FOLIA ORIENTALIA — BIBLIOTHECA
VOL. I — 2018
DOI 10.24425/for.2019.126129

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Druzes and Slavs between History and Fiction: the (Hi)Story of Ḥannā Yaʿqūb in the Novel *The Druze of Belgrade* by Rabīʿ Ǧābir[1]

Abstract

This paper intends to present an semantic and cultural analysis of Rabīʿ Jābir's novel *Druzes of Belgrade*. Published in 2011, the story deals with a period in Slavic history of the 19th century that parallels the reality of Middle East in the same time. The aim of the contribution is to examine the narrative context of historical events in the hero's life which are narrated primarily through the juxtaposition of historical facts. Distinctions that are made between the real and the imaginary in the novel are bound to mystify – perhaps even mask – the historical and cultural relationship between Arab and Slavs. The writer is not only involved in producing the story of the mutual Arab – Slavic (co)existence within the Ottoman empire in Lebanon and Balkan as well, but is equally intent on providing the story behind the (hi)story. As a mode of representing reality the analysed literary work isn't neutral; it presupposes system of moral values which underlies the Arab Christian hero's factual statements connected with the power-structure and power-relations of the Ottoman society the protagonist lives in. Between history and narrative literature exists a relationship of complementarity that can only enrich and deepen reader's understanding of a given culture and society. The narrative representations of historical facts in the novel *Druzes of Belgrade* are semantic and philosophical operations and as such can be misrepresentations according to Rabīʿ Jābir's literary tendency in a specific historical and intellectual setting.

Keywords

Rabīʿ Jābir, Arabic literature, *Druzes of Belgrade*.

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[1] Lebanese novelist and journalist Rabīʿ Ǧābir was born in Beirut in 1972. He has been editor of *ʾĀfāq*, the weekly cultural supplement of *al-Ḥayāt* newspaper, since 2001. His first novel is *Sayyid al-ʿatma* (Master of Darkness, published in 1992). He has written 16 novels, including *Riḥlat al-Ġarnāṭī* (Journey of the Granadian, published in 2002), *Bīrītūs taḥt al-arḍ* (Berytus: A City Beneath the Earth, published in 2005), *ʾAmrīkā* (America, published in 2009), and *Durūz Bilġrād* (The Druze of Belgrade, published in 2010) which won the International Prize for Arabic Fiction (IPAF) in 2012.

Durūz Bilġrād: Ḥikāyat Ḥannā Yaᶜqūb (Druzes of Belgrade: Story of Ḥannā Ya'qūb)

The events of the novel are set after the Lebanese civil war of 1860, when the Ottoman rulers exiled Druze rebels to the furthest Balkan corners of their empire and a helpless Christian egg-seller becomes caught up in their expulsion and imprisonment. As for the unchanging realities of power, the novel events refer to the despotic late 18th century ruler of Acre and Beirut, Aḥmad al-Ǧazzār, "the Butcher" – a cruel tyrant whose regional heirs are all too easy to identify.

The highest point of the novel is that it is not only about a historic period that shaped the area, it also acts as a traveler's guide, taking the reader on a free excursion through the Balkans. During the journey in the Balkan exile, there were variant scenes in which the writer describes the geographic area. The writer also describes the architecture of Balkan villages resembling wide terraces full of fruits to be dried and meat for curing. He also describes Slavic women and traditions. As the Ottoman Empire included many nationalities and people from far corners of the world, it was common that nationalities replaced surnames or that one would call an individual by his nationality. This was depicted in

the novel, by including characters whose names were Samoil the Bulgarian and Ahmed the Bosnian. The Christian-Arab Yaʿqūb (Jacob) met people from different cultures during his exile-journey, which one of these individuals was for example a Macedonian shepherd.

The novel's hero is a simple egg-seller, Ḥannā Yaʿqūb, who happens to be in the wrong place at the wrong time, for which he has to pay a high price: years spent in prisons in the Balkans. A number of fighters from the religious Druze community are forced into exile, travelling by sea to the prison fortress of Belgrade on the boundary of the Ottoman Empire, after being accused of involvement in the killing of Christians. In the novel, a hapless Christian egg-seller becomes caught up in their expulsion and imprisonment.

Ḥannā Yaʿqūb is no Druze, but he has to replace one, whose father had bribed the authorities to set him free. He is just sitting in the port, selling his 'fresh boiled eggs' and waiting for buyers, when, of all people, he is picked up by the Ottoman officers to replace the lucky Druze. Ḥannā Yaʿqūb's protestations that he is a Christian and not a Druze are of no avail. Even when the French consul notices him, the interpreter gives a deceptive translation and tricks him into believing that Ḥannā Yaʿqūb is a Druze who is declaring proudly that he killed a Christian.

Ḥannā Yaʿqūb comes back to his young wife and little daughter after years in exile, wishing to continue his life where it was interrupted, but alas, time has not frozen in his absence: the young wife has become a middle-aged woman and the little girl a young woman, so will he fit into their life or live in another kind of exile in his own hometown with his own family. The novel is a very good narrative theatre in which to play out the tragedy of what happens to ordinary people in times of unrest.

Rabīʿ Ǧābir spent long days researching the era and the geography of his setting or just relied on his imagination. He managed to move his characters smoothly and credibly, and even seemed more at home in that environment than his own characters, who find themselves strangers in a strange land, surrounded by people who do not speak their language.

One of the first questions that confront both the historian and the literary theorist is how to define their respective fields of study. Some historians have courageously come to recognize that *"everything is historical, hence history does not exist."*[2] But other historians have had to accept, as a definition of their discipline, that history is *"what historians do."*[3] Literary theorists, on the other hand, have come to strikingly similar conclusions about the object of their study. *Terry Eagleton*, after a long attempt to find a satisfactory definition of literature, comes to the conclusion that literature *"does not exist"*; if anything,

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[2] Paul Veyne, *Comment on écrit l'histoire*, Paris, Editions du Seuil, 1971, p. 21.

[3] Jean Molino, "Histoire, roman, formes intermédiaires", *Mesure*, 1 (1989), p. 64.

like *Roland Barthes* before him, *Eagleton* is of the opinion, that *"literature is what gets taught."*[4]

These seemingly disquieting definitions that deny the existence of the object of study are ultimately rather comforting. In fact, what they point to is the ever-shifting nature and concerns of both historical and literary studies. History and literature are not homogenous entities; there are fluid, heterogenous areas where diverse practices and techniques are mixed, a fact that makes it difficult to construct a unified theory or methodology in either case.[5]

However, the problem of defining objects of study is not the only shared concern between the two fields. If neither historians nor literary theorists are able or willing to draw the boundaries of their objects of study, one thing they are willing to admit to is the importace of analyzing and understanding history and literature as narrative forms, as two types of narrative discourse that respond *"to a problem of general human concern, namely the problem of how to translate knowing into the telling."*[6]

If today history seems to have acquired a hegemonic position within the human sciences it has done so precisely through its literariness.[7] In so doing historiography exhausted the novelistic form until it was resurrected in the nineteenth century in the form of the historical novel. Indeed, historians remind us that prior to the professionalization of history towards the end of the nineteenth century *"there were strongly interactive relations between novelistic and historical narratives ... at times an almost agonistic rivalry."*[8] Similarly, literary theorists have not failed to note that literature was invented sometime around the turn of eighteenth century, and *"the concept of literature was not confined as it is today to 'creative' or 'imaginative' writing. It meant the whole body of valued writings in society."*[9]

It is evident, therefore, that between history and narrative literature there exists a relationship of complementarity that can only enrich and deepen our understanding of a given culture or society. Modern distinctions that are made between the *'real'* and the *'imaginary'*, hence between the historical and the literary, are bound to mystify – perhaps even mask – the relationship that exists between literature and the human science, in this case history in particular. In fact, once we begin to accept this intricate relationship between history and literature, we will see that the distinction which *Aristotle* proposed between history and poetry becomes far more relevant and more profound: history is

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[4] Terry Eagleton, *Literary Theory*, Minneapolis, University of Minneapolis Press, 1983, p. 197.

[5] Jean Molino, *op.cit*., p. 64.

[6] Hayden White, "The Value of Narrativity in the Representation of Reality" [in:] *The Content of the Form*, Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987, p. 1.

[7] Michel Crouzet, "Mesure pour Mesures", *Mesure*, 1 (1989), p. 12.

[8] Dominick LaCapra, *History, Politics, and the Novel*, Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1987, p. 8.

[9] Terry Eagleton, *Literary Theory*, p. 17.

what happened; poetry is what could have happened. Here we are in the realm of possibility and probability, one quite different from that of the *'real'* and the *'imaginary'*. Within the *Aristotelian* perspective one could say that literature includes the historical, rather than opposes itself to it.

Given that history and literature share the same objective, namely, the transformation of *'reality'* and of *'life'* into structures of mening, they are bound to construct self-contained worlds regulated by their own time and space and by the representations of the actions of individuals and groups. This thrust to resurrect life necessarily makes of history a kind of story, in perpetual exchange with the novel.[10] For as the historian *Paul Veyne* has argued, the reality produced by the historian is never that of the actors themselves, rather it is a narrative, a story: *"In no instance is what is called an event by historians directly or completely captured. If anything it is always incomplete and laterally seized through documents and testimonies."*[11]

Like literature, history does not make us relive an event, it can only represent it. And representations (whether historical or literary), as *Roland Barthes* has noted, are linguistic operations and as such can only be deformations. This does not imply that they are misrepresentations, rather that as representations.[12] It is therefore evident that history and literature are condemned to distort; that *'reality'* is always constructed by both the historian and the writer. The difference between the historiographical and literary texts does not lie in which of the two is more *'real'*. Rather the difference lies in how and why the *'real'* is constructed and transformed within each text.[13] On another level we will find that, as a mode of representing reality, history, like literature, may opt to represent the world with a well-marked beginning, middle and end. We also know that the choice is open to the historian to adopt *'nonnarrative'* mode of representation of reality (as is the case predominantly with economic or social histories), whereby the historian *'narrates'* rather than *'narrativizes'*.

The relation between (hi)storical texts and identity is even more obvious in the case of travelogues, or accounts of visits to foreign places and peoples. The function of (hi)storical travelogues becomes especially significant in periods when contacts between more or less segregated communities are intensified. The *other* serves as a mirror to construct a self image, this *other* would probably not be described as a total alien, but rather as a kind of *alter ego* contrasting with the self-image. In any case, by making such choices in modes of representation history and literature can never be neutral: each, in its own way, is bound to and by autority. As the historian *Hayden White* has noted, narrativity – or

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[10] Jean Molino, *op.cit*., p. 64.

[11] Paul Veyne, *op.cit*., p. 14.

[12] Samia Mehrez, *Egyptian Writers between History and Fiction*, Cairo, The American University in Cairo Press, 1994, p. 4.

[13] Samia Mehrez, *op. cit*., p. 5.

nonnarrativity for that matter – whether fictional or factual, *"presupposes the existence of a legal system against or on behalf of which the typical agents of a narrative account militate."*[14]

The authentication force of the fictional text, its capacity to create fictional worlds, is a special kind of performative force; the character of literature as performative has been noticed by *Barthes*.[15] He did not go beyond this passing remark. Earlier, but no less casually, the performative character of the literary text was suggested by *Iser*.[16] The illocutionary diversity of literary texts means a diversity of authentication "authorities".

This holds especially true about narrative texts, which are the instruments of the narrative-world construction. The plurality of discourses is well known in the narrative text. The basic factor of this plurality is the dual source of the narrative texture-the narrator and the fictional person(s). The actual producer of the entire text is its author; yet its texture, its formal, semantic, and illocutionary features, are determined by the opposition of the narrator's and the characters' discourse. A sharp distinction between author and narrator is an axiom of modern narrative theory.[17]

The opposition creates a tension within the narrative text that ultimately gave rise to gamut of narrative discourse types, ranging from a strictly objective to a purely subjective. The simple intensional distinction of factual and virtual domains gives the fictional world a remarkable ontological depth. *Ryan* was the first to notice this feature.[18] The texture of a fictional text is the result of the choices the author makes when writing the next. When the author produces an explicit texture, he or she constructs a fictional fact (provided that the felicity conditions of authentication are satisfied). If no texture is written (zero texture), a gap arises in the fictional-world structure. Gaps are a necessary and universal feature of fictional worlds. Yet particular fictional texts vary the number, the extent, and the functions of the gaps by varying the distribution of zero texture.

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[14] *Ibidem*, pp. 5–6.

[15] *"Writing [in the sense of écriture] can no longer designate an operation of recording, notation, representation, 'depiction' (as the Classics would say); rather, it designates exactly what linguists, reffering to Oxford philosophy, call a performative."* Roland Barthes, *Image, Music, Text*, New York, Hill&Wang, 1977, p. 145.

[16] Wolfgang Iser, "Indeterminacy and the Reader's Response in Prose Fiction" [in:] (ed.) J. Hillis Miller, *Aspects of Narrative: Selected Papers from the English Institute*, New York, Columbia University Press, 1971, p. 6–7.

[17] Roland Barthes, "Introduction à l'analyse structurale des récits", *Communications*, 8 (1966), p. 19.

[18] "The private worlds of characters generate mutually incompatible courses of events", among which the actualized plot charts its path. The world's ontological depth is "the basic condition of tellability … the aesthetic appeal of a plot is a function of the richness and variety of the domain of virtual". Marie-Laure Ryan, *Possible Worlds. Artificial Intelligence, and Narrative Theory*. Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1991, p. 156.

The radically incomplete physique of the romantic hero serves the stylistic aims of romantic narrative: a physical detail surrounded by emptiness is brought into sharp focus and thus offered for symbolic reading.[19]

Pavel has observed that "authors and cultures have the choice to minimize or maximize" the "unavoidable incompleteness" of fictional worlds; he has suggested that cultures and periods of a "stable world view" tend to minimize incompleteness, whereas periods of "transition and conflict" tend to maximize it.[20] *Ryan* uses the degrees of incompleteness as a criterion of for a triadic typology of fictional worlds. She has demonstrated how the types are generated by a gradual emptying of the "ideal" complete world model. Realistic fiction strives for the highest degree of completeness, with ever being able to reach the ideal.[21] *Dällenbach* has come independently to a similar conclusion: the reality-like completeness of realistic narratives is no more than an illusion "destined to camouflage [their] blanks.[22]

Specialists in the field of literary studies have long abandoned static notions of genre, which pit a monolithic entity like 'fiction' or 'literature' over against 'historiography'.[23] They presuppose that cultural practices are continuously evolving as a result of the exchanges between them and the circulation of ideas across different media. 'Fiction' is used as a general umbrella term to designate cultural practices that are governed by the principle of 'poetic licence': the freedom in principle to deviate from what is accepted as factual for the purposes of producing artistic works.[24]

'The historical novel' represents a literary practice that, like any other genre, changes as certain procedures become formulaic or superseded by new ones, or as fusions take place with other forms (the memoir, the realist novel, autobiography, romance, philosophical tale, historiography, metafiction and so on).[25] Novels can be seen as having a role to play as a meeting point where

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[19] Lubomír Doležel, *Heterocosmica. Fiction and Possible Worlds*, p. 170.

[20] Thomas G. Pavel, *Fictional Worlds*. Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1986, p. 108–109.

[21] Marie-Laure Ryan, "Fiction as a Logical, Ontological, and Illocutionary Issue", *Style* 18 (1984), p. 131–134.

[22] Lucien Dällenbach, "Reading as Suture (Problems of Reception of the Fragmentary Text: Balzac and Claude Simon)", *Style* 18 (1984), p. 201.

[23] The models of culture that currently inform the discipline are dynamic ones. From within the field of literary studies this dynamic approach to culture, which sees literary writing in its interactions with other practices, has been most prominently formulated within the framework of New Historicism; for example, S. Greenblatt, 'Culture' [in:] (eds) F. Lentricchia and T. McLaughlin, *Critical Terms in Literary Study*, Chicago, 1995, pp. 225–232.

[24] See Ann Rigney, 'Semantic Slides: History and the Concept of Fiction' [in:] eds R. Torstendahl and I. Veit-Brause, *History making: The Intellectual and Social Formation of a Discipline*, Stockholm, 1996, pp. 31–46.

[25] As studies of the novel since Mikhail Bakhtin have emphasised, a novel represents a non-specialist and 'non-disciplined' discourse that, in telling stories about people in recognisable worlds,

various other forms of remembrance are picked up and reworked. Most obvious in the case of the historical novel is its reworking of documentary sources – as in the case of the Rabīʿ Ǧābir's Novel *The Druze of Belgrade*.

Novelists are not only into the business of passing on images, they add something with the help of imagination and literary skills – a story of possibility of virtually participating in the past experiences of particular individuals using whatever techniques are available. It's well known that presenting events in an emplotted form answers to people's desire to believe in the underlying coherence of history.[26] Rabīʿ Ǧābir has applied his literary art to writing fiction with a historical, very often bearing on the traumatic historical events or on historical versions of intercultural conflict.

Within the broader framework offered by the concept of cultural remembrance, however, and against the background of advances in our understanding of how representation works in different types of discourse and circulates between them, it has become possible to think in new ways about historical fiction. There are three related arguments to support this case: the first relates to the novel's role in making events representable; the second has to do with its role in showing the relevance of 'forgotten' parts of the past; the third relates to its role as mediator between mnemonic communities.[27]

Narrative Space in the Ǧābir's Novel
1. Belgrade/prison:

رموه في قبو تحت الأرض وظل (حنا يعقوب) زمناً لا يعرف أين هو – هذه عكا؟ غير واثق من النجاة. لم يشعر بالرحلة ولا بالبحر. من أيام الباخرة ولياليها لم يركد في ذاكرته غير رائحة التوابل لأن الباخرة كانت معدّة للتجارة مع بلاد الهند.[28]

صاح في القبو حتى بحّ صوته: "أنا حنا يعقوب!" كانت الرطوبة فظيعة وشعر بالعفن ينمو على رقبته. زحفت الحشرات على جسمه. دق رأسه على الحائط. داخ من شدة الألم.[29]

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picks up on all sorts of other more specialist discourses and cultural practices. In M. M. Bakhtin, 'Discourse in the Novel', in his *The Dialogic Imagination*, ed. M. Holquist, Austin, 1981, pp. 259–422.

[26] Hayden White calls this the 'value of narrativity in the representation of reality'. H. White, *op.cit.*, pp. 1–25.

[27] Ann Rigney, "Fiction as a Mediator in National Remembrance" [in:] eds S. Berger, L. Eriksonas and A. Mycock, *Narrating the Nation. Representations in History, Media and the Arts*, New York, 2008, pp. 84–85.

[28] Ǧābir, p. 34.

[29] *Ibidem*, p. 36.

2. Belgrade/paradise:

بلغراد – جنة على الدانوب بلا قصد أنقذتهم نازلي هانم من موت محقق. كانت عشيقة جودت باشا صاحب بلغراد وفي حاجة إلى قاطفين للموسم. أصغى الباشا وهي تشكو إليه سرقته عبيدها.

"حاميها حراميها."

"ليسوا لك. هؤلاء للدولة العلية."

"تريدني أن أنزل بهذا الثوب الحرير كي أقطف الخوخ والتفاح والعنب؟"

أخرج جودت باشا المحابيس من الأقبية ... خرجوا من قنطرة القلعة وساروا في صف طويل على درب حمراء كالكريز وهم لا يصدقون ما يرون. وجدوا البيوت شديدة البياض مرتبة كأقراص المعمول والأشجار خضراء مورقة شاهقة العلو. في أسفل التلّة تهادى الدانوب عظيم المياه. بدوا مصدومين: "هذه الجنّة؟"[30]

3. Belgrade/influential place:

استمرّ خروج المحابيس اليومي إلى البساتين حتى اقترح شراولي بك الاستفادة منهم هنا في ترميم الأسوار المتداعية على جهة نهر السافا. جودت باشا سحب نفساً مديداً من أرجيلته ثم نفخ كالتنين غيمة رمادية صفراء غطّت أبراج الكنائس المتكاثرة. من شرفة القلعة البيضاء بانت القوارب صغيرة في الأسفل وهي تعبر من نهر السافا إلى مصبه في نهر الدانوب. عند ملتقى النهرين حيث يرتفع تلّ بلغراد كبيت سلحفاة بحرية تُتوجه القلعة البيضاء، يلتفّ ضباب خردلي صامت أول السماء ويغمر السفح الغربي حيث يسكن الصرب في بيوت عمّروها أو ابتاعوها بثمن التراب من بوسنيين وأتراك ومقدونيين نزحوا أثناء السنوات الأخيرة إلى السفح الشرقي للمدينة أو إلى أماكن أبعد داخل السلطنة.[31]

4. Beirut/homeland:

أطلّت بيروت مثلثة المآذن كما يتذكرها (حنا) مغمورة بنور الغروب تسقفها أسراب الحمام. دارت الطيور في أقواس فرحة كأن الرب أقام المدينة على هذا الشاطئ من أجل هذه الساعة. شعر أنه في حلم.[32]

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[30] *Ibidem*, p. 44–46.
[31] *Ibidem*, p. 61–62.
[32] *Ibidem*, p. 233.

5. Beirut/Hanna's home

ظهرت هيلانة قسطنطين يعقوب من داخل البيت تحمل ثوباً. رأت رجلاً مرتعداً في عتمة المساء. سقط الثوب من يدها "حنا؟ هذا أنت يا حنا؟"

جلس حنا يعقوب على الأرض.

"هذه هيلانة. أنا في البيت." شعر بالأصابع على جسمه تتأكد أنه ليس شبحاً. حضن زوجته وابنته وبكى. شهق وملأ رئتيه بالهواء.[33]

It does not mean that we consider the literary text a priori, charged with more *'truth'* than the historiographical text. For just as we will find narratives (both fictional and factual) that speak on behalf of the state, we will find others that speak against its authority. We do not attempt to reduce literature to being a direct representation of reality, whether that be a social or political one. For the relationship between the text and the world it represents is far more problematic and complex: it is a dialectical and dialogical relationship in which develops the other.

It is important to note that as literature begins to write the silences and exclusions of offical history, the literary text will in turn produce its own significant silence. If the writer is engaged in making speak the silences of history, than the critic has the task of making speak the silences of the literary text itself.[34]

There is a doubling of the writer's role: not only are writers involved in producing a story, but very frequently they are equally intent on providing the story behind that story: the historical, ideological, and political context in which such a story (and not another) was not just possible but necessary. This condition leads one to conclude that many of the narratives that are being produced on the Arab literary scene today are what one could refer to as *(hi)stories*.

This term indicates that the narratives discussed and analyzed are predominantly self-reflexive; they are not simply engaged in representing *'reality'* from an alternative viewpoint, rather they are equally committed to representing the very material conditions which enabled/disabled these narratives within the confines of such a *'reality'*. Such doubling of the writer's role necessarily makes

[33] *Ibidem*, p. 235.
[34] Samia Mehrez, *op. cit.*, p. 7.

these (hi)stories not just individual, personal records, but collective, underground (hi)stories that constitute the larger narrative on history.[35]

Through these narrative strategies the writer has been able to communicate numerous urgent messages: the polyphonic text allows them to expose their undermined authorial voice and simultaneously pose as *'objective'* historian; the omniscient presence permits him to parody and satirize power by adopting its godlike, prying position vis-à-vis their subjects; the interior monologue is instrumental in foregrounding the isolation, alienation, and fear that characterize the human consciousness within an oppressive system; the world of documents that are inserted in the fictional texts advances the sharp critique of the discourse and practice of the authorities; and finally the resurrected models from the Arab literary tradition prove to be an effective means of misleading the censor and inviting a rereading and rewriting of history in which both writer and reader are implicated.

Narrative theory has always recognized that fictional and nonfictional narratives alike are characterized by the presence of a story, a more or less complex chain of events. Contemporary narratologists have repeatedly stated that story is the necessary, defining constituent of narrative: *"Narrative, narrative discourse, can only be such to the extent that it tells a story, without which it would not be narrative (like, let us say, Spinoza's Ethics)"*.[36] Fictional semantics does not deny that the story is the defining feature of narrative but moves to the foreground the macrostructural conditions of story generation: stories happen, are enacted in certain kind of possible worlds. The basic concept of narratology is not "story" but "narrative world," defined within a typology of possible worlds.[37]

The construction of a multiperson world requires just the opposite: to assemble a group of persons (minimally two) for face-to-face contact. All the protagonists enter the fictional world in person, with the exception of the *exceptional hero*, the author reserves for him (the hero) an exceptional means of gradual introduction. First, he is a verbal sign. Second, presented through his portrait, he becomes a pictorial sign. In the third stage does the hero appear in person.[38]

The positions of the protagonists in the agential constellation remain fixed for the duration of the story; but their connections, dominated by the ambiguous love/hate emotional relation, are unstable and subject to sudden reversals. Rabīʿ Ǧābir elaborates in detail the reversals / relations in the narrator – Ḥannā Yaʿqūb / and the narrator – Slaves (Slaves inhabitants of the Balkan) link, it becomes a background of a narrative picture of the Arab-Slav historical relationships.

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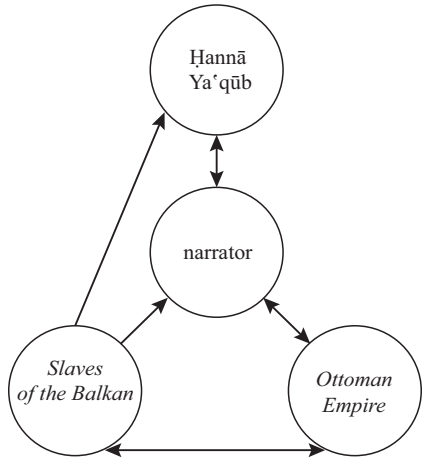
[35] *Ibidem*, pp. 8–9.

[36] Gérard Genette, *Figures III.*, Paris: Seuil, 1972. (English trans. (of the portion "Discours du récit") in *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method*, Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1980, p. 74.

[37] Lubomír Doležel, *Heterocosmica. Fiction and Possible Worlds*. Baltimore, The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998, p. 31.

[38] *Ibidem*, p. 75.



The radical shifts in the personal links are manifestations of the intense emotionality. Bonds between narrator and the Slavic inhabitants of the Balkan are unstable, because they are constantly threatened by their unpredictable and uncontrolled impulsive actions. The passions and drives that motivate the acting of Rabīʿ Ǧābir's character are volatile, appearing, disappearing, changing arbitrarily on the spur of the moment. The impulsive and irrational personal confrontations combine with random interventions of the nature force to create a chaotic fictional world. Ottoman Empire's existence as an acting person is temporary, delimited by a history of Slaves-Arab relations and by a prehistory and a posthistory of the Arab presence in the Balkan.

Shortly after entering the fictional world, the hero is drawn by accident into one of its most complex and remarkable exhibits. The private event becomes a public spectacle when a crowd of outsiders gathers around the original group. The scandal is obviously modeled on theatrical performance, where spectators are allowed to witness intimate exchanges staged by the fictional persons of the dramatic world. As the participants lose control over their passions and succumb to impulsive and irrational acting and as new, unexpected agents intervene, the conflict escalates. As a concert of uncontrolled passions, violent words, and senseless acts, the Jābirian writing exhibits supremely the potential of rational beings for irrational acting.

Rabīʿ Ǧābir stressed the accuracy of the history in his fiction. He did considerable research and was proud of the pictures and explications of the period of Ottoman empire in Balkan area. He didn't take an "unwarranted liberty with the real facts", but rather constructed his tales on the historical facts. Rabīʿ Jābir himself traced the popularity of his historical fiction to his "faithful narration of historical facts" rather than to any fictional elements he might have employed in the composition of the novel. He insisted upon the importance of

imagination in breathing life into the facts of history. In the novel *The Druze of Belgrade* the fictional element is restricted to the depiction of the "inward life" of his historical personages, specifically in regard to determining their motives.

The purely imaginary characters, when they are introduced, are always few in number and so ordered as not to interfere with the historical events and motivations. The wholly fictitious characters are merely the passive sufferers in the panorama of history and never its active agents. Writing as a historian and wishing to examine each age as fully as possible, Rabīʿ Ǧābir set up his minor characters to embody some particular force he felt to be at work in the epoch in which he was interested.