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Hā' wa Asfār Ishtar: Between an Ideology of Refusal and the Deployment of Introspection to Articulate the Unspoken

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Abstract

The relationship between the novelistic narrative in its linguistic manifestation and the implicit discourses it deliberately leaves unspoken has become a central concern in modern critical studies and across different fields of narrative. Such readings rely on rhetorical equivocation (tawriya) to uncover the latent domains of the unspoken. They move beyond the limited verbal surface and foreground productive meanings concealed within linguistic structures and lexical choices. This process remains closely connected to the present moment, which continues to shape literary writing. The disclosure of the implicit system, as one of the clearest manifestations of the unspoken, has become a productive field of interpretation. It contributes to meanings that exceed the immediate wording of the text by activating narrative rhythm and the components that organize a wide range of situations. Within the narrative, these situations function as literary testimony to what human authority does not openly articulate. This is clearly evident in Azzedine Djellaloudji's novel *Hā' wa Asfār Ishtar*. The novel adopts the perspective of the narrator-protagonist to reveal several implicit dimensions of human experience. In this and other literary works, the disclosure of the implicit begins as a narrative procedure and ultimately reaches the human sphere. It constructs situations concerned with marginalized human and civilizational questions, including the individual's relationship with authoritarian power and with major systems such as religion, society, and the family.

Keywords: implicit discourse; the unspoken; *Hā' wa Asfār Ishtar*; ideology

Introduction

The novel is an imaginative construct through which the writer looks onto the world and interrogates the present by raising complex questions about human existence and its aesthetic dimensions. These dimensions provide a fertile field for self-knowledge and for tracing the dynamics of human existence and its possible turns as life intersects with lived reality. Mohammed Berrada writes: "In the novel, imagination blends with reality, and pleasure with anxiety, as the self sees itself in a mirror. Gradually, the serious Arabic novel - especially those works conscious of their aesthetic specificity - became a space for self-disclosure, dialogue, and difficult questions through a detailed observation of changes in society, the human being, and space."¹ The novel is therefore the literary genre most capable of absorbing reality and transforming it into artistic material through which the present and the human being, in their different civilizational dimensions, can be represented. This is achieved through a constitutive integration of the real and the imagined.

This may explain why novelistic works adapt their artistic tools to capture decisive moments at the height of their intensity. They also seek to uncover what remains obscured within those moments. Many novels have therefore moved toward what is commonly described as "the implicit and the unsaid." They construct different narrative models that interpret human

¹ Mohammed Berrada, *Questions of the Novel, Questions of Criticism*, 1st ed. (Casablanca, 1996), p. 56

types in their many forms. Their narrative design is guided by an intention that opens the literary work to a broad field of meanings generated by the unsaid. This semantic process recognizes the power of underlying systems. As one critic puts it, "when the unsaid within speech becomes a means of revealing the inner world of the creative self, direct disclosure of that inner world often reveals what is hidden at a time when the creator may need, for many reasons, to turn away from explicit statement."¹ These concealed systemic practices are central to the present reading of *Hā' wa Asfār Ishtar*. The analysis focuses on the signs through which they appear and on the authority delegated to different discourses, especially the discourse of the narrator-protagonist. Much of this discourse belongs to the sphere of the unsaid and the implicit.

Hā' wa Asfār Ishtar: Open Structure and Semantic Layering

The first striking feature of *Hā' wa Asfār Ishtar* is the organization of its artistic structure into two main divisions, presented as subtitles:

A. Journeys of Wandering

B. Journeys of Metamorphosis

These sections create a human fictional world centered on the pursuit of freedom as an absolute value. The narrator-protagonist seeks this freedom throughout the novel. Across different temporal moments, he rejects all forms of servitude. His dialogue combines the power of the imagined with the attraction of meaning. He appears as a figure who rebels against every form of belonging, even against the name that remains hidden behind strategies of concealment. Yet he cannot fully resolve the fundamental split between the desire for absolute freedom and a reality governed by enduring laws.

The novel opens with a description of a house associated with the one girl loved by the narrator-protagonist. He removes her from the ordinary world of flesh and blood and even withholds her name. She is represented as a luminous being who gradually becomes a symbol of life and a source of existence. He says of her: "Whenever I wished to venture with her on the wings of longing and desire, and on the lightning steed of rebellion through the labyrinths of existence, she drew me toward the nest of calm and peace and covered me with azure, rainbow-colored garments woven from dreams of serenity."²

The presence of this "spoiled little girl," as the narrator-protagonist calls her, becomes a source of suggestion. At every stage of his life and at every decisive turn, she helps uncover what remains implicit. Her presence radiates meaning across a network of concealed signs within the narrative utterance. These signs are linked to existential oppositions such as existence/non-existence, dream/wakefulness, freedom/prison, rigidity/submission. In each pair, she helps fill the semantic gaps and the charged spaces of the unspoken that emerge in her encounters with the narrator-protagonist.

This function is established from the opening of the novel, when the protagonist turns the beloved into a mechanism of identification and existential travel: "My beloved... come, come. I have resolved to begin the long journey. Be my companion on the road and the comfort of my loneliness. Let us descend together into the depths of revelation, then write together the journeys of wandering through the ravines of questions, bewilderment, and challenge."³ The opening therefore performs a clear signifying function. It anticipates the novel's later divisions and establishes the beloved as a central axis from which several layers of meaning will radiate.

The subtitles function as major narrative joints. The narrative develops through them, and each title organizes situations that contribute to the work's central semantic focus. The first subtitle concentrates on the fate of the narrator-protagonist and his continuing sense of wandering in search of freedom. It also includes concrete events such as his imprisonment and pursuit by the authorities: "I was quickly brought to trial, and the judge quickly handed down a severe prison sentence on the charge that I posed a danger to religion, the nation, and national security."⁴ The episode corresponds to the idea of wandering announced in the first title. Wandering takes several forms, but prison is the clearest. It becomes the central image of loss between the protagonist's desire to escape servitude and the many forms of servitude imposed upon him. The narrative devotes considerable space to this tension without breaking the semantic bond with the subtitle *Journeys of Wandering*. This is consistent with the view that the title is "an act of writing and a product of writing."⁵ Meaning is therefore produced through the correspondence between narrative events and the title that frames them.

The movement to the second subtitle, *Journeys of Metamorphosis*, follows the same artistic logic. Here, the narrative event is shaped by the title's promise of transformation. Metamorphosis is associated with the marvelous through the appearance of the goddess Ishtar. She helps expose and intensify the weakness created by the gap between the protagonist's desire for freedom and the constraints imposed by custom. The narrator recalls: "We were climbing toward the summit. He

¹ Abdelkader Faydoug, *The Metaphor of the Implicit and Its Shadows in Arabic Poetry: Contemporary Algerian Poetry as a Model*, 1st ed. (Algeria: Dar al-Tanwir, 2002), p. 14

² Azzedine Djellaoudji, *Hā' wa Asfār Ishtar* (Algeria: Dar al-Muntaha for Publishing and Distribution, 2002), p. 7

³ Djellaoudji, *Hā' wa Asfār Ishtar*, p. 8.

⁴ Djellaoudji, *Hā' wa Asfār Ishtar*, p. 69.

⁵ Khaled Hussein, *On the Theory of the Title: An Interpretive Adventure in the Affairs of the Textual Threshold* (Damascus: Dar al-Takwin for Authorship, Translation and Publishing, 2007), p. 61

told me about him, about his adventures with the goddess Ishtar, and about his victories over her whenever he was close to becoming her victim. He also told me of his mythical journey across seven seas, of meeting the one who had been granted immortality, and of the serpent that betrayed him and stole the flower of the depths."¹ Like other passages, this one serves the broader purpose of probing what has been concealed. From the protagonist's perspective, the imposition of servitude becomes a shared destiny of humans and gods alike. Both can appear as overwhelming forces that deny freedom and turn the individual into a servant.

Together, the two titles create a fictional universe that questions human destiny and seeks to say what has not been said. They bring into view what custom has concealed within the implicit. The novel signals these meanings by giving space to conflicting discourses that deepen the debate through oppositions such as freedom/imprisonment and rebellion/submission.

The Rhetoric of Disclosure: An Ideology of Refusal and Mechanisms for Disrupting the Implicit

Implicit discourse, in its clearest manifestations, begins with literal meaning, which is formed through the linguistic body of the text, but then moves beyond it. The aim is to activate concealed meanings that may not appear on the surface. Umberto Eco describes the implicit in terms of content: it is what "is not visible on the surface at the level of expression and must therefore be activated at the level of content."²

Implicit discourse differs from the unspoken. The first is produced through linguistic activity and interpretation. The second may function as a deliberate choice that allows the writer, and sometimes the reader, to avoid legal or social accountability and to preserve a degree of deniability. Such a strategy becomes important when intended meanings conflict with the interests of social or legal institutions. The unspoken often emerges from fear of addressing censored subjects. Foucault expresses this restriction clearly: "We know very well that we do not have the right to say everything, that we cannot speak of everything in every circumstance, and that not everyone may speak of just anything. There are prohibited subjects and rituals specific to each situation."³

Creative works nevertheless demonstrate a considerable capacity to use the linguistic system to obscure and conceal meaning, whether through individual words or through syntactic structures. Language is especially suited to this task because it offers rich possibilities for suggestion and ambiguity. It is, in one formulation, "metaphorical in its nature and essence; when it cannot describe things directly, it turns to indirect means of description and to ambiguous terms with double meanings."⁴ The implicit and the unspoken therefore emerge through a narrative game that relies heavily on rhetorical equivocation because it deliberately combines concealment with suggestion. This allows critical writing on political and social realities to move beyond the expressive limits of direct statement and to open the text onto inexhaustible semantic horizons.

Hā' wa Asfār Ishtar is first of all a literary work concerned with human and civilizational questions. It also draws on the marvelous and the fantastic to the point of creating the impression of a "sudden emergence of what cannot be accepted in the real world we inhabit, achieved by disguising reality and estranging imagination in a marvelous form."⁵ Within this framework, the novel makes extensive use of what may be called implicit discourse. It uses this discourse to lift the veil from what several systems leave unspoken. The strategy follows the principle that "it is useful for a person to say something without appearing to be the one who says it."⁶ Language is thus left as a trace that invites the reader to interpret. The reader is equipped with interpretive mechanisms that make it possible to formulate careful readings of what the narrative never states directly.

Through a process of narrative proliferation, the narrator-protagonist constructs a vision that preserves a discourse of refusal and unsettles the cultural systems embedded in language. The implicit itself becomes a value system that the novelist adopts through productive artistic concealment. The narrative repeatedly accompanies the protagonist's desire to free himself from every restriction, including what he regards as the constraints of existence itself. The novel examines this value system closely and presents every space as a form of prison, even when that space appears to be a natural condition imposed by the cosmic order.

The narrator-protagonist expresses this refusal with striking force: "How wretched we are as we move from prison to prison. We leave the prison of the womb for the prison of the home, then for hundreds of prisons: the family, society, the

¹ Djellaoudji, Hā' wa Asfār Ishtar, p. 147.

² Umberto Eco, *The Reader in the Tale: Interpretive Cooperation in Narrative Texts*, Arabic trans. Antoine Abu Zeid (Casablanca: Arab Cultural Center, 1996), p. 62.

³ Michel Foucault, *The Order of Discourse*, Arabic trans. Mohammed Sabila (Beirut: Dar al-Tanwir, 2007), p. 4.

⁴ Ernst Cassirer, *An Essay on Man: An Introduction to a Philosophy of Human Culture*, Arabic trans. Ihsan Abbas, 1st ed. (Beirut: Dar al-Andalus, 1991), p. 198.

⁵ Fatima al-Zahra Atiya, *The Fantastic and Its Formation in Ibn Shuhayd al-Andalusi's Al-Tawabi' wa al-Zawabi'* and Rukn al-Din al-Wahrani, PhD dissertation, Mohamed Khider University, Biskra, p. 6.

⁶ Oswald Ducrot and Jean-Marie Schaeffer, *New Encyclopedic Dictionary of the Sciences of Language*, Arabic trans. Abdelkader Mehiri and Hammadi Sammoud, 1st ed. (Tunis: National Center for Translation / Dar Sinattra, 2010), p. 646.

state, the nation, the law, religion, and (...) finally we are handed over to the prison of the grave."¹ Literature may indeed be "a linguistic form of expression that gives voice to the inner contents of the culture of the nation that produces it and takes on the colors of its identity."² Yet the passages cited from *Hā' wa Asfār Ishtar* also create a cultural vision that both engages with and departs from established patterns concerning the thinkable and the unspoken.

The vision is aligned with those patterns when it seeks to dismantle rigid acceptance of the Other as a restricting authority. It departs from them when the narrator-protagonist bases his understanding of life on the belief that any rule that demands loyalty is unstable. His awareness gives him a distinctly human role in representing human anxiety. The novelist assigns this task to him throughout the narrative. As Diana Dwatfaner writes, "we are not concerned with a kind of objectivity that offers ready-made sets of types and characters. We are concerned, rather, with the poetic capacity to present a person's hopes, fears, and anger in human terms."³ This is precisely the role assumed by Djellaoudji's protagonist as he gives voice to different forms of human anxiety.

The narrator-protagonist also takes a troubled and uneven approach to the idea of human formation. His position reflects the crisis that structures his psychology. He seeks to affirm a self-identity that recalls Paul Ricoeur's view of the self as "capable of designating itself as the author of its words and actions; that is, as responsible for what it says and does."⁴ In *Hā' wa Asfār Ishtar*, however, this identity expands into a broad ideological field. Narrative situations intensify it and allow the narrator-protagonist to reveal it. The novel therefore moves beyond limited meanings of the unspoken and creates what may be described as a genuine revolt. The protagonist even resists the cosmic conception of the human being as a directed or determined creature. His resistance rejects obedience and submission.

Many critical studies argue that "religious discourse is one of the principal foundations of political authority, because political authority expresses its voice through the language of religion in order to protect its interests."⁵ The narrator-protagonist goes further. He questions the religious interpretation of human formation itself. In his view, this interpretation helps naturalize a life of prisons by grounding it in a cosmic order that reaches back to the beginnings of human existence. He asks: "Did we know that we were in a prison when we were a sperm and an ovum? Can the human being be defined as an imprisoned creature?"⁶

This formulation reveals a resistant personality. The protagonist affirms freedom by challenging the value of a cosmic logic in which the human being is created from a drop of fluid in a secure resting place. The narrative then turns this challenge into an ideological position of opposition and refusal. It reappears whenever the protagonist confronts authority in its different forms. The discourse of opposition is voiced from what Foucault describes as a position that enables the intellectual "to withdraw and locate himself at the margins of power, or to occupy a transcendent position from which he judges it."⁷ The protagonist declares: "My fellow human being, free yourself from your prisons. Your self is a prison; your nations are prisons; your religions are prisons; your customs are prisons; your instincts are prisons; your fear is a prison. Free yourself from your fear. Free yourself from all prisons."⁸

The protagonist thus approaches an acknowledgment of the nothingness experienced by a human being surrounded by forms of belonging that demand submission and loyalty. The novel goes on, through his consciousness, to challenge familiar human and cosmic certainties. Even fashion becomes, for him, a virtual world that reinforces servitude and dependence. Following fashion is another form of submission and incapacity. He states: "It is slavery to fashion companies. We are also slaves to the companies that make our clothes, our food, and many of our necessities. They therefore control our tastes and our choices (...) I find peace only in the embrace of nature, and I drag myself away from the falsity of servitude."⁹

Through this rejection, the ideology of refusal acquires an interpretive dimension. It dismantles conventional assumptions surrounding the world of fashion and creates a text of difference rooted in the singularity of the narrator-protagonist. It also connects this singularity with the concerns of the present by exposing what remains unspoken. This discourse rejects dissolution into the Other, understood as a field of multiple identities. The Other, one study notes, "is said

¹ Djellaoudji, *Hā' wa Asfār Ishtar*, p. 97.

² Salima Loukam, *The Other in Culture and Literature: Presence and Evocation*, 1st ed. (Tunis: Dar Sahar, 2017), p. 133

³ Diana Dwatfaner, *The Craft of the Novel*, p. 56 [bibliographic details as given in the Arabic source].

⁴ Jannat Belkhan, *Historical Narration in Paul Ricoeur*, 1st ed. (Algeria: Manshurat al-Ikhtilaf, 2013), p. 108

⁵ Halima Wazidi, *Semiotics of Novelistic Narrative: From Narration to Passions*, 1st ed. (Morocco: Manshurat al-Qalam al-Maghribi, 2017), p. 160

⁶ Djellaoudji, *Hā' wa Asfār Ishtar*, p. 97.

⁷ Abdelaziz al-Abbadi, Michel Foucault: *Knowledge and Power*, 1st ed. (Lebanon: University Foundation for Studies, Publishing and Distribution, 1994), p. 23

⁸ Djellaoudji, *Hā' wa Asfār Ishtar*, p. 102.

⁹ Djellaoudji, *Hā' wa Asfār Ishtar*, p. 102.

of persons, things, and numbers; it designates what differs in essence and stands opposite the self."¹ Fashion can therefore be placed within this field of otherness. The discourse of refusal is ultimately grounded in the protagonist's cultural and civilizational specificity.

The ideology of refusal in *Hā' wa Asfār Ishtar* is complex and layered. It does not oppose a single fixed system. Refusal assumes several forms and targets several domains. Each contributes to the mechanism that lifts the veil from what remains implicit. These domains include major social and religious institutions and practices, among them marriage, work, and education.

1. Marriage as an Institution: The Poetics of Disclosure and the Probing of Fragility in the Name of Custom

Foucault describes the intellectual as one who speaks "the language of knowledge and lucid consciousness" and occupies a privileged position "outside power, yet within knowledge."² Djellaoudji's protagonist is portrayed as an intellectual whose awareness exceeds the culture of his age. He therefore carries the rejection of servitude to an extreme point, including the rejection of marriage as a legitimate social institution.

This position confronts one of the most protected institutions in Arab social life. Marriage is commonly treated as sacred and placed within a zone that resists questioning. In most societies, it is defined as "a social system based on the relationship between a man and a woman, a relationship recognized by law and affirmed by custom and tradition."³ In Islam and in Arab social systems in particular, marriage is often invested with forms of sanctity that move it toward the sphere of the untouchable. Arab custom can reinforce this by concealing aspects of the relationship behind conventions of discretion.

If literature is understood as "a truthful account of human experience,"⁴ then literary treatment of marriage can bring into view what is not normally said about it. It can expose what custom leaves implicit. Creative writing performs this task slowly and indirectly because the literary work is "a space in which symbols emerge. It does not merely reformulate things or rearrange images and stories. Although the individual self is involved in producing it, it also exceeds that self and meets what Paul Ricoeur calls the social imaginary."⁵ This social imaginary allows literature to move away from silence understood as submission to political or social authority.

Hā' wa Asfār Ishtar gives unusually broad space to implicit discourse in its treatment of marriage. It repeatedly searches for concealed zones hidden behind the authority of custom. These zones are placed within a fictional time and space that remain open to urgent human questions. The narrative exposes what the narrator-protagonist sees as the emptiness of the value system governing the relationship between the Arab man and his wife. His voice opens a closed social culture to issues that are usually kept silent.

One episode captures this dynamic: "One evening, my mother noticed that my father's finger had no wedding ring. She suddenly turned into a thunderstorm. The smile that had appeared on her thick lips died (...) My father froze in place, checking his fingers and pockets, trying in vain to calm her. Then he rose in terror."⁶ By staging confrontation, the novel enters the unspoken dimension of marital relations and, more broadly, the institution of marriage. From the narrator-protagonist's perspective, marriage becomes a form of enslavement. The meaning is not announced directly at first. Instead, it emerges through sustained reading of the marital relationship and through the concealment of meaning in the service of what Kerbrat-Orecchioni calls "strategic structures."⁷ The suggestive language of the narrative carries both criticism and transmission. Kerbrat-Orecchioni describes such procedures as "skillful manipulations."⁸

Within this semantic field, which initially appears diffuse, the novel develops a view of marriage as a form of servitude imposed by social and cultural custom and often reinforced in the name of religion. The protagonist considers his father a victim of this law, whose universal appearance conceals its coercive force. He says: "I remained there in astonishment. The ring had imposed barren years of servitude on my father, pressing mercilessly on his finger, and the pressure increased as he

¹ Zeina Ghanim, *The Dialectic of Self and Other in the Poetic Discourse of the Mufaddaliyyat*, 1st ed. (Amman: Dar Yafa Scientific Publishing and Distribution, 2021), p. 16

² Michel Foucault, *Knowledge and Power*, p. 23 [Arabic edition].

³ Mohammed Safouh al-Akhras, *The Structure and Functions of the Arab Family: A Field Study of the Family in Syria* (Damascus: Ministry of Culture and National Guidance, 1976), p. 174

⁴ Ian Watt, *The Rise of the Novel*, Arabic trans. Thaer Deeb (Dar Sharqiyat for Publishing and Distribution, 1997), p. 30.

⁵ Mohammed Nouredine Afaya, *The Imaginary and Communication: Paradoxes of Arabs and the West*, 1st ed. (Beirut: Dar al-Muntakhab al-Arabi, 1993), p. 9

⁶ Djellaoudji, *Hā' wa Asfār Ishtar*, p. 16.

⁷ Catherine Kerbrat-Orecchioni, *The Implicit*, Arabic trans. Rita Khater, 1st ed. (Beirut: Arab Organization for Translation, 2008), p. 497.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 508.

gained weight."¹ The linguistic context organizes a semantic pattern around the protagonist's absolute rejection of marriage as a hidden form of servitude.

The protagonist even rebels against the conventional idea that woman is part of man. His life experience challenges a view of woman as the basis of existence and as "the man's garden, through whose gardens of beauty he wanders, from whose flowers of seduction he plucks, and from whose tree of desire he tastes (...) He wishes to absorb her completely and consume her, until she disappears in him or he disappears in her. Pleasure is founded on annihilation; therefore existence is through woman or within her."² The novel continues to use a language saturated with absolute refusal in order to expose the unsaid within marriage.

Comparison becomes an important device. The protagonist contrasts his father's life before and after marriage: "Within two years he became much thinner than he had been at the time of his marriage. He had been a tall young man, inclined to thinness, with black hair and shining eyes, full of vitality and activity. Love burst from every movement and stillness in his relation with my mother. Gradually, that love turned into submission, surrender, and dependence."³ This comparison disrupts the conventional view of marriage as an institution founded on stability. It also allows the narrative to reach broader semantic territory by exposing the hidden program that governs the relationship.

This hidden program is what we have called the unsaid or the unspoken: "the meanings conveyed by a speaker that cannot be inferred directly from the utterance and that are usually not part of what is explicitly stated."⁴ The narrator-protagonist therefore does not simply declare that marriage is slavery. Through artistic indirection, he presents that conclusion as a private experience whose implications become more general. Describing his parents' marriage, he says: "Gradually, his love turned into submission, surrender, and dependence. My mother went further in her arrogance toward my father until her love became possession and control. She even stole his taste and his feeling. With time, he became nothing more than a faithful follower. The more arrogant she became, the more submissive and dependent he became."⁵

This passage reveals the novel's ability to condemn what it presents as the negative side of marriage in Arab societies. Such aspects remain both thought about and left unspoken. The narrative therefore constructs a fictional world based on recurring correspondences that allow a specific case to become a broader model. The semantic intention rises from the protagonist's rejection to the purpose of the work as a whole. This is part of the novel's social focalization and of a strategy that "invites us to think about what contains neither signifier nor signified - not even by allusion - and turns to the symbolism of silence when the unsaid within speech reveals the inner world of the creative self."⁶

Hā' wa Asfār Ishtar adopts the unsaid as an active semantic strategy. The novelist relinquishes the semantic load of what may be openly stated, avoids explicit disclosure, and replaces it with the semantic load of what is concealed.⁷ In narrating the protagonist's history as a form of autobiography, the novel enters into dialogue with the existential human inheritance. It attempts to uncover meanings hidden behind the narrative frame. These meanings belong to the sphere of the thinkable and the unsaid.

2. Work as a Cultural Given: Claims of Superiority and the Consolidation of Value Fragility

The narrator-protagonist's discourse develops through repeated returns to past events that occurred before the narrative present. Such events are "temporally outside the field of the current narrative events in the novel"⁸ and appear through retrospective narration. This structure brings together major ideas related to freedom as an absolute value. The protagonist seeks that value while rejecting all forms of servitude, including work.

His position becomes explicit when he rejects an argument made by a university professor, who had claimed that human identity is realized through work. The protagonist responds: "I suddenly spoke from the back of the room and rejected the idea with a ferocity I had never known even in myself. I wanted to convince him that work is slavery and that it is a device invented by human cruelty to enslave one human being to another. People are persuaded that work allows them to realize themselves and their humanity, while it actually takes away their freedom, confiscates their will, and drains their essence. Those who claimed to be thinkers, philosophers, and theorists also participated in this crime."⁹

¹ Djellaoudji, Hā' wa Asfār Ishtar, pp. 16-17.

² Ali Harb, *Love and Annihilation: Reflections on Woman, Passion, and Existence*, 1st ed. (Damascus: Dar al-Manahil, 2003), p. 20

³ Djellaoudji, Hā' wa Asfār Ishtar, p. 17.

⁴ Khalid bin Hilal bin Nasser al-Abri, "Meanings of the Unspoken in Discourse," *Dhakha'ir al-Lugha* 4, no. 1 (June 2023): 63

⁵ Djellaoudji, Hā' wa Asfār Ishtar, p. 17.

⁶ Faydouh, *The Metaphor of the Implicit and Its Shadows in Arabic Poetry*, p. 14.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 14.

⁸ Maha Hassan al-Qasrawi, *Time in the Arabic Novel*, PhD dissertation, University of Jordan, 2002, p. 189

⁹ Djellaoudji, Hā' wa Asfār Ishtar, pp. 33-34.

This passage brings two temporal perspectives together. The first is the past, associated with a deep alienation produced by an ideology of servitude that remains both thinkable and unsaid because of the cultural and religious value assigned to work. Religion, in general, "recommends work and insists on its necessity because it regards work as dignity and honor for the human being and as protection from humiliation and degradation."¹ Such a view tends to sanctify work as a means of self-discipline and identity formation. The second perspective is the present, which becomes a deliberate revolt against this unspoken ideology and against what the protagonist sees as its coercive effects. This temporal difference matters because "a person's later view of a past event undergoes many physical and psychological changes. The perception of past events changes as the conditions of the present change and develop."²

The protagonist's current perspective therefore becomes the basis of his intellectual wager. He tries to demonstrate the continuing incapacity of the human being who suffers different forms of servitude, including the servitude of work and education. He says: "I left the university completely from that moment and never returned. My spoiled little girl, however, continued to receive doses of servitude. She specialized in 'aṭimā' iyyāt after intending to study 'iqtisādiyyāt, as I like to call them."³ The deliberately distorted Arabic forms deform the ordinary words for social sciences and economics. Within the novel, this linguistic deformation reinforces the protagonist's view of intellectual stagnation.

The passage extends the theme of the unspoken by disturbing implicit systems that the protagonist's narrative vision seeks to expose. Language itself confirms this process. His rejection reaches the university, even though it is normally treated as a foundational institution of civilization. In this way, the unspoken is delegated to a discourse that challenges the accepted necessity of education and work. Arab and Western societies alike continue to value both as near-sacred principles and rarely question them. This recalls Foucault's observation that not everyone may "speak of just anything; there are subjects that may not be discussed, and there are rituals specific to each participant."⁴

One of the subjects largely avoided by Arab discourses is the possible servitude associated with work and education. Silence protects those discourses from social, legal, and even religious challenge. Hā' wa Asfār Ishtar breaks that silence by speaking through the narrator-protagonist. His convictions appear deviant within the fictional world, yet they reinforce a comprehensive ideology of refusal. He justifies his position as follows: "I began from what she had told me in order to prove what I had always argued: the university manufactures slavery because it produces slaves and contains false gods. A university that manufactures freedom but does not produce free people cannot be relied upon."⁵

Here and elsewhere, the narrative discourse works through the principle of revealing what is obscured and exposing the implicit system. It condemns cultural assumptions that sanctify knowledge and education as the foundations of civilization. Such disclosure is an artistic aim of novelistic writing when it seeks to bring forward what custom hides. This is part of the essence of narrative creation, achieved through the power of imagination, "for every novel presents one thing and suggests that it presents another."⁶

The concealed meanings become visible through the protagonist's repeated refusals of forms of knowledge that he considers connected with servitude. He explains: "I read everything that came into my hands with enormous appetite and great depth. Yet I never surrendered and allowed myself to become its prey. I read with extreme caution and with a penetrating critical vision. I therefore freed myself from what I read as soon as I understood it, and much of it was nothing more than a road to servitude."⁷ The discourse radicalizes refusal until it reaches knowledge itself, even though knowledge is usually understood as a human pursuit of higher achievement.

The novel draws its logic of release from this rejection of knowledge and education, but it keeps that rejection within the protagonist's own subjective framework. It does not present his position as a universal norm. Rather, it confines it to the logic of a particular character and then provides narrative justification for that position. The protagonist is presented as a blocked democratic possibility: "I completely agreed with what the professor had said, but I did not consider this a defect in that type of student. It was a merit that should be taken into account and respected, because most human geniuses were rebels against customs, laws, sacred things, and even the certainties of science."⁸ The result is a narrative rhythm of retreat and frustration. The protagonist continues to suffer because he cannot change reality, even though he appears as a form of confrontational consciousness.

¹ Ibrahim al-Asal, *Development in Islam: Concepts, Methods, and Applications*, 1st ed. (Beirut: University Foundation for Studies, Publishing and Distribution, 1996), p. 149

² Al-Qasrawi, *Time in the Arabic Novel*, p. 187.

³ Djellaoudji, *Hā' wa Asfār Ishtar*, p. 34.

⁴ Foucault, *The Order of Discourse*, p. 4 [Arabic edition].

⁵ Djellaoudji, *Hā' wa Asfār Ishtar*, p. 34.

⁶ Said Yaqtin, *Issues in the New Arabic Novel: Existence and Boundaries*, 1st ed. (Algeria: Manshurat al-Ikhtilaf, 2012), p. 166

⁷ Djellaoudji, *Hā' wa Asfār Ishtar*, p. 36.

⁸ Djellaoudji, *Hā' wa Asfār Ishtar*, p. 39.

3. The Pattern of Disillusionment: Constructing the Ideological and Framing the Intellectual's Relationship with Power

One of the social relationships most strongly explored by the novel is the relationship between the intellectual and power. Fiction has long focused on this theme because it contains a deep fracture and opposition. The relationship often preserves a contradictory image in which authority justifies repression in the name of law, while the intellectual seeks justice and becomes an obstructed force that must "take the measures required to resist the rules of power."¹

The author develops this condition by making his protagonist speak on behalf of a wounded society. "Characters in a work of art are often truthful in the course of their movement through anxiety. They seem to reflect a reality equal in scale to the artist's path and ambitions and to the artist's engagement with a reality filled with questions and competing conflicts."² The problem is intensified when political authority in many Arab societies becomes a source of domination. It moves from limited authority to absolute power and represents the will of rulers more than the will of peoples.

The task of the intellectual is therefore doubled. It begins as an ethical task and ends as a political one. It also requires a refusal of compromises that would weaken the intellectual's responsibility to oppose arbitrary power. Edward Said insists on "the need for the intellectual to hold firmly to higher values such as freedom and justice, for oneself and for others, and to reject compromise where these values are concerned."³ For Said, the intellectual should not place knowledge under the command of power.

The novel is no longer required merely to repeat suffocated and rigid intellectual discourse. Instead, it can move beyond the limits imposed by the unspoken and create an ideology that rejects and exposes arbitrary treatment of the intellectual. It does this by marking conflicting centers of discourse. One of these centers carries the intellectual's voice and seeks to "break the molds of fixed stereotypes and reductive generalizations that impose severe constraints on human thought and on communication between human beings."⁴

This pattern is clear in *Hā' wa Asfār Ishtar*. Djellaoudji insists on making the intellectual part of society and part of its fears, while also giving him a heightened form of awareness. The protagonist traces the fate of the intellectual under arbitrary systems of power. He tries to enter spaces of nothingness and hidden decay that are concealed by the slogans of authority. He is driven only by "the general human values and principles in which he believes, not by narrow party commitments or rigid and fanatical group loyalties."⁵

Azzedine Djellaoudji builds these narrative situations and semantic nuclei into the protagonist's prison diaries. The diary form is an artistic device used to frame an existential vision in which freedom is a psychological drive to escape imposed chains and laws. This idea is linked to the representation of the past, because the present is shown as emerging from it. The novelist therefore has the protagonist recall a saying inherited from his grandfather. The past is reactivated within the present: "The echo of my grandfather Misbah resounded within me: freedom is not to leave servitude; freedom is for servitude to leave you. I imagined my grandfather Misbah smiling as he shouted the sentence, passing before me - yes, directly before me - on the deck of an old ship struggling against violent waves."⁶

Here, imagination makes the past present so that it can offer lessons and meanings to the present. This mechanism reflects an important feature of the novel, which differs "from most earlier forms of storytelling by using the plot to make past experience a cause of present action."⁷ The point of bringing the past into the present is to establish a continuity of awareness. The protagonist's consciousness appears in the narrative present, while the grandfather's belongs to the past. Both affirm the need for absolute freedom. At the same time, this return to the past becomes an opening into a larger issue: authority continues to perform the same oppressive role in both past and present.

The narrative also carries the author's ideological concern with the domination of the intellectual by authority. Prison life is one of its most concrete forms. The fictional space reveals this life through the physical attack on the protagonist: "The chair was suddenly pulled from beneath me and I fell to the ground. The floor was very hard... One of the prisoners stood behind me angrily, ready to punch me if I showed any resistance."⁸ The passage moves from abstract reflection on oppressive

¹ Abdelkader Faydouh, *The Narrativity of Politics in the Arabic Novel: A Cultural Study*, 1st ed. (Sharjah: Safahat for Studies and Publishing, 2005), p. 32

² *Ibid.*, p. 33.

³ Edward Said, *The Intellectual and Power*, Arabic trans. Mohammed Enani, 1st ed. (Baghdad: Ru'ya for Publishing and Distribution, 2006), p. 11.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 11.

⁵ Burhan Ghalioun, *The Society of the Elite*, 1st ed. (Beirut: Arab Development Institute, 1986), p. 75

⁶ Djellaoudji, *Hā' wa Asfār Ishtar*, p. 12.

⁷ Ian Watt, *The Rise of the Novel*, Arabic trans. Thaer Deeb (Dar Sharqiyat for Publishing and Distribution, 1997), p. 24.

⁸ Djellaoudji, *Hā' wa Asfār Ishtar*, p. 15.

power to a concrete physical act. The punch becomes a condensed sign with strong interpretive force. It gives continuity to the protagonist's rejection of authority and becomes a basis for further semantic reflection through narrative.

Through this discourse of confrontation, the novel enters hidden areas of the relationship between the intellectual and power. One of them is the figure of the rebellious intellectual who refuses submission to the laws of authority. The narrative thus opens discussion of what Arab states often treat as a political taboo. The narrator-protagonist goes so far as to reject the concepts of nation and citizenship: "He knew that I did not believe in anything called the nation or citizenship (...) They are only forms of hateful tribalism. They differ in name but share the same spirit and practice (...) From them arise servitude, invasion, plunder, and the offering of sacrifices from the blood of the weak. I do not believe in anything called the state, the tribe, authority, the regime, or the law. They are nothing but hateful fences and walls erected by a band of thieves to steal the freedom of the naive and powerless."¹

This passage establishes a radical semantic rejection of authority. The oppression experienced by the protagonist generates an expanding awareness until it becomes a project that intensifies the tension surrounding the very concept of power. The gap between the narrator-protagonist and political rulers becomes a wound in the intellectual's consciousness. He feels that wound on behalf of an oppressed community. Narrative conventions in such a case are not merely "restrictions on the historian and the novelist. Rather, they create the possibility of an interactive narrative between what is historical and what is real/political."² This interaction produces a poetics that invests political discourse in narrative form and creates a model deeply aware of the relationship between intellectual and authority.

Because this thesis forms part of the novel's ideology beneath the masks of narration, Djellaoudji repeatedly reinforces it. Large sections of the novel give the narrator-protagonist extensive freedom through the technique of first-person or self-narration. The character is thus able to judge distorted understandings of power and the alienation produced by dogmatic political perspectives. He recounts: "At a later stage of my imprisonment, I was transferred to a wing housing the most dangerous criminals in the prison. Most had received heavy sentences and were involved in major crimes. The purpose of placing me among them was to increase my suffering. I was to become easy prey for their physical and psychological violence."³

The narrator-protagonist's discourse works on two levels. The first defines the character. The second reveals a substantial part of the dogmatic policies directed against him. On the first level, the discursive system foregrounds rebellion and a tendency toward transcendence in the character's formation. This becomes especially clear when he accepts imprisonment rather than submit to the logic of domination or accept uncritically any dissolution into the Other. On the second level, the narrative offers a revised perspective shaped by the broader textual frame. Through the protagonist's subjective judgment, it opens an interpretive route toward distant meanings and calls for "careful thinking about all available alternatives and choices, selecting the sound alternative, and then defending it intelligently."⁴

Through the protagonist's speech, the novel reduces the authority of perspectives that promise a narrowly bounded freedom bordering on non-existence. It exposes the closed and negative character of dogmatic authority. The protagonist declares: "Our struggle must therefore continue so that the human being can return to the freedom of original nature. We do not need all the mud of servitude that has accumulated upon us - the mud of philosophies, ideas, religions, and doctrines that have driven us into the furnace of savagery."⁵ The narrative thus constructs an ideology that rejects authoritarian power. It repeatedly produces meanings that expose what oppressive policies leave unspoken and develops an explanatory perspective that runs against those policies.

The novel examines the intellectual's confrontation with violent authority more closely through the protagonist's prison experience. Its representation of place is shaped by an integrated artistic and human vision built on two principles.

First principle

The narrative does not focus on a topographical description of prison as a closed place except from a psychological angle. Prison is presented through the protagonist's subjective evaluation and through the meaning he gives to the abuse directed against him, not primarily as a geographical setting. He recalls: "During the first days of my imprisonment (...) my clothes were quickly changed and I was forced to wear others that were old and filthy. The guard then led me through a very long side corridor, so long that I imagined I was moving through two different times (...) Finally, we reached a room beside other similar rooms extending far along the corridor."⁶ The phrase "as if I were moving through two different times" gives the

¹ Djellaoudji, Hā' wa Asfār Ishtar, p. 60.

² Abdelkader Faydouh, *History and Politics in the Algerian Novel*, 1st ed. (Algeria: Dar Mim, 2022), p. 20

³ Djellaoudji, Hā' wa Asfār Ishtar, p. 74.

⁴ Yves Clavaron, *Edward Said: The Cultural Uprising*, 1st ed. (Safahat for Studies, Publishing and Distribution, 2017), p. 66 [Arabic edition].

⁵ Djellaoudji, Hā' wa Asfār Ishtar, pp. 73-74.

⁶ Djellaoudji, Hā' wa Asfār Ishtar, p. 68.

setting a symbolic dimension. The prison is described only briefly as a physical space, but it occupies a spiritual threshold between the paradise of freedom - even if freedom is never absolute for the protagonist - and the hell of servitude.

Second principle

The closed space affects the protagonist in an inverse way. Instead of destabilizing his convictions and forcing him to abandon his positions, prison confirms them. Its brutality does not come from geography alone. It comes from the behavior of those who control the prison, and that behavior corresponds directly with the protagonist's prior convictions. The place therefore acquires its meaning through memory rather than description. This is signaled by the phrase "I went back in memory."

The protagonist says: "I went back in memory, retracing the paths I had crossed since I rejected everything in which human beings believe, or at least most of the falsehood that had settled over their minds and hearts and that they had turned into fences that enslaved them (...) Now I am in this miserable prison, but only my body is imprisoned. My soul, which longs for freedom, is like a mythical dove whose dignity cannot be violated, like the phoenix that always rises from beneath the ashes to be reborn as another creation (...) When will humanity rise from beneath the rubble and from beneath the layers of ash?"¹

In this context, prison becomes a necessity that generates convictions and possible routes toward release. The central condition of such release is the refusal of submission. Prison also becomes a spatial and human logic through which the protagonist asks fundamental questions about human destiny rather than withdrawing into closure. The novel therefore follows an enlightening intention. Its semantic movement condemns domination through the many justifications offered by the narrative program. These judgments are condensed in the voice of the protagonist, whose critical position resembles that of many intellectual voices that carry the possibility of change and "move away from reassuring and optimistic slogans and discourses, embrace historical analysis, and listen to the questions of reality and to its complex language that reveals truths."² Such a position necessarily involves risk and challenge.

The narrative of *Hā' wa Asfār Ishtar* is largely concerned with the suffering of the narrator-protagonist because of his refusal to submit to any authority. At the same time, it repeatedly points to a crisis of values in the relationship between the intellectual and power. The intellectual often opposes the political sphere and exposes its failures and domination. Confrontation brings mechanisms of prohibition and exclusion into view. Repression can reach the point of elimination. Foucault describes repression as "not merely prohibition, but exclusion, silencing, and the elimination of what must be repressed as soon as it attempts to appear. It operates through a triad of prohibition, disappearance, and silence."³

This is inseparable from the resistance created by the person who rebels against authoritarian values, and in the novel that person is usually the intellectual represented by the narrator-protagonist. As Foucault writes, "where there is power, there is resistance (...) and this resistance is never entirely outside power."⁴ The meanings of prohibition, pursuit, and exclusion, together with the resistance they require, are conveyed through discourse as an artistic component of the novel. Discourse does not merely describe the event. It performs an act with its own capacity to penetrate experience and shape a perspective.

This becomes clearer when discourse is understood through Foucault's formulation in *Genealogy of Knowledge*: "Discourse is not simply what announces or suppresses desire; it is also the object of desire. Discourse, as history teaches us, is not simply what reveals battles or systems of domination. It is that for which and through which struggle occurs; it is the power that one seeks to seize."⁵ In this sense, the discourse of any narrative carries two forms of authority: it fills the major narrative joints and it directs semantic signification.

The authority of discourse in *Hā' wa Asfār Ishtar* deepens the narrator-protagonist's misery. This becomes visible through a careful reading of the intellectual's relationship with power. The narrative links the level of the event with the other levels of novelistic art in order to create a text of difference. Its underlying system repeatedly seeks to reveal the unspoken and the unsaid within lived reality.

Conclusion

Hā' wa Asfār Ishtar adopts a distinctive first-person narrative discourse in an ambitious attempt to represent the general human condition. It follows and frames the most sensitive moments and axes of human reality. In doing so, it seeks to construct an "implicit text of difference." The central wager lies in what the narrative does not place on the visible surface of reception, yet still focalizes as a semantic center. This opens a space for engaging the implicit and drawing it into an open dialogue with the narrative material around difficult human questions that belong at once to the realm of the thinkable and the unspoken.

¹ Djellaoudji, *Hā' wa Asfār Ishtar*, p. 69.

² Berrada, *Questions of the Novel, Questions of Criticism*, p. 64.

³ Michel Foucault, *Knowledge and Power*, 1st ed. (Lebanon: University Foundation for Studies, Publishing and Distribution, 1994), p. 22 [Arabic edition].

⁴ Michel Foucault, *La volonté de savoir* (France: Gallimard, 1976), p. 121.

⁵ Michel Foucault, *Genealogy of Knowledge*, Arabic trans. Abd al-Salam Benabdelali, 1st ed. (Morocco: Dar Toubkal, 2008), p. 7.

The novel derives its distinctiveness from focalizing the implicit from a position of knowledge rather than ignorance. It sustains a discourse of confrontation throughout its narrative course. The protagonist appears with a consciousness that transcends his immediate spatiotemporal circumstances. He confronts attractive social values and customs through explicit opposition, which the narrative presents on behalf of a human world weakened in the name of custom. The novel thus contains a rich narrative program grounded in the clarity of the protagonist's human experience. Through introspection, it probes a form of social regression that marginalizes what is rejected and cloaks it in religion and society. The semantic field mobilizes the resources of narrative to establish counter-discourses within the implicit. These discourses turn away from reproducing falsehood and give priority to unveiling what human systems leave unspoken: custom, politics, and society.

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