



Narrative Space between Presence and Transformation: Dynamics of the Self and Narrative Components



Zineb Khodja ¹, Karima Boutarene ², Samir Bennabet ³, korbaa Ali ⁴, khelfaoui farid ⁵

¹ University of Mohamed Seddik Ben Yahia – Jijel

Email: khodjazineb44@gmail.com

² Lecturer (Class A), Department of Arabic Language and Literature, University Center of Barika, Amdukal Road, Barika, 05001, Algeria.

² Research Laboratory: Studies in Language and Literature, University Center of Barika

Amdukal Road, Barika, 05001, Algeria.

Email: karima.boutaren@cu-barika.dz

³ Lecturer(Class B)

³ Laboratory of Orientalist Studies, Linguistic and Social Protection – University of Oum El Bouaghi

Department: Arabic Language & Literature Department

³ Institute of Letters & Foreign Languages, University Center of Barika, Amdukal Road, Barika, 05001, Algeria

Email: samir.bennabet@cu-barika.dz

⁴ Martyr Hamma Lakhdar University of El Oued

⁴ Laboratory of Pragmatics and Discourse Analysis

Email : KorbAA-ali@eloued.dz

⁵ Martyr Hamma Lakhdar University of El Oued

⁵ Laboratory of Research in Algerian Literature and Criticism

Email: khelfaoui-farid@univ-eloued.dz

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Abstract

This study explores the narrative space as a structural and dynamic element in shaping the literary text. It is not merely perceived as a backdrop for events, but rather as an active domain that contributes to the construction of the narrative self and directs its transformations. Narrative space performs a dual function: it is a site of presence, which consolidates the identity of characters and provides them with tangible embodiment, and simultaneously a site of transformation, which opens possibilities for change and displacement through interaction with time, characters, and language. The research aims to highlight the dialectical relationship between space and self, and to demonstrate how narrative components reconfigure this relationship to generate new meanings.

Keywords : Presence, Transformation, Narrative Space, Narrative Sel.

Introduction:

Narrative space constitutes one of the most essential structural components in literary texts, as it transcends its traditional function as a mere framework for events to become a semantic domain actively engaged in shaping the narrative identity of both characters and narrator. Space is not a neutral background; rather, it is a dynamic element in the production of meaning, manifesting through the duality of presence and transformation.

Presence reflects the embodiment of the self within a defined space that grants identity and stability, whereas transformation reveals the dynamics of change and displacement experienced by the self through its interaction with time, events, and language. Hence, narrative space emerges as a fertile field for examining the dialectical relationship between the self and other narrative components, offering deeper insights into how literary texts construct fluid and multiple identities.

This article seeks to highlight the role of space in reshaping the relationship between the narrative self and structural components by analyzing the mechanisms of presence and transformation, and by uncovering the dynamics of interaction that render the literary text an open domain for meaning production and identity reconstruction.

Section One:

The Novelistic Concept of Space

In the novel, space is regarded as a fundamental element that frames the unfolding of events and the movement of characters. It performs a structural role in presenting the narrative as a domain upon which its components rely, distinguished by its static presence independent of the dynamics of time, due to its close association with description. Although organically intertwined with other narrative structures, space often appears as a mere background to events, without surpassing its function of achieving realistic proximity rather than contributing effectively to the artistic construction of the novel. This limitation characterizing space constitutes one of the most significant distinctions between it and narrative space, which extends far beyond a simple reference to a physical location¹.

Space is characterized by its capacity to encompass various narrative structures, as its presence becomes evident even in moments of stillness and description, reflecting its central role in shaping the textual structure. In ancient philosophical thought, a clear distinction is drawn between the concepts of place and space. According to Aristotle's perspective, place is defined as the external boundaries surrounding a given object, whereas space is understood as the internal boundaries of the vessel that contains that object. Thus, the place of a thing may disappear or change, but space, by its very nature,

¹ - Ibrahim Jandari, *The Novelistic Space in the Works of Jabra Ibrahim Jabra*, Tamouz Publishing and Distribution, Damascus, 1st Edition, 2013, p. 196

remains constant, making it broader and more inclusive compared to place, which is marked by more specific limits. In this sense, place represents a singular geographical locus...². This is what makes space a broader and more comprehensive term than place ³.

Thus, we arrive at the conclusion that narrative space in the novel is broader and more comprehensive than place. It represents the totality of locations upon which the narrative movement—embodied in the process of storytelling—unfolds. Moreover, the temporal developmental line is essential for perceiving the spatiality of the novel, unlike place, whose perception is not conditioned by the temporal progression of the story⁴. Thus, narrative space encompasses both temporal and spatial elements within which the story unfolds ⁵. From this, it becomes clear that narrative space in the novel is a fundamental element that transcends being merely a decorative background completing the narrative scene—as sometimes occurs with place, which is employed to provide a visual décor serving superficial description. Space is distinguished by its structural depth, as it is interconnected with all components of the novel in overlapping relations that contribute to shaping its narrative identity and determining its impact on artistic construction. Moreover, space plays a central role in creating the illusion of realism in events and contributes to generating the text’s effective meaning through a dialectical relationship with other narrative elements, making it more comprehensive than place, which remains confined to a contextual function without attaining the structural influence enjoyed by space.

As Gaston Bachelard states in his book *The Poetics of Space*: “This place toward which imagination gravitates cannot remain an indifferent place of mere geometric dimensions; it is a place where human beings have lived—not only objectively, but with all the partiality that imagination entails.”⁶.

He also states that place is the familiar place, namely the house in which one was born—the childhood home⁷. It is the place where we practiced daydreams and where our imagination was shaped. Spatiality in literature thus becomes the artistic image that recalls or evokes memories of the childhood home. In *The Poetics of Space*, Gaston Bachelard argues that place is not a neutral space of geometric dimensions, but rather a domain charged with human experiences that contribute to its semantic and imaginative formation. It is perceived not only objectively, but also through the collective imagination, with its biases and memories. From this perspective emerges the notion of intimate place, embodied in the childhood home, where the first sensory experiences are formed and imagination is shaped through daydreams.

² - Hamza Qarira, *The Structure of Space in Narrative Discourse*, Khayal Publishing and Translation, Bordj Bou Arréridj – Algeria, n.d., 2020, p. 29.

³ - Wafia Ben Massoud, *Narrative Techniques between the Novel and Cinema: A Comparative Study of Narrative Structures in the Novel “The Yacoubian Building” and its Film Adaptation*, Al-Wissam Al-Arabi Publishing House, Algeria; Zain Publications, Lebanon, 1st Edition, 2011, p. 332

⁴ - Asmaa Ahmed Maaykel, *Authenticity and Westernization in the Arabic Novel: The Novels of Haidar as a Model*, An Applied Study, Modern World of Books, Jordan, 1st Edition, 2011, p. 77.

⁵ - Hamid Lahmidani, *The Structure of the Narrative Text: From the Perspective of Literary Criticism*, Arab Cultural Center for Printing, Publishing and Distribution, Beirut, Lebanon, 1st Edition, 1991, p. 64

⁶ - Omar Mohamed Abdelwahid, *The Poetics of Narrative: An Analysis of Narrative Discourse in Al-Hariri’s Maqamat*, Al-Huda Publishing and Distribution, Minya, 1st Edition, 2003, p. 83.

⁷ - Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, trans. Ghalib Halsa, University Foundation for Studies, Publishing and Distribution, Beirut, Lebanon, 2nd Edition, 1984, p. 31

Hence, spatiality in literature becomes an artistic device that summons memories, reinforcing the emotional bond with narrative space and granting it semantic depth beyond being a mere frame for events.

Among Arab critics, Siza Qasim is considered one of the pioneers who devoted special attention to the study of place. She provided a definition that highlights its pivotal role in the narrative structure, emphasizing its organic relation to other textual elements and its influence in shaping literary meanings and significations, defining it as “the framework within which events take place”⁸. She also affirms that the narrative text creates, through words, an imaginary place endowed with its own specific components and distinctive dimensions⁹.

Siza Qasim defines narrative place as the framework within which events unfold, highlighting its essential role in shaping the narrative structure. She further notes that the novelistic text, through its language, does not merely evoke real place, but rather creates an imaginative space endowed with its own features and distinctive dimensions, thereby granting it a literary impact that transcends being a mere background for events.

Meanwhile, Algerian critic Abdelmalek Mortad distinguishes between *place* and *space*: place refers to what is geographical, whereas space denotes what is non-geographical—that is, the textual domain formed by narration, description, dialogue, and so forth. In his view, place is something real, while space is something fictional, non-real¹⁰.

The Algerian critic Abdelmalek Mortad argues that there is a clear distinction between *place* and *space* in literary texts. Place, according to his definition, is tied to geography and represents the real, tangible domain that can be perceived sensorially, such as cities, villages, and physical landscapes. Space, on the other hand, is a non-geographical concept formed within the text through narrative elements such as description, dialogue, and textual interactions, making it an imaginative rather than a concrete reality. In this view, place carries a realistic dimension, while space is linked to the imaginative structure of the literary work, reflecting its role in shaping narrative meanings beyond material boundaries.

From this perspective, we conclude that place plays a fundamental role in the novel, possessing significant importance in shaping the basic structure of the text. It is not limited to being a mere background for events, but rather has a prominent capacity to determine the trajectories of characters and explain the development of events, making it an active and influential element in the architecture of the literary work.

Section Two: Types of Place

⁸ -Siza Qasim, *The Construction of the Novel: A Comparative Study of Naguib Mahfouz's Trilogy*, Family Library, Cairo, n.d., 2004, p. 106.

⁹ -Siza Qasim, *The Construction of the Novel: A Comparative Study of Naguib Mahfouz's Trilogy*, Family Library, Cairo, n.d., 2004, p. 106

¹⁰ - Abdelmalek Mortad, *Narrative Discourse Analysis: A Deconstructive Approach, A Complex Semiotic Reading of Naguib Mahfouz's Zuqqaq al-Midaq*, University Publications Office, Algeria, n.d., n.d., p. 245.

In his analysis of place in the novel, Ghalib Halsal classifies narrative places into three main types, each endowed with a specific significance that reflects its role in the narrative structure and its interaction with characters and events:

1. **Metaphorical place:** A place that does not possess real existence but is closer to assumption, serving merely as a space in which events occur or unfold—like a stage upon which actors move.
2. **Geometric place:** A place that appears in the novel through the author's descriptive detailing of locations where the story takes place, focusing on spatial features without necessarily engaging in the dialectical interplay of other narrative elements.
3. **Place of living / intimate place:** A place capable of evoking in the reader the memory of their own familiar environment¹¹. It is a place where the novelist once lived, and later revisits imaginatively after having departed from it.

In spite of the various classifications proposed by scholars concerning narrative space, the most widely recognized typologies of places tend to be articulated through binary oppositions. Within the same novel, space often appears structured around contrasting pairs that convey meanings and attributes diametrically opposed to one another. Among the most recurrent oppositions is the open/closed dichotomy: the open space serves as the framework for the characters' movement and transition, whereas the closed space signifies their dwelling and habitation¹².

A/Open Spaces:

The open space is defined as an external spatial domain that is not confined by narrow boundaries. It constitutes a vast and expansive environment, often represented as a natural landscape in the open air¹³.

Open spaces are characterized as domains that are not restricted by boundaries or barriers, which grants them a distinctive quality of openness toward nature. Such spaces—deserts being a prime example—are typically conceived as expansive environments. They are also regarded as public realms accessible to all, where individuals can move freely without constraints.

B/ Closed Spaces:

The closed space generally represents a spatial domain bounded by clear limits that isolate it from the external world, rendering its environment narrower in comparison to the open space. Such confined places may be rejected for their inaccessibility, yet they may also be sought after as shelters that provide

¹¹ - Ghalib Halsal, *Space in the Arabic Novel* (Edited and Introduced), Ibn Hani Publishing House, Damascus, 1st Edition, 1989, pp. 22–35.

¹² -Al-Sharif Habila, *The Structure of the Narrative Discourse: A Study of Naguib Al-Kilani's Novels*, Modern World of Books, Irbid, Jordan, 1st Edition, 2010, p. 204.

¹³ - Ourida Abboud, *Space in the Algerian Revolutionary Short Story: A Structural Study of "Rebellious Souls"*, Al-Amal Publishing and Distribution House, n.d., n.p., p. 51.

refuge and protection away from the noise of life¹⁴. Closed spaces are characterized by explicit geographical boundaries that make them restricted and limited environments, thereby constraining the movement of characters and reducing their mobility within the narrative. As a result of this enclosed nature, these places are often perceived as private and static realms, sometimes undesirable due to the sense of isolation and discomfort they generate—as exemplified by prisons or hospitals.

Section Three: Space and Its Relation to Narrative Components

Every literary work is distinguished by its own artistic elements that constitute its fundamental structure; no creative text can exist without these components. Poetry has its defining elements, the short story is shaped by its narrative components, and the novel rests upon a set of interrelated elements such as characters, time, events, and space—none of which can be separated from the others. Despite the importance of space in narrative fiction, it does not constitute the structure of the work on its own; rather, it is closely intertwined with the other narrative elements—characters, events, and narrative perspectives—thus forming an integrated narrative fabric that enhances interaction within the literary text.

1. The Relationship Between Space and Characters

The character represents one of the essential components of the novelistic structure, playing a pivotal role in shaping events and developing the narrative, thereby contributing to the construction of the literary work and defining its artistic features. According to Latif Zeitouni, a character is “any participant in the events of the story, whether positively or negatively; whoever does not take part in the event does not belong to the characters. The character is constituted by the totality of discourse that describes it, portrays its actions, and conveys its thoughts and utterances¹⁵. Thus, it is impossible to conceive of a narrative work without the presence of a character, for it constitutes the primary driving force of events and the dynamic agent that endows the text with its internal vitality. On this basis, the character cannot be reduced to a mere formal or decorative element; rather, it performs a functional role that contributes to the development of the plot and the construction of meaning within the literary text.

The character functions as the bridge that links the various narrative components—such as space, time, and event—thus ensuring the coherence and structural unity of the novel. For this reason, several scholars have emphasized the centrality of the character in fiction, as it constitutes the fundamental pillar upon which the narrative structure is built. The character is not merely an isolated entity; rather, it interacts dynamically with the other components in ways that enrich the literary experience and provide it with semantic depth.

Habib Mounsi, in his book *The Philosophy of Space in Arabic Poetry*, observes: “Those who study the character in isolation from space deprive it of a significant dimension essential for defining its traits, diagnosing its behavior, and determining its aims and purposes.¹⁶. Consequently, the relationship

¹⁴ - Ourida Abboud, *Space in the Algerian Revolutionary Short Story* n.d., n.p., p. 59

¹⁵ - Latif Zeitouni, *Dictionary of Novel Criticism Terminology (Arabic–English–French)*, Dar Al-Nahar Publishing, Beirut, Lebanon, 1st Edition, 2002, pp. 113–114

¹⁶ - Hassan Salem Hindi Ismail, *The Historical Novel in Modern Arabic Literature: A Study in Narrative Structure*, Dar wa Maktabat Al-Hamid Publishing and Distribution, Amman, Jordan, 1st Edition, 2013, pp. 200–201

between character and space in the novel is a complementary one, as space constitutes an essential part of the character's identity and directly influences its formation and behavior. A fictional character cannot be conceived in isolation from the space that embraces it, just as space itself does not acquire its full significance except through the characters who inhabit and interact with it. Space shapes the features of the character, leaving its imprint on individuals' dispositions and conduct: those who live in the mountains acquire traits consistent with the nature of the terrain, while urban life imprints individuals with distinct social and behavioral patterns. This reciprocal influence between space and character reflects the role of both natural and social environments in shaping individual identity. Moreover, space is linked to the character on an emotional level; it is not merely a physical domain but also carries psychological dimensions that mirror individuals' feelings and experiences. Thus, the relationship between character and space is organic and intimate. From this perspective, space is not simply a backdrop for events but an active element in the narrative structure, influencing and being influenced by the characters, and contributing to the shaping of the plot and directing its trajectories.

The Relationship Between Space and Time

By its very nature, the novel is constructed upon a set of fundamental components, among which time plays a pivotal role in shaping the structure of the narrative text. No fictional event can be conceived apart from time, for it is the framework that grants events their sequence and logic within the narrative. Time influences the other elements and reflects upon them, being an abstract and fluid reality that becomes perceptible only through its effect on the surrounding components¹⁷. Thus, time constitutes a fundamental element in the structure of narrative fiction, as no narrative process can be conceived outside its framework. Time is not limited to serving as a temporal backdrop for events; rather, it transcends this role to become a central agent that influences the development of the plot and the construction of meaning, thereby assuming a pivotal function in the artistic architecture of the novel. Abdelkader Ben Salem affirms that time is an indispensable element in the construction of the narrative event, one that cannot be dispensed with¹⁸.

Time represents a fundamental aspect of human existence, reflecting the very essence of being and closely tied to the continuity and permanence of existence. It is not merely a temporal framework, but rather a central element that contributes to shaping identity and structuring human experiences through the succession of events and the transformations of the self. In his book *The Theory of the Novel*, Abdelmalek Mortad states: "Time is as if it were our very existence itself; it first affirms this existence, then gradually subdues it through decay. Existence is time, which besieges us day and night, in residence, in companionship, in youth and old age, without ever leaving us for a single moment."¹⁹ .

This perspective demonstrates that time is inseparably bound to human life in general and to the novelistic structure in particular, as it plays a central role in shaping both human and narrative experience. Because of this profound importance, time has received wide attention from philosophers, scientists, and

¹⁷ - Siza Qasim, *The Construction of the Novel: A Comparative Study of Naguib Mahfouz's Trilogy*, p. 38.

¹⁸ -Abdelkader Ben Salem, *Narrative Components in the New Algerian Short Story*, Arab Writers Union Publications, Damascus, n.d., 2001, p. 79.

¹⁹ -Abdelmalek Mortad, *Theory of the Novel: A Study in Narrative Techniques*, National Council for Culture, Arts and Letters, Kuwait, n.d., 1998, p. 171.

researchers, who have offered numerous definitions reflecting the diversity of their theoretical approaches to understanding its nature and its impact on thought and existence. Among these, Abdelmalek Mortad, in his book *Theory of the Novel*, states: “Time is a term derived from the plural ‘azmina,’ meaning residence²⁰.”

Here, time refers to continuity and permanence within the framework of space, as its existence is tied to the process of endurance and duration, making it a fundamental element in determining spatial relations and the interaction of being with its surroundings. Gerald Prince, in his *Dictionary of Narratology*, defines time as: “the period or periods during which the presented situations and events take place²¹.”

Space and time constitute an interconnected duality in the construction of the narrative text, as they complement one another to form a coherent narrative unit. Their relationship is essential and inseparable, with time regarded as the guiding intellect of space, much like the relationship between mind and body in shaping human existence. From this perspective arises the importance of the interaction between these two elements in structuring the narrative, as they directly influence the unfolding of events and the delineation of characters within the fictional domain. Their coexistence thus becomes indispensable for ensuring the consistency and cohesion of the novel.

It has also been said that the relationship between time and space is akin to that between mind and body: neither can exist without the other, and life itself cannot be conceived without their coexistence. If space were to exist independently of time, it would be a dead space.²²

From all the foregoing, we may conclude that the relationship between time and space constitutes a fundamental axis based on integration and interpenetration, such that neither can be separated from the other without disrupting the overall structure of existence. Space cannot exist apart from time, which grants it its dynamic dimension, just as time can only be apprehended through its embodiment in a tangible domain. Any attempt to separate one from the other results in stripping them of their meaning and negating the possibility of event or character outside this spatio-temporal framework.

In the context of the novel, time and space are inseparable elements, for addressing one necessarily entails the presence of the other. Although their distinction is sometimes adopted as a methodological procedure for purposes of analysis and study, such division remains purely theoretical, since in reality time and space are intertwined in a manner that cannot be transcended. Consequently, the novel is founded upon a spatio-temporal structure that determines the point of departure of events within a temporal context and anchors the integration of characters within a spatial domain, thereby providing a comprehensive framework for organizing the movement of narrative. Time regulates the rhythm of the

²⁰ - Abdelmalek Mortad, *Theory of the Novel*: P172.

²¹ - Gerald Prince, *Dictionary of Narratology*, trans. El-Sayed Imam, Mirt Publishing and Information, Cairo, 1st Edition, 2003, p. 201.

²² - Hanan Mohamed Mousa Hammouda, *Spatio-Temporality and the Structure of Contemporary Poetry: Ahmad Abdel-Mo'ti as a Model*, Modern Books World for Publishing and Distribution, Irbid, Jordan, 1st Edition, 2006, p. 114.

unfolding of events, while space contributes to shaping the trajectories of characters and defining the contours of the narrative experience, making these two elements essential pillars of the creative process.

- **THE relationship between place and event**

The event constitutes a fundamental pillar in the artistic construction of any literary work, whether a short story or a novel, as it represents the axis around which all other elements—characters, time, and space—interact. It is the component that grants the literary work its dynamism and frames the narrative movement within a defined spatio-temporal context, thereby ensuring the coherence and integration of its constituents. Thus, the event functions as the organizational structure that directs the trajectory of characters and determines the nature of their relationships, while simultaneously enabling time and space to assert their presence within the novel through their interaction with it. Their effectiveness becomes manifest only through the event, which imparts rhythm to time and sensory as well as semantic dimensions to space, making it essential in shaping the creative fabric of the literary text. Accordingly, the event represents the backbone that binds together the elements of the novel, and it cannot be studied in isolation from them, for it is the source of movement, vitality, and growth within the character.²³

Given the pivotal position that the event occupies within the novelistic text, it has been the subject of multiple definitions that highlight its essential role in the structure of narrative. Some have regarded it as the element that imparts movement and dynamism to the literary work, while others have considered it the nucleus around which the remaining components—characters, time, and space—are organized. Thus, the event remains a fundamental constituent in shaping the architecture of the novel, as it determines the trajectory of the plot and contributes to the construction of narrative meanings in accordance with the writer's creative vision. Among the definitions offered is that of Ibrahim Fathi in his Dictionary of Terms, where he states: "The event is a distinct part of action; it is a brief or short narrative that addresses a single situation. When events are organized together and linked by a single thread in a coherent manner, they become a sequence of events within a plot"²⁴.

Since the event occupies a central position within the novelistic text, it has been the subject of multiple definitions that reflect its essential role in the structure of narrative. Some have considered it the element that imparts movement and dynamism to the literary work, while others have regarded it as the nucleus around which the remaining components—characters, time, and space—are organized. Thus, the event remains a fundamental constituent in shaping the architecture of the novel, as it determines the trajectory of the plot and contributes to the construction of narrative meanings in accordance with the writer's creative vision. One definition describes the event as "a record of occurrences whose cohesion and succession form a narrative material based on a set of artistic and linguistic techniques"²⁵. In this sense, the event is the foundation upon which narrative construction rests, embodying a coherent and sequential narration that directs the course of events and regulates the relationship among other elements such as characters, time, and space. Through it, the plot crystallizes and meanings evolve, making it a crucial factor in achieving textual unity and reinforcing narrative structure.

²³ - Sabeeha 'Ouda Za'rab, Ghassan Kanafani: The Aesthetics of Narrative in the Novelistic Discourse, Majdalawi Publishing and Distribution, Amman, Jordan, 1st Edition, 2006, p. 134.

²⁴ - Ibrahim Fathi, Dictionary of Literary Terms, Workers' Cooperative for Printing and Publishing, Tunis, n.d., n.p., p. 137

²⁵ - Mī Ahmad Yūsuf, The Aesthetics of Traditional Narratives: Applied Studies in Classical Arabic Narrative, Al-Ma'mūn Publishing and Distribution, Amman, Jordan, 1st Edition, 2011, p. 50

Despite the pivotal role of the event, it cannot be separated from the element that embraces it and grants it spatial dimension—namely, space. Space is the principal container of events, for they cannot unfold or develop outside a spatial framework that accommodates and directs their movement. Accordingly, the relationship between event and space is intrinsic and interdependent: the study of one necessarily entails consideration of the other, since “the relationship between space and the narrative event is a close one, based on inseparability; events cannot be conceived apart from the places in which they occur.” This relationship is characterized by mutual influence, as space provides the framework that contains the event and guides its development, while the event contributes to shaping the narrative significance of space. Space is not a neutral backdrop but an active element that participates in the formation of characters and events, and its presence within the text stimulates the reader to anticipate occurrences consistent with its nature.

From this perspective, event and space become inseparable, for events cannot be realized without a domain that hosts them and enables their interaction and progression, while space acquires its narrative identity only through the movement of events within it. Moreover, space plays a crucial role in determining the degree of realism of the event, granting it plausibility and influencing its very nature through its size, breadth, or confinement. Space not only accommodates occurrences but also defines their dimensions and directs the interaction of characters within them, thereby enriching the narrative with semantic depth.

Ultimately, the existence of the event in the novel is incomplete without its connection to time and space, which together constitute the fundamental coordinates that provide cohesion and coherence to narrative. Without them, the realization of a fully integrated narrative act that embodies the story’s message becomes impossible. Thus, event and space are inseparable components in the construction of the novel, for the event cannot materialize outside a spatial framework that offers it a setting, while space derives its narrative identity from the events that unfold within it²⁶. Their interrelation makes them indispensable elements in any literary work.

-The relationship between place and description

Description constitutes a fundamental technique in the creative process, whether in poetry or prose, as it enables the writer to articulate thoughts and emotions with precision and clarity, while also allowing the depiction of the various transformations experienced by the individual or society. Its importance lies in its central role in bringing the reader closer to the text, helping them to comprehend events and engage with them more profoundly. Description also complements narrative, endowing it with a pictorial dimension that enhances its artistic and semantic depth. Indeed, no literary work is devoid of the interplay between description and narration, for description represents the most immediate tool through which the writer conveys his creative vision with clarity and accuracy. As Gérard Genette observes: “Description

²⁶ - Nidā’ Ahmad Mish’al, *Description in the Novelistic Experience of Ibrahim Nasrallah*, Ministry of Culture Studies, Amman, Jordan, 2011, p. 35.

in narrative is an inevitability; one may describe without narrating, but it is impossible to narrate without describing.²⁷

Description enjoys an independent existence, yet at the same time it is bound to narrative through an inseparable relationship of complementarity. Narrative cannot be complete without the element of description, which contributes to the growth and development of events, granting them semantic depth and a visual dimension that brings them closer to the reader. Description constitutes one of the essential pillars of the narrative text, as it usually accompanies narration to such an extent that it is difficult to imagine a narrative passage devoid of description. In its basic structure, the literary text is divided into narrative and descriptive segments, alongside dialogue that enhances character interaction and deepens the dimensions of the text.

It is therefore evident that description is not merely an accessory to narrative but a fundamental factor in its formation, providing precision and detail and endowing it with a pictorial quality that reinforces scenes and events in the reader's mind. Without description, narrative cannot fully perform its function, since description is the means that grants clarity, embodiment, and vitality, making the text more engaging and impactful. This importance has been particularly emphasized in the traditional novel, where writers such as Honoré de Balzac devoted great attention to description, filling their works with meticulously depicted houses, furniture, and clothing²⁸.

The term "description" has been the subject of multiple definitions, among which is that of Qudāma ibn Ja'far, who regards description as one of the essential elements of literary production. He argues that description enables the writer to depict scenes and embody events with precision, thereby imparting to the text a pictorial quality that enriches the reader's experience and deepens narrative comprehension. As he states: "Description is the mention of a thing with its conditions and forms; since most of the poets' descriptions fall upon objects composed of various parts, the poet recounts them in his verse and represents them to the senses through their attributes"²⁹.

Qudāma ibn Ja'far conceives of description as encompassing the finest details, whether related to conditions, objects, or meanings, for it reflects the transformations of life across ages and accompanies the changes experienced by both the individual and society. From this perspective, description is regarded as a historical record that documents human and social shifts, making it a fundamental element in literary texts in general and in poetry in particular, where it serves as a tool for embodying scenes and expressing emotions with precision and clarity.

Building on this, space emerges as a crucial component in shaping the novelistic domain, for it cannot be dispensed with in any creative work. Space functions as the framework that hosts events and directs the movement of characters, while simultaneously playing a significant role in stimulating the process of description within the text. Thus, space constitutes an inseparable element of the novelistic structure in

²⁷ - Abdelmalek Mortad, *Narrative Discourse Analysis: A Deconstructive Semiotic Reading of Naguib Mahfouz's Zuqqaq al-Midaq**, University Publications Office, Algeria, n.d., n.d., p. 264

²⁸ -Al-Sharif Habila, *The Structure of Narrative Discourse: A Study of Naguib Al-Kilani's Novels*, Modern World of Books, Irbid, Jordan, 1st Edition, 2010, p. 197.

²⁹ -Mohammad Najib Al-'Umāmī, *Description in the Narrative Text: Between Theory and Practice*, Dar Mohammad Ali Publishing, Tunis, 1st Edition, 2010, p. 14

general and of narrative components in particular, owing to its essential role in supporting the plot and enriching the narrative experience.

Place and Language

Language constitutes a fundamental element in the construction of the narrative text, playing a central role in shaping the novelistic space by defining its contours and endowing it with its distinctive identity. In essence, fictional space manifests itself as a linguistic structure articulated through narration, thereby becoming an inseparable part of the literary fabric. It is, therefore, a “linguistic world and a verbal domain par excellence.”³⁰

The formation of space in the novel is manifested through language, which constitutes the primary means of constructing and defining its features. By employing language, the novelist is able to create an artistic domain within the narrative, endowing it with its distinctive characteristics and dimensions, so that this fictional space becomes a model that mirrors the structure of any real space beyond the novel. In this way, space enhances the aesthetic dimension of narration and embodies the novelistic experience.

Accordingly, the novelist builds his artistic world and materializes it in space, with language serving as his essential medium. Thus, space in the novel is, in essence, a linguistic world, for “the narrative text creates, through words, an imaginary space with its own specific components and dimensions. Description, therefore, is a linguistic representation that transcends the visible image, transferring the world of reality into the world of fiction, where the aim is not to reproduce reality but to create a reality analogous to it.”³¹

The existence of narrative space becomes evident when it is woven into the fabric of writing, merging with language and transforming into a fundamental component of textual construction. According to Gérard Genette, language is not merely a medium for expressing space, but rather the very domain that grants it narrative existence, as it is framed within the textual structure to become more than a geographical sitean interpretive signifier imbued with symbolic and semantic dimensions. In this sense, narrative space emerges as an imagined domain shaped through language, enabling the writer to reconstruct it according to his artistic and narrative vision. For Genette, language represents a primary spatiality, as it appears more capable of articulating spatial relations than of expressing other types of relations³². The formation of narrative space is closely tied to the spatiality of language itself, such that space cannot exist narratively except through language, which grants it semantic depth and imaginative representation within the text. In this sense, language becomes the essential medium for constructing space, as its narrative domain arises solely from its expressive structure and semantic potential. Thus,

³⁰ - Hassan Bahraoui, *The Structure of the Novelistic Form*, Arab Cultural Center, Beirut, 1st Edition, 1990.
Cited in: Murshid Ahmad, *Space and Artistic Perspective in the Novels of Abdul Rahman Munif*, Dar Al-Qalam Al-‘Arabi, Aleppo, 1st Edition, 1989, p. 105.

³¹ -Mohammad Azzam, *The Poetics of Narrative Discourse*, Arab Writers’ Union, Damascus, 2005, pp. 69–70

³² -Voir: Gérard Genette, *Figures* 2^{ed} seuil, 1969, p44.

“the positioning of words within the sentence constitutes the mode of being of language, determined by the force that claims spatiality.”³³.

Thus, language grants space its linguistic existence, as its features are shaped within the expressive structure of language. The novel, in its essence, is a linguistic domain embodied through words, whereby every element within it—including space—is nothing but a reflection of the novel’s language and a manifestation of its narrative signification.

Space in the novel therefore constitutes an integrated linguistic structure, fundamentally distinct from other artistic domains such as painting or architecture, which rely on colors, shapes, and tangible materials. In the novel, language does not merely describe space; it constructs and embodies it as a living reality, delineating its contours and defining its dimensions through precise narration that imparts a pictorial quality enriching the literary experience.

Language is distinguished by its unique capacity to build artistic space within the novel through an interwoven semantic and aesthetic system, enabling it to represent reality with its objects and components and to evoke diverse domains in the mind and imagination. In this way, narrative space transcends the limitations of geographical reality to become an open literary domain without rigid boundaries, granting it a wide extension that allows the reader to move freely within it, exploring its various dimensions through a coherent artistic vision.

Language in the novel also plays a clear role in embodying artistic reality, reflecting the social and cultural diversity permeating the literary text. As environments and characters multiply within the novel, language emerges as a mirror of this diversity, adapting to the cultural and social level of each character, thereby lending credibility and harmony to the narrative context.

From this perspective, space is intimately bound to language, which confers upon it a distinctive character that reflects the identity of the characters and defines their social and professional features. The relationship between language and space in the novel is therefore dialectical: space endows language with uniqueness and distinction, while language embodies space and imparts its artistic dimensions, transforming the novel into a domain that reshapes reality with greater vitality and precision.

Section Four: The Self Between Consciousness and Space — The Dialectics of Formation and Development

Consciousness constitutes the cornerstone in the process of self-formation, beginning with the individual’s awareness of existence and ascending toward more complex levels of knowledge and insight. As the self advances through stages of intellectual growth and expands its experiential knowledge, it acquires greater capacity to achieve functional and axiological distinction, expressing its interaction with the world.

At its highest level, consciousness becomes reflexive—that is, the self perceives itself and recognizes that it perceives itself—thus enabling it to conceive of its position within the existential structure and to define its relation to other selves. This evolving consciousness does not remain confined within an isolated individual scope; rather, it extends to encompass networks of environmental and historical

³³ - J. E. Kessiner, *The Poetics of Narrative Space*, translated by Lahcen Hmama, *Afrique Orient*, n.p., 2003, p. 163.

relations, whereby the self becomes aware of its surroundings and its place within the trajectory of collective development.

Consciousness is not merely an individual phenomenon; it can evolve into a social and national dimension, where the awareness of a nation regarding its destiny becomes part of the structure of its civilizational development. Likewise, consciousness acquires a historical dimension when viewed as an extension of human experience across time, rendering it an instrument for understanding historical transformations and situating the nation within them. In its highest manifestation, human consciousness is realized only when both the individual and the nation internalize the fundamental existential values—truth, goodness, and beauty—thus transforming consciousness from mere awareness into an ethical practice with civilizational impact.

1. Consciousness as the Basis for Self-Development

Consciousness constitutes the cornerstone in the process of self-formation, beginning with the individual's awareness of existence and ascending toward more complex levels of knowledge and insight. As the self advances through intellectual growth and expands its experiential knowledge, it acquires greater capacity to achieve functional and axiological distinction, expressing its interaction with the world. At its highest level, consciousness becomes reflexive that is, the self perceives itself and recognizes that it perceives itself thus enabling it to conceive of its position within the existential structure and to define its relation to other selves. This evolving consciousness extends beyond the individual to encompass social, national, and historical dimensions, ultimately attaining its highest manifestation when both the individual and the nation internalize the fundamental existential values of truth, goodness, and beauty, thereby transforming consciousness into an ethical practice with civilizational impact.

2. Space and Its Role in Self-Formation

The self cannot exist without space, which constitutes an existential condition for its growth and continuity. Space is not merely a physical frame but a nurturing environment that provides the conditions of life, making the relationship with it interactive and formative. Each space determines the pattern of growth achievable by the self according to its natural requirements, as spatial elements act as constraints or stimuli influencing historical movement and societal development. While some environments such as plains, rivers, and commercial centers—facilitate growth, others such as deserts and islands—restrict development due to overwhelming geographical factors. Yet space is not static; it interacts with social dynamics, allowing humans to create artificial conditions to overcome natural limitations. However, such adaptation remains limited unless achieved on a collective level capable of transforming space into a sustainable structure for growth.

3. Integration of Self, Consciousness, and Space

Consciousness and space are intertwined in the formation of the self, as its development depends on the growth of awareness and its interaction with the environment that embraces it. This interconnection imposes a responsibility on each generation to accumulate knowledge and experience, thereby contributing to continuous social and historical progress and propelling humanity toward higher levels of maturity in understanding its existence. The self realizes its existence only through awareness of itself

and its position within a network of relations with others, granting it the ability to assert modes of being in the world. Consciousness, as the foundation of self-development, evolves from basic awareness to reflexive recognition, extending to social, national, and historical dimensions. Space, as an existential condition, shapes possibilities of growth and development, with its impact varying across environments. Ultimately, the dialectical relationship between consciousness and space forms the basis for the self's evolution, demanding collective responsibility for knowledge and experience to advance humanity toward greater maturity.

Key Findings

- Narrative space is not merely a backdrop for events but a structural element actively shaping meaning and reproducing narrative identity.
- The duality of presence and transformation reveals that space both consolidates character identity and enables possibilities of change and displacement.
- The narrative self is formed through its relationship with space, which becomes a domain for tangible embodiment as well as symbolic and semantic transformation.
- Other structural components (time, characters, narrator, language) intersect with space to generate complex narrative dynamics, making the text an open domain for reconfiguring identity.
- Narrative structure operates dialectically between stability and change, reflecting the dynamic nature of the literary text as a constantly reshaping entity.
- Narrative space contributes to the production of new meanings through its interaction with the narrative self, granting the text philosophical and critical depth that transcends mere formal structure.