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## **Narrative Techniques in the Short Story According to Mohsen Al-Ramli: Distant Papers from the Tigris as a Sample**

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### **ABSTRACT**

The Arabic short story occupied a prominent position, and this is due to the great interest it received from her book, the latter which became the tongue of the writer who expresses what stirs in his chest in a beautiful artistic form, using its mechanisms to write about the homeland, heritage, love, war, memory and the encounter of cultures.

Mohsen al-Ramli is among the Arab writers who produced a short narrative discourse that relies on experimentation, symbolism, imitation, suggestion and declaring between the real and the delusion of it.

Iraq is an occasional guest in all the stories that involve a sense of deprivation, but the absent Iraq, the Iraq of the family, tries to be present as a hidden equivalent to the one that haunts the imagination of the storyteller in his exile, yet it remains on the sidelines of events even if it tries to cling to the consciousness of the hero of the story.

It is hoped that this article will answer some questions, perhaps the most important of which are: To what extent was the structure of the story formed in a group of papers far from the Tigris? What is the peculiarity of writing sandy stories?

**Keywords:** Structure - short story - Mohsen Al-Ramli - symbol - title - Motherland

### **INTRODUCTION**

The Arabic language is considered the richest and most abundant in terms of linguistic material and its generative morphological forms, encompassing a remarkable diversity of structures and multiple compositions. These variations, in an astonishing manner, differ in their ability to accurately convey the intended meaning. This opens up a wide range of possibilities for the creative writer to employ them rhetorically within contexts they deem suitable for serving a specific literary genre that captivates them, be it poetry, oratory, novel, or short story. The latter has garnered significant attention from many literary figures and has established its presence in the literary arena. The short story is one of the modern literary arts that emerged not only in the global literary scene but also in the Arab world, where it has acquired a prominent position among critics and scholars. It has become a refuge for writers who have found their solace in this artistic form, enabling them to embody their aspirations and portray the realities of their societies. Consequently, the novel has become a reflective mirror of reality.

What is the nature of the short story? What are its types? What are its artistic techniques? To what extent has the structure of the short story evolved through a collection of writings far removed from deception? These questions, among others, will be addressed in the body of the article.

### **Presentation**

The short story is a form of literary expression, and it cannot be solely linked to events and characters. It is also connected to linguistic techniques as a necessity for assimilation. The way events are presented in the story engages and attracts the reader, to the extent that they feel that real life is unfolding, real incidents are occurring, and real characters are living. (Qutb, 1983, p. 93). Therefore, employing artistic techniques in writing a short story is essential to establish a bridge of communication between the author and the reader. This can only be achieved through persuasion and authenticity. This ensures that the story possesses movement and life, free from psychological and social analysis. Some writers believe that a story should not be devoid of humor, satire, irony, criticism, or a joke. (Sultan, n.d., pp. 7-9). Accordingly, at the beginning of this research paper, we seek to understand the nature of the short story and its various aspects before delving into the world of the short story collection "Tahfat Al-Sahrān" by the Arab writer Mohsen Al-Ramli. This collection is structurally complete, encompassing characters and events that carry hidden artistic features behind their façades. We will attempt to

explore these features using various methodologies and tools as a means to uncover the underlying meanings, which we will address in the practical section.

### **Definition of a Story**

#### **Linguistic Definition**

Arabic dictionaries present us with multiple meanings for the linguistic root "qasas." In most of its meanings, it signifies narrating a story. Al-Razi, in his book *Mukhtar Al-Sahah*, expressed this meaning by stating, "Al-Qissa is the news and the narration. It has been used to mean narrating a story in the form (qasaha). The noun form of it is also (al-qasas) with an open vowel, used as a gerund, and it became more common. And (al-qissa) with a kasrah is the plural of (al-qissa) that is written." (Al-Razi, 1986, p. 225).

Ibn Mandhur, in his book *Lisan Al-Arab*, defines the story as follows: "Al-Qissa is the news, and it is the stories. And if someone narrates his news, he is said to (qassa) it, narrating it in detail and extensively. It is mentioned in his book... And (al-qissat), with a kasrah on the letter qaf, is the plural of (al-qissa) that is written." (Mandhur, 2008, p. 120).

In Al-Wasit dictionary, the story is defined as: "The narrator who tells the story as it is. Al-Qussas: narrating news and concise news. And al-Athar al-Qissa: the story that is written. It can refer to a sentence, speech, command, news, matter, or prose narrative derived from imagination, reality, or both." (Anis, Abdul Haleem, and Muhammad, *Al-Mu'jam Al-Wasit*, pp. 739-740).

From the aforementioned dictionaries, we can conclude that in language, "qissa" means narrating news, and "al-qasas" is the plural form of the written story. The verb "qassa" appeared in the Quran in the following verse: "So when he came to him and narrated to him the story, he said, 'Fear not.'" (Surah Al-Qasas, 28:25).

#### **Technical Definition**

The short story is a modern literary genre with a linguistic system that reflects life and mirrors its characteristics. It represents a vivid painting in which humans see the embodiment of themselves and their liberation from individuality. The compact size and sequence of events in a short story help attract the reader's attention and engage them in following the realistic or fictional chain of events.

In its general concept, the short story is a collection of events narrated by a writer, focusing on a single incident or multiple incidents related to various human characters, both real and unreal. These characters differ in their ways of life and behavior, mirroring the diversity of people's lives on Earth. Their impact and influence on the story vary. (Najm, 1966, p. 9).

From a different perspective, Taher Hajar acknowledges the difficulty of providing a comprehensive and complete definition of the art of the short story. He questions the boundaries between it, the novel, and the short story, stating, "It is difficult to give a precise and comprehensive definition of the short story that encompasses all the possibilities of this literary genre, which has not been firmly established yet. Indeed, what is the difference between the novel, the short story, and the short short story?" (Hajar, 2004, p. 99).

#### **Types of Short Stories**

Critics divide the short story into three main types based on length: the short story, the short story, and the novel. The short story, also known as flash fiction, is the most recent and widespread type. Its popularity stems from its small size, which is convenient for both readers and writers. It doesn't require much time to read like a novel or a regular short story, nor does it need a large space in newspapers and magazines. In the modern era of speed and automation, the short story is considered the most suitable literary form. (Al-Bari, n.d., p. 200).

The short story, called "Conte" in French, deals with a specific aspect or sector of life. It focuses on a single incident or a few incidents that form an independent subject with its own characters and elements. Despite its brevity, the subject must be fully mature in terms of analysis and treatment. This is where the writer's skill shines, as the limited space requires focus. (Salam, n.d., p. 5). In French, the term "nouvelle" is used for the short story. It falls between the short story and the novel. In the nouvelle, the writer addresses broader aspects than in the short story. It allows for a longer timeframe, with events unfolding and developing in a more intertwined manner. (Same, p. 5). As for the third type, the novel, it is referred to as "roman" in the foreign terminology. In the novel, the author addresses a complete or multiple full and rich lives. The reader is immersed in the lives of the protagonist or protagonists at different stages. The field of the novel is vast, allowing the writer to unveil the lives of the characters and unfold the events, regardless of the time it takes. (Same, p. 5).

### **Short Story**

#### **Concept of the Short Story**

The short story is a literary art form written in direct, descriptive, or suggestive prose language. It expresses a specific life issue and relies on an intense and charged event with expressive and connotative elements. It features contrasting characters in terms of roles, activity, passivity, and movement, as well as a temporal and

spatial sequence. It incorporates the elements of artistic truth and objective equivalence in terms of influence and impact on the sender and receiver, making the text simultaneously active and effective. (Ad-Daqqaq et al., 1997, pp. 187-188). Frank O'Connor suggests that the main reason for naming this literary art form the short story is not solely due to its small size, but rather because it has been treated in a particular manner. It approaches its subject matter vertically rather than horizontally, focusing on the turning points within it. Just as one standing on a bend in the road can see the entire road, those who explode the turning points in a situation can gather the past, present, and future in a single moment that becomes visible. (O'Connor, 1969, p. 14).

The short story has several definitions, including the following, without limitation:

1. According to the writer Ibrahim Fathi, he sees it as "a relatively short narrative (less than ten thousand words) aimed at creating a dominant individual effect and possessing elements of drama. In most cases, the short story focuses on a single character in a single situation at a single moment." (Fathi, 1986, p. 275).
2. Rashad Rushdi defines it as "not just a story contained within a few pages, but rather a genre of modern literature that emerged in the late nineteenth century and has specific formal characteristics and features." (Rushdi, n.d., p. 01).
3. Abdullah Al-Rukaybi perceives it as "an expression of a specific situation or moment in time in a person's life, aiming to express a human experience that convinces the reader of its possibility. It is a vivid portrayal of a aspect of life in a concise and focused manner." (Al-Rukaybi, 2009, p. 133).

### **Components of the Short Story**

The short story consists of a cohesive set of elements, including events, characters, structure, style, focus, and setting. Each element serves as a strong building block in the overall structure, as it functions to complete the artistic work. Weakness in any element can cause the rest of the elements to falter, thus affecting the work as a whole. (Al-Sharouni, 1967, p. 294). Ibrahim Shahab Ahmed divides the elements of the story into two parts: (Ahmed, 2012, p. 61.)

Firstly, the construction of the story (the narrative work) includes:

- The event and its associated meaning, idea, and significance.
- The plot and its elements, such as introduction, conflict or dilemma, climax or turning point, and resolution.
- The story's setting, which encompasses time and place.
- The characters.

Secondly, the fabric of the story (the artistic expression) includes:

- Language.
- Narrative in its various forms.
- Dialogue in its various forms.
- Description in its various forms.

The component of the event will be addressed as the intended part of the study and application in the short story collection (Afar Papers from the Tigris).

### **The artistic techniques of the short story by Mohsen Al-Ramli are as follows**

The material of the short story collection by the Iraqi writer Mohsen Al-Ramli, titled "The Insomniac's Masterpiece," published by Dar al-Mada in the following countries: Baghdad, Beirut, and Damascus, is formed from the finest details of daily life and human experiences that thrust individuals into a real confrontation with life and its developments. They find themselves facing pivotal moments that serve as new beginnings or endings that they are compelled to confront.

In this sense, Mohsen Al-Ramli attempts to shape his narrative material from the experiences of people, the common people, whose lives suddenly unfold through an unexpected turn amid their relentless pursuit and preoccupation with the conditions of living and working. Iraqi/Arab suffering becomes part of their struggle, intensifying the confrontation and the clash between oppression and the desire for life.

Mohsen Al-Ramli is a distinguished artist who writes diverse stories in terms of their themes and forms. Among the issues he addresses are love, war, migration, memory, cultural encounters, heritage, isolation, and existential concerns. His stories vary in techniques, language, and narrative styles, ranging from experimental, symbolic, and traditional approaches, employing suggestion and explicitness, and oscillating between realism and illusion. (Al-Ramli, 2017, back cover of the book).

Mohsen Al-Ramli exhibits remarkable character embodiment skills and employs symbolism, which permeates most of his stories. His stories possess a high creative energy through the temporal and spatial elements that transform into a coherent cosmic fabric, in line with his artistic ability. He becomes the time of times in the sense of transcending the self-contained narrative, and he further amplifies the imagination of places where storytelling struggles and infiltrates the components of life.

### **Techniques of the Short Story: "Faraway Papers from the Tigris"**

The significance of any study and its accuracy extends beyond the theoretical aspect from which it originated. Therefore, its reinforcement requires practical application in order to verify the elements of the subject. In this section, we will attempt to study the techniques of title and event in the short story collection "Faraway Papers from the Tigris."

#### **Summary of the Short Story Collection**

The proposed short story collection for study is by the Iraqi writer Mohsen Al-Ramli (Al-Jadeed, September 11, 2018). It consists of 11 short stories, namely: "A Paper... Meaning All Papers," "Dhaym Simit and His Family," "The Traveler and My Wounded Mare," "Andalusia... Us... Them," "Laban of Erbil," "Ihdidabat," "The Absence of Basra," "The Wedding of Al-Wawi," "Sitting," "I Am the One Who Saw... Documents," and "Faraway Papers from the Tigris." Each story has its own theme and significance. These stories were included in the author's short story works titled "The Insomniac's Masterpiece" in 2017, with one of his short story titles chosen as the title for this collection.

The collection was published twice: the first edition by Alwaha Publishing House in Spain, and the second edition by Azmenah Publishing House in Jordan. Mohsen Al-Ramli opens his collection with a quote from Al-Sayyab: "My body is from the clay of Iraq, and my water is from Iraq." In "Faraway Papers from the Tigris," Mohsen Al-Ramli addresses a range of different human themes. He portrays the lived reality and depicts the suffering with precision, shedding light on aspects of society that have long been concealed.

#### **Techniques of the Title**

The title serves as a link between the reader and the text, making it essential to pay attention to its composition and formulate it in an attractive manner that helps convey the text, intrigue the reader, and capture their interest.

#### **A. The Title of the Short Story Collection**

The title represents the visible external aspect of the collection, which is the original title. It is the miniature face of the text on the cover page, catching the reader's eye from the very first moment. It is considered a crucial sign and one of the most important textual thresholds and openings that semiotic researchers encounter, capturing their attention. It is the primary key to accessing any literary text (Hamdawi, 1997, p. 120). Mustafa Sulaiman states in this regard, "Titling comes at the forefront of these sections, where it holds great importance. It is the first thing that catches the reader's eye and the first thing that takes shape in their mind. Those preoccupied with parallel texts, text accompaniments, or textual thresholds have an impact on refining titling and choosing the best fit for the texts they will write. The title of the short story should be as captivating, provocative, and enchanting as the overall title that the story collection presents to the readers. It should not be one of those titles that reveal everything from the very beginning. The clever and discerning creator knows how to choose titles for their stories that are not consumed or flat" (Sulaiman, 2007, p. 98).

Standing at the threshold of the title "Faraway Papers from the Tigris," the angle of the text unfolds. It is the first thing that captures the reader's eye, carrying within its folds the intentionality of the author, who hints at multiple connotations that transport the reader to different worlds of literary arts: the short story, autobiography, and poetry, skillfully blending them together without segregating the aforementioned literary genres. The writer tactfully touches upon emotions, presenting a narrative filled with passion and a quest for exploration. The language of writing keeps the reader in a constant state of pleasure and enjoyment throughout this narrative, which is interwoven with autobiography and poetry.

#### **B. A review of the titles in the short story collection**

It has been mentioned earlier that the short story collection "Faraway Papers from the Tigris" consists of 11 stories. Some of the stories include an introductory dedication that expresses a rich sense of human connection and loyalty to the history of the relationship between the parties involved in the dedication. Although each story has its own subject and theme, upon close reading, one can observe that each story complements the others. They belong to a unified space, as most of the stories share a common theme: the maze of fantastical reality and the portrayal of social life. This is accomplished by presenting aspects of human life and the struggles within a series of lost hopes and aspirations.

#### **The story of "A Paper" symbolizes all papers**

Paper is known as a versatile product used for writing, printing, and more. It is obtained from the pulp of softwoods, often extracted from pine trees. In the story "A Paper" signifies both the singular and the plural form, indicating that this paper represents all papers. The author uses it to refer to writing, that expressive art form through which a certain stance can be conveyed. How could it not be? The author is a committed writer, addressing the issues of their country, Iraq, which they love and pulsates within them, while also being pained by its conflicts and tragedies. The author delves into the art of writing in the story, considering it as the writer's

escape, where they create and innovate texts brimming with emotions and events that express their own condition and the condition of their society. Writing is the straw that the drowning person clings to, whether drowning in sorrow, circumstances, or life itself. Writing is the only outlet for their overflowing emotions, the hidden sentiment that permeates within them. Writing is a tool or means to convey events and emotions because it emanates from the heart, experiences, and silence.

#### **The story of "DhaymSemit and His Family"**

always comes with questions and messages, as is characteristic of the works of Mohsen Al-Ramli. The author leaves the reader with the task of answering these questions, while striving to convey the messages through the story. "DhaymSemit and His Family" is no different in this regard, as it suggests from the beginning that "dhaym" refers to injustice, humiliation, and similar concepts.

The author opens the story with the phrase "To the soul of the writer Mahmoud Jandari (Nasir, 2022)... the friend who died five minutes after..." Here, we understand that he is referring to the issue of silence that sometimes prevails in the lives of writers, and even overwhelms them to the extent that it takes them into a world full of mystery and despair. How could it not be, when this writer, Mahmoud Jandari, has experienced silence and pain from a society that oppressed him and suppressed his voice? In my exploration of the life of the writer Mahmoud Jandari, I found it to be a journey of responsibility. He was known as a mature and conscious writer who delved into the issues of his nation and proposed solutions. A writer carries a message that requires intellectual and cultural enrichment, enriching his experience and deepening his vision of humanity and society. All of this enhances his sense of belonging to the community and the country.

#### **The Story of "The Traveler and My Wounded Mare"**

The writer reminisces about his friend, the writer Abdul HadiSaadoun, as a tribute. The title of the story seems to be inspired by a well-known song by the artist Kazem Al-Saher, titled "Rahal" (Traveler). The opening lines of the song are as follows:

Rahal

Don't complain about your wound to people, you're its owner

The wound only hurts those who feel pain

Rahal... Rahal...

I am the traveler, my wounded mare, my life is long

I stumble and return, rivers make the impossible weak

The first word in the collection's title, "Rahal," indicates the act of traveling from one place to another, which is the state of writers who leave their cities in search of freedom. The writer begins his story in Madrid, in one of its squares, and it also ends in the same square, in front of the same view (the statue of Don Quixote). When asked about Madrid, he answered his companions, "Love is in the streets, and freedom is in the streets" (Al-Ramli, "Tuhfat Al-Sahran: Al-A'mal Al-Qissiya," p. 291).

#### **The Story of "Andalusia... Us... Them"**

This collection tells the story of Al-Andalus, that cherished piece in the hearts of every Muslim or Arab. It is a story of a rich heritage that we have greatly missed. Simply put, it is Andalusia, the sun that never sets, and the love that never fades.

The writer dedicates the introduction of this collection to what he calls "The Arab Thieves in Spain" (Al-Ramli, "Tuhfat Al-Sahran: Al-A'mal Al-Qissiya," p. 295). The story recounts the tale of an Arab immigrant who can't believe that our Andalusia has become their Andalusia!

#### **The Story of "Milk of Erbil"**

"I forgive the bullets fired towards me, the windows of your castle, or her hollow eyes in the clouds/history/pain/beauty." With this sentence, Mohsen Al-Ramli opens his story "Laban Erbil" and dedicates it to the Kurds... those who have died and those who are waiting. Mohsen Al-Ramli titles his story with the name of one of the provinces located in northern Iraq, the city of Erbil. It is the capital of the autonomous region granted to the Kurds and was considered the summer capital of Iraq during the previous regime. Erbil holds historical significance throughout the ages and is a cultural and influential center in northern Iraq. (Times, 2015).

#### **The Story of "Ihdedabat"**

The word "Ihdedabat" carries the meaning of protrusion and prominence, as well as crookedness and lack of straightness.

As usual, Mohsen Al-Ramli begins his stories with special dedications, this time "to the blind in the streets of Nineveh throughout the ages" (Al-Ramli, "Tuhfat Al-Sahran: Al-A'mal Al-Qissiya," p. 301). He knows that a dedication is a threshold of entry into the text, and its significance is no less important than the author's name

and the title itself. It serves as an auxiliary element for understanding the text, as it is "one of the initial entrances to any possible reading of the text" (Mansur, 2007, p. 47).

The writer, Mohsen Al-Ramli, opens a window for literature to reflect on society through his story "Ihdedabat," embodying the situation of the marginalized group of the blind. These individuals live on the fringes and do not receive appreciation from their society.

The title of the story raises hot and catastrophic issues experienced in Iraq, shocking the reader with dilemmas that they read about. The writer examines these dilemmas with penetrating insights in order to uncover their hidden secrets.

#### **Title: "The Absence of Basra"**

The title of the collection follows the logic of loss. Mohsen Al-Ramli did not leave a place in Iraq without immortalizing it in his writings. He lives in Spain, but his soul resides in Nineveh, Baghdad, Basra, and other places. He says, "So I shouted: 'Basra'... Its name was written on my footsteps... On it, I will stand, and from it, I will depart towards it" (Al-Ramli, "Tuhfat Al-Sahran: Al-A'mal Al-Qissiya," p. 308).

The title "The Absence of Basra" is one that captivates the reader, making them contemplate and raising questions within them. It is a fascinating and innovative reality, perhaps unprecedented, captured skillfully by the author's soaring imagination. The writer connects silence with darkness and attempts to establish a relationship between them.

#### **The Story: "The Wedding of Al-Wawi"**

The title of the story combines two contrasting elements: "wedding," which signifies happiness and joy, and "Al-Wawi," which refers to a cunning animal known for its trickery and deceit. The Arab mother used to invoke the name of Al-Wawi ("Baaba'a") to scare her mischievous child and make him calm down by saying, "Al-Wawi is coming for you."

The title of the story reflects Mohsen Al-Ramli's life and the intensity of his nostalgia for his homeland and bitter memories. His style is a beautiful blend of prose, surrealism, and documentary. The story "The Wedding of Al-Wawi" can be a good example of this, where the reader can sense the vast treasury of narration that takes shape against a backdrop of captivating folklore. The complex themes are rooted in the turbulent Iraqi space, encompassing both the internal and external aspects.

#### **The Story of "Sitting"**

The title of the story "Sitting" takes us on a new journey in the autobiographical narrative of Mohsen Al-Ramli. It delves into his personal circumstances, recounting his works and their effects, reminiscing about his childhood and youth, and other milestones in his life. "Sitting" represents Al-Ramli's desire to dwell within the realm of beautiful memories and carefree days, where he lived and continues to live his reality in all its details.

#### **The Story of "I, the Witness... Documents"**

Al-Ramli continues the series of dedications at the beginning of each story, stating: "To all the prisoners... I mean all humans" (Al-Ramli, *The Night Watchman: Short Stories*, page 317). The title of the story takes us into the world of prisons; a life sentence is one thing, and the imprisonment (detainment) is another! Al-Ramli succeeds in conveying his comprehensive and personal vision through his narrative... their narrative! About prisons and their torments.

#### **The Story of "Leaves Far from the Tigris"**

We conclude with the final story that takes its title from the collection itself, beginning with the phrase: "To those who hungered and slept on the platforms of exile" (Al-Ramli, *The Night Watchman: Short Stories*, page 327).

The chosen title of the collection is revealing and almost confines the reader within the pages of the memories of an Iraqi poet named Saadi, who writes letters about his life and describes important issues, including:

- Concern for the nation and the community.
- The prevailing presence of culture and literature, along with the concerns of intellectuals and writers.
- Breaking the silence surrounding marginalized individuals.

We can deduce that titles are the initial thresholds to reach a deeper understanding of the texts. What stands out in Al-Ramli's story titles is that they are generally long phrases, often consisting of noun clauses. An exception to this is the title of one story, "Sitting," which is the only title consisting of a single word.

We believe that the author succeeded in labeling his collection with this title because most of the stories represent the testimony of Mohsen Al-Ramli, who expresses his despair at times and his profound anxiety at other times. The title indicates a delicate thread that connects the stories in the collection, or the majority of them.

### Techniques of the Narrative Event

As mentioned earlier, a short story consists of several fundamental artistic elements that serve as its foundation. The author relies on these elements to add beauty to its composition.

Now, we will focus on the structure of the narrative event and its presence in the selected collection for study. Due to the limited space available for this study, we will attempt to cover the remaining elements of the short story in future studies, with the help of Allah.

3-1- The Event: It is the most important axis of the story, as it revolves around a single event or a series of consecutive events performed by the characters. It reveals their conflicts with one another, and it is the axis that closely connects the other elements of the story, just as threads are intertwined in a fabric, forming a cohesive piece (Sherifa and LafiQazf, 2008, p. 124). In the short story, events are a collection of situations orchestrated by the author to emerge as a story. The following table illustrates the various events that occurred within the studied stories:

**Table 1: Represents the component of events in the story collection.**

Story Title	Event
Leaf.. It means all the papers	- Writing is fertile material to complete the portrayal of his world of stories, and to convey the fragrance of Iraq, its charm and events, writing as described by a straw resorted to by the drowned to deliver
Grievance of silence and his family	- Silence is stronger than a cry, a cry of oppression and suffering
Rahhal and my dowry are wounded	- Departure and departure from home
Our..their Andalusia...	- Heartburn for Andalusia
Erbil Laban	- Description of the situation of geographical areas in Iraq and abroad
Iron Pipes	- A group of friends leaving home to other places where they film their lives
Absence of Basra	- Departure from home / Basra
Wawiwedding	- Return of the memories bar
Sitting	- Recall memories
I am the one who saw... Documents	- Entering the prison and documenting its events
Papers far from the Tigris	- Poet Saadi relives his memories

The primary event takes the form of a narrative focal point around which ideas gather and situations develop. Al-Ramli selects events from everyday life and reality for his novel, and the narrative event is not like the real event. While it originates from reality, the narrator manipulates the events of the work and their chronological sequence, presenting them in a linear narrative. The author resorts to writing in an attempt to give meaning to his life, whether in terms of living or recording the experience of this life. He says, 'Thus, I continue my attempts to cling to the straw/writing, documenting and expanding the current of consciousness, and embellishing the deep wound within the self. As I mentioned in the introductory paper of my new collection: Writing... that straw that deluded the drowning person with salvation, and each of us has their own straw.' (Al-Rubaie, 2009).

"In the story 'The Suffering of the Mute and His Family,' it is notable that it raises the issue of the intellectual who is consumed by despair and confusion about his fate, as well as his relationship with a society that marginalizes and neglects him.

The intellectual is the voice of truth, rejecting any negative assault on his society. He desires to change his society, and when he couldn't find a meaningful expression, he resorted to silence and withdrawal from people. It is the silence that, from his perspective, is stronger than a cry that expresses his oppression and suffering. The stories "Rahhal and MuhrtariJarihi" (My Wound's Traveller), "Andalus... Us... Them," "Ihdeedabat" (The Deserted Areas), and "Ghiyab al-Basra" (The Absence of Basra) all revolve around one main event: leaving the homeland. The author is forced to leave, not out of a desire to leave, but because there is no other choice in the face of wars and daily destruction.

Through these stories, the author explains that the decision to leave has its painful psychological dimensions. You leave a part of yourself in your country, and this is the price of departure that the traveler must acknowledge before embarking on the journey. Nostalgia for the homeland takes on various forms in these stories, and it is worth noting that Mohsen al-Ramli concludes these stories with a condensed statement: "You are my homeland, and death is inevitable, and glory, mountains, executioners, and beauty are all in you... in you... Do I see you? Do I see you? Safe and prosperous, even if I occupy myself with eternity away from the Arab lands, my homelands." (Al-Ramli, Tuhfat al-Sahran: Al-A'mal al-Qissiya, p. 290).



In "Rahhal and MuhrtariJarihi" (My Wound's Traveler), "Andalus... Us... Them," "Ihdeedabat" (The Deserted Areas), and "Ghiyab al-Basra" (The Absence of Basra), Al-Ramli tackles the sense of alienation experienced by Iraqi citizens. Despite Iraq still existing and Iraqi expatriates being able to return whenever they wish, they choose to escape the conflicts, wars, violence, and other hardships.

In "Rahhal and MuhrtariJarihi" (My Wound's Traveler), "Andalus... Us... Them," "Ihdeedabat" (The Deserted Areas), and "Ghiyab al-Basra" (The Absence of Basra), Al-Ramli delves into the estrangement of the Iraqi citizen. Despite Iraq's ongoing existence and the capacity for Iraqi expatriates to repatriate at will, they choose to flee from conflicts, wars, violence, etc. Haqi Jasim further expounds on the sufferings of the individual in the Iraqi context, as presented by the author, perceiving them as follows: "The denouement of each narrative is not a respite, and the subsequent narrative may not be a fresh continuation of the writer's autobiographical journey. However, we can confidently ascertain that we are traversing with him along his impeded path. The magnitude of anxiety compounds with each occurrence... The quandary is not the indecisiveness itself but the forfeiture of the fortitude of awareness: fear... The epochs depicted by Al-Ramli are essentially the epoch we inhabit... It is the unadulterated and distinctive Iraqi epoch: the epoch of devastating wars, societal catastrophe, the erosion of humaneness, indoctrination, the emigration of intellectuals and competencies, the million-person exodus of a diminutive populace, orchestrated mass slaughter and terrorism, and, ultimately, absolute demise." (Jasim, 2009).

The author deepens his sense of estrangement when he reminisces about Andalusia, which becomes a symbol of Iraq and its objective equivalent. Andalusia represents a place of alienation, perhaps even a realm of spiritual and mental displacement at the same time. It is in Andalusia that the author flirts with his homeland, expresses anger towards it, reproaches it, and yearns for it. In the stories "Urs al-Wawi" (The Wedding of Al-Wawi), "Julus" (Sitting), and "AwraqBa'ida 'An Dijlah" (Papers Far from the Tigris), there is no central event. Instead, the author recalls memories that he sometimes imagines, and at other times they have actually occurred. This is what makes the writing an attempt to give those memories a complete narrative form, where reality blends with imagination, the tangible merges with the ideal.

In the aforementioned stories, the author's preoccupation is the return to Iraq, a country that has witnessed wars, conflicts, and turmoil, as reflected through his memories. These stories are not concerned with documenting past events as much as delving into Al-Ramli's memory and dreams, exploring his intimate relationship with himself and his society. They are stories that attempt to grasp Iraqi pain through the experience of Al-Ramli, who found himself in the heart of the tragedy suddenly. Through the remaining memories of his homeland, Al-Ramli futilely attempts to return to a painful time—an era of lost hope and agonizing nightmares—hoping to generate a ray of light, a glimmer of hope, from the rituals of writing.

Regarding the story "Laban Arbil" (Arbil Yogurt), we can observe the presence of a major event, which involves the depiction of geographical regions in Iraq and beyond, such as Arbil, San Sebastian, the Basque Country, and Kurdistan. Subsequently, this event gives rise to preceding and subsequent partial tribal events. The author initiates the narrative by alluding to the state of April and providing a description of the protagonist's circumstances within it. This is followed by the author's portrayal of Sherine captivating the protagonist's noble gaze. However, the question arises: is "Sherine" a symbol or an actual name rooted in reality?

The author then directs their attention towards the prison experience, and the story "Ana Al-LadhiRa'a... Watha'iq" (I, Who Witnessed... Documents) shines a spotlight on this particular experience by documenting the author's encounters within the prison. In one instance, the author mentions, "July ignites the iron basin, and we find ourselves naked beneath it, drenched in sweat and humiliation. We crawl in the darkness like rats, cautiously avoiding any contact between our skin and the scorching iron. The low one-meter ceiling prevents us from standing upright, and the sole source of light emanates from a single opening carved into the ground, serving as both a conduit for urine and a means for the guard to offer us a tray of soup." (Al-Ramli, "Tuhfat Al-Saheran: Al-A'mal Al-Qasasiyya," p. 318).

What is interesting is that Mohsen Al-Ramli, in his story, goes beyond focusing solely on the world of the prisoner and their concerns as the protagonist. He also explores their relationship with the other, the jailer, and their relationship with rivals or companions. He also doesn't overlook the various forms of imprisonment that exist within the human experience. Imprisonment is not merely a cold wall or a locked door, but it encompasses "prisons of existence from its beginning to its end or to infinity: the womb, the body, the home, love, homeland, language, papers, the grave, paradise, and hell." (Al-Ramli, "Tuhfat Al-Saheran: Al-A'mal Al-Qasasiyya," p. 317).

The author exposes the tyranny of corrupt systems in Spain and Iraq by attending to the minutiae of daily life in their prisons, inhabited by the aura of brutal torture. "But the torture of security men is severe... I seek refuge in you from the oppression of men. As for the dominance of religion, I have become accustomed to it, and thanks to religion, I have reached this point. But I also ended up in prison, after getting tired of a series of prisons there... I was sentenced to three years in prison, and every night, I endured the torture of slaps." (Al-Ramli, "Tuhfat Al-Saheran: Al-A'mal Al-Qasasiyya," p. 318).

The author doesn't fail to draw the reader's attention to the psychological and physical torture endured by prisoners, as well as the isolating solitude that affects the detainees with various forms of depression. Additionally, the provocative nature of searches and interrogations is highlighted. All of this, or some of it, is sufficient to indicate that Al-Ramli takes his reader on a journey from one prison to another, from one police station to another, to the extent that the earth itself becomes transient cells in time and space.

Group (Distant Papers from the Tigris) came in 270 pages, comprising eleven short narrative texts. They are united by the solidity of composition and the narrative language's ability to reveal the depths of the psyche and the issues and events that unfold within it. Mohsen Al-Ramli assumes the role of the protagonist in most of these stories, which are the product of his personal experiences.

## CONCLUSION

The stories before us take the reader on a journey through the landmarks of the homeland and its terrain, filled with tragedies and events. Mohsen Al-Ramli conveys arduous struggles and human experiences, narrating them to the extent that the reader embarks on an endless series of recollections. The author gathers them into mournful units of death, disorientation, and tragedy, along with the associated psychological torment and societal bonds. All the stories in the collection adhere to this catastrophic perspective on the homeland and human destiny, through a dark vision that returns us to the moment of strict commitment to the complexities and contradictions of the harsh reality.

Finally, Iraq emerges as an unexpected guest in all the stories that involve a sense of deprivation. However, the absent Iraq, the Iraq of the family, attempts to make its presence felt as an invisible counterpart to the author's imagination in his estrangement. Yet, it remains on the sidelines of events, even if it tries to cling to the protagonist's consciousness.

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