on the third person narrators and the creation of a dictated fictional form, through the presence of the analytical level, Nassif's clips, the puppet theatre, and the sharp sense of irony that satisfies his instincts. These very literary tools make the narrative structure loose, fragmented, and prone to smooth connection. Although the novelist's visions help ease the fragmented texture, reading through the novel is a difficult task. Ironically, Ibrahim's deep engagement in the lure of experimentation matches our deformed and irrational reality. No attempt is made to deny *Sharaf's* fictional value and structural strength. Despite its various blunders and slips, it manages to address the mind and awaken the conscience after getting shocked by its ugly nudity.

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