

History, Romantically Imagined: A Conceptual Approach

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Received: 01.03.2026 Accepted: 02.08.2026 Publishing: 04.09.2026

Abstract:

The relationship between the novel and history is an open, ever-renewing one, fraught with numerous complexities and questions. This stems from the fact that the novel is a literary discourse that seeks artistic pleasure, whereas history is a factual discourse that aims to arrive at truth. These complexities have come to the fore whenever the novelist has taken history as a broad terrain upon which to draw on the factual dimension in constructing a fictional narrative. Dynamic, open, and aesthetic in nature, this article aims to trace the manifestations of the intermingling—or intersection—between the historical and the fictional within narrative discourse, by delineating the boundaries and definitions between history and fiction, as well as the imagination and interpretation of history.

Keywords: history, fiction, historical fiction, fictionalization, imagining history, interpretation.

Introduction:

The relationship between the novel and history is an old, ever-renewing, and constantly evolving one, marked by broad epistemic intersections and interconnections. This is due to the novel being the most comprehensive and open of all literary genres, as it extends and expands to encompass all facets of human life. Moreover, it summons history—whether local or global—by linking the past with the present within an encompassing narrative and imaginative framework. For Bakhtin, it is rebellious and flexible, accommodating all remaining genres—poetry, history, letters, memoirs, and others—so that it becomes a mosaic of all genres. Perhaps the very nature of the distinction between "history as a utilitarian discourse that seeks to uncover the laws governing the succession of reality"¹ and the novel as "an aesthetic discourse in which the referential function is foregrounded"² has contributed to the formation of a paradox grounded in the juxtaposition of what is fundamentally irreconcilable. For the novel and history belong to two entirely separate domains: the novel operates upon imaginary material, while history operates upon factual material. "Yet, since both belong to the realm of narrative, the forms of exchange between them have become systematically feasible. The process of mutual assimilation will thus continue to adapt the context of reception to systemic

¹- Abdullah Ibrahim, *Historical Imagination, Narrative, Empire, and the Colonial Experience*, Arab Institute for Studies and Publishing, Beirut, 1st ed., 2011, p. 9.

²-Ibid, p. 9.

compatibility, enabling the novel to incorporate historical materials in order to construct a narratively significant and artistically meaningful entity."³

Accordingly, between the novel and history, there exist "semiotic foundations and open spaces of significations that observe the varying narrative laws, ranging from the rigidity of syntax to the fluidity of open signification,"⁴

upon which several issues and questions are predicated, relating to the nature of both history and the novel, the search for the mechanisms by which history operates within the novel, and how it is imaginatively reformulated.

1- The Concept of History:

In *Lisān al-ʿArab* (the Arabic lexicon), it is stated that "at-tārīkh (history/date) means defining time, and at-tawrīkh is its equivalent; arrakha al-kitāb li-yawmkadhā means he dated the book to such-and-such a day."⁵ The Arabs did not know the science of history until the era of 'Umar ibn al-Khattab, may Allah be pleased with him, for "the dating system that people use is not purely Arab; rather, the Muslims took it from the People of the Book. The Muslim calendar was dated from the time of the Hijrah of our Master the Messenger of Allah, may Allah's peace and blessings be upon him, and was recorded during the caliphate of 'Umar, may Allah be pleased with him, and it has remained the calendar to this day."⁶

For history, there are several concepts. Muslims defined it as: 'the science of reports' or 'the art of news.' IbnKhalidun says: 'The reality of history is that it is news about human society, which is the civilization of the world, and what befalls the nature of that civilization in terms of conditions such as: savagery, sociability, tribal loyalties, and the various kinds of domination of some people over others, and what arises from that of kingship, dynasties, and their ranks, and what people acquire through their efforts and endeavors of livelihoods, subsistence, sciences, crafts, and all other conditions that occur in that civilization by its very nature.'⁷, and upon this definition, AbdallahLaroui bases himself; for there is no difference in his view between history—facts and history—reports—which means that history is inseparable from man, and especially the specialized man whom he calls the historian. In this context, history and the historian are intrinsically linked together, and before each of them lies the era of non-history or prehistory, from which nothing has reached us but reports circulated among people that are not worth mentioning."⁸

³-Abd al-Salam al-Uqlaimun, *Narrative and History: (The Sultan of the Tale and the Tale of the Sultan)*, New Unified Book House, Beirut, 1st ed., 2010, pp. 101–102.

⁴-Ahmed Youssef, "The Historical Condition and Implications of Otherness in the Novel 'The Prince' by Wasini al-A'raj," *Al-Tawasul Journal*, University of Badji Mokhtar, Annaba, No. 29, December 2011, p. 74.

⁵-IbnManzūr, *Lisān al-ʿArab*, edited by ʿAbdAllāhʿAlī al-Kabīr, MuḥammadAḥmadḤasabAllāh, and HāshimMuḥammad al-Shādhilī, Dār al-Maʿārif, Cairo, n.d. (no edition stated), vol. 1, p. 58.

⁶-Ibid., p. 58.

⁷-IbnKhalidūn, *Al-Muqaddimah* (Introduction), DārIbn al-Jawzī for Printing, Publishing, and Distribution, Cairo, 1st ed., 2010, p. 29.

⁸-See: AbdallahLaroui, *Concept of History* (Mafhūm al-Tārīkh), Arab Cultural Center, Morocco, 4th ed., 2005, p. 34.

As for Michel Foucault, he views history as the sum total of 'the facts of human experience—that is, what occurs of events in life, whether past or present.'⁹, and among these concepts—and the boldest of them—is that what is written about the past of peoples, described by one scholar as 'written history' (Writing history), involves 'transforming historical material into writing, which entails that this writing becomes a form of literature according to Hayden White, who argues that historical facts do not exist without being written by a writing self marked by creativity, writing a story formulated in a manner tinged with the subjectivity of its author.'¹⁰

Moreover, history in its simplest definition is 'a narrative about the past, or a collection of human events and facts that have passed and ended; yet they are susceptible to transformation, interpretation, and influence. They are events and facts that leave their imprints and traces on the present and the future, and contribute to shaping human behavior in general and creative action—including literature—in particular.'¹¹

In this regard, the French critic Pierre Barbéris, in his study entitled 'The Literary Text and History,' proposes the existence of three meanings that carry the same signification, which provide us with a broad concept of the term 'history'¹²:

- History as reality, as a path, and as an objective process of what occurs in society of events, developments, and conflicts separate from man and individual perceptions.
- History as discourse and a type of knowledge, taking history as a scientific subject, and granting it existence through rhetorical and conceptual procedures.

History as a tale, a story, narratives, or *Histoire*—that is, as literary storytelling or literary narration that literature recounts—and this representational work is essentially connected to the material of literary formation, which possesses its historical dimension due to its inclusion within a temporal context.

In this context, we find the philosopher Hegel, in his work *Lectures on the Philosophy of History*, acknowledging the existence of a temporal and conceptual relationship to the event, one that is essentially linked to man and his civilizational development. It appears that Hegel was content with presenting a set of general observations on history (universal or general history), such that he began to examine the different methods by which history can be written, and confined them to three major types, namely¹³:

1- Original history

⁹-MuḥammadibnMuḥammad al-Khabbū, "The Formation of History in the Fictional Text" (Tashkīl al-Tārīkhfī al-Naṣṣ al-Riwā'ī), from *Proceedings of the Fifth Al-Bāḥa Literary Forum, 1433 AH — "The Arabic Novel: Memory and History"*, Arab Diffusion Foundation, Beirut, 1st ed., 2013, p. 234.

¹⁰-Ibid., p. 234.

¹¹-Shukrī 'AzīzMāḍī, *In Literary Theory* (FiNāzariyyat al-Adab), National Foundation for Studies and Publishing, Beirut, 1st ed., 2005, p. 145.

¹²-See: 'AmmārBilḥasan, "The Novel and History in Algeria: A Critique of Legitimacy" (al-Riwāyahwa al-Tārīkhfī al-Jazā'ir: Naqd al-Mashrū'iyah), *Al-Tabyīn Journal*, Algeria, Issue No. 7, Year 1993, pp. 96–97.

¹³-See: Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of History (Reason in History)*, trans. and ed. Imām 'Abd al-FattāḥImām, Dār al-Tanwīr, Beirut, 3rd ed., 2007, Vol. 1, p. 32.

2- Reflective history

3- Philosophical history

The second type, "reflective history," closely resembles the historical novel in the particular manner through which past facts are formed via a textual/linguistic construction.

2. The Concept of the Historical Novel:

Critics define the novel as: an imagined story that is directly based on history, which indicates the close relationship binding history and the novel. This relationship stems from the restraining power of narration, which pulls it toward the constraint of historical truth and its objectivity—whether from the perspective of philosophy or from that of science. But the imagination is eager to travel to the mined regions of history and wishes to cross into its dark recesses, as well as to interrogate what is not readily questioned, whether it concerns the self or the community¹⁴, this relationship is manifested in the very nature of the fictional art itself, which is based on depicting reality in an artistic and imaginative manner.

In this way, it becomes clear to us that history constitutes a fundamental material for the novelist, from which he derives his themes, characters, events, and the worlds of his fictional text—which means that 'the historical becomes a novelistic component capable of diagnosis and interrogation, beyond the presuppositions that the possibilities of both writing and reading might (or might not) summon.'¹⁵

Accordingly, it can be said that the novel is the closest literary genre to history. Perhaps its novelistic characteristic grounded in temporality has made it a temporal text par excellence, where 'it has turned it into a documentary text for history, supplementing true history with imagined material that artistically narrates historical events through their arrangement and interpretation—narratives that penetrate the official accounts of history'¹⁶

This dialogic relationship between history and the novel is embodied through interaction between them on one hand, and differentiation between them on the other. They may touch, overlap, and diverge (differentiate), and they may complement and resemble each other at certain moments. All of this has placed us in a generic crisis, heralding the emergence of a new literary genre that has known how to attract its readers through its sensitive subjects intrinsically connected to history—and this literary genre has come to be known as the historical novel.

As a preliminary, we must recognize that the historical novel derives its events from history, as well as its characters. It is 'constructed narratively upon history, feeds on it, is formed from it, adds to it, condenses it, and manipulates it—yet it is not history itself'¹⁷, the historical

¹⁴-See: Aḥmad Yūsuf, *The Historical Condition and the Implications of Alterity* (al-Sharḥ al-Tārīkhī wa'l-ḥā'āt al-Ghayriyya), p. 76.

¹⁵-Abd al-Fattāḥ al-Ḥajmrī, "Do We Have a Historical Novel?" (Hal Ladaynā Riwayāh Tārīkhīyyah?), *Fuṣūl Journal of Literary Criticism*, Cairo, Issue No. 3, Vol. 16, Winter 1997, p. 62.

¹⁶-Rafīf Riḍā Saydāwī, *The Arabic Novel Between Reality and Imagination* (al-Riwayāh al-'Arabiyyah Bayna al-Wāqī' wa al-Takhayyul), Dār al-Fārābī, Beirut, 1st ed., 2008, p. 95.

¹⁷-Niḍāl al-Shamālī, *The Novel and History: A Study in the Levels of Discourse in the Arabic Historical Novel* (al-Riwayāh wa al-Tārīkh: Baḥṭh fī Mustawayāt al-Khiṭāb fī al-Riwayāh al-Tārīkhīyyah al-'Arabiyyah), 'Ālam al-Kutub al-Ḥadīth, Jordan, 1st ed., 2006, p. 107.

novel, in this sense, is an independent genre with its own characteristics, controls, and specific laws. It is an art and a creative work, and the reader must engage with it according to this logic and on this basis.

As is known, the historical novel 'relies on two references in the construction of the work: the first is a real reference connected to the historical event (the story), and the second is an imaginative (novelistic) reference associated with the fictional event. The first reference is a utilitarian reference, while the second is an aesthetic reference."¹⁸

It is difficult to reach a fixed artistic definition of the concept of the historical novel, as researchers have offered various definitions. We find the scholar Georg Lukács defining it, saying: 'It is a novel that evokes the present and is lived by contemporaries as their own pre-self history."¹⁹

This approach reflects one of the fundamental objectives of turning toward history, namely illuminating lived reality and stirring its issues through the evocation of historical events. Alfred Sheppard defines it, saying: 'The historical story deals with the past in an imaginative manner. The novelist possesses wide-ranging abilities with which he can transcend the boundaries of history; but on the condition that he does not settle there for a long time, unless the imagination represents a part of the structure in which history will settle"²⁰, this description shows us that the historical novel is a return to the past; but with the aim of reproducing it anew in a way that transcends the boundaries of history, and reviving it through imagination and language.

In the same context, Baker views the historical novel as 'that novel which deals with the customs of certain people, written in a modern language"²¹, through this definition, brief as it is, we observe that it prioritizes the artistry of the historical novel over its historicity. For him, history is a material shaped by the novelist through his modern artistic language.

We find another definition from the researcher Sa'īdYaqṭīn, who holds that nearly all the definitions and determinations offered by dictionaries and specialized studies on the concept of the historical novel agree that 'the historical novel is a narrative work that aims to reconstruct an era of the past in an imaginative manner, where historical characters intermingle with imaginary ones. In the historical novel, we find the presence of historical material, but it is presented in a creative and imaginative way"²²

Based on the foregoing, researcher Niḍāl al-Shamālī presents a comprehensive, precise, and definitive definition of the historical novel, as he views it as 'a literary discourse that engages with a pre-established historical discourse in a horizontal engagement, attempting to reproduce it novelistically within contemporary data that does not conflict with the

¹⁸-Niḍāl al-Shamālī, *The Novel and History*, p. 124.

¹⁹-FayṣalDarrāj, *The Novel and the Interpretation of History: Theory of the Novel and the Arabic Novel* (al-RiwāyahwaTa'wīl al-Tārīkh: Naẓariyyat al-Riwāyahwa al-Riwāyah al-'Arabiyyah), Arab Cultural Center, Morocco, 1st ed., 2004, p. 263.

²⁰-Ibid., p. 112.

²¹- Ibid., p. 114.

²²-Sa'īdYaqṭīn, *Issues of the New Arabic Novel: Existence and Boundaries* (Qaḍāyā al-Riwāyah al-'Arabiyyah al-Jadīdah: al-Wujūdwa al-Ḥudūd), Ikhtilāf Publications, Algeria, 1st ed., 2012, p. 159.

fundamental data of the historical discourse; and a vertical engagement when it attempts to complete the historical scene from the author's perspective through interpretive, explanatory, or corrective completion for projective, commemorative, or forward-looking purposes"²³, in accordance with the novelist's artistic needs.

3. The Concept of Fictionalization:

The novel, in a sense, is "a fictional linguistic text composed of references and currents."²⁴ Through the presence of the fictional characteristic in the narrative text, and considering it as the foundation upon which it is built—which is, in some of its aspects, a "generic characteristic"—we find ourselves facing the problem of the referential correspondence between the structures of the creative text and the structures of given reality. So what is the concept of fictionalization? And what are its modes of operation and the process of its development?.

If we return to the linguistic root 'kh-y-l' (خيل) in *Lisān al-'Arab* dictionary, we find: 'Khāla al-shay'ayakhālukhaylanwakhālanwakhaylan...: he assumed it; and in the proverb: "Whoever listens, assumes" (man yasma' yakhul), i.e., he supposes... And khayyalafīhi al-khayr and takhayyalahu: he assumed it and discerned it"²⁵. Through this definition, it becomes clear to us that fictionalization (takhyīl) is associated with supposition (ẓanniyyah), which refers to illusion and indicates ambiguity.

The issue of fictionalization has constituted a human cultural preoccupation throughout history. It seems that Greek philosophical thought was the first to raise this creative problem, inaugurating it through the concept of mimesis (imitation), whereby Aristotle made it the fundamental starting point for reproducing reality in various ways. Aristotle holds that when the writer imitates, he does not merely transmit but rather acts upon what is transmitted. We find that Aristotle went even further when he said: 'The poet does not imitate what is, but rather imitates what might be or what ought to be by necessity and probability.'²⁶

Moving to Arab and Islamic philosophy, we find a strong presence of the concept of fictionalization (takhyīl), as it was discussed by IbnSīnā (Avicenna), al-Fārābī, al-Kindī, IbnRushd (Averroes), and the Ikhwān al-Ṣafā' (Brethren of Purity), through their treatment of the concept of poetry. They offered conceptions, opinions, and analyses predominantly characterized by a logical and rational framework, as they considered it to be an analogical reasoning based on imaginary premises and false images that are not concealed from the addressee "²⁷, they also considered it one of the divisions of rational arguments, beginning with rhetoric, then poetry, then demonstration, then dialectic, then sophistry. These arguments serve either to produce conviction (taṣḍīq) or to effect influence on others, such as fictionalization

²³-Niḍāl al-Shamālī, *The Novel and History*, p. 117.

²⁴-Shu'aybḤalīfī, "The Imaginary and the Referent: The Process of Discourses" (al-Mutakhayyalwa al-Marjī': Sīrūrāt al-Khiṭābāt), *Fuṣūl Journal of Literary Criticism*, Cairo, Issue No. 66, Spring 2005, p. 232.

²⁵-IbnManẓūr, *Lisān al-'Arab*, Vol. 2, p. 1304.

²⁶-'AzīzShukrīMāḍī, *In Literary Theory*, p. 29.

²⁷-See: 'Abd al-RaḥmānḤasanḤabankah al-Maydānī, *The Controls of Knowledge and the Foundations of Inference and Debate* (Ḍawābiṭ al-Ma'rifahwaUṣūl al-Istidlālwa al-Munāẓarah), Dār al-Qalam, Damascus, 4th ed., 1993, p. 302.

(takhyīl), and the instrument of fictionalization is poetry, in which imaginary propositions"²⁸ must be employed. This is on one hand. On the other hand, they focused on the psychological conception in terms of the psychological effect of fictionalization on the recipient, as the efficacy of fictionalization operates beyond reason and logic—that is, the connection of fictionalization to the psychological, emotional, and affective aspect rather than the rational one. The psychological aspect is strongly present in Avicenna's conception of fictionalization. Avicenna says: 'The imaginative (al-mukhayyil) is speech by which the soul is moved, so that it expands toward certain matters and contracts from others, without deliberation, thought, or choice; in sum, it is affected by a psychological, non-intellectual emotion, whether the statement is believed to be true or not. For its being believed true is other than its being imaginative or not imaginative. For one may believe a certain statement to be true and yet not be affected by it; but if it is uttered again and in another manner, the soul is affected by it in obedience to fictionalization, not to conviction. For emotion often takes effect without producing conviction, and perhaps what is known to be false may be imaginative"²⁹.

As for Arabic rhetorical studies, they have greatly benefited from the philosophical conceptions of fictionalization (takhyīl), which gave them a kind of specificity and distinction. The approach to fictionalization in Arabic rhetoric becomes clear when we examine the declarative sentence (al-jumlaḥ al-khabariyyah) in terms of truth/falsehood (ṣidq/kidhb). Some describe the statement as false (kādhīb) because it contradicts reality, while others consider it to contradict the speaker's belief. Whether in this position or that, the truth-value of speech is what grants it legitimacy for circulation. However, this non-truthfulness managed to find for itself a place or a space that attracted an audience of recipients, and it has been attended to through various textual discourses that all agree on this non-truth-value, which is fictionalization (takhyīl) "³⁰.

Thus, discussion of fictionalization (takhyīl) continues to expand with the developments in the field of human sciences and the qualitative leap in the domain of methodologies and procedural and analytical tools. We find that the concept of fictionalization opens itself to numerous modern fields of knowledge, and in this context it registers a strong turning point, as Gérard Genette undertook a re-examination of the term 'fictionalization' within a fundamental and general concept related to literariness (littérarité), whereby he considers it 'a linguistic operation and a discursive practice that has its own specificities. It is a linguistic act linked to a purpose and a function, and the finality of the utterance of fictionalization does not respond to any of the conditions (truthfulness, commitment, and the capacity to justify the seriousness of the utterance)—that is, the correctness of its correspondence to what it refers to. The fictional utterance is organized by a formula of claim (pretension); it is an assertion and an illusion that

²⁸-See: Aḥmad 'Abd al-Fattāḥ al-Malawī, *Commentary of al-'Allāmah al-Malawī on al-Sullam of al-Akhḍarī in Logic* (Sharḥ al-'Allāmah al-Malawī 'alā al-Sullam li-l-Akhḍarīfi 'Ilm al-Mantiq), Muḥammad 'AlīṢubayḥ and His Sons Press, Al-Azhar Square, Egypt, n.d. (no date), n.p. (no publisher details), p. 75.

²⁹-IbnSīnā (Avicenna), *Kitāb al-Shifā'* (The Book of Healing), within *The Art of Poetry* (Fann al-Shi'r), p. 161, quoted in: Sa'īdJabbār, *From Narrativity to Fictionality* (Min al-Sardiyyahilā al-Takhayyuliyyah), p. 45.

³⁰-See: Sa'īdJabbār, *From Narrativity to Fictionality* (Min al-Sardiyyahilā al-Takhayyuliyyah), Ikhtilāf Publications, Algeria, 1st ed., 2013, p. 46.

claims to correspond to reality or the referent"³¹, "That is, what it refers to. Gérard Genette's view of fictionalization (takhyīl) can be summarized in the following observations: "³²

- Fictionalization is a literary mode that includes two types: narrative and drama, from a generic classificatory perspective, as it examines the structural and semantic characteristics of mode and genre. Fictionalization here is a semantic manifestation more than a formal one.

- Fictionalization is an important element for establishing literariness, and it is also the most specific characteristic of language.
- Fictionalization is a linguistic operation; it is a linguistic act with its own specificities and structural and semantic articulations, as it operates at the artistic level of language.
- Truth in fictionalization is an artistic and fictional truth, which cannot be addressed using logical mechanisms or objective scientific and rational principles. It is a discourse that establishes its own logic and determines the nature of the truth it seeks and intends.
- Fictionalization belongs to the category of utterances whose truth or falsehood cannot be verified. It is a figurative, non-declarative utterance, and the reference of the fictional utterance is representational rather than denotational; the referent here is imaginary and fictional, not real and actual.
- Fictionalization is a representational act that combines the thing represented and its image; it appropriates the thing represented and leaves only the imagined representative image.

This is with regard to Gérard Genette. If we follow Umberto Eco's approach, the matter is different, especially since the latter, in the narrative domain, employs possible worlds (mondes possibles), while recognizing the difficulty of doing so, because the philosophical and logical context with which the 'theory of possible worlds' is associated is entirely different from the narrative context in which this theory has been invested. Eco presents us with a definition of the possible world, saying: 'The possible world is a state of affairs expressed by a set of propositions in which each proposition is either A or not A. It is a world composed of a set of individuals endowed with properties, and since these properties or predicates are actions, the possible world can also be viewed as a course of events. And since this course is not necessary but possible, it must necessarily be related to the propositional attitudes declared, believed, or desired by someone"³³.

Through this description that Umberto Eco conceives regarding the possible world in the narrative domain, we find ourselves before a hypothetical, probable world that exists in parallel to the actual world. The possible world is not an actual world, because the text that describes the state of affairs or this course of events is 'a linguistic strategy aimed at provoking the interpretations of the Model Reader. Just as this interpretation appears in the

³¹-al-MuṣṭafāSalām, "Fictionalization in Contemporary Critical Thought" (al-Takhyīlfi al-Fikr al-Naqdī al-Mu'aṣir), *Journal of Rhetoric and Literary Criticism*, Morocco, Issue No. 2, July 2015, p. 65.

³²-See: Ibid., p. 66.

³³-al-MuṣṭafāSalām, *Fictionalization in Contemporary Critical Thought*, p. 67.

relationship between the text and the Model Reader, thus it can be said that the fictional text is a mechanism for producing possible worlds"³⁴.

Thus, the investigation of possible worlds is at the same time an investigation of fictional worlds, because possible worlds operate upon and include the language of fictional worlds in their connection to the actual world to which they refer, if it exists. Accordingly, we can identify three possible worlds in the narrative domain, namely: "³⁵.

The Narrative World: This is the first world that the reader discovers, where he finds himself before a specific narrative text. This world, declared by the author, is presented in the form of a sequence of states of affairs, according to the temporal logic with which it operates. The narrative worlds existing within this narrative text are not considered independent worlds in themselves; rather, they may be states of the same possible world. Thus, the reader has the right to compare between the state existing within the narrative world and the state existing outside the narrative world, or states belonging to his own world. From here, the reader anticipates the narrative sequences he receives; they may contradict him, compelling him to change and interpret them, or the reader may anticipate the narrative sequences and they may confirm what he expected or what was likely to occur, up to the last sequence in the narrative text"³⁶.

The Reader's World: We find that the fictional text becomes an object of activation and becomes incomplete. The existence of the text presupposes the participation of the Model Reader to complete the signification of the fictional text, for the text is nothing but "a fabric of blank spaces, gaps that must be filled. The one who emits it conjectures that these (gaps) will be filled, so he leaves them blank for two reasons: first, that the text represents a lazy (or economical) mechanism that lives on the surplus value of meaning that the receiver has introduced into the text"³⁷, this means that the reader is responsible for contributing—through filling the gaps and blanks—for which the interpretive initiative is left to him. That is, the possible worlds constructed in the text are intended by the author to fulfill the reader's horizon of expectations and to align with his anticipations. However, the reader of the text can go beyond this horizon set by the author. Umberto Eco 'leaned toward the idea of interaction between text and reader, thereby transcending the one-sided view that privileges either the pole of reader response or the pole of textual agency"³⁸.

"In contrast, Wolfgang Iser stands on a unique experience, as he went beyond some old presuppositions that view fictionalization as a distinctive feature of literary discourse. Thus, for a long time we have found literary texts defined as fictional texts, for the fictional text is the

³⁴- Ibid., pp. 67–68.

³⁵-See: Ibid., p. 68.

³⁶- Ibid., p. 68.

³⁷-Umberto Eco, *The Reader in the Story* (Lector in Fabula), trans. AnṭwānAbūZayd, Arab Cultural Center, Morocco, 1st ed., 1996, p. 63.

³⁸-AḥmadYūsuf, *Systemic Reading: The Authority of Structure and the Illusion of Conversation* (al-Qirā'ah al-Nasaqiyyah: Sulṭat al-BunyahwaWahm al-Muḥādathah), Ikhtilāf Publications, Algeria, 1st ed., 2007, p. 26.

text that has no referent other than itself"³⁹, and because this definition, which adheres to the old distinction between fictionalization and reality as a referential framework, will not benefit us much, this led Iser to go beyond these definitions and old presuppositions that are built on defining fictionalization in terms of its divergence from reality. Since 'the literary text is a mixture of reality and types of fictionalization, it therefore generates an interaction between the given and the imagined"⁴⁰, It is thus preferable to avoid the old opposition between them. Among the important observations in Iser's study is his replacement of the dichotomy of the real/the fictional with a triad of reality, fictionalization, and the imaginary. For Iser, the literary text is nothing but the interaction of these three elements (the real, the fictional, and the imaginary).

Accordingly, the literary text is the product of interaction and interrelation between the real, the fictional, and the imaginary. The real element refers to the empirical world, which is a 'given' world placed at the disposal of the literary text, and it generally presents the multiple referential fields and epistemological, cultural, political, religious, social, and historical systems... It is the referential field of the text, and it is of an extra-textual nature"⁴¹. As for the fictional element, it is an intentional act, and it possesses all the characteristics of an event. Thus, Iser provides us with a definition of fictionalization as 'a linguistic procedure derived from the figurative power of language and from the representational capacity of the human mind. Consciousness of the universe and its perception are embodied in the form of conceptions and representations; it is, in other words, a hypothetical possibility in which what exists is positioned after having been represented"⁴². This definition tends to make the specific nature of fictionalization the imaginary, which is the imaginary image generated by the act of fictionalization that has exercised its influence on reality. It is that thing which we cannot touch nor recognize in reality, nor can we obtain it in fictionalization itself—that is, the sum of elements transformed from their referents and transferred from their original systems, through artistic, linguistic, rhetorical, and aesthetic tools in the human mind. This means that the psychological mental state is part of the conception of the aesthetics of literature and its interpretation"⁴³.

Since every text is permeated by a large number of elements that can be identified, these elements are selected from reality, social systems, references, norms, images of the world... and others. Once they are transferred 'from reality into the text, it is precisely the reproduction of these elements within the fictional text that brings out the aims, attitudes, and experiences that are not specifically part of the reality being reproduced. Thus, these elements appear in

³⁹-See: Wolfgang Iser, *The Fictional and the Imaginary: Toward a Literary Anthropology* (Das Fiktive und das Imaginäre: Perspektivenliterarischer Anthropologie), trans. ḤamīdLaḥmīdānī and al-Jalālī al-Kadīyah, al-Najāḥ al-Jadīdah Press, Casablanca, 1st ed., 1998, p. 7.

⁴⁰-Ibid., p. 7.

⁴¹-See: Ibid., p. 29.

⁴²-al-MuṣṭafāSalām, *Fictionalization in Contemporary Critical Thought*, p. 71.

⁴³-See: al-MuṣṭafāSalām, *Fictionalization in Contemporary Critical Thought*, pp. 69–71.

the text as products of a fictional act"⁴⁴. In this way, Iser defines for us the nature of the fictional act as follows"⁴⁵:

"- **Border-Crossing (Transgression)**: This relation lies in what is extracted from the specific nature of the fictional act. Whenever real elements are transferred into the text, they acquire other significations, and are thus driven to transcend and detach themselves from their original nature.

- **Infraction (Violation)**: It shapes impressions concerning systems and orders that quickly vanish or change.
- **Intentionality**: The act of fictionalization is linked to intentionality, and it has a specific message. It makes the impossible or the improbable take on an image or form through which it can be perceived.

The fictionalization that we aim to approach in this study is a fictionalization 'associated with factual narratives (récitsfactuels) that manifest in their primary form as narratives that produce what occurred and work to document it, because the function of fictionalization here acquires a semantic specificity by adding to events and facts implicit connotations far removed from their natural signification, which are derived from the general context in which the text"⁴⁶ was produced.

Accordingly, fictionalization (takhyīl) is an essential component of the literariness and artistry of the literary text, for 'the fictional coexists alongside the real in an interactive and interwoven manner, contributing to the production of new signification that is conveyed through a communicative message ⁴⁷ aimed at formulating a new reality for an alternative, missing world. However, its constitutive structure requires the presence of other elements, according to what Iser proposed, namely: the real, the fictional, and the imaginary.

The Concept of Historical Imagination:

Ever since humanity knew the novel, questions and inquiries have been raised daily about the nature of the novel and history, and about the relationship between them. Thus, this duality has remained a subject occupying narratology and modern critical studies. We find that 'AbdAllāhIbrāhīm, in his book entitled *Historical Imagination: Narrative, Empire, and Colonial Experience*, calls for a shift from the term "historical novel" to a more precise term, "historical imagination" (al-takhayyul al-tārīkhī). This is in order to transcend the problem of literary genres, their boundaries, and their generic functions, whereby the duality of novel and history is deconstructed and re-integrated into a new narrative identity that is not bound to either of them. It also revisits the question of the extent to which narrative imaginings are subject to the principle of correspondence with historical references, by opening up to a writing that does not carry historical facts nor define them. Rather, it seeks its capacity to contain the past through the theses and constraints of the future, and searches for symbolic representations between them, and through the revelation of reflections, destinies, tensions, value collapses, and grand

⁴⁴-Wolfgang Iser, *The Fictional and the Imaginary*, p. 8.

⁴⁵- See: al-MuṣṭafāSalām, *Fictionalization in Contemporary Critical Thought*, p. 79.

⁴⁶-Sa'īdJabbār, *From Narrativity to Fictionality*, p. 63.

⁴⁷-Ibid., p. 62.

aspirations, it makes all of this an organizational framework for its events and significations. All these grand trajectories are proposed by 'AbdAllāhIbrāhīm in the term "historical imagination," whereby that narrative writing is liberated from a position whose generic boundaries were restricted, toward expansive horizons of writing open to the past and the present⁴⁸:

"In this context, 'AbdAllāhIbrāhīm defines 'historical imagination' (al-takhayyul al-tārīkhī), saying: it is 'historical material shaped by narrative, which has been severed from its documentary and descriptive function and has come to perform an aesthetic and symbolic function. Historical imagination does not refer to the facts of the past, nor does it determine them, nor promote them; rather, it draws inspiration from them as interpretive pillars for its events. It is the product of the interactive relationship between narrative reinforced by imagination and history supported by facts, but it is a third composite different from both"⁴⁹.

And by this definition, we find that it determines for us the place of 'historical imagination' in the borderlands between the historical and the imaginary, thus arising in a free zone whose components are derived from one another, and which formed a new, multifaceted configuration"⁵⁰, this is achieved through texts whose historical material has been rewoven, thereby conforming to the conditions of literary discourse. They are detached from their real, factual contexts, then integrated and inserted into metaphorical frameworks. Thus, it is the invention of a plot for historical material that transforms it into narrative material. This plotting, in turn, brings about a reconciliation between events and their various contexts, mediating between two opposing poles: harmony and dissonance. This is what Paul Ricoeur termed 'narrative identity'—the focal point where exchange, blending, intersection, and intertwining between history and fiction occur through narrative. The result is a new formation capable of expressing human life better than either history alone or literary narrative by itself could ever do"⁵¹.

The researcher AmnaBelali has attempted to define 'historical imagination' by distinguishing it from 'historical interpretation.' She observes that in 'historical imagination,' 'the novelist leans toward imagining possible historical events within a real historical framework. The narration proceeds from the general outlines of the historical material, while the imagination is occupied with producing the details and particularities that fill that framework. History here begins where the novel ends"⁵².

Here we are faced with what might be called the clothing of history with the idea that the novelist puts forward and from which he departs. As for 'historical interpretation,' it is defined for us as that in which 'some writers lean toward taking pre-existing historical material and working on the historical event, figure, or subject, interpreting it in ways that serve their purposes. We thus read history, but from the novelist's perspective, which directs the reader

⁴⁸-See: 'AbdAllāhIbrāhīm, *Historical Imagination*, p. 5.

⁴⁹-Ibid., p. 5.

⁵⁰-Same reference, p. 6

⁵¹-See: Same reference, pp. 60–67.

⁵²-AmnaBelali, *The Algerian Novel between the Imagination of History and Its Interpretation*, Proceedings of the Fifth Literary Bahah Forum, 1433 AH, p. 257.

toward events or traits of characters that differ from what the recipient had previously known. That is, he modifies them, questions them, and engages in dialogue with some of their issues, possibly turning the main text into a margin and the margin into a main text"⁵³.

In this mode of novelistic writing, history precedes the novel, unlike the first mode. However, despite the apparent difference between 'historical imagination' and 'historical interpretation,' they represent two sides of the same coin. Historical imagination is fundamentally built upon foregrounding the artistic and aesthetic dimension of the novel, whereas historical interpretation is, in essence, an imagination open to multiple readings and interpretations that furnish the production of the ideological, intellectual, and cognitive dimension of the novel.

Conclusion:

In conclusion, this article aims to explore the dialectical relationship between the novel and history, and to interrogate the most significant boundaries and definitions in order to draw a clear picture of this literary genre—the historical novel.

This article has reached the following findings:

1. The relationship between the novel and history is an open and highly complex one, owing to the very nature of each. The novel is an imaginative, artistic, and aesthetic discourse, while history is a referential and factual discourse.
2. Novelistic discourse is imaginative and fulfills a range of aesthetic and artistic functions; however, it possesses a distinctive characteristic in that it establishes a strong connection with historical discourse.
3. The historical novel is a literary discourse that engages horizontally with a pre-established historical discourse, attempting to reproduce it novelistically within contemporary parameters that do not conflict with the fundamental givens of historical discourse.
4. Imagination is an essential component of the literariness and artistic quality of the novel, as it merges with the real in an interactive and interwoven manner that contributes to the production of new significations.
5. Historical imagination is fundamentally built upon foregrounding the artistic and aesthetic dimension of the novel, whereas historical interpretation is, in essence, an imagination open to multiple readings and interpretations that furnish the production of the ideological, intellectual, and cognitive dimension of the novel.

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