

Narrative Mechanism in the Essays of Wahy al-Qalam: A Study on the Limits of Intertextual Overlap Between the Essay and the Short Story

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1. Abstract:

This study falls within contemporary critical approaches that seek to reconsider the concept of literary genre by tracing manifestations of intergeneric overlap within literary discourse. It takes Wahy al-Qalam by Mustafa Sadiq al-Rafi'i as its applied field, considering it a prominent example of prose writing that transcends the traditional boundaries separating the essay from the short story.

The study starts from the hypothesis that literary genre has become a flexible system based on interaction and hybridity, a phenomenon clearly reflected in al-Rafi'i's texts, which blend the reflective nature of the essay with the narrative structure of the short story. The essays under study present their ideas through various narrative techniques such as event construction, character formation, dialogue usage, and the exploitation of time and space, granting them a distinct narrative vitality. These texts are built upon a dual structure that combines thought and narration, where the idea becomes a semantic nucleus around which narrative elements are constructed, achieving a form of integration between the contemplative and the storytelling dimensions.

2. Introduction:

The concept of literary genre is one of the critical notions that has undergone significant development in modern literary studies. It has shifted from traditional classifications based on the general formal categorization of texts to a more complex understanding that takes into account the internal features of the text as well as its aesthetic and communicative functions. This concept has thus become a theoretical framework for understanding literary genres as dynamic systems in which boundaries overlap and intersect within literary discourse.

Within this context, the essay emerges as one of the most prominent prose forms associated with the writer's intellectual and emotional experience. It is based on the unity of an idea and its condensation within a linguistic structure that combines persuasion and aesthetic pleasure. Similarly, the short story is characterized by its focus on a specific event and a unified aesthetic

effect, making it one of the closest narrative genres to the essay in terms of length and the limitation of experience, despite clear differences in structure and function.

With the development of modern Arabic prose writing, the phenomenon of genre hybridization has become increasingly evident, especially between the essay and the short story. The boundaries between them are no longer rigid; instead, texts have taken on a hybrid form that combines narration and reflection, narrative structure and intellectual discourse. Wahy al-Qalam by Mustafa Sadiq al-Rafi'i stands as a prominent example of this overlap, presenting essayistic texts with a clear narrative dimension in which elements of the short story intersect with essay construction. This opens the way for a critical reading that explores the mechanisms and aesthetic limits of this intergeneric interaction.

Accordingly, this study aims to analyze the narrative dimension in the essays of Wahy al-Qalam by identifying its core elements (event, character, time, and place) and examining how they are employed within the essay structure. This will help determine the nature of the relationship between the essay and the short story and clarify the limits of their overlap in al-Rafi'i's literary experience.

3. The Essay with a Narrative Dimension in Wahy al-Qalam: Toward a Reading of the Interaction between Literary Genre and the Elements of the Short Story

The concept of literary genre has evolved alongside critical practice itself; it has moved from simple traditional conceptions based on the general classification of texts to a more complex notion that takes into account their internal features as well as their aesthetic and communicative functions. The modern term was introduced to frame this transformation and to help scholars understand forms of literary expression and distinguish between their patterns. The term genre is relatively modern in critical discourse. Before the eighteenth century, the terms used to express its meaning were Kinds or Species. The term genre originates from the Latin word *genus*, which in some cases refers to a kind, sort, or species, but in other contexts a species is considered a branch of genus, whose root is *genus* and *gignere* (to beget) or, in the passive form, "to be born." In this latter sense, the term refers both to a category or group and to an individual work as well¹.

The essay is considered one of the most prominent prose genres that has acquired a distinguished position in modern literature, due to its flexibility of expression and its capacity to accommodate various human and intellectual experiences. It is a broad space where emotion meets thought, and the subjective intersects with the objective, in a style that combines the artistic with the intellectual. It is a "sentimental experience through which the writer expresses in prose a single emotional state or a phase of a single state, in a few limited pages, whose words and paragraphs converge around a direct impulse or what this impulse generates in the writer's psyche, conveying to the reader his emotional response along with accompanying thoughts, reflections, and impressions, in beautiful images drawn from the writer's imagination, with a life derived from sincerity, and behind all of this a talent that transforms the experience into a life experience."²

Literary prose constitutes a fertile field for the intermingling and interaction of literary genres, as the boundaries between them are not based on absolute separation but rather on intersection

and adjacency. The essay is one of those genres that establishes external relations and resists closure, absorbing multiple characteristics. It overlaps with the short story in some of its artistic features, and it also intersects with oratory in its persuasive and communicative dimension, while each genre retains its own stylistic and expressive identity. Thus, “the essay and the short story meet in length and in the limitation of experience, but differ in that the essay is freer in form, more spontaneous, broader in subject matter, and more closely tied to subjectivity; it also meets oratory in brevity, emotionality, and addressing others, but differs in that it is less intense emotionally, is not delivered orally, and treats the reader as a responsive friend, thus avoiding an overly emphatic tone.”³

It is worth noting that the concept of literary genre has moved beyond simple formal classification and has become a complex theoretical framework in which linguistic, social, and aesthetic dimensions intersect. Modern studies have gone beyond the classical understanding that linked genre to the binary of form and content, instead viewing it as a system of relations within literary discourse determined by contexts of use. Sa‘id ‘Alloush presents definitions of genre that highlight its dimension as a living and evolving organization of literary forms. According to him, literary genre:⁴

Refers to a type of discourse identified according to social and linguistic criteria.

Is characterized as an organic organization of literary forms.

Allows for the distinction between two types of genres: major genres and minor genres.

The theory of literary genres is based on two fundamental axes: a classical axis that relies on the binary opposition of form and content, which is, in some aspects, a non-scientific definition, and another axis that includes certain categories of literary discourse such as comedy and tragedy.

Literary genres reveal multiple worlds through the concepts of reality and narrative sequencing. It should be noted that the literary map has witnessed significant expansion with the development of expressive forms, especially in the field of prose. Cultural and social transformations have produced new writing patterns that express the needs of modern individuals with greater flexibility and freedom. As a result, these modern literary forms have gained an increasingly important position alongside poetry and theatre, and they require critical attention that matches their presence and influence, such as biography, essay, and reflective prose.⁵

The essay is one of the literary forms most closely connected to the writer’s self and intellectual-emotional experience. It undergoes stages of formation and maturation within the writer’s consciousness; it is the product of a continuous interaction between thought, experience, and reading. This makes it a coherent

structure based on a central idea from which multiple elements branch out. Its specificity lies in being an art form that combines intellectual depth with aesthetic dimension. The essay is built upon “an idea in the writer’s mind that remains there for a period of time, during which it grows and develops until it takes a proper shape. During this period of growth, it is nourished by the writer’s observations, diverse readings, and personal experiences. Hence, the essay relies on storytelling, examples, and allusions alongside acquired material. All of this takes its final form in accordance with the writer’s psychological state. This means that the writer determines

the project of the essay before writing it, so that all its material, of different kinds, is directed toward clarifying a single idea in all its aspects. At the same time, while the writer is keen on the coherence and strength of the essay, he is also keen on entertaining the reader.”⁶

The essay in its modern form was shaped through the interaction of Arabic literature with its European counterpart, where it moved from extended forms close to the “epistle” (risāla) to a more condensed and focused structure. This transformation highlighted the essay’s distinctiveness as an art based on selecting an idea and treating it in depth without exhaustive coverage, which gave it a greater capacity for influence and aesthetic pleasure, making it one of the most prominent prose genres in modern literature. This is confirmed by ‘Izz al-Din Ismail, who states: “The first use of the word ‘essay’ appeared when Montaigne published his essays in 1850; however, the word ‘essay’ was in fact closer to what was known in classical Arabic literature as the risāla (epistle)—not the personal or administrative letter, but the epistle that deals with a subject through research, such as the epistles of the Brethren of Purity (Ikhwan al-Safa). It was therefore lengthy, often filling dozens of pages. As for the essay in its modern artistic form, it is characterized by brevity, because it does not attempt to encompass all facts and ideas related to its subject as Locke did in his *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, but rather selects one aspect or at most a few aspects of it for consideration. Here lies its artistic value, because the author must choose these aspects in such a way that he can present them to his readers in an engaging manner.”⁷

The short story is one of the literary genres that is difficult to define precisely due to the interweaving of its artistic elements and the diversity of its components. It is not merely a presentation of an event or a description of a situation; rather, it depends on a coherent narrative structure in which several elements integrate to produce a clear artistic effect. This makes defining its characteristics a matter that requires careful analysis and precision. Researchers have acknowledged “the difficulty of defining the short story and the difficulty of determining the distinguishing features that must blend together in order to obtain an appropriate narrative structure (Sujet), since the mere presence of an

image or the description of a specific incident is not sufficient for us to conclude that we are dealing with a short story.”

Since the text is long and highly academic, I translated it carefully while preserving the critical tone and citations.

Since its emergence, the short story has been characterized by precise artistic features that distinguish it from other narrative genres. These features are closely linked to the idea of focus and unity of effect, as the short story tends to concentrate on a specific situation or event around which all its elements are constructed in harmony, producing a unified artistic impact on the reader. It is “an independent unit with an autonomous entity that cannot be divided into structure and texture, or form and content, nor can it be equated with anything outside its scope... All that exists in the short story—events, characters, and meanings—aims at portraying an integrated event that reveals a particular moment. Therefore, the short story is not merely a report or a set of reports; rather, it is an event that necessarily arises from a specific situation and develops toward a specific point at which the meaning of the event is completed.”⁸

Narration (sard) is a critical term concerned with the method of transferring a story from a real or imagined form into a linguistic form characterized by the author's stylistic features and carrying his cultural background. It is "a powerful means of reproducing and reconfiguring real and imagined events, distributing them within the folds of the narrative text, representing cultural references, and expressing symbolic visions and positions."⁹

Narration works to construct specific worlds, that is, "the construction of fictional worlds within which truth appears possible, or at least a potential state among other possible states."¹⁰ Thus, narration is a tool of human expression that formulates what we intend beyond the limits of everyday language. Although language is its medium, narration imitates through it human behavior, movements, actions, and places, which function as universally meaningful elements. Every narrative text, regardless of its type, contains two interrelated horizons: "the horizon of experience, which is oriented toward the past and must acquire a specific descriptive form that transfers the sequence of events into an actual temporal system; and the horizon of expectation, which is the future-oriented horizon through which the narrative text escapes according to the conventions of the genre itself... leaving the reader or recipient with the task of interpretation."¹¹

The essay has become an open space that interacts with various literary arts, benefiting from their techniques and expressive modes. This intertextuality has granted the essay greater flexibility and a wider capacity for influence, enabling

it to combine narration, description, dialogue, and poetic tone within an integrated artistic structure. "The essay has benefited from other arts, borrowing from biography and fiction the depiction of characters, from drama the dialogue, and from poetry its lyrical tone."¹²

Al-Rafi'i speaks about his experience, saying: "I have written little in fiction, if by that you mean the literary form conventionally called by this name. Yet I still do not see that I have placed all my books and essays except within a single story—the story of this mind in my head, and this heart within my chest."¹³

Al-Rafi'i is among those writers who tend to transcend traditional literary classifications, viewing their production as a unified intellectual and emotional experience manifested in multiple forms rather than separate genres. From this perspective, his vision reflects a particular awareness of writing that makes it an extension of a single internal experience rather than a commitment to a fixed artistic mold. He states: "I do not deny that fiction is a high form of literature, but in my view, this high literature only emerges by taking events and nurturing them in narrative form as children are raised, whether in knowledge or virtue. From this perspective, fiction is a school with established laws, refined methods, and a defined goal; it should only be undertaken by exceptional thinkers endowed with the ability to deliver decisive insight into the problems that life raises or that life itself provokes. Likewise, it belongs to eminent masters of expression who possess the power to translate between the human soul and life, and between life and its psychological materials. In both, life imagines and creates its finest poetry, reflects to produce its highest wisdom, and legislates to establish its most accurate laws."

In this passage I preserved academic tone, citations, and terminology accurately:

'Izz al-Din Ismail argues that the completeness of a narrative work depends on the availability of specific elements that ensure its formation as a literary genre with its own artistic features

and boundaries. He states that “there are events and actions that happen to people or are performed by them; thus emerges the second element, namely character. The occurrence of the event must necessarily take place in a time and place, which is the third element. Then there is the style through which the event is narrated, and the dialogue that takes place between characters. The final element is the idea or point of view, for every story necessarily presents a perspective on life and some of its problems. All the preceding elements are nothing but tools through which the story reveals the author’s way of viewing life, his understanding of it, and his general attitude toward it.”¹⁴

The book *Wahy al-Qalam* by Mustafa Sadiq al-Rafi‘i is not a collection of stories in the generic sense; its narrative contract does not define it as fiction. However, it includes essays with a strong narrative dimension, which involve a significant overlap between the boundaries of the essay and the short story. From this perspective, we have attempted to trace the elements of the short story (event, time and place, and character) contained within these essays.

1.3 The Event:

Narrative storytelling is considered one of the most prominent expressive forms that reflect human experience and interaction with reality. The short story is based on a precise organization that connects individual incidents within a coherent structure. The arrangement and sequencing of events follow a specific system that gives the story its distinctiveness and uniqueness. The course of the event varies according to the writer’s artistic vision. The event is composed of “a set of partial occurrences connected and organized in a specific way, which can be called the ‘plot.’ In every story, things must happen in a certain order. Just as things must happen, it is this order that distinguishes one plot from another. Events follow one line in a story and a different line in another.” The event is also defined as “a set of successive situations that constitute the story, or a series of narrated incidents presented artistically within an external framework.” These successive incidents and actions are linked through a plot governed by temporal and causal relationships that direct the movement of the story.

“Event (Action): a sequence of connected incidents characterized by unity and significance, unfolding through a beginning, middle, and end; a systemic organization of actions. In Aristotelian terms, the event is a transformation from bad fortune to good fortune or vice versa, and two events may form a larger one. In Barthes’ terminology, the event is a set of functions occupied by the same actor or actors; for example, the functions assigned to a subject in pursuit of a goal constitute what is called an event. The event is also action.”

The narrative event in the essay *Al-Yamamatān* represents a complex structure in which historical reference intertwines with imaginative artistic construction. Historical material related to the Islamic conquest of Egypt is reworked within a literary framework that imbues it with both human and symbolic dimensions.

The event begins from an explicit historical reference attributed to Muhammad ibn ‘Umar al-Waqidi regarding the conquest of Egypt by Amr ibn al-‘As, including the siege of the city of Bilbays and the capture of Armanusa, daughter of al-Muqawqis. However, the writer goes beyond the historical record, filling the “narrative gaps” left by the historian. He invents the character of Maria and makes her a central emotional focus through which the event shifts from a military occurrence into an inner human experience.

The event develops along a clear ascending trajectory, beginning with Maria's state of fear and anxiety resulting from the distorted image the Byzantines had constructed of the Arabs. Thus, the external event (military invasion) is transformed into an internal psychological event based on illusion and fear. The event then enters a phase of transformation through the dialogues of Armanusa, who presents a contrasting image of the Muslims, allowing a positive awareness to emerge. At this stage, the event shifts from a military conflict to an intellectual and value-based struggle between two visions of civilization and humanity.

With Maria's indirect encounter with Amr ibn al-'As, the event acquires an emotional dimension, as admiration turns into silent love. Here, the external event (the conquest) intertwines with the internal event (the experience of love), creating a semantic parallel between the "conquest of Egypt" and the "attempt to conquer Maria's heart." However, this trajectory remains incomplete and ends in a tragic climax represented by Maria's death, giving the event a clearly tragic tone.

The event concludes with the image of the dove embracing her eggs in the camp of Amr ibn al-'As. Although historically marginal, this incident becomes the semantic center of the text; it establishes a contrast between two opposing acts: war as a production of death, and the dove as a symbol of life and continuity. Through this contrast, the writer reinterprets the historical event, elevating it from mere occurrence to symbolic level, where the dove becomes a conceptual counterpart to Maria, and the entire event turns into a meditation on love, life, and destiny.

Thus, the event in *Al-Yamamatān* is not linear or simple; rather, it is a multi-layered structure: historical, psychological, intellectual, and symbolic. The writer succeeds in transforming it from a static historical report into a living narrative experience, in which reality and imagination, objectivity and subjectivity, are deeply intertwined, reflecting a high artistic ability to employ the narrative event in service of the essay's literary and intellectual vision.

2.3 Character:

It is worth noting that character in a narrative work is closely linked to the event, as there is no separation between them: "it is the performer and agent of the event, and it determines its course and direction. There is no character without an event, nor an event without a character, which confirms that the relationship between them is strong and extends as long as each of them exists. A writer cannot separate the character from the events of his story, nor can he allow the trajectory of the main character to deviate from the overall course of the event."¹⁵

The character, as a "paper being," has its boundaries shaped by its interaction with the narrative event. Its features are often revealed through its behavioral reactions to the situations and events it encounters within the narrative work. Accordingly, the character is considered one of the most important foundations

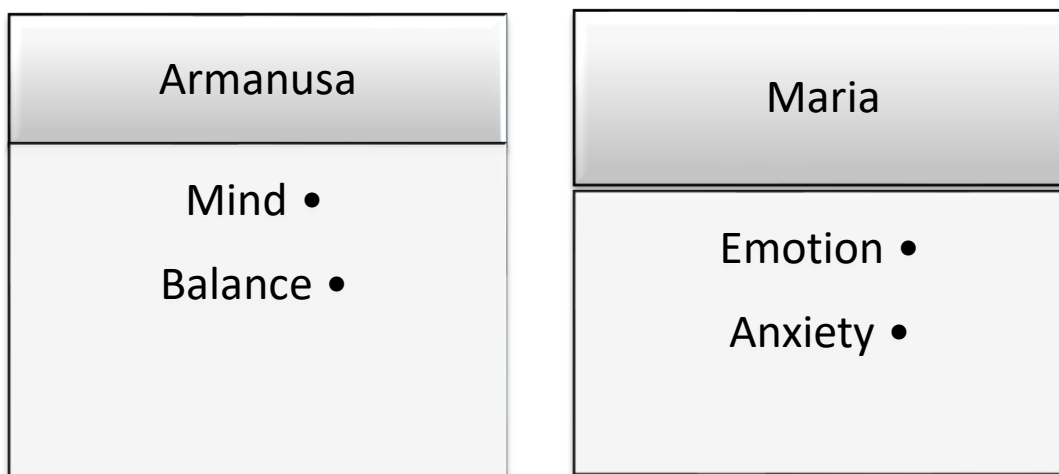
of narrative construction, since it is impossible to imagine events without characters who perform or interact with them. The features and dimensions of the character are shaped through "its close, continuous, and clear relationships with the events of the novel, regardless of the different contents they express. The more closely the character is connected to the events, the more the writer is able to unify the parts of the work into an integrated whole in which the organic unity of the entire work is achieved."¹⁶

In the essay *Al-Yamamatān*, the character forms a central structural and semantic axis, being constructed as both an intellectual and symbolic carrier that reflects the writer’s vision of the world.

It reveals a significant overlap between the essay and the short story, as the text does not merely recount a historical event linked to a figure from Islamic history—namely Amr ibn al-‘As—but rather reconfigures it imaginatively through characters that perform deep psychological and intellectual roles.

This referential diversity creates a balance between the real and the imaginary: historical characters provide the text with an illusion of factual authenticity, while fictional characters allow the writer greater freedom of shaping and interpretation.

The character “Maria,” who plays the role of Armanusa’s attendant, represents the narrative focal point:



She functions as a “consciousness heroine” rather than an “action heroine,” as she does not change the course of events as much as she reflects the psychological and intellectual transformations that constitute the core of the text.

This character moves from a stage of fear and hostility toward the Other (the Muslims), shaped by a distorted stereotypical image of Arabs, which she expresses in a tragic poetic discourse that amplifies her sense of danger. She then transitions into a stage of awareness through which she is able to reconsider her perceptions via dialogue with Armanusa, moving from emotional reaction to questioning and then understanding. Eventually, her feelings turn into admiration and then silent love for Amr ibn al-‘As; however, this love remains impossible, leading her to decline and ultimately to a tragic end.

Accordingly, the overall trajectory of the character is defined by a movement from illusion to knowledge, then to emotion, and finally to annihilation—a trajectory that reveals the depth of internal tension characterizing the modern literary character.

In contrast, the character of Armanusa represents a fixed, stable figure who functions as an intellectual guide. She is a rational and balanced character who helps correct Maria’s

perceptions and presents an interpretive discourse that reflects the writer's vision of Islamic civilization.

Her relationship with Maria is structured within a binary opposition.

This contrast in character construction deepens the semantic dimension of the text, as it reveals an internal conflict between two different visions of the world.

In addition to the main and supporting characters, we also find the presence of a historical figure represented by Amr ibn al-'As. He appears more as a moral model than as an active agent within the event. His presence is limited, yet it is influential in shaping perceptions of Muslims as a whole. He is portrayed as a Muslim commander who combined strength with morality, and as an example of a civilizational conquest grounded in Islamic values rather than violence.

Thus, the character of Amr ibn al-'As contributes to constructing an alternative image that works to deconstruct the stereotypical image formed by the Other about Muslims, exposing its falsity and limitations. This constitutes a profound semantic indicator that reveals the writer's vision and intellectual stance, which he embeds in a new, composite image of Islam and Muslims.

The essay *Al-Yamamatān*, as its title suggests, also relies on a symbolic character: the dove (*al-yamāmah*), which carries the symbolism of peace. It is the most important symbolic element in the essay, functioning as a central sign that condenses the text's vision of life, femininity, and love in contrast to war and death.

The dove appears on the narrative level as a secondary element linked to a real incident: when Amr ibn al-'As orders that his tent be left standing because a dove has laid its eggs there, and he shows mercy by refusing to disturb it.

The presence of this character is built upon several intertwined significations, the first of which is the meaning of life and continuity. On a broader symbolic level, the dove performs the function of reinterpreting the historical event; it shifts the narrative from the domain of military conquest to the domain of human reflection. The incident of leaving the tent standing—an ethical gesture—acquires a deeper meaning connected to the triumph of human values (mercy and the protection of life) within a context of war. Here, the dove becomes a universal symbol of life persisting despite violence, and an indication that the Islamic conquest aimed to revive life in souls rather than end it.

From this point, the character opens up to a third dimension: its oppositional relationship with Maria. The dove represents a possible image of happiness, while Maria represents its tragic counterpart. Both are “female,” yet the first possesses the object of her love (her eggs/life), whereas the second fails to realize her love and thus ends in decline and death. In this way, the dove becomes a “symbolic mirror” reflecting what Maria has lost, or what she could have been had emotional fulfillment been achieved.

The writer employs this symbol as a semantic closure for the text, elevating the event from the level of history to that of symbol, and granting the narrative a deep contemplative dimension that transforms *Al-Yamamatān* from a simple story into a reflective vision.

Thus, the functions of character in *Al-Yamamatān* are multiple: aesthetic, intellectual, and symbolic at the same time. Characters contribute to building the narrative dimension of the

text, while also conveying the writer's civilizational and ethical vision, transforming individual experience into a human significance with a universal perspective.

3.3 Narrative Time and Space:

First: Time

Time is a fundamental element in the narrative structure of the short story; no story is devoid of a temporal framework within which its events are organized. In modern fiction, time is subject to an artistic treatment that produces anachrony, through which temporal order is disrupted. The linear sequence of events is broken, and their arrangement is reshaped according to the writer's vision, in a way that serves the aesthetics of the text and enriches the reading experience.

In al-Rafi'i's essays, we notice a deconstruction of chronological linearity achieved through a return to the past to recall earlier events, a technique known as flashback (retrospection). In the essay "Dreams in the Palace," the narrator says: "His father was among those princes who were born with a sword's radiance in their blood, the brilliance of a crown, the pride of victory, and the dignity of domination and conquest; but the era of siege struck him, and power passed to others. Thus, the ruling capacities within him shifted from conquering land to purchasing land, and from building emirates to constructing buildings."¹⁷

The flashback spans a temporal space covering two generations, through which al-Rafi'i retrieves the history of the prince's father and his social transformations, revealing a complete civilizational shift. This reflects a transition from real authority to an illusory one, symbolized by titles such as "the prince" and "son of the prince." The writer constructs this retrospection through parallel binary oppositions that summarize the transformation between past and present: the prince moved from (conquering land to purchasing land) and from (building emirates to constructing buildings). Thus, the principality has vanished along with its glorious past, replaced by a present based on land acquisition and urban construction.

Similarly, in the essay *Al-Yamamatān*, al-Rafi'i initiates a return to a distant historical past, precisely situating it when he states: "It is mentioned in al-Waqidi's history that al-Muqawqis, the great ruler of the Copts in Egypt, married his daughter (Armanusa) to Constantine, the son of Heraclius, and provided her with wealth and attendants so that she might travel to him, and he would build with her in the city of Caesarea."¹⁸

This flashback takes us decades before the Islamic conquest, then establishes a temporal line that rises toward the present moment of narration. It thus fulfills a dual narrative function: it provides historical information while simultaneously preparing the dramatic trajectory that the new narrative will unfold.

This flashback takes us back decades before the Islamic conquest and then establishes a temporal line that rises toward the present moment of narration. It thus achieves a dual narrative function: it performs the act of historical reporting while simultaneously preparing the dramatic line that the new narrative will unfold.

Foreshadowing is a leap forward in time, that is, an anticipation of what has not yet occurred within the narrative time. In al-Rafi'i's writing, it functions as a tool of warning rather than mere reporting; it points to the fate awaiting the character if no change occurs.

In the essay “Al-Ṭufulatān” (The Two Childhoods), one of the most striking moments of foreshadowing appears in the speech of “Ja‘las” to “Ismat,” when he says to the pampered child: “You, son of the school, are as if you are a child made of paper and notebooks, not of flesh and blood, and as if your bones were made of chalk! You, son of the school, are the very person you will become after twenty years, and none knows but God how you will turn out.”¹⁹ Through Ja‘las’s voice, al-Rafi‘i sketches a blurred future for Ismat if he continues on this path of luxury and dependence. This foreshadowing is delivered through the voice of a street child who has experienced poverty, hunger, and need, which gives the scene a sharp dramatic irony. In the essay “Dreams in a Palace,” foreshadowing takes the form of a dream. Here, it hides behind the mask of a nocturnal vision, as the prince’s son sees in his dream an image of his expected future if he does not repent and abandon his current way of life—a future of poverty, homelessness, humiliation, and madness. The king addresses him in the dream with blunt clarity: “Woe to you! You have driven away the poor man, fearing that his germs might infect you and make you ill, not knowing that within every poor beggar there are other germs that corrupt blessing itself. If you honor him, they remain within him; but if you humiliate him, he shakes them off upon you. Today your blessing has perished, O prince!”²⁰ This statement is an explicit warning-based foreshadowing that inverts the logic of health and disease: the poor is not the source of infection; rather, humiliation itself is the true germ that destroys blessing. The most significant foreshadowing in the text is its open ending: “And who knows what will happen after this? Will the prince’s son go tomorrow to the mosque and turn to the poor, doing good to them, or will he go to his beloved who has rejected him, and buy her jewelry for ten thousand dinars?”²¹

Al-Rafi‘i also resorts to suspending narrative time through the use of descriptive pause techniques.

In the essay “Bint al-Basha” (The Pasha’s Daughter), description halts the progression of the narrative in the portrayal the narrator gives of the Pasha’s daughter’s beauty, when he says: “This woman had a radiant face, with a bright complexion like a rising moon... She was delicately proportioned, perfectly formed in the most exquisite manner; her body intertwined gracefully in a harmonious, almost geometrical elegance, rising above the beauty of other graceful women.”²²

This external description is then followed by a depiction of her psychological state after the tragedy that befell her, resulting in the loss of her infant: “A shattered, dimmed, and exhausted figure... shedding tears.”²³ Between the transition from external description to internal (psychological) description, the narrative draws upon real time while simultaneously suspending it.

The historical narration itself pauses at Armanusa’s arrival, giving way to a descriptive pause: “Armanusa had a maidservant of Byzantine origin named Maria, possessing a Greek beauty perfected by Egypt and touched by its enchantment, while the wise creator of beauty made it incomplete by making it Egyptian. She even overlooked the possibility that among the beauty of her women there might be a conqueror who completes it.”²⁴

The descriptive passages extend further in the essay “In the Blue Spring” across successive and developing pages. In describing the sea, it is said: “The sky appears to you upon the sea greater

than it is, as if you were looking at it from another sky rather than from the earth... In the beauty of the soul, everything becomes beautiful... and the small house turns into a palace because it is within the spaciousness of the soul.”

We also find the use of the dialogue scene technique, which is one of the narrative techniques closest to real-life time. Dialogue imitates living speech and gives the story an immediate presence. Al-Rafi‘i frequently incorporates dialogue in *Wahy al-Qalam*. In the essay “Between Two Rams,” he depicts a scene between a large ram and a young lamb, saying:

“The small one stirred from his sleep, and the ram said to him: It seems to me that you were just engaged in something important, so why are you swollen while you are here in the slaughterhouse and not in the pasture?

The young one said: O brother of my grandfather... I have realized that you have grown old and senile, and your saliva and judgment have become confused...!

The ram said: What is that, woe to you?

He said: You said that humans have brought upon us the white blade, and you described slaughter, skinning, and eating; then I fell asleep and saw in my dream that I attacked the man who brought us here... and I took the blade in my teeth and struck his throat until I slaughtered him, then I tore a piece of him and chewed it in my mouth; and I swear I found nothing more foul or disgusting than him!

Man enjoys eating us and feeds on us and lives off us: how fortunate we are to be of benefit and life to others... The elder said: You are right—by God—and in this we are wiser and nobler than man; for he spends his life taking for himself, fiercely competing for his share, and gives nothing except through coercion, domination, and fear. Come, O slaughterer, come take this flesh and this fat; come, O man, to give you something; come, O beggar...”²⁵

This dialogue constitutes a “scene” in the precise narrative sense, as time stops advancing to allow the two characters to engage in simultaneous interaction. Al-Rafi‘i employs this technique to infuse the idea with a dynamic, dialectical vitality that goes beyond what direct expository language can achieve.

The use of dialogue as an expressive device thus performs a function that expository essay writing alone cannot accomplish.

Second: Space in the Essays of Wahy al-Qalam

Space is an active force in constructing the meaning of a literary text, and an essential element in shaping its narrative structure.

A. The Familiar Space

The familiar space is the environment in which the narrator or character finds psychological safety and emotional belonging.

1. Nature as a Familiar Space

In *Wahy al-Qalam*, nature is transformed into a comforting embrace that provides the narrator with reassurance and inspiration. In the essay “In the Blue Spring,” it is said: “How beautiful the earth is along the edge of the two blues—the sea and the sky; the seated observer here almost believes himself to be drawn within a divine painting.”²⁶

Nature becomes a cosmic space that dissolves the boundaries between the self and existence. The sea and sky together form a familiar space because the narrator finds within them a correspondence between inner and outer worlds, between the soul and the universe.

In the essay “Spring,” nature is repeatedly presented as a refuge:

“In spring, the colors of the earth appear... and the colors of the soul appear... Water performs its work in nature, bringing forth the forms of plants, and blood performs its work, bringing forth the forms of dreams.”²⁷

Here, spring is a familiar space because it brings human beings into harmony with existence. The metaphor of blood and water deepens the connection between body and earth, and between place and life.

The mosque also plays the role of the only familiar space in “Dreams in a Palace.” Its peculiarity lies in its absence throughout most of the text; it is mentioned twice without the “prince’s son” ever reaching it. The narrator says: “One day he became bored with him [i.e., Satan], so he almost decided to abandon him and let him enter the mosque to pray with some righteous princes.”²⁸ Although the mosque is a familiar space, the character of the prince’s son remains disconnected from it, despite recognizing it as a spiritual refuge in which the self attains emotional balance.

The mosque reappears in the conclusion as an open question: “Will the prince’s son go tomorrow to the mosque and turn toward the poor to do good to them, or will he go to his beloved?”²⁹ Here, the mosque is not merely a religious space but a symbol of moral awareness, containment, and protection from the evils that afflict the soul.

B. The Hostile Space

The hostile space is the environment that threatens the character and constitutes an existential or psychological danger. The modern city, with its winds of change that have shaken social morals, is presented as a hostile space. This is evident in several of al-Rafi‘i’s texts, where he expresses his criticism of the material manifestations of Western civilization that invaded Egyptian cities. In this view, the modern city is a hostile space because it corrupts values, threatens identity, and pushes its youth toward alienation. Al-Rafi‘i treats this space symbolically, as it is embodied in streets, cafés, and gatherings that have become urbanized according to Western models.

The street in the essay “Dreams in a Palace” is a hostile space for the character of the “prince’s son.” It is a place where titles are not recognized and lineage has no value, reducing every individual to his actual worth. Thus, the “prince’s son” in the street becomes nothing more than a human being in rags: “Hardly did her eyes recognize him in his torn clothes, his poverty, and his misery, than she ordered him to be dragged away by his hands and pushed from behind.”³⁰

In al-Rafi‘i’s description of the prince’s son’s journey through the street, spatial stations accumulate to form a gradual trajectory of collapse: the shop of the courtesan → the doors of the shops → the marketplace of beggars → the road to the asylum.

Each station strips away a layer of illusion until he reaches the essence, bare of all falsehood. The classification of space is thus based on openness and closure, as we observe both open and closed spaces.

C. The Open Space:

The sea in Wahy al-Qalam represents a quintessential model of open space. In the essay “In the Blue Spring,” the sea becomes a cosmic metaphor for openness, contemplation, and liberation:

“The sky appears to you upon the sea greater than it is, as if you were looking at it from another sky rather than from the earth... and in the beauty of the soul, everything becomes beautiful.”³¹ In al-Rafi‘i’s vision, open space is associated with the expansion of the spirit and its liberation from the constraints of time and everyday existence. This boundless extension grants the self a wider space of freedom and simultaneously expands its inner horizons.

D. The Closed Space:

Closed spaces appear as containers of secrets, fear, and pain. In *Dreams in a Palace*, the palace functions as a closed space; however, it is an illusory one. It is not described through its physical dimensions but is instead evoked through indirect indicators: the luxurious bed at the end, courtesans, and jewelry worth ten thousand dinars. This indicates that it is a space that creates an illusion of safety while reinforcing vanity and arrogance.

Evidence of this lies in the prince’s son’s perception of the palace, as he sees it as “derived from those who make laws, not from those who submit to them.”³² Thus, the “palace” becomes an ideologically closed space before it is an architecturally closed one; it prevents its inhabitant from seeing and perceiving the truth.

Temporal paradox refers to a lack of correspondence between the order in which events occur and the sequence in which they are narrated. For example, a beginning may occur in the middle, followed by a return to earlier events, which constitutes an ideal model of temporal paradox.

In relation to the present moment, it is the instant in which continuous narration aligned with chronological time is interrupted, allowing narrative expansion. Temporal paradoxes may take us back to the past (retrospection, analepsis, flashback), and they have a specific scope or extension (they cover a certain duration of the story’s time). They also have a defined temporal dimension, as the portion of the story they cover constitutes a temporal distance from the present moment (see: Gerald Prince, *Dictionary of Narratology*, p. ...).

Analepsis (flashback): a temporal paradox that takes us back to the past relative to the present moment. It is the recollection of an event or events that occurred before the present moment, or before the point at which chronological narration is interrupted to allow for retrospective insertion. It can be considered a flashback scene. For example: “John became extremely angry, although he had promised himself years ago never to lose his temper, and he began shouting in a mad manner.” Flashback has a certain scope and duration. In another example: “Mary could not face the situation, although she had spent several hours preparing for it the previous day.” Here, the flashback spans several hours and extends back one day. Completing a flashback fills narrative gaps created by ellipsis in the narration, while repeated flashbacks reiterate past events³³

Prolepsis (foreshadowing): a temporal paradox oriented toward the future relative to the present moment (a shift from present to future). It refers to anticipation of an event or events that will occur after the present moment, or at the point where chronological narration is interrupted to allow for projection into the future (pause, future scene, prospective view). For example: “John was angry, but after several days he regretted his attitude, although at that

moment he did not think about the consequences and continued shouting.” Prolepsis has a limited scope and covers a specific duration of narrative time. It also has a defined temporal dimension. For instance: “Mary did not seem to notice it, but the next day she would think about it for several hours.” Here, prolepsis extends over several hours and a one-day span. Complementary prolepsis fills gaps caused by ellipsis, while repeated or preparatory prolepsis anticipates events that will later be narrated again.³⁴

Descriptive pause: a pause imposed by description. Not all narrative pauses are descriptive; some result from commentary. Moreover, not every description necessarily produces a pause in narration. For example, the sentence: “The hall was long and opened onto protruding balconies of a kind of courtyard surrounding it, on which service tables were placed,” constitutes a descriptive pause because it does not correspond to any progression in time or any change in the fictional world represented in Thomas Mann’s *The Magic Mountain*. In contrast, “After the fish, there was excellent decorated meat, then a course of vegetables, a roasted chicken, dessert, and finally cheese and fruit” does not constitute a descriptive pause within the same narrative³⁵.

4. Conclusion:

The study reached the following results:

Al-Rafi‘i’s experience in *Wahy al-Qalam* represents an advanced model of generic hybridity in modern Arabic prose writing, as he reconfigured the essay in light of narrative possibilities without losing its intellectual and reflective character.

The study confirmed that the concept of literary genre in modern criticism is based on interaction and hybridity rather than rigid separation, which is clearly manifested in *Wahy al-Qalam*.

The study revealed the presence of a coherent narrative structure within al-Rafi‘i’s essays, embodied in the elements of event, character, time, and space, which grants them a distinct narrative character.

Narrative elements (event, character, time, and space) in *Wahy al-Qalam* contribute to the production of meaning and the reinterpretation of historical and human reality.

Wahy al-Qalam combines literary essays with a complex textual structure that carries an aesthetic and intellectual vision based on transcending the boundaries separating literary genres, making it an open text with multiple structures and meanings.

The essays of *Wahy al-Qalam* constitute a complex expressive space in which idea and event coexist, and reflection and description intersect, forming a hybrid textual construction that combines intellectual and narrative sensibilities without abandoning its essayistic nature.

The intersection of the essay and the short story in al-Rafi‘i’s work is a conscious artistic choice aimed at achieving a composite literary form that unites thought and narration, thereby granting his texts a distinctive expressive and aesthetic power.

5. Footnotes:

Mustafa Sadiq ibn Abd al-Razzaq ibn Sa‘id ibn Ahmad ibn Abd al-Qadir al-Rafi‘i was a scholar of literature, a poet, and one of the leading writers. He originally came from Tripoli in the

Levant and was born in Bihteem in his maternal grandfather's house. He died in Tanta (Egypt). He suffered from deafness, so he used to write down what was meant to be communicated to him. His poetry is characterized by its pure diction, though somewhat austere in most of it, while his prose is of the highest quality.

Al-Rafi'i's works include: *Diwan al-Shi'r* (three volumes), *Tarikh Adab al-'Arab* (two volumes), *I'jaz al-Qur'an wa al-Balaghah al-Nabawiyyah*, *Tahta Rayat al-Qur'an*, *Rasa'il al-Ahzan*, *'Ala al-Sufud* (in which he responded to Abbas Mahmoud al-'Aqqad), *Diwan al-Nazrat*, *Al-Sahab al-Ahmar fi Falsafat al-Hubb wa al-Jamal*, *Hadith al-Qamar*, *Al-Ma'rakah* (a response to Dr. Taha Hussein's *Al-Shi'r al-Jahili*), *Al-Masakin*, *Awraq al-Ward*, and *Wahy al-Qalam* (three volumes) (see: Mustafa Sadiq al-Rafi'i, *Wahy al-Qalam*, Dar al-Kitab al-'Arabi, no edition, vol. 1, 2009, pp. 5–6).

¹ Mustafa Sadiq ibn Abd al-Razzaq ibn Sa'id ibn Ahmad ibn Abd al-Qadir al-Rafi'i was a scholar of literature, a poet, and one of the leading writers. He originally came from Tripoli in the Levant, and was born in Bihteem in his maternal grandfather's house. He died in Tanta (Egypt). He was afflicted with deafness, so he used to write down what was intended to be communicated to him. His poetry is characterized by its pure and refined diction, though it tends toward austerity in most of it, while his prose is considered of the highest standard.

²Al-Rafi'i's works include: *Diwan al-Shi'r* in three volumes, *Tarikh Adab al-'Arab* in two volumes, *I'jaz al-Qur'an wa al-Balaghah al-Nabawiyyah*, *Tahta Rayat al-Qur'an*, *Rasa'il al-Ahzan*, *'Ala al-Sufud* (in which he responded to Abbas Mahmoud al-'Aqqad), *Diwan al-Nazrat*, *al-Sahab al-Ahmar fi Falsafat al-Hubb wa al-Jamal*, *Hadith al-Qamar*, *al-Ma'rakah* (in which he responded to Dr. Taha Hussein regarding his book *al-Shi'r al-Jahili*), *al-Masakin*, *Awraq al-Ward*, and *Wahy al-Qalam* in three volumes (see: Mustafa Sadiq al-Rafi'i, *Wahy al-Qalam*, Dar al-Kitab al-'Arabi, no edition, vol. 1, 2009, pp. 5–6).

³ Ralph Cohen, "History and Genre," in Tzvetan Todorov et al., *The Poetics of Prose: Theory of Literary Genres*, trans. Khairy Douma, Dar Sharqiyyat, Cairo, 1st ed., 1997, p. 23.

⁴ Ali Jawad al-Tahir, *Introduction to Literary Criticism*, Arab Institute for Studies and Publishing, Beirut, 1st ed., 1979, p. 262.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 262.

⁶See: Sa'id 'Alloush, *Dictionary of Contemporary Literary Terms*, Dar al-Kitab al-Lubnani, Beirut / Souchpress, Casablanca, 1st ed., 1985, p. 223.

⁷ See: 'Izz al-Din Ismail, *Literature and Its Arts: Study and Criticism*, Dar al-Fikr al-Arabi, Cairo, 9th ed., 2013, p. 151.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 163.

⁹ *Ibid.*, same page.

¹⁰ Shaker Abd al-Hamid, *Psychological Foundations of Literary Creativity: The Short Story*, Egyptian General Book Organization, Cairo, 1992, p. 23.

¹¹ Rashad Rushdy, *The Art of the Short Story*, Anglo-Egyptian Bookshop, Cairo, n.d., p. 169.

¹² Saeed Yaqtin, *Speech and Narrative: Introduction to Arabic Narratology*, Casablanca: Arab Cultural Center, 1997, p. 19.

¹³Saeed Benkrad, *Narrative Fiction and the Experience of Meaning*, Casablanca: Arab Cultural Center, 2008, pp. 237–238.

¹⁴ p. 57

¹⁵ Muhammad Yusuf Najm, *The Art of the Essay*, Dar al-Thaqafa, Beirut, 4th ed., 1996, pp. 95–96.

¹⁶Mustafa Sadiq al-Rafi‘i, *Wahy al-Qalam*, p. 184.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, same page.

¹⁸Izz al-Din Ismail, *Literature and Its Arts*, p. 103.

¹⁹ Muhammad Sadiq al-Rafi‘i, *Wahy al-Qalam*, p. 76.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 12.

²¹ Muhammad Sadiq al-Rafi‘i, *Wahy al-Qalam*, p. 68.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 78.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 81.

²⁴Muhammad Sadiq al-Rafi‘i, *Wahy al-Qalam*, p. 82.

²⁵Muhammad Sadiq al-Rafi‘i, *Wahy al-Qalam*, p. 82.

²⁶*Ibid.*, same page.

²⁷*Ibid.*, p. 12.

²⁸*Ibid.*, p. 40.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 60.

³⁰ Muhammad Sadiq al-Rafi‘i, *Wahy al-Qalam*, p. 79

³¹ *Ibid.*, same page.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 30.

³³see: Gerald Prince, *Dictionary of Narratology*, p. 25

³⁴see: Gerald Prince, *Dictionary of Narratology*, p. 186.

³⁵ see: Gerald Prince, *Dictionary of Narratology*, p. 58.