



## METAFICTIONAL FEATURES IN MUŞTAFĀ AL-RĀFI'Ī'S "RASĀ'IL AL-'AḤZĀN (LETTERS OF SORROWS)"<sup>i</sup>

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### Abstract:

This study traces the signs of metawriting or metafiction as a phenomenon in a literary sample written by al-Rāfi'ī in 1924. More specifically, the study investigates the features of this phenomenon in al-Rāfi'ī's book "Rasā'il 'al-'Aḥzān (Letters of Sorrows)". The study attempts to answer the following questions: How did al-Rāfi'ī work with metafiction before it appeared as a literary phenomenon at the end of the twentieth century? And how was metafiction reflected in his literary writings? We do indeed find that al-Rāfi'ī talked about the author, the narrator and the implied author. He also talked about metalanguage and about writing as a craft, discussing its processes, purposes, methodologies and expressive techniques as well as exploring the relationship between the author and the implied reader. All of these are considered metafictional features, thus proving our hypothesis that metafiction as a phenomenon had existed before the end of the twentieth century, and that al-Rāfi'ī used various metafictional features in his writings.

**Keywords:** al-Rāfi'ī, Belles-lettres, metafiction, biography, the 20th Century literature

### ملخص:

نتتبع في هذه الدراسة إرهابات لظاهرة الميتاكتابة أو الميتاقتص، في نموذج أدبي للرافعي من عام 1924. حيث تستقصي الدراسة ملامح الظاهرة في كتابه "رسالة الأحران". تحاول الدراسة الإجابة عن السؤال: كيف اشتغل الرافعي بالميتاكتابة قبل أن تكون ظاهرة أدبية كما ظهر في نهاية القرن العشرين؟ وكيف انعكست الميتاكتابة في كتاباته الأدبية؟ نجد أن الرافعي قد تحدث عن المؤلف والراوي والمؤلف الضمني، وعن الميتالغة وعن الكتابة كصناعة، سيرورتها والغاية منها، منهجيتها وأدواتها التعبيرية، كما تحدث عن علاقة المؤلف بالقارئ الافتراضي المروي له. يعتبر كل ذلك ملامح ميتاقتصية، مما يثبت فرضيتنا أن الظاهرة الميتاقتصية وجدت قبل نهاية القرن العشرين، وأن الرافعي استخدم بعضها منها.

### كلمات مفتاحية:

الرافعي، أدب الرسائل، ميتاقتص، سيرة غيرية، أدب القرن العشرين.

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## 1. Introduction

Metafiction is a style of "*fictional writing which self-consciously and systematically draws attention to its status as an artifact in order to pose questions about the relationship between fiction and reality*" (Waugh, 1984, p. 2). It is a self-reflection of the author who assumes the role of the critic in any fictional text by referring to its fictional status and expressive forms. It is also considered a critical text within a fictional narrative context, "*placing itself on the border between fiction and criticism*" (Currie, 1995, p. 2).

The novel "al-Qaṣr al-Maṣhūr (The Enchanted Palace)", written in 1936, is a joint work by the two authors, Tawfīq al-Ḥakīm and Ṭāha Ḥussein. According to the concept mentioned above, this novel is considered the first metafictional novel in Arabic literature. Yet, I have found features of this phenomenon in "Rasā'il al-'Aḥzān (Letters of Sorrows)" that was written in 1924 by al-Rāfi'ī. This novel, which was authored by al-Rāfi'ī, is the subject of this study.

Metafiction is typically concerned with exposing the conventions and limitations of realistic representation in fiction (Holmgren, 2016). The functions of metafiction range from undermining aesthetic illusion to poetological self-reflection, commenting on aesthetic procedures, the celebration of the act of narrating, and playful exploration of the possibilities and limits of fiction (Neumann, 2014).

## 2. The Author, the Narrator, and the Implied Reader

The author often assumes the role of an all-knowing narrator who is masked as the implied author, making it easy for himself/herself to convey his/her ideas. Some authors address their readers for the purpose of breaking the illusion that what the readers are reading is fictional, and they base this upon the desire to emphasise the material nature of the text and its characters. Authors who address their readers also do so for the purpose of earning their readers' engagement with the events and their sympathy with the author or characters. Another purpose behind this is to reproach the readers, provoke them, or break their expectations (Hamad, 2011A, p. 123).

The narrator's use of the third person in narration is what allows him to take a distance from the character he introduces, and then he is able to look at it with the observing eye of the event and the characters, and then he succeeds in capturing stray and close details, and every part, visible or hidden within the character (Rayan, 2016, p. 154). The author writes with a reader in mind. A reader that the author knows, addresses and deals with. In fact, it may happen that the writer did not write the text except for the sake of that reader at his request or to confront him (al- GHadhāmī, 1999, p. 148).

The implied author of any textual product supervises and controls the stylistics activities behind the writing processes of the actual author. Under these circumstances, the notion of implied reader also comes into focus, which is to impose certain limits on reading activities of the actual readers. To this end, the implied author also covertly imposes some norms and ideals on the reading processes of the actual readers (Moosavinia & Khaleghpanah, 2018). In a narrative communication model, narration is conceived "*as a communicative process in which information*

*about the story level is conveyed by a particular kind of narrator to a particular kind of narratee"* (Herman, 2009, pp. 64-65).

Therefore, the implied reader is different from the real reader since it is a textual construct rather than a flesh-and-blood human being. Also, the implied reader differs from the narratee in that it is not a member of the fictional world (Ryan, 2011, p. 36). The implied author in his own turn does not belong to the narration, it is a part of a text as an artistic whole (it is the result of the selection of material for the literary work, refinement, sequencing, choice of language means), and it belongs to the time of interpretation (Senkane, 2014, p. 15). The narrator creates and puts into action the strategies of text formation under its communicative experience, knowledge of the language, the source or raw material, but the storyteller who is often identified with narrator is only one of author's artistic instruments that indirectly discloses author's messages. The real author and narrator are metaliterary instances where one conceives communication but the other carries it out (Senkane, 2014, p. 14).

The narrator remains in the position of mere observer and reporter, letting the dialogues and events be the only source of information. He is somehow both in and on the edge of what is happening. In such a way, the reader seems to be given certain liberty of making his own judgments by not being influenced by the 'authorial' commentary. However, this is rather deceptive, as the narrator orchestrates what is and what is not presented, and thus continues to influence the reader in an indirect way while creating the impression of non-influence (Zgierska, 2017, p. 163). Moreover, Wolfgang Iser's conception of the "implied reader" incorporates a pre-structuring of potential meaning by the text along with the reader's actualization of this potential through the reading process. While readers are acknowledged as taking an active part in the composition of a work's meaning, this activity is relegated to discursive and aesthetic discovery through the exercise of cognitive faculties (Iser, 1974).

Thus, metafictional comments are used in order to negotiate the position of the Author as a type of historian whose writings have to remain credible (Gjerlevsen, 2016, p. 184). Metafictional texts can self-reflexively comment on the reading, writing, and meaning-making processes by disrupting the story line with intrusive comments, as well as by mirroring and thematizing acts of reading, writing, and interpreting through which the metafictional text can indicate different roles that readers and writers can assume (Saumaa, 2014). The author himself commenting on his story and calling it unreal, the character giving the author the story to be told, the author appearing both as character and narrator, the narrator directly addressing the reader. Some of the books go against established conventions of form and content, disregard the borderlines of the factual and the fictional, and the conventional roles of the author, narrator and the character (Kuriakose, 2018, p. 151).

### **3. Metalanguage – Language Speaks for Itself**

In metafictional novels, language is preoccupied with paying attention to its linguistic status and expressive forms to the extent that readers feel that they are in the midst of a linguistic game. This is since the use of linguistic techniques in the formulation of metafictional narratives is based

on manipulation. Metalanguage refers to concepts related to the nature of language, these include language as a semantic duality, language as a means of expression, language as possibilities of manipulation, and language as a grammatical construct (Hamad, 2011A, p. 113). It also refers to the use of pronouns, structures, letters, nouns, verbs, and linguistic metaphors within the text. For instance, Wāṣīnī al-A'raj writes some words without connecting their letters together, such as the word "Al- J a z ā 'i r" which he wrote in this way to indicate a real disintegration of the state and the people (Laredj, 1999, p. 7).

Narrative metalepsis is seen as the most radical way of transgressing this boundary or, in other words, of defying the assumed logic of representation (Tykhomyrova, 2018, p. 405). Metalepsis not only offers the paradoxical impossibility of denying its own prerequisites, but also denies the very spatiotemporal make-up of our understanding, of how we make sense of the world. It is this denial that destabilizes readings, proliferates meanings, and prolongs the dynamic instigated by such transgressions (Hanebeck, 2017, p. 112).

There are many different forms by which novelists turn to language. These include portmanteau, derivation, forms, strange structures, local dialects, and poetic language. For example, Imīl Ḥabībī resorts to manipulating language in his novel "Al-Waqā'i' al-Gharība fī 'Ikhtifā' Sa'id Abī al-Naḥs al-Mutashā'il (The Secret Life of Saeed, the Ill-Fated Pessoptimist)". Here, "the acronymic word *al-Mutashā'il* [Pessoptimist] is a portmanteau of the two words *Mutashā'im* and *Mutafā'il*", which mean pessimist and optimists, respectively (Habiby, 1997, p. 175).

### 3.1 The Process of Writing

The writing process constitutes a narrative obsession that haunts the writer beginning from the initial stages of work. Choosing the content, methods of expression, characters, art form, plot, and other storytelling elements, all put the writer before a large and complex project. Writing is emphasised through its tools. And perhaps these details which we may see as small give the importance that surrounds this profession, expressing the great degree of preoccupation with expressive tools that self-conscious narration is consumed with paying attention to.

### 3.2 Writing as a Profession

Metafictional novels constantly refer to writing as a craft. And with the text paying attention to this subject, the reader's awareness of it is achieved. But what does the concept of writing mean for a novelist? Writing, here, is a psychological need without which the soul cannot be purified from its sediments. Writing is also a process of self-actualisation, and it is an immortalization of the writer through his text, which in this case writes the writer and immortalizes him (Hamad, 2011A, p. 107).

Metafiction, as a narrative practice of critique, is divided into several areas including "the novelist's general preoccupation with critique, which resembles the role of the critic, and the novelist's

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<sup>iii</sup> Emile Ḥabībī begins his novel "Sarāyā Bint al-Ghūl" with the author's speech, in which he talks about his process of writing fiction in general: "I, as common in my previous novels, do not plan the repercussions of the novel before starting to write it, but rather loosen the reins of esotericism, sometimes to the extent of complete abandonment." (Sarāyā Bint al-Ghūl, p. 710).

*critique of his novelistic work or what relates to his work, which all lie outside his novelistic work. These also include the novel's preoccupation with critiquing itself or other novels, or critiquing both together"* (Sulaiman, 1994, p. 41). The 20th century saw an outstanding upheaval in theoretical appreciation of literature, and as a result the literature itself became involved in its own interpretation (Tykhomyrova, 2018, p. 364).

### 3.3 The Author and the Reader

The implied reader in such cases—the pre-structured role or position from which the text is most obviously intelligible—is a position constructed in reaction to the characterized reader (Reimer, 2010, p. 7). Nikolajeva explains how *"the implied author is responsible for the ideology of the text"* and that, in a mainstream (adult) novel, *"a character can serve as the author's mouthpiece"* (2002, p. 4).

### 3.4 Abstraction as a Metafictional Position

Inside views are taken as authoritative comments by a reliable narrator—one that shares the perspective of the implied author—they influence how the reader reads the narrative, evaluates characters, and understands the ideological norms and beliefs of the narrative. The opposite of a reliable narrator is an unreliable or fallible narrator, who does not share the perception, interpretation, and evaluation of the implied author (Resseguie, 2019).

In *"Rasā'il 'al-'Aḥzān (Letters of Sorrows)"* (1924), al-Rāfi'ī draws attention to the idea of abstracting from himself another self, thus programming the hypothetical situation into a real one. The novel's literary atmosphere is composed of a narrator, a messenger, and a receiver which is treated as the implied reader who will strive to read the letters and interact with them in order to understand their purpose. This implied reader refers to al-Rāfi'ī's beloved woman, as indicated by al-Rāfi'ī's friend Muḥammad Sa'īd 'Iryān who authored the biographic book *"Ḥayāt al-Rāfi'ī (The life of al-Rāfi'ī)"*, in which he says:

*"Al-Rāfi'ī addresses himself in Rasā'il 'al-'Aḥzān (Letters of Sorrows) in an abstract manner, as he claims that these letters have been sent to him by a friend, so you see him directing the letters to that unknown friend whom he seeks his help for solace through announcing and complaining; then he feigns that this friend writes back to him letters that are directed by a style of writing used in his own letters. However, neither the friend nor the letters really exist. What exist are al-Rāfi'ī and his letters, which he uses to talk to himself about the story of his love, his hopes, and what had happened to him. It can also be said that: in these letters, al-Rāfi'ī has put something in place of something else, meaning that he created these letters to his companion (his beloved May Ziyāda) and then published them as a book for her to read in order for her to learn about his condition, which she did not know about or he thinks that she did not know about; They are thus his letters written to her in a style of love's pride, thus healing him and at the same time not affecting his pride." (p. 127).*

The implied author wants the reader to move from the surface to a deeper, spiritual understanding (Resseguie, 2019). This issue can be glimpsed in al-Rāfi'ī's (1924) introduction to the novel, for instance when he says: *"I never thought that I would see a beautiful woman as she is in*

*herself, and I left her as she is in herself, but there is a self. Oh, from myself"* (p. 8). The repeated use of the word *self* in this excerpt highlights the idea of abstraction that Sa'īd 'Iryān referred to. This word repetition may serve as a dramatic feature that corresponds to the metafictional literary vision, through which the author occupies a textual space within himself and relies on writing as a source to announce his concerns.

This aspect of point of view also allows the implied reader to identify conflicts and opposing points of view. A character's point of view that goes against the norms, beliefs, and worldview of the narrator creates distance between the character and the reader, while a character's perspective that agrees with the narrator's stance creates affinity (Resseguie, 2019). Paratexts also present a chimera of embodiment in the continuous competing, apprising, and overlapping movements of textual bodies that inform the reader of the nature of its whole (Bailey, 2017).

The dimensions of the implied reader which al-Rāfi'ī (1924) drew in his mind also appear here. This since these letters are directed to his beloved, as she is the one whom he addressed when he said: *"I loved a girl as if she were a love poem in a poetry book, not a political speech in a party."* (p. 40), and also when he said: *"One of her characteristics is that she does not like anything as much as she likes the accuracy of poetic expression, and I will continue this for you in another letter. What she wants to bring to her pure face, radiant cheeks, glamour, and charm are pure pronunciations, radiant meanings, glamorous expressions, and charming phrases. And for her, this is love; She loves you as she loves a word that you write or a meaning that you imagine, for if she is tired of you, she only has the third, only a newspaper to rip"* (p. 63).

This beloved one is the implied or hypothetical reader to whom al-Rāfi'ī writes his letters. The implied reader understands and interprets the narrative in the manner the implied author intends. The real reader who adopts the role of the implied reader knows the conventions of the implied author and assembles the message according to the author's design (Resseguie, 2019). What can be noticed here is that features of metafiction interact with expressing the beauty of his beloved, thus forming a canvas of marvellous writing in congruence with his beloved's marvellous image. So, for him, his beloved becomes a story in his book, an intended receiver of his letters, and a hypothetical implied reader. This is clear when considering how al-Rāfi'ī's (1924) describes his beloved:

*"Her femininity alone is a style of beauty. If you meet her, you will soon see yourself searching in her eyes for the secret of this marvellous style, so you do not find them in secret, but in love. And if you are clever, she will add to the impulses of her affection an admiration for you, and then this knot that she has made cannot be untied."* (p. 76)

*"The historical author writes, the historical reader reads; the implied author means, the implied reader interprets; the narrator speaks, [and] the narratee hears."* (Nelles, 1993, p. 22)

The goal of having a concept such as implied reader is not to understand what the real reader might have been like but to identify the perspective from which the narrative might be interpreted (Haghanikar, 2020).

Al-Rāfi'ī's artistic talents may struggle with his heartfelt feelings. So, what appears throughout the letters are these critical metafictional expressions that point to the surrender of his artistic expressive talents to his feelings, surfacing whenever he invokes his beloved one in his mind and heart. By this, al-Rāfi'ī forgets his supreme goal to revive language and that he is the prose poet and narrator. For instance, al-Rāfi'ī (1924) says:

*"I will write these trembling words, and I will simplify the trembling of my heart in their expressions and meanings; I write about (...) that name that was a whole year in the life of this heart. I will write things and express other things that I do not reveal."* (pp. 24-25)

And he also says:

*"Languages are sometimes incapable of what we make them carry, so they cannot express well if the emotion is strong and excited, and a similar emotion has erupted in me. If the soul is fed up with this awareness, it will resort to its first language, and the emotion will colour the face whether it was shyness or fear."* (p. 60)

Al-Rāfi'ī (1924) returns at the end of the novel to confirm the idea of abstraction, thus he repeats abstracting from himself another person whom he considers to be the receiver of his letters, which is presented as his friend, indicating the implied reader who is actually his beloved. In this regard, al-Rāfi'ī (1924) says:

*"And I tried, dear one, to write to you while I was in this death, so I composed words. Then I was afraid that someone might find my secret, so I kept it in them and left it among my papers; My heart used to tell me that it can smell from these papers the many pages that I will write. I am writing to you in a condition that it is very clear, yet it has become very mysterious. What condition do you think it is? And you do find it impossible with your one person to turn into two, accompanied by the imagination of a third person."* (pp. 167-169)

Al-Rāfi'ī ends "Rasā'il 'al-'Aḥzān (Letters of Sorrows)" by surrendering to his silence, considering that his words and his expressive talents did not give justice to his heart. Hence, he no longer needed what was in them to get out. Al-Rāfi'ī was thus punched by the highest levels of subordination of thought to the heart, as he and his interpreter are the masters of the situation. Al-Rāfi'ī (1924) continues to say:

*"Now I will let my silence complete my words. And this silence is dark in its depths and black in its aspects, because it is filled with the idea of reprimand; It is very dark because the sun of love*

*does not shine in it; It is obscure and closed on itself because it is the image of bad thinking; It is lonely and empty because it draws a sad heart."* (p. 177)

### 3.5 Understanding the Author's Language of Metafiction

The metafictional phenomena expand in al-Rāfi'ī's statements and positions, as his personality as an author takes the direction of rebellion against reality in a way that is more of a rebellion against himself as an author in this reality. Due to the severity of his sorrows, writing was no longer helping al-Rāfi'ī emancipate from the repressions of himself. So, he stood helplessly captive in front of his beloved trying to mediate the situation with his expressive talents, but to no avail. Hence, in his demonstration of the realistic social situation and by taking a sharp and critical view of reality, al-Rāfi'ī used critical literary terms that confirm the prominence of metafiction as a phenomenon in his writing. This is clear when al-Rāfi'ī (1924) said:

*"The major human problem is that every person wants to be the protagonist of the novel, which is like a virgin until that person who was brought in comes to be cursed in its context. However, the details of the novel are written before, and the chapter on the curse comes as it is, with its parts, margins, causes and consequences."* (p. 10)

Al-Rāfi'ī (1924) often drops language and its literary terms throughout the novel in congruence with the nature of his relationship with his beloved one, calling her in his mind to be the desired receiver of these words. An example of this is when he said, *"And the lover may turn into a connotation, a kiss, or a meaning when the one who loves wants to take his beloved with him everywhere while actually remaining in place"* (p. 20), and *"He was still complaining about rejection, until he hated in himself the letters of rejection and their signs"* (p. 54).

The flaunting of linguistic knowledge appears as a matter of glorification, on the one hand, and as a matter of weakness, on the other hand. This is since al-Rāfi'ī (1924) sees himself shrinking and diminishing in front of his beloved, as neither has language played its role nor has his prestigious lifestyle helped him to be an agent of expressing his innermost feelings. For instance, this is clear when al-Rāfi'ī (1924) said, *"And she said as you told me that it is a small misfortune, and she claimed that this is what they call minimizing reverence, and thus you are two small misfortunes"* (p. 76). Despite acknowledging the clever nature of his beloved, she is still not one of the people of the language. That is because she herself fell in love with him, as he claims, so she became far from joining the pioneers of language since love has blurred her insight. He continued saying,

*"However, she is not good at writing in formal Arabic. So, if she writes, and little did she write, she will get lost in what resembles a deep sea and then run to the coast and dance there on the sprinkler of affection. She used to say that what makes her helpless among the genres of books are the books of Arabic language; She brought an old man to teach her one of these books, but to her they became two books not one."* (pp. 80-81)



This statement is merely an attempt to justify the impotence of her expressive talents, which confirms that his fondness and extensive love for her return back to him with the same feelings from her. This is because anyone who reaches this emotional rank would be unable to have stylistic talents.

The activation of implicatures not directly associated with the context and suggested by lexical and rhetorical choices intentionally made by the speaker, enhances the semantic potential of the message. This result is surely also based on illocutionary force and other pragmatic tools. Nevertheless, more covert and sophisticated linguistic (lexical and syntactic ones), pragmatic and semantic properties are involved, that bridge the divide between language and symbolic representation of feelings, beliefs and often unconscious cognitive systems of values (Baldi, 2020, p. 339). Figures of speech or rhetorical figures depart from customary or standard usage of language by the order and pattern of words and phrases. Although figures of speech use words or phrases in their customary or literal manner, they achieve special effects by the arrangement of words, phrases, clauses, and syntactical forms (Resseguie, 2019).

The emotional states of al-Rāfi'ī often appeared in metafictional-linguistic forms, for instance al-Rāfi'ī (1924) wrote:

*"I dipped the tip of the pen in her folds and thought for a moment, then I dipped it again and wrote this word 'poetry' on the side of the page. She looked at me with a smile and said, 'Take this pen, and write a small word in poetry so that I can translate it into French in one of my articles.' Poetry is beyond the soul, the soul is beyond nature, and what is beyond nature is the unseen. If everything that was said in poetry was collected, I would see that most of its meanings fit to be said in the soul. Then I would see it being only understood from our side, and not understood from his." (pp. 92-93)*

And he continued saying:

*"She said, 'According to what you are saying I am begging you for another meaning? I said, 'not only one but several meanings, including that I...' She said, 'and what do I understand from this I?' I said, 'is it not a pronoun?' She replied, 'and what about this pronoun?' So, I said, 'Come on, don't be stubborn, doesn't this pronoun include the speaker himself?'" (p. 151)*

The language used by the narrator avoids any phrases that might emotionally involve the reader. His tone and manner of narration are supposed to further create the distance not only between the narrator and his subject but also between the reader and the text (Zgierska, 2017, 163). The ability of language to contain al-Rāfi'ī's concealed feelings is something that Sa'īd 'Iryān confirms and is very evident throughout the biographic book "Ḥayāt al-Rāfi'ī (The life of al-Rāfi'ī)". This is since the major life events and inner feelings of al-Rāfi'ī have cast a shadow over his writing, as al-Rāfi'ī's circumstances helped prepare and develop the metafictional features of his writing.

Therefore, it clearly appears that love was a basic form of the idea of metafiction in his writing. In this regard, Sa'īd 'Iryān (1955) said:

*"Similar to this love, he had many different lovers who fruitfully gave birth; and it appears to me that whenever al-Rāfi'ī felt a need for love, he would search for (one) and say to her: Let us love each other, because in myself there is poetry I want to compose, or a love letter I want write it...! And I once heard him say that to one of them... and I heard one of them say back to him: When will I see myself in your company so you can write a letter about me in a (rose paper)?" (p. 97)*

Sa'īd 'Iryān (1955) also said:

*"He wrote and organized, and love inspired his poetry and writings. But since he had a taste of love, he realized that he was unable to say anything about love, neither in poetry nor in prose. And he died humming a poem that he did not organize, a poem that no one has ever heard one verse from. This is because human language is too narrow to accommodate this poem's meanings or to express them. Because it is from the heartbeats and whispers of deep sentiment. His self said words to him, and he said other words to himself, as if things had been revealed to him that he had not seen before with the eyes of the lover. So, before the story reaches its end and the knot becomes unravelled, his pride would come to surpass the conclusion." (pp. 101-102)*

In addition, Sa'īd 'Iryān (1955) wrote:

*"His conscience spoke to her conscience, so she smiled and said: I did not love you as a man, but rather as a thought, a soul, and a poetic self, and you are all that which fills my soul and my heart; Do not seek in me a female character or else you will go astray, my beloved. He said, my beloved, have you only seen me as an idea that forever circles in you, a soul that flutters around you, a self that engulfs poetry and wisdom from the inspiration of your eyes?" (p. 125)*

### 3.6 The Methodology of Metafictional Writing

It is noticed that most of al-Rāfi'ī's (1924) love poems were taken by a system of perfect/complete meters, thus secretly guaranteeing the perfection of his poetry and literature and replacing his previous confessions of weakness. This system is also a reference to the perfection of his beloved, who needs something less perfect than her perfection in order to for him to express her beauty. The third letter in the novel was based on this perfect meter:

*"When she looked, the deer blushed for her,  
and when she turned to the full moon, it shied for her." (p. 50)*

And so is the fifth letter:

*"The passion exploded smiles from its holes,*

*flying like glimpses over my darkness."* (p. 68)

And the eighth letter as well:

*"As if this full moon in its darkness  
is a merciful hand wiping my sorrows."* (p. 108)

It is important to note here that al-Rāfi'ī's (1924) style of writing differs from one letter to another. Some of these letters were written as prose and some were written as poetry, and part of them combined the two styles together. The reason behind this diversity is to strengthen his literary talent which was incapable of describing his beloved. Thus, he brought together these two styles in order to reach his goal. Sa'īd 'Iryān (1955) referred to this by saying to his friend al-Rāfi'ī:

*"This is from her magic that she has cast upon you, and if she reached what you have described about her, or even less than that, then she would have confirmed the ties between you two from under the soul and above the heart. But your description of her is unimaginable even in an illusion, and it does not come to anyone's mind except for you, in your illusion and your mind, because you are you."* (p. 114)

Al-Rāfi'ī reinforces the idea that his poetics are inspired by his affection, and he adopts this approach throughout his writings. For example, al-Rāfi'ī (1924) wrote:

*"I did not see my heart seek pleasure until after its belief in three: the human thought that descends in the minds of philosophers and poets from the highest heavens, or the one that springs from the depths of the soul."* (p. 122)

This is found in a letter about the heart and its role in programming a critical view of life, and it focuses on his relationship with his beloved; that relationship which is not only related to the minds of philosophers but also to his beloved with her supreme beauty that surpasses the ideas of philosophers and the ability of poets to compose poetry.

In this regard, al-Rāfi'ī (1924) continued to say:

*"But I swear by God, I do not know whether I described her or I was described with her, whether I wrote from her or wrote about her, for that is a requirement without it would make the description of hot coals sting like hot coals; And whatever I write, she remains in my soul without diminishing, as much as we want it to. For she contains two things, thought and beauty, and in me there are two things, imagination and love. And these four things together generate in me a wonderful creation that I have never seen before in a woman, for in her alone what is more than all women, because in her alone is my soul."* (p. 124)

Here, the word "more" (referring to the word "ziyāda" in the original text) may refer to his beloved (May Ziyāda), who is the intended receiver of his letters and the one who made him unable to describe and explain. This is since her love outpowered his rhetorical ability, so when he described her, he was also described with her.

What can be noticed here is his use of poetic language when talking about love and mentioning his beloved and flirting with her. And what is meant by poetic language is using language with short, intense sentences that are rich in inspiration, as this language participates in the construction of events and employs words in new forms. This is linked to the style of the writer who is confused by the words that can achieve a poetic understanding and contribute to deepening the meaning of the text (Harabi, 2018, p. 284). This becomes clear when considering how al-Rāfi'ī mentioned the surname of his beloved but in another sense.

Despite acknowledging al-Rāfi'ī's claim of being weak because of his beloved, the power of latent recognition of literary ability has taken a different turn, i.e., towards an appreciation for him among his readers. The features of metafictional writing methodology are confirmed throughout the biography "Ḥayāt al-Rāfi'ī (The life of al-Rāfi'ī)" by Sa'īd 'Iryān (1955). This biography asserts al-Rāfi'ī's critical literary writing, starting from the introduction of the biography which draws attention to al-Rāfi'ī's relentless objective of taking the novel as a major factor and crystallizer of his literature.

The biography begins with Sa'īd 'Iryān (1955) telling a story that happened to him with al-Rāfi'ī, describing the moment they met each other by saying, "*He was sitting behind a desk and hiding behind piles of books to veil himself from the people speaking to him, and to his right and left you can find tables crowded with books without any organisation or arrangement*" (p. 12). This passage calls attention to turn to the main writing instruments—the books and the library—that make the writer.

The tendency to glorify the writing process within the literary work of al-Rāfi'ī grows and develops in the biography, especially when referring to his death. This is since al-Rāfi'ī's pen and heart are still beating in the collective reality of his readers. This becomes clear when considering what Sa'īd 'Iryān (1955) wrote about al-Rāfi'ī's death:

*"The voice was gone, the human died, and the pen was broken; but the poet's heart is still alive and beating, because the poet's heart is stronger than mortality. I turned to the obituary and read it with heartbreak and sadness, but reading it did not add to me any kind of knowledge except that Muṣṭafā Ṣadiq al-Rāfi'ī had died."* (p. 14)

Similar to what was mentioned earlier, it is important to present the identity of al-Rāfi'ī that is related to the metafictional vision that he drew for himself during his lifetime. This is since all of al-Rāfi'ī's circumstances circle around defining his identity as a writer, signalling that heritage must not die when his owner dies. For every book written by al-Rāfi'ī has a story, and every situation that happened with him was supplemented by an article or a poem written by him. The life of al-Rāfi'ī, as his friend Sa'īd 'Iryān (1955) talked about, was not narrated like the

stories of others as it was not an ordinary one, it was a life that, with all its aspects, was related to writing in a way or another. More specifically, Sa'īd 'Iryān (1955) wrote:

*"No one knows him except through what he writes in books and publishes in newspapers, or through what his opponents write about him. He follows his own path, not caring that his status among people is in a place of contentment or a place of anger and resentment. And he does not look at anything other than the goal that he made for himself since his first day, which is to be this nation's Arabic mouthpiece in an Arabized foreign language." (p. 16)*

This confirms the relationship between a literary work and its author, regardless of the reaction of people around him. This is because the author directs his attention towards language so it can reflect on him. So, he uses language with his tools, skills, and talents to surmount it for people and, by this, trying to remove the veil of foreignness that obliterated the minds of Arabs and repelled them from their mother tongue.

Sa'īd 'Iryān (1955) draws attention to the interest raised by al-Rāfi'ī in other authors, saying that:

*"Many literary historians tried to talk about al-Rāfi'ī and his life; They called him a poet, a writer, a novelist, a scholar, and they called him a historian, but they did not say the word that should have been said. He was a poet, a writer, a novelist, a scholar, and a historian, but with all those together, and even without them, he was something other than the poet, the writer, novelist, and other than the scholar and historian; He was God's gift to the Arab Muslim nation during this time." (p. 17)*

'Iryān (1955) continued saying:

*"But every time I want to hold the pen, I feel helpless, as I was almost certain that no one could write about al-Rāfi'ī except for al-Rāfi'ī himself. But al-Rāfi'ī had died, and here I am trying to write about al-Rāfi'ī, trying to gather the pieces of his life that were scattered by the news, stories and anecdotes of his contemporaries." (p. 18)*

One of al-Rāfi'ī's endeavours to confirm his value according to his method was by framing himself in the hearts of his readers as a great writer, presenting what 'Iryān (1955) had mentioned in the biography:

*"If a visitor visited him in his office, he would sit for a while to greet him and listen to what he says, but soon he would take a book in his hands and say to his visitor: come, let us read. This meant that al-Rāfi'ī reads and the guest listens. Whether in the coffee house, in the train, and in the council, you will not find al-Rāfi'ī alone without a book in his hand." (p. 33)*

Thus, it can be noticed from the beginning that telling the details of al-Rāfi'ī's biography revolves around al-Rāfi'ī's attachment to books and his keenness to undisputedly present himself as a premier writer in the art scene.

This is the idea that his friend Sa'īd 'Iryān (1955) sought to demonstrate, and it becomes clear when he talks about al-Rāfi'ī's appointment as a clerk in the Talkha Court, saying that *"would he not nominate himself to be the writer of this nation? This is how he saw himself from the first day, and he continued to see himself like that until the last day"* (p.34). And when al-Rāfi'ī wrote his report to the Ministry of Justice, the report said: *"Let him live as he desires to live, and leave him to work, fascinate, and innovate the literature of this nation in whatever way he wants."* This report came after the employer had begun to constrict the workers through disciplinary laws and monitor them in every small or large matter. This has disturbed al-Rāfi'ī, as a writer like him should not be treated like this. However, the Ministry of Justice gave attention to this report, and, as a consequence, al-Rāfi'ī started working without anyone's authority over him. And he worked without ever neglecting his duty (p. 41).

Moreover, one of al-Rāfi'ī's friends told the story of the first time they both met, saying that:

*"He said to me: Do you know that I am a poet? I said: No, I don't know. He said: I am Muṣṭafā Ṣadiq al-Rāfi'ī, and all these pamphlets are from my poetry. Then he showed me a few notebooks that were on the desk, then resumed saying: But it is the poetry of modernity, and as I do not like it, I will choose the best quality and tear the rest, and I will print my poetry collection shortly, so you will know me."* ('Iryān, 1955, p. 47)

In this situation, al-Rāfi'ī emerges as a critic who speaks in terms of a thematic dialogue between criticism and storytelling, thus defiantly presenting the features of metafiction in his life. Sa'īd 'Iryān (1955) also confirmed al-Rāfi'ī's critical approach when he said:

*"Arabic readers, in general, are familiar with the insightful critical knowledge of al-Rāfi'ī, and they know about his critical intensity and vigority, which is why many of them love him and gather around his literature. For whoever wants to know about al-Rāfi'ī's critiques should read al-Rāfi'ī's article Poets of this Age which was written in the year 1905."* (p. 57)

What can be noticed here is that the title of the mentioned article contains an expression that indicates the concept of metafiction.

It is worth noting that al-Rāfi'ī experienced many obstacles that contributed to his search for himself as a writer, poet, and storyteller, such as the disease that afflicted him in his childhood and continued to afflict him until he lost his hearing in his youth. Sa'īd 'Iryān (1955) wrote about this saying, *"He did not complete thirty years of age when he became deaf, and he stopped hearing anything around him, so he was cut off from the world"* (p. 30). Al-Rāfi'ī was thus very keen to employ his writing talents to communicate with people. Not only that, but his writings included a semi-permanent alertness to his persona as a writer, and he sought to solidify his intellectual beliefs

as a writer in the minds of his readers, *"and he said to himself: If people cannot hear me, then let them hear from me"* ('Iryān, 1955, p. 31). This reflects the writer's concerns about- and his preoccupation with the craftsmanship of literary writing, and by this confirming his beliefs and self-esteem.

### 3.7 The Metafictional Development of the Writer

When the writer resorts to the phenomenon of metafiction in his literary work, he strives to draw the reader's attention to his being as a writer by talking about writing and its tools, its processes and contents, and about writers, critics and books related to writing. The writer also draws attention to his relationship with reality as well as the protagonists of his stories (Hamad, 2011B, p. 370).

Many refer to the qualitative leap that al-Rāfi'ī had experienced after he battled with poetry and poets and moved to the world of structural prose writing. This is clear in one of his chapters that was entitled *"From Poetry to Writing"* (p. 64). It is noticeable that a prominent development occurred in al-Rāfi'ī's literary personality, as after people had become familiar with him as a poet, he wanted to experience being an expert in prose and composition. Sa'īd 'Iryān (1955) wrote about this turn, saying that:

*"Al-Rāfi'ī began here to be the writer whom Arabic readers know, while al-Rāfi'ī as a poet began to shrink little by little until people forgot him, or almost forgot him. They only talk about him as they talk about a poet whom they once listened to his pleasant songs then he left their world to a second world to talk to them from the pages of history."* (p. 71)

And:

*"He excelled in this world as he considered himself to have the talent of structural prose. So, he translated this feeling by authoring the book "Malakat al-'inshā' (The Talent of Composition)", and he spoke about it saying: I liked the simplicity of expression and the ease of meaning, so I set that as an example for my writing."* (p. 76)

Sa'īd 'Iryān (1955) went to define al-Rāfi'ī's writings by exposing his eloquent literary ability through reviewing examples in which metafictional features emerge. For instance, he referred to al-Rāfi'ī's book *"Awrāq al-Ward (Papers of Roses)"*, which has a metafictional title as the papers refer to a key element in the literary writing industry.

*Papers of Roses* begins with an eloquent introduction to literature, in which he talks about the history of Arabic love letters in a style that belongs only to al-Rāfi'ī himself with his own comprehension and a breadth of knowledge that no one else knows but him; And this introduction alone is a section of Arabic literature which nothing like it was written before ('Iryān, 1955, p. 143).

Also, when Sa'īd 'Iryān (1955) talks about the battles that al-Rāfi'ī fought with his contemporaries, he directs us towards al-Rāfi'ī's articles and books that have metafictional titles as means to assert his literary superiority. An example of this is the book *"Fī al-Naqd (On*

Criticism)" that deals with the literary battles between the prominent literary writers Ṭāhā Ḥusayn, al-'Aqqād, and al-Rāfi'ī himself, which is worthy of inclusion in the history of criticism (pp. 147-149).

Al-Rāfi'ī criticized the pioneers of modern literature who sought to slander ancient texts, and by this imitating the book "Kitāb Kalīlah wa-Dimnah". Based on this approach, he published the book "al-Ma'raka (The Battle)" with an introduction in which he said:

*"I have a copy of the book Kalīlah wa-Dimnah, and no one has a similar copy to it.... Whenever I wanted a parable, I would find one in it; I returned to it today and I was struck by this story that I found in."* ('Iryān, 1955, 166)

It is noticeable here that al-Rāfi'ī raises his own value rank based on the idea that his book is inclusive of everything. This is in addition to his attachment to the story of the ancient writer Ibn al-Muqaffa' who grew up among the nation's first generation of writers. Al-Rāfi'ī thus also counts himself among the nation's first generation of writers, and by this he prides himself and criticizes others.

When al-Rāfi'ī returned to poetry after excelling in writing prose, one of his competitors emerged with a poem and stole from him the title of the king's poet. As a result, al-Rāfi'ī began getting into conflicts with other writers as means to declare his persona and greatness. In this regard, al-Rāfi'ī said:

*"Do you see how he makes of me? He wants to get me. Is his poetry compared to mine? Does he see him and me alike? Does he think that writers will be deceived by this embellishment in printing, considering him a poet among my class or considering me a poet among his?"* ('Iryān, 1955, 174)

This type of criticism differed from what was common from al-Rāfi'ī, as al-Rāfi'ī used to have his disputes in defence of religion, especially around preserving the language of the Qur'ān and the ancient heritage of language. However, in the later stages of his life he combined this approach with another approach that serves his personal interest, i.e., emphasizing the depth of metafiction as a phenomenon. Thus, his critical battles began to revolve around accusing his opponents of negligence, corruption of taste, weak opinion, and lack of knowledge. For these reasons, al-Rāfi'ī's friend, Sa'īd 'Iryān (1955, p. 175), criticized him by declaring that he was not successful in criticism despite his extensive comprehension and delicate taste; For the critic should have a chaste tongue and restrained self.

It is important to point to the most prominent critical battles that al-Rāfi'ī was involved in, which mostly focused on defending the eloquence and inimitability of the Qur'ān against his opponent, al-'Aqqād. Sa'īd 'Iryān (1955) talked extensively about this battle, saying:

*"This battle began with a conversation that took place between al-Rāfi'ī and al-'Aqqād in Dār al-Muqataṭaf about the miracle of the Qur'ān and the book " 'Ijāz al-Qur'ān (The Miracle of the*



*Qur'an), in which al-'Aqqād had a different opinion than that of al-Rāfi'ī. Here, al-Rāfi'ī's anger was ignited in defence of the Qur'ān while al-'Aqqād denied its inimitability." (p. 184)*

Although this battle was caused by something that has to do with personal beliefs, it crystallized the metafictional features of al-Rāfi'ī's writing. He thus began criticizing al-'Aqqād's persona as a poet and a writer, saying that:

*"This is a method of response by which I intend to reveal the falsehood of this writer and to defame his literature. Even if his true status in literature is established among Arabic readers, you do not see them listening to his opinion when it comes to talking about the inimitability of the Qur'ān; That is because anyone who does not understand the logic of Arabic in terms of thought and language cannot speak well about the inimitability of the Qur'ān." ('Iryān, 1955, 191)*

In the midst of the series of responses between al-'Aqqād and al-Rāfi'ī, it happened that al-Rāfi'ī pointed out a grammatical mistake that was made by Shawqī. So, al-'Aqqād waited for al-Rāfi'ī to make a similar mistake in order to take on him, not as a victory for Shawqī - as the war between the two is competitive and their history is stained with grudges - but because this intervention touched on al-Rāfi'ī's pride by challenging his knowledge and character. Here, al-'Aqqād did not miss the opportunity of seeing al-Rāfi'ī seeking to decorate himself for himself as well as for his readers and striving to preserve his pride without calling for the protection of the Arabic language, as was his approach before. Sa'īd 'Iryān's (1955) opinion about this is as follows:

*"For I have to return everything to its causes, I claim that al-Rāfi'ī did not write what he wrote purely for protecting the Arabic language, it is rather for his pride, self-esteem, and the fear of being defeated by al-'Aqqād in a literary battle." (p. 196)*

The critical responses between al-Rāfi'ī and al-'Aqqād continued in the literary arena, with each of them highlighting his mastery in language and its sciences to the extent that they would end up insulting each other at the end of each response. And it happened often that one of them would stop for a while before continuing their critical battle again. A friend of al-Rāfi'ī referred to these events by saying:

*"So, you do not intend to respond? Al-Rāfi'ī said: And what part of what he wrote do you think deserves a response? I said: But readers will not understand your silence towards him, and they will call it nothing but a withdrawal from battle...! Do you agree that they say that about you...? Then, al-Rāfi'ī seemed convinced as my words prompted him again to battle his opponent." ('Iryān, 1955, p. 205)*

After waging these critical literary battles, al-Rāfi'ī's awareness started to develop as he took a break from daily writing and instead devoted himself to reading. This resulted in igniting

his desire for writing fiction stories, as before that he was not interested in writing fiction. However, the influence of his friend Sa'īd 'Iryān, who encouraged him to go through this experience, was prominent on him; Since then, fiction became one of al-Rāfi'ī's most cherished style of writing, even after he had deterred himself and his literary friends from it. The beginning of this period is marked with al-Rāfi'ī's published article entitled "Falsafat al-Qissa (The Philosophy of the Story)", which was a response to a question from one of his readers asking him, "Why don't you analyse the story?" This article is important as it brought about al-Rāfi'ī's critical metafictional dimensions.

The ideas presented in al-Rāfi'ī's fiction stories focused on examining and emphasizing the metafictional features of writing, these include: "Qiṣat 'Abb (A Father's Story)", "Qiṣat Zawāj (A Marriage Story)", "al-Saṭir al-'Akhīr min al-Qiṣa (The Last Line of the Story)", "Qiṣat Sa'īd ibn al-Musīyb (The Story of Sa'īd ibn al-Musīyb)", and "Zayl al-Qiṣa wa Falsafat al-Mahir (The Tail of the Story and the Philosophy of Dowry)".<sup>iv</sup> Observing these titles confirms al-Rāfi'ī's inclinations and acceptance of the fiction story as a literary art, even after he was hostile to it and cynical of its pioneers, seeing those who turn to fiction as unprivileged. Fiction, in his previous view, was to him a form of absurdity, but that did not last; This is because al-Rāfi'ī realized his ignorance of himself and his reality, so he followed people's tendency and started to love fiction as they do. Through this, al-Rāfi'ī compensated for his absence from this literary form by replacing it with fiction stories that contain metafictional titles. The aim of these stories was not only for self-criticism but also for developing his writing tools.

Due to his admiration for fiction as a writing genre, he began investing in events, occasions, and visits that help him author his stories. He even used to adapt situations to his own benefit so he can write about them. For example, he once got his friend into an embarrassing situation with a young lady in order for him to write a story:

*"A funny story... We made the knot, so look at the process of solving it, it will be an interesting literary chapter, Sheikh Sa'īd, and you will be the author while I will be the narrator. We are tired of pure imagination, so we sought you as a way to some truth."* ('Iryān, 1955, 264)

Likewise, his friend's suicide incident inspired him to write many stories and articles. Sa'īd 'Iryān (1955, p. 282) considered this approach to writing stories innovative in a way that had never been written in Arabic before, and this is in the record of al-Rāfi'ī's literary contributions.

Al-Rāfi'ī's literature developed over time, and he was destined to be accepted in the hearts of readers. This is because his writings considered the conditions of people and their secrets, and his ideas materialized in the form of stories and articles based on what they needed. Therefore, his readers felt close to him because he expresses them, so they sent him piles of letters consulting him and expressing their admiration for what he writes ('Iryān, 1955, pp. 302-316).

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iv See these in 'Iryān (1955), pp. 240, 257, 250, 258

### 3.8 The Metafictional Reader

The metafictional features of al-Rāfi'ī's writings draw attention to the close relationship between the writer and the reader. Not only that, but this relationship should be preserved and protected due to its repeated reference in "Rasā'il 'al-'Aḥzān (Letters of Sorrows)" and its confirmation in the biography "Ḥayāt al-Rāfi'ī (The life of al-Rāfi'ī)", particularly in the last pages. Sa'īd 'Iryān (1955) calls the nation to take care of its writers, and considers this as a lifetime right for writers over their readers whom he urges to renew their calls after their death; This is since they spent their lives reviving the message of their nation. But that does not happen, as the writers of the nation are marginalized in their lives, striving for their peoples and governments to accept their ideas. But none of them would listen. Hence, the biography of al-Rāfi'ī indicates that peoples and governments do not appreciate the pioneers and leaders of society until after their death.

Everyone seems to think that they are trying to revive the biography of this deceased leader and creator, but the mouthpiece of his biography says: Where were you when your writers were pulsing with life? You were hostile to them, denying and forgetting their proposals, and you were not interested in the essence of these writers' discourses; This matter casts a shadow over the writer who is not self-aware in the eyes of those whom he writes for, so he does not find their appreciation for him. Therefore, metafictional features emerge in his stories and articles so that he can see himself in himself, as the nation ignored his destiny and neglected his issues.

Upon the death of al-Rāfi'ī, someone said: "*Reprint the poetry collection, reprint the miracle of the Qur'ān*" ('Iryān, 1955, p. 247), as if it was an invitation to perpetuate the legacy of this great writer whom they did not care about in his lifetime. As if he was saying that if you did not appreciate the writer in his lifetime, then appreciate his writings after his death. Accordingly, it is noticed at the conclusion of al-Rāfi'ī's biography that the author reviews al-Rāfi'ī's books so that they remain in the mind of his readers, as if he is saying that these literary publications that were left behind by this great Arab novelist live with him. Since it is known that reviewing books are usually presented at the beginning of biographies, being reviewed here in the last pages of the book, as well as being scattered throughout it, does indeed have a signifying meaning.

### 4. Conclusion

al-Rāfi'ī's work "Rasā'il 'al-'Aḥzān (Letters of Sorrows)" (1924), is considered a meta fictional example of self-reflective writing. This method is used by al-Rāfi'ī on purpose to refer to himself being an author, and to address his lover who appreciates the profession of writing.

al-Rāfi'ī addresses his readers for the purpose of breaking the illusion that what the readers are reading is fictional, and he bases this upon the desire to emphasise the material nature of the text and its characters. al-Rāfi'ī addresses his readers also does so for the purpose of earning his readers' engagement with the events and their sympathy with the author or characters. Another purpose behind this is to reproach the readers, provoke them, or break their expectations.

al-Rāfi'ī, as an implied author, supervises and controls the stylistics activities behind the writing processes of the actual author. while his beloved "May Ziyāda" is the implied or hypothetical reader that he addresses his letters.

Metalanguage refers to concepts related to the nature of language; these include language as a semantic duality, language as a means of expression, language as possibilities of manipulation, and language as a grammatical construct. It also refers to the use of pronouns, structures, letters, nouns, verbs, and linguistic metaphors within the text.

The flaunting of linguistic knowledge appears as a matter of glorification, on the one hand, and as a matter of weakness, on the other hand. This is since al-Rāfi'ī (1924) sees himself shrinking and diminishing in front of his beloved, as neither has language played its role nor has his prestigious lifestyle helped him to be an agent of expressing his innermost feelings.

It is noticed that most of al-Rāfi'ī's (1924) love poems were taken by a system of perfect/complete meters, thus secretly guaranteeing the perfection of his poetry and literature and replacing his previous confessions of weakness. This system is also a reference to the perfection of his beloved, who needs something less perfect than her perfection in order to for him to express her beauty.

al-Rāfi'ī resorted to meta-fiction in ("Rasā'il 'al-'Aḥzān (Letters of Sorrows)") , seeking the reader's attention to him being an author and a critic by talking about writing , its tools, process and content. Also, by talking about authors, critics and related books. In addition to his connection to reality and the protagonists of his stories.

### **Conflict of Interest Statement**

The authors declare no conflicts of interests.

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