

An Interdisciplinary Analysis of the Function of Narrative Duration in the Representation of Resistance Based on Gérard Genette's Theory: A Case Study of the Novel *Satā'ir al-'Atmah*

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Introduction

Time is essential to narrative, shaping our understanding of experience and identity (Rimmon-Kenan, 2008). Narrative inherently unfolds in time; without it, structure and intelligibility are lost (Asa Berger, 2001). Genette's systematic framework of narrative time—order, duration, and frequency—remains foundational in narratology (Ahmadi, 1996; Lothe, 2009). By distinguishing story time from text time, he enabled a systematic reading of narrative structure. Duration, which governs narrative pace and rhythm, operates through four types: descriptive pause, ellipsis, summary, and scene. These techniques allow authors to omit, condense, expand, or suspend time, thereby shaping reader perception and emotional engagement. This study analyzes duration's function in representing the lived experience of resistance in Al-Hawdali's "Sata'ir al-'Atma," which recounts ninety days of the protagonist Amer's imprisonment and interrogation. The novel's significance lies in its tense temporal setting and the author's skillful use of duration techniques to convey psychological pressure, oppressive prison atmosphere, and the protagonist's inner complexities. The central research questions are: (1) How and for what purpose does Al-Hawdali employ each type of duration? (2) Which type is most frequent, and what are its artistic and semantic implications? Using a descriptive-analytical method, this study demonstrates how duration functions as a meaning-generating device, shaping both the reading experience and empathy with the protagonist.

Methodology

This study employs a descriptive-analytical method based on Gérard Genette's theory of narrative time. Genette, one of the most influential figures in narratology, introduced a systematic framework for analyzing time in narrative through three main components: order, duration, and frequency. By distinguishing between "story time" (the chronological sequence of events) and "text time" (the order and manner in which events are presented in the narrative), he demonstrated how authors manipulate time to create specific effects. Among these components, "duration" governs the pace and rhythm of the narrative by regulating the relationship between the length of time an event takes in the story and the length of text devoted to it. Duration is realized through four main techniques: descriptive pause (where narrative time halts for detailed description), scene (where narrative time equals story time, typical of dialogue), summary (where narrative time is condensed), and ellipsis (where narrative time is omitted entirely). This study specifically focuses on the component of duration and its four subtypes, examining how they function within the novel "Sata'ir al-'Atma." The entire novel (176 pages) was read and analyzed as a complete corpus, and all instances related to the four types of duration were extracted and categorized.

Results and Discussion

In "Sata'ir al-'Atma," Al-Hawdali uses all four duration types across 176 pages covering 90 days of Amer's imprisonment. Narrative pace varies—ellipsis and summary create positive acceleration, while descriptive pause and scene produce negative or equal pace. The author omits minor events and elaborates on significant ones through scene and descriptive pause, thereby indicating their relative importance within the plot. By slowing the pace, he emphasizes key events; by accelerating, he signals lesser importance. In response to the second question, descriptive pause has the highest frequency. Throughout the novel, the author describes characters such as the four interrogators, the judge, the female interrogator, Tawfiq Muhammad, Nabil, and Ibrahim, familiarizing the audience with them so that the reader can visualize them throughout the story. Alongside character descriptions, he also describes spaces and places such as the prison cell, the bathroom, the prison yard, the courtroom, the moment of the operation, and so on, making them tangible and vivid for the reader. The author also details Amer's various states—fatigue, torment, pain, and torture—in great detail, allowing the reader to deeply empathize with his suffering and psychological turmoil. After descriptive pause, scene has a high frequency, with Amer shown in dialogue with the four interrogators, Nabil and Ibrahim, and Tawfiq Muhammad. During these dialogues, the narrator has a minimal presence, intervening mostly to describe the characters' states or to establish atmosphere between conversations, meaning that narrative speed is almost identical to event time. This technique lends credibility and immediacy to the interactions, making the reader feel as though they are witnessing the events firsthand. Ellipsis, which is predominantly explicit in this novel, appears through precise indications of time passage—such as "a week passed" or "ten days passed"—thereby omitting repetitive or uneventful periods during which no significant action occurs.

Conclusion

This study applies Genette's concept of duration to the novel "Sata'ir al-'Atma." The findings reveal that Al-Hawdali employs all four types of duration: descriptive pause, ellipsis, summary, and scene. Descriptive pause, the most frequent, details the prison atmosphere and characters' psychological states. Scene maintains a pace equal to real time in dialogues, with minimal narrator intervention. Explicit ellipsis omits repetitive events, while summary condenses longer periods. By manipulating narrative speed, the author transforms duration from a technical device into a meaning-generating tool for conveying anxiety, endurance, and psychological complexities of resistance. This study offers a model for analyzing resistance narratives in contemporary Arabic literature.

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