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RESEARCH ARTICLE

PRISON SPACE IN ARABIC SCIENCE FICTION NOVELS.

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Abstract

This study examines the meaning of prison space as it is reflected in two Arabic science fiction novels.

Prison is a closed space in which inmates are deprived of their freedom, individuality and identity. Traditionally, the vast majority of prisons have been associated with torture and humiliation. In the novel *al-'Azmān al-muḥlīmā (Dark Times)*, Dr. Qāsim is incarcerated in Guantanamo because of his opposition to the actions of a terrorist group. In prison he suffers physical and mental abuse and is experimented on, as if he were a guinea pig. Because he places Qāsim in solitary confinement, the novel's author must use the literary device of soliloquy in order to convey what is happening in the character's mind. The novel also highlights positive aspects of life in prison—a place for exchanging views and ideas and for forging new friendships. It also makes the inmates take a more profound look at life and transforms them intellectually, conceptually and ethically.

In the novel *Qāhīr al-Zaman (Time's Overcomer)*, the journalist Kāmil is sent to prison because he opposes testing on living human beings. The novel depicts prison as a dark grave, narrow, stagnant and detached from the world, a place where inmates and their behavior are changed. Kāmil is filled with frustration and despair. He behaves like a nervous animal in a cage and his frayed nerves lead to a complete breakdown. His inner agitation makes him lose all contact with his humanity. Kāmil's reminiscences are used to provide the reader with the missing information concerning his experiences in prison.

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Introduction:-

Prison may be classified as a place of forced residence, a closed or hostile space. It is patriarchal in nature, with its pyramid of authority and its coercive nature. The prison space, a world that is severed from the world of freedom outside the walls and conjures up the opposite of freedom, has proven to be a fertile theme for novelists. Writers have used it as a narrative space in which protagonists are placed against their will under conditions of harsh punishment. In this sense, prison is a point of transition between the outside and the inside, between the world and the inmate's inner self. Going into prison involves a transformation of values and habits and an imposed burden of do's and don'ts. The moment one steps across the prison threshold, one leaves behind the world of liberty. Upon entering its gates, its walls enclose one, and then begins a series of torments that never end, even when one comes out. Prison instills fear, distress and pain in its inmates, who are put there against their will and suffer in a way that cannot be imagined by anyone who has not been there. Prison differs from any other place, because it oppresses

people who are opposed to the ruling government or to an illegitimate occupying power. Men in prison are deprived of their most basic right, the right to freedom. Place, as Jurij Lotman has noted, is closely associated with the concept of freedom; and obviously, one of its most basic forms is the freedom of movement (Baḥrāwī, 2009, 55; Shāhīm, 2001, 50; Kāsīd, 2003, 130-131).

The sub-genre known as Prison Literature first appeared in Arabic writing in the 1950s. The Arabic literary corpus has developed a discrete sub-genre dealing with political incarceration, not just because novelists had almost without exception personally experienced detention, imprisonment and torture, but also because the contemporary history of the Arab intellectual is one of constant struggle against the authorities.

Modern literary critics, Arab and non-Arab, who have reviewed Arabic prison literature have concentrated mainly on its political and social content and purpose. They have dwelt on the dominant themes of freedom of expression and human rights, the reasons for imprisonment, the suffering of political prisoners, and the interrogators' and torturers' brutality (Elimelekh, 2014, 1).

al-'Azmān al-Muẓlima (*Dark Times*):-

Digest of the novel: A science fiction novel by the Syrian writer, Ṭālib 'Imrān.¹ The novel describes what happens to an Arab world after the 9/11 attacks on the World Trade Center in New York. It depicts the actions of the secret terrorist Freemason organization, which rules the world in cooperation with governments all over the world, especially that of the United States.

After Dr. Qāsim returns to his country, he is abducted by the organization, which is impressed with his mental brilliance and wants him to join it. The masons compel Dr. Qāsim to take an oath of allegiance to their organization, swearing upon his honor to join them and execute their commands. Qāsim gives orders to murder people, burn down homes and offices, and fill lakes and water reservoirs with the eggs of frogs, other amphibians and water snakes. These acts cost the lives of hundreds of innocent human beings, including that of Qāsim's mother. The writer shows us the conflict raging in Qāsim's mind. The latter understands that the orders that he gives are illegitimate and inhumane and knows that it is his duty to save people's lives and treat their illnesses. He, therefore, decides to destroy the organization and flee.

Accordingly, he reverses course and begins to work against his own bosses. He gives orders to kill members of the organization. His superiors only realize that he is behind this after many are killed and despite the control and supervision imposed by his superior in the organization, he succeeds in hiding from them together with his girlfriend Sally, who he later marries.

He is arrested by Dirak, an officer in the organization. He is transferred to Guantanamo, tried and sentenced to death. Before he is to be executed, scientific experiments are carried out on him, as if he were a guinea pig. Eventually, it is decided to remove his liver and transplant it in the body of an American rabbi named Shaul. Dr. Peter and the soldier John, however, feel sorry for him after they hear his story; they object to the operation and manage to smuggle Qāsim into the United States.

Dr. Qāsim lives for a time in the United States, where he changes his name to Yaakov Ezra, a Jewish name. Under this name, he is able to travel safely within the United States and also go abroad. Because of this name, he is able to board airplanes with no trouble and treated with respect by the security guards, whom he deceives with a false passport. He, however, does not like the name by which he is now known.

The story makes it clear that he is against the wars that the United States is pursuing against certain countries.

Dr. Qāsim returns to his own country using the name Yaakov Ezra. He is treated with the utmost respect by the security guards. He goes back to his wife Sally and discovers that she has given birth to a son, who was given the name Qāsim. He does not remain in his country for very long. He changes his wife's name to Esther (meaning "star") and his son's name to David (the name of a king of Israel, a symbol of power and spirituality) and brings the whole family to the United States. Their names pave the way for them. When they reach the United States, they are met by John, Peter, Lara, Madeline and Mike, who, Qāsim felt, were his real family ('Imrān, 2003).

¹. For more on Ṭālib 'Imrān, his life and other works, see 'Azzām, 2000.

Prison in *al-ʿAzmān al-Muḡlima*:-

Prison is a place where freedom, the most precious thing humans strive for, is restricted. It detaches its inmates from their social environment, deprives them of their individuality. Those who are incarcerated are often subject to torture and humiliation, especially in the Arab world. Political imprisonment is a theme that has been treated frequently by Arab novelists² (ʿAzzām, 2010:217; Elimelekh, 2014, 1-8). Dr. Qāsim is arrested and jailed by officer Dirak. He is put into a small, dark room, with a narrow bed, a jar of water and a drain instead of a toilet. The room is windowless, with only a small opening in the wall, through which he is given food, consisting of bread, cheese and a small cup of water (ʿImrān, 2003:220-225).

Qāsim is in a political prison, which differs from normal prisons in its treatment of the prisoners, in the images it imprints on them, and in the physical and mental harm it causes. Political prisons are also the places where colonialists put local natives who refuse to yield. It is a place for forcing nationalist rebels to bend and submit to the domination–submission equation, since the colonialist can only survive by imprisoning rebels (al-Fayṣal, 1994, 31-32; Zāhī, 1991, 56). After his arrest, the political prisoner is put into a solitary cell, which is itself a kind of torture, in order to pressure him to tell what he knows and to make him compliant to the demands of the authorities. This stage, which is the longest and most difficult one for the prisoner, comes after he is admitted to the prison and interrogated (al-Fayṣal, 1994, 36). In prisons of this kind, inmates are deprived of the words and ideas in which they believe and for which they have sacrificed, and in their stead, other ideas are imposed on them, for the purpose of instilling submission and loyalty to the ruling regime. Ordinary criminals, serving time for theft or murder or any other crime against society, are not forced to show loyalty to the regime. Only prisoners of a special kind are treated in this way, prisoners with political, economic, social, religious or intellectual principles, who do no harm to society but attack the state and its rulers, and consequently, are accused of endangering the state’s security and strength (al-Qusaṅṭīnī, 1995, 340).

Dr. Qāsim is accused of a number of crimes, among them the murder of members of the terrorist organization and being a traitor. For these acts he is sentenced to death, but first he is subjected to corporal punishments of various kinds in order to compel him to confess: he is blindfolded, given poisoned food, left alone with a seductive woman, given anesthetic injections and forced to inhale narcotic perfume (ʿImrān, 2003, 221-224, 230).³

The “prison literature” novels describe the stages through which inmates go before they are thrown into their cell. One stage is the “reception”, during which the prisoner is stripped of his money, his watch, belt, necktie, shoelaces, eye glasses, shaving kit, etc. This stage puts psychological pressure on the prisoner, instills fear and despair, and gives him an intimation of the horrors to come (al-Fayṣal, 1994, 35).

Dr. Qāsim arrives in Guantanamo with a plastic mask on his face, blindfolded, his ears covered, wearing the special tight-fitting jacket of the prisoners there, a head covering and light shoes that do not protect him from the heat of the soil or the heat of the sun on his legs. Just the opposite: they make it worse due to their special design. After these humiliations, imposed immediately upon entering the prison, the prisoner is deprived of his personal identity by having his name taken away and replaced by a number, turning him into another undifferentiated item among the prison population. Qāsim becomes number 1340. By taking away the prisoner’s name and turning him into nothing more than a number, the loss of his personal identity becomes final. Taking away one’s name has a far-reaching impact; it reflects a hostile desire to shatter the individual’s personality and humiliate and objectify him in a way that is more painful than the loss of liberty itself. The basic intent behind all these punitive acts against the prisoner, from depriving him of his name to dressing him in special prison garments and impounding his personal effects, is to take

². For more on the depiction of “prison space” and “prison suffering” by Arab writers, see, for example: ʿAbd al-Raḥmān Munīf’s novels: al-Qusaṅṭīnī, 1995: 101-105, 302-344; al-Muḥādīn, 1999; Ilyās Khūr’s novels: Ṣāliḥ, 2005:103-104; Baḥrāwī, 2009:55-77 (set in Morocco); and for more on Arabic prison literature, see ʿAbū Niḍāl, 1981; Elimelekh, 2014; al-Fayṣal, 1994; al-Salḥūt 2012, al-Shaykh-Ḥishmī, 2016.

³. Samar Rūḥī al-Fayṣal distinguishes between two types of torture of political prisons. One is direct torture, in the form of whipping, caning, kicking and cursing. The other is indirect and may consist of shackling the inmate, putting him in isolation, exposing him to damp, insects and darkness, urination inside the cell, and the smell of sweat: al-Fayṣal, 1994: 41-42.

away his identity and any feature that distinguishes him from the rest of the group. He loses whatever individuality he may have had and is transformed into yet another copy of the beings that occupy the prison's closed space.⁴

Qāsim gets taken into the examination room for a physical check-up, because he has been chosen as a human subject on which numerous experiments are to be conducted. He submits to his fate and allows himself to be moved from one instrument to another, to have samples extracted from his blood, reproductive system, liver and spleen, and to have his reflexes checked. He is treated as if he were a guinea pig, with no consideration given to any pain he suffers (Baḥrāwī, 2009, 56; 'Imrān, 2003, 249-269; al-Muḥādīn, 1999, 102).

Ṣabrī Ḥāfiẓ (1984) divides spaces in novels into open and closed areas.⁵ Prison is, obviously, a closed space, in which one is locked into a cell and left to oneself (169-170). According to Maḥdī 'Ubaydī (2011), when a person is locked up in prison and separated from the outside world, his mind evokes associations and memories in the form of dreams or when in a state of wakefulness, in an effort to regain the liberty now gone (76). Dr. Qāsim finds himself alone in a dark cell. In such a situation, one loses a sense of time. Contact with the outside world no longer exists, so one seeks to console oneself with anything that is available. One tries to occupy one's mind with memories, in order to prevent being affected by the darkness and solitude of the cell. Prisoners in solitary confinement possess nothing but their memories, be they good or bad. Solitude awakens the imagination and takes one away from one's harsh reality and terrible solitude into another world, where one feels safe. In other words, use of the imagination helps create a kind of separation from reality (Shāhīn, 2001, 52-53).

Qāsim sighs as he suffers inside his cell; he recalls his pregnant wife, now alone with no one to support her, and hopes that she will be able to reach his sister, who would help her in her difficult situation. He reviews his entire life, from his remote childhood until his studies, in which he excelled, then his professional specialization elsewhere, his dramatic return followed by his involvement in that organization, his escape to a cave where he lived for two years, followed by his recent fall into the claws of its executioners. He is watched over by the image of his late mother who praises him for his determination in the face of his executioners. At this stage of the novel, his reminiscing is abruptly stopped. The door to his cell opens suddenly and he is again summoned to be interrogated. This time he is falsely charged with crimes he did not commit and the judge orders him to be given the red uniform worn by those who are sentenced to death ('Imrān, 2003, 225-234, 242; Shāhīn, 2001, 53).

⁴. Scott Sanders noticed that a 'lot of novels written by Western writers such as Isaac Asimov, Brian Aldiss, John Brunner, and Ira Levin introduce governmental institutes that deal with people as numbers and digits within grids, tables, and graphs. What characterizes the people in these novels is their similarity, homogeneity, and loss of identity' (Sanders, 1979, 135-136); see, for example, Ira Levin's *This Perfect Day* 2010. The novel describes a country that is run by a mechanical brain (robot) that defines the behavior of all the people in it, observes every person, and knows his location at all times. Every person has a number, and the hero's number is Li RM35M4419.

⁵. Juril Lotman is of the opinion that "the most general social, religious, political and ethical models of the world, with whose help man comprehended the world around him at various stages in his spiritual development, are invariably invested with spatial characteristics—sometimes in the form of oppositions such as "heaven vs. earth" or "earth vs. nether regions" (a vertical tri-partite structure organized along the vertical axis), and sometimes in the form of a socio-political hierarchy with the marked opposition of "the high" to "the depth", and sometimes in a form that involves ethically marked oppositions such as "right-left". Ideas regarding "elevated" and "degrading" thinking, occupations and professions, the identification of what is "near" with what is understandable, one's own and familiar, and the identification of what is "distant" with what is not understood and alien—all these things are couched in models of the world invested with distinctly spatial features" (Lotman, 1977: 218).

J. J. Van Baak divides the spaces in the novel into several detailed oppositions: inside/outside, closed/open, near/far, left/right, front/back; see Baak, 1983, 60-75. Ibrāhīm Ṭāhā defines spaces in the novel through oppositions referring to extensive places (sea, sky, land), restricted places (building, house, room, car, boat), fixed *versus* moving (car, train, airplane, ship). This, in turn, affects events and figures. For if the place is closed, then the person in it is shut off from the outside world, unless he can communicate with it via a window, a telephone, a radio or a television set. Or a place may move while the man remains static. There is no movement in a moving place such as a car, airplane or boat Their movement is routine, frozen and fixed by rules that are imposed by force on the person, who is weaker than the place; see Ṭāhā, 1990:101-157.

Dr. Qāsim's sufferings in prison reveal aspects of his personality. He occasionally experiences waves of despair and wishes he would die. He feels that his pride had been completely degraded and that he is incapable of putting the remains of his humanity back together. He sees the image of his wife, Sally, before his eyes and weeps bitterly. When he is about to be transferred to Guantanamo, he realizes that his life is no longer worth much, and he ceases to dream about being released from prison. He then has a mystical experience and feels that he is close to God who will grant him the patience he needs to survive his pain and grief.

As part of the prison's routine, the time permitted for a stroll in the courtyard appears like an oasis in an unending desert, something to break the rigid monotony. The few minutes which inmates are given to move about outside become a true joy in a place that by its very nature is designed for physical and psychological coercion and isolation from society. The courtyard in which he is permitted to walk is within the world of the prison and is subject to its rules, but still it stands in stark contrast to the space of the cell. While the cell's purpose is to make the inmate lose all contact with his lost freedom and all thought of the wide-open spaces outside, the place where the stroll takes place is the opposite of all this, providing the inmate with views of his lost freedom (Baḥrāwī, 2009, 69-72). Qāsim is permitted to walk in an area overlooking the sea and surrounded by an electrified fence. True, the view of the sea can arouse a sense of unlimited freedom, the onlooker must be careful not to be swept away by it and lofty words of freedom. The prison routine dominates, with the cell as the worst and the stroll as the best, reinforcing the isolation from which he suffers so. The view of the space in which he takes his stroll must be compared to the very restricted space inside the prison and not with ordinary spaces experienced by those outside the prison walls. It is only in this context that we can understand the unusual nature of the stroll in a prisoner's life and the extent of pleasure or suffering it causes him.

Dr. Qāsim sees many prisoners who wear a red uniform. The sight fills him with grief, especially since the effects of the torture they have suffered are visible on their faces and their limbs. They drag their heavy shackles; their shattered gazes are empty and expressionless. They move like the living dead, limp, with bent backs, not exchanging a single word, because that was forbidden. Qāsim tries to speak about freedom to a fellow inmate who is sitting on a rock and gazing out to the sea, but the latter asks him to be quiet and not to look at him, because speaking is not allowed. The stroll period, we see, is an open place where everyone is locked into their own space, even when outside of the cell walls. The stroll acquires the meaning of restricted space and limited movement despite the fact that such activity would in the normal case mean a recess, even though quite limited, from the usual symbols of imprisonment.

The outside area would be a fitting place for the inmates to regain some of the human characteristics that the prison tries so assiduously to erase. During the period given to prisoners to stroll, they succeed in breaking down some of the barriers constructed around them and are able to gaze at the only natural space they are permitted to view, and of which they are deprived most of the day and night. The open courtyard is the appropriate opportunity to communicate with the forbidden natural space, a place that opens a horizon that differs from the one which the inmates usually see in this prison ('Imrān, 2003, 242-243).

Prison imposes changes on inmates' behavior and life style (Baḥrāwī, 2009, 61). The way in which the novel presents what happens shows that Qāsim's solitary confinement forces him to soliloquize. A study of the function of soliloquy in novels reveals that it commonly accompanies emotional crises and conflicting passions, when negative feelings such as fear, despair and grief flare up. It is as if the narrator intends, through the soliloquy, to raise the veil covering what goes on inside a person's mind, or perhaps to draw the reader's attention to important issues. According to Firyāl Samāḥa (1999), the view, place and nature of the situation in which the protagonist finds himself—in this case solitude, gloom and fatal mental isolation—make it necessary to use this device in order to convey his thoughts and emotions (177-178, 187).⁶ Qāsim's situation inside the prison drives him to speak to

⁶. According to Shukrī al-Māḍī, the protagonist's solitary confinement in 'Abd al-Raḥmān Munīf's novels forces him to use the device of the monologue. The events in both *Sharq al-mutawassiṭ* and *al-Ān...hunā, aw sharq al-mutawassiṭ marratan ukhrā* take place inside Arab detention camps, where the protagonist has no one to talk to, and therefore, talks to himself; see al-Māḍī, 1996. On the torments of prison in Munīf's novels, see al-Qusṭantīnī, 1995:101-105, 302-344. Some critics point out that the novels' chronologies and events force their writers who use a certain technique, the monologue being one of them. After the Arab defeat of June 1967, some writers receded within themselves in order to give themselves an accounting of what had happened, as can be seen in their works; see al-Māḍī, 1978; Samāḥa, 1999:170.

himself and reveal his inner thoughts. It is the prison that him make the transition from the external world of freedom to his inner world, and to express his feelings aloud to himself. His soliloquy articulates his negative feelings of despair, pain, fear and humiliation.

When Dr. Qāsim was arrested and transferred to Guantanamo, he was greeted by with great contempt, blows and punches. He was blindfolded and muzzled, given special clothing and heavy chains. He says to himself:

"O Qāsim, your real journey of torment has begun. O God, never in my life did I imagine that I would be so afraid, as a strange hand pushes me in a direction whose path I do not know. Woe is me, all my senses are blocked, no hearing, no sight, no smell. I immediately lost all sense of direction. I am crushed by loss of place and claustrophobia, unable to feel my way in this pervasive darkness. No feeling, no breath, nothing but solitude, darkness, silence and horrible pain" ('Imrān, 2003, 261-263).

The soliloquy above reflects the negative emotions such as fear, despair and pain that consume Qāsim in prison.⁷ For an inmate, prison constitutes a transition point from the outside to the inside, from the world to the self, including a change in values and habits, and the imposition of requirements and prohibitions. The fact that escape from prison is impossible may arouse in inmates a sense of complete helplessness at being unable to break out of this enclosed space. Their emotions reflect their morale and their powers of resistance or lack thereof. We may thus, for example, find that a prisoner suffers from isolation and a sense of guilt, in addition to his loss of freedom (Baḥrāwī, 2009, 55-62; Ṣāliḥ, 2005: 103). Prison forces Qāsim to make the transition from his outside world, where he was free, to his inner world, where he speaks to himself about his despair, helplessness, fear, pain and humiliation.

Robert Humphrey (2000) noted that a soliloquy typically organizes units of thought in the manner in which they arise in the individual's consciousness (76). In fact, if we consider the above example, we see that the soliloquy does obey this generalization. Here is the sequence of feelings and thoughts with which it deals:

- Dr. Qāsim is beset by fear.
- Fatigue takes over his body.
- His senses of hearing, sight and smell are blocked.
- He loses his sense of direction and cannot find his path in the darkness.
- Waves of pain roll over parts of his body, such as his arms, his skin and his head.
- He feels tears in his eyes and beads of sweat on his brows.
- Lastly, he feels nothing, not even his own breathing, nothing but solitude, darkness, silence and pain.

Note that each emotion and thought experienced by Qāsim results from the preceding one. This sequence of interconnected feelings and thoughts leads one to conclude that the inmates are not being treated as human beings, worthy of respect and honor, but rather as laboratory animals or samples in an experiment, put through indescribable physical and mental torments. According to Firyāl Samāḥa (1999), the intention behind soliloquies of this kind is to emphasize the fact that the person in question lives in a world filled with forces of social, political and natural repression and exploitation, and that it only by using his free can he face and challenge these forces (177-178).

Some writers use linguistic-artistic devices in order to highlight their protagonist's mental state (Ghanāyim, 1992, 79). Below, we note two of the more significant and functional of these devices that were used in the aforementioned soliloquy, namely repetition and conjunction.

A. *Repetition*, as in the following two examples:

1. Woe is me, all my senses are blocked, no hearing, no sight, no smell;
2. No feeling, no breath, nothing.

Note the repeated use of the negation word "no", which here serves a number of purposes. First, it is used to provide detail: in the first sentence Qāsim speaks of "all my senses", and the following negations explain in detail what these senses are. Second, they are used to confirm the protagonist's poor mental state. Third, they stress the fact that the inmate is deprived of his basic right to decent treatment and respect. Maḥmūd Ghanāyim is of the opinion that repetition not only imposes a rhythm on the sentences, but that it is also a stylistic device that indicates the narrative's transition from the outside world to the protagonist's inner world. A reexamination of the repeated words

⁷. Soliloquies appear elsewhere in the novel as well; see 'Imrān, 2003, 306, 325.

reveals yet another function that derives from the inner depiction, namely a response to the person's great agitation or an expression of his mental tremors and his sincere emotions (Ghanāyim, 1992, 98).

B. *Conjunction*, as in the following two examples:

1. Nothing but solitude, darkness, silence and horrible pain;
2. I immediately lost all sense of direction. I was crushed by loss of place and claustrophobia, unable to feel my way.

In the first of the examples above, Qāsim conjoins four words with negative connotations, in order to depict his wretched mental state. In the second example, three verbs with negative connotations are conjoined, in order to highlight the protagonist's feeling of disorientation following the brutal and humiliating treatment he received. In both examples, the feelings are presented in Qāsim's own words, from his perspective.

Despite the evils of prison, it can also become a place where ideas are exchanged and new friendships made ('Ubaydī, 2011, 76). Dr. Peter, an American physician, becomes acquainted with Qāsim. They become friends and in time, after hearing his personal story and his many scientific achievements, Peter begins to sympathize with the prisoner. When Peter encounters the American soldier John, he becomes convinced of Qāsim's innocence. John's appearance helps the author reveal other aspects of Qāsim's personality. The soldier was Dr. Qāsim's student in college; based on this earlier acquaintance, John informs Peter of Qāsim's high moral qualities and his commitment to his work. Because of his genius, his great knowledge, his sagacity and his great love for his fellow man, John likes him more than his own family. At first, Qāsim considers John just another barbaric soldier, a representative of the colonialist enemy army but Peter and John successfully smuggle Dr. Qāsim out of prison and into the United States ('Imrān, 2003, 270-277, 301-321).⁸

There is a strong mutual interrelation between a place and those who occupy it. A place leaves nearly indelible marks on those who live in it (al-Qāsim, 2005, 119). This is especially true when the place is a prison. The difficulties faced by those who are incarcerated in it have a great influence on their subsequent lives (Shāhīn, 2001, 54). Qāsim suffers many kinds of torture; yet, his time in prison also opens up a new world for him, one populated by good, humane people. This was something Qāsim did not expect at all, especially in view of the fact that these people belonged to the forces of the occupying superpower. Qāsim comes to realize that the soldier, John, has a pure heart and is more loyal to humanity than many others. John opposes his government's tyrannical policies. He cannot tolerate killing or the sight of dead bodies or of prisoners. For Qāsim, John is a speck of white in the blackness that covers his country, a light of hope for change and purification in difficult times. John befriends Qāsim; they become so close that John asks him to be the best man at his wedding with Lara. Qāsim also discovers the honesty and humanity of Mike, John's friend, who also opposes his own government's unjust policies. In fact, he discovers that many people reject their governments' oppressive and despotic actions around the world. Peter also shows himself to Qāsim as a man of positive principles. After John enters Peter's life and urges him to help Qāsim, Peter becomes aware of many things in himself that he neglected in the past and begins to take a different and more profound view of life. He becomes more cognizant of the restrictions placed on Qāsim and realizes just how unjust and oppressive his country is, weighing down and nearly pulverizing the entire world ('Imrān, 2003, 321, 335, 341, 361, 404-405). Qāsim's physical prison is thus transformed from a harsh, uncivilized place into a place that reshapes a person, mentally, intellectually and morally (al-Nābulī, 1994, 315-316).

Qāhir al-Zaman (Time's Overcomer):-

Digest of the novel:-

The novel *Qāhir al-Zaman*⁹ is a science fiction work by Egyptian writer Nihād Sharīf.¹⁰ It is based on cryogenics, the idea of defeating time and extending life by cooling the body to a temperature at which it will neither grow nor

⁸. The relationship between the East and the West has been a theme in a considerable number of Arabic novels ever since the Arabs began writing novels in their present form. Westerners who appear in Arab novels are located usually in one of two places. Either they are in Europe, in case the novel takes place on that continent, or they are in an Arab or oriental country. For more on this relationship and on Westerners in Arabic novels see Šāliḥ, 1997; Šāliḥ, 2003; Qāsim, 2005: 380-388.

⁹. The novel was published in 1972 by Dār al-hilāl in Cairo. It was made into a movie in 1987 and republished in 1994 by al-Hay'a al-miṣriyya al-'amma lil-kitāb in Cairo. For more details about the novel, see Bahī, 1982; al-Shārūnī, 1980: 269-270; al-Shārūnī, 1986: 87-91; al-Shārūnī, 1989: 262-263; 'Abdullāh, 1987.

disintegrate, until such a time that a cure will have been found to treat the disease from which the person suffered (if that is what killed him or her), or in order to benefit from the deceased's intelligence and skills in the future. Dr. Ḥalīm Ṣabrūn first performs experiments on animals, with a view to moving on to human subjects if his initial efforts succeed. This is a hazardous undertaking that could cost people their lives, as previous experiments proved fatal for some animals. As a result, Dr. Ṣabrūn carefully hides his activities from the police, to prevent others from discovering his victims and preventing him from continuing his work, not to speak of prosecuting him for his actions. Accordingly, he sets up a secret lab in an isolated villa in the interior of an uninhabited mountain.

Kāmil's work as a journalist and researcher drive him to penetrate the villa in order to discover Dr. Ḥalīm's secrets. He is caught, but Dr. Ḥalīm forgives him and even signs a contract for Kāmil to work as a journalist for him and to write up the reports on his research. In this way, Kāmil manages to get close to the mysterious scientist and uses every opportunity to uncover his strange secrets and satisfy his curiosity concerning the nature of Ḥalīm's experiments.

In the course of his stay in Dr. Ḥalīm's laboratory, Kāmil discovers that the scientist is performing illegal experiments on living human beings. Kāmil believes that anyone who conducts such experiments should be brought to justice, because what is being done constitutes a clear violation of God's will and divine law. No one, he judges, has the right to allow himself to be experimented on, no matter how desperate his situation; the one thing that should never be sacrificed for the sake of science is human life and the human spirit. Kāmil, therefore, informs Dr. Ḥalīm that he is opposed to the direction of his research and cannot assist him in any way. Ḥalīm defends what he is doing, arguing that sometimes an individual must be sacrificed for the common good, and that he sees nothing wrong with performing experiments on terminally ill people, doomed to die prematurely and who could just as well become martyrs for the cause of science.

Kāmil's views on human relationships as a journalist almost extinguish his burning enthusiasm. He tries to destroy the cryogenic machinery and then flee with his beloved Zīn. They are both caught and each put in a cell in the villa. Kāmil suffers greatly during his imprisonment, but subsequently manages to escape. In the end, a fight breaks out between Dr. Ḥalīm and his assistant Marzūq, the laboratory is blown up and everyone is killed (Sharīf, 1994).

Prison in *Qāhir al-Zaman*

Kāmil tries to escape from Dr. Ḥalīm's villa together with his beloved Zīn after he finds out about the doctor's dangerous and illegal experiments. He is caught and thrown into a cell (Sharīf, 1994, 178-183). The narrative space occupies a place within the novel thanks to its dual significance; first it is presented in the text by depiction and designation, and then it is interpreted and given meaning by placing it within a certain context. It is within this context that novels produce a world defined by prison space, through a presentation of the latter's physical features and description of the writer's opinion of them. This dual meaning of place has fired the imagination of novelists who view prison space as an extraordinary world, using an extremely varied interpretive language. Some novelists have combined the two meanings into a discourse in which description and interpretation coalesce, while others refrain from physical depictions of prison space and restrict themselves to mental annotations that explain the unusual nature of the prison world and the nature of the place on which it is based¹¹ (Baḥrāwī, 2009, 59-60).

An example of such description and interpretation is provided by Kāmil's depiction of his cell and his commentary on it. Remembering and writing it down, he says:

"The cell had a single weak light that illuminated the gloomy shadows around me, the light from a kerosene lamp, with a tiny wick and glass blackened from the soot that was constantly deposited on it. The smell of burning kerosene that spread throughout the still air in the room nearly suffocated me. I write lines but cannot put a date on them. The days follow each other, long and heavy, indistinguishable from each other, since I was thrown down before the bed standing next to one of the four damp walls. After they shut the low wooden door behind them I discovered that it was the only opening in the smooth walls that surrounded me. I tried more than once to scrutinize the sparse contents of the narrow cell but managed to do this only after hours of lying prostrate on my bed, weakened by illness and despair. Whenever I raised my head and tried to turn my eyes towards what was around me my ears would ring with the bitter hiss that came from the depths of my spirit and being. But in the end, when I gazed towards the weak light, I was able to see nearly all that it

¹⁰. For more on Nihād Sharīf, his life and other works, see al-Shārūnī, 1997; Snir, 2000.

¹¹. For more details about the prison cell, see al-Fayṣal, 1994: 36.

contained: Here was the old-fashioned brass bed and the wide hide-covered chair, with a filthy sheepskin rug between them. Then there was a rusty bell hanging on a nail sticking out of the wall. After a long time in solitary confinement, I would guess nearly a whole month, that for them I had become nothing more than just another guinea pig, waiting its turn to have some scientific or criminal experiment performed on it, under the fraudulent pretext of cryogenic research" (Sharīf, 1994, 183-199).

Prison in this sense ceases to be a place with dimensions that highlight the place's closed and restrictive nature and is transformed into a special space that rises over the debris of the familiar outside world. This, in turn, gives rise to the changes that prison imposes on the behavior of its inmates in order to force them to obey its private laws (Baḥrāwī, 2009, 61). Prison is a hostile place, such as exile may be to one who lives it, or nature with no human presence, a place of banishment (Halsā, 1989, 22-40), a defined and delimited space specifically designed to inspire defeat and despair, run on the lines of a patriarchal society with its pyramid of authority, reacting violently towards any violation of its rules, and having an arbitrariness that seems foreordained. It is a place that is the opposite of womb-like or maternal (al-Nābulṣī, 1994, 12-13). Kāmil was filled with frustration and despair and spent hours lying prone on his bed, seeing no way out, as if he were laboratory rat. His prison thus becomes, in a very real sense, a temporary grave: Narrow, dark, detached from the world, silent, lonely, inducing a return to his inner world. The cell's layout was apparent in the weak light: the walls, the door and the filthy bed. According to Shākir al-Nābulṣī (1994), walls and doors are the most salient physical features of a prison. Walls in the human history of imprisonment have many meanings, among them as shaping an area for incarceration for a crime. Prison walls are associated with age, dampness and the grave, thus transforming the prison into a place of brutality and torment (315-316).

The fact that prison inmates are unable to leave their imposed lodgings whenever they wish engenders in them a sense of complete helplessness. The texts of prison novels depict the impotence and despair felt by certain inmates because of the stifling atmosphere of the prison, which arouses feelings of humiliation and isolation (al-Nābulṣī, 1994, 61-62). Prison appears to be a mechanism for changing people's behavior ('Ubaydī, 2011, 76). Kāmil feels within himself the anger of a caged animal and is overcome with misery and a desire to smash everything in his way. He paces in a small semi-circle around his bed. The fury he feels in his innermost being severs any connection with the man he was before being put him inside these walls, whose coldness and hardness are like iron stakes. Whenever he stops moving for a few seconds he touches his long fingernails, his beard and his thick, filthy hair. His clothes hang on him and his dull skin is that of a sick old man. The former youthful Kāmil, so full of strength and vitality, can no longer be recognized. He lifts his head, for a moment, in surprise mixed with desperation, like a caged animal moving around ever more nervously and with ever shorter steps. To this is added another feeling: hunger. Whenever Kāmil's thoughts reach this lowest point of despair, he returns dejected to his bed, lies down cowering on his side and hides his face in his hands, close to tears. His frayed nerves lead him into a state of total distraction. When he removes his hands, he can only stare unseeing at the ceiling and walls around him (Sharīf, 1994, 201-202).

In this way, the author demonstrates the state of impotence into which inmates fall due to their inability to break through the prison walls. Their new situation makes them suffer both physically and mentally, and thus their torment continues. The prison space becomes an overpowering focus of helplessness that enfolds the inmates and doubles their pain. On the other hand, prison also imposes on its inmates a peculiar mode of behavior and forces them to obey its laws. Kāmil falls from his bed like a caged animal, blinded by hunger. He sticks his fingernails into the wood of the door and tears at it furiously. He pushes the door so hard that it collapses under him, leaving him hovering in the air. Thus, he succeeds in escaping from prison (Sharīf, 1994, 209-201; Baḥrāwī, 2009, 61-62).

Reminiscence is a device for connection to a protagonist's inner world. It involves invoking mental images of past events. The person remembering goes back in time and sees events and situations that occurred a certain time ago. This return in time freezes the course of certain events and illuminates them. Reminiscence helps reveal a figure's past in order to better explain its present and expose formerly hidden aspects of his life story (Bū Ṭayyib, 1993, 134; al-Māḍī 1996, 43; Ṣāliḥ, 2005, 28-29; Samāḥa, 1999, 47; Wahbī, 1974, 472).¹²

After Kāmil leaves prison, he reminisces about what happened to him inside. This provides the reader with missing information about Kāmil's experiences there (Sharīf, 1994, 183-199). The function of the reminiscence is to

¹². For more details about reminiscence and analepse, see Genette, 1990: 33-85.

highlight the protagonist's own situations, ideas and opinions, in addition to shedding light on his or her personal mental and psychological evolution. It also has a more significant function than summarizing the past; reminiscence can transmit the subtlest of feelings concerning what happened in the past and clarify the personality changes that took place over a certain period of time (al-Raqīq, 1998, 78; Samāḥa, 1999, 170-172, 178-180).

The lengthy passage quoted above shows that prison forced Kāmil to move out of his external world (freedom), into his inner world, where he experienced negative feelings such as despair, grief, fear and humiliation. The passage reveals how the units of thought and feeling aroused in the protagonist are organized:

- The smell of petroleum stifles Kāmil's breath.
- The loss of his ability to distinguish one day from another.
- Illness and despair threaten Kāmil's being.
- He hears a bitter hiss coming from within himself.
- He began to feel like a guinea pig.

Note that every emotion and every thought experienced by Kāmil is the result of the previous one. These sequential, interconnected thoughts and feelings make him realize that inmates are not treated as human beings deserving respect and possessing an inalienable right to an honorable life. They are treated as if they were lab rats, subject to scientific and medical experiments of various kinds involving indescribably physical and psychological torment.

The reminiscences are reported in the first person and are narrated from the protagonist's perspective, not from that of the narrator. This perspective colors the recall with a special emotional hue. It is the protagonist's own self that dominates the discourse, so that the reader is presented with a narrative that is charged with impassioned power. This way the past is pulled into the present with all the emotional intimacy aroused within the protagonist's spirit. The past submerges the present completely, just as the evoked ego inundates the evoking ego and mingles with it. It is then that the text undertakes to inform the reader about the protagonist's experience (al-Raqīq, 1998, 78; Qāsim, 1984, 43), as can be seen in the following examples:

- The room's still air nearly stifles me.
- I write down these lines but cannot put a date on them.
- Long, heavy days followed each other, I don't know how many.
- I tried to inspect the cell's contents.
- I felt that for them I had become just another animal.

Here Kāmil expresses his emotions and thoughts during his stay in prison by means of reminiscing in the first person. These reminiscences reveal the sources of his emotional breakdown, his warring passions and the negative feelings burning inside, such as fear, despair and pain, as if the protagonist wants to expose everything that goes on inside him, or perhaps to draw the reader's attention to important issues such as torture in prisons and experimentation on human being.

Summary:-

Science fiction novels depict prisons in the Arab world as despotic institutions in which opposing opinions are repressed, because they constitute a threat to the survival and stability of the ruling regime. They also depict the stages through which prisoners go from the moment they are arrested until they are thrown into prison, as well as the accompanying torture, humiliation and dishonor that they experience, until they lose their individual identity. Our perusal of the two novels dealt with here showed that prison forces prisoners to change their behavior and way of living. The authors adopt the devices of soliloquy and reminiscence, respectively, to convey to the reader the prisoners' sense of frustration and despair. Elsewhere in the novels prison constituted a place where new ideas and views were encountered, a place where thinking could crystallize, the soul refined and the personality polished.

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