

SOFT TRANSITIONS: FROM BIOGRAPHY TO NOVEL

¹Lahoua El Oualid

Mohamed Lamine Debaghine University, Sétif 2, Algeria

walidbarae@gmail.com

²Lamia Aitou

Associate Professor (Class B)

aitou.lamia@univ-oeb.dz

Larbi Ben M'hidi University of Oum El Bouaghi, Algeria

³Professor : Abid Bachir

Bachir.abid@univ-batna.dz

University of Batna 1 – Algeria-

Received: 05.03.2026 Accepted: 18.08.2026 Publishing: 20.09.2026

Abstract:

Clément Moisan criticizes historical practices as interpretive practices incapable of confronting representations of systems and structures as complex systems. He argues that researchers have burdened themselves by devoting most of their effort to questioning historical interpretation without paying sufficient attention to heterogeneous texts. The greatest functionality of systems, in his view, lies in revealing the interweaving of the functions of literature in bourgeois society within history, together with the history of normative or codifying treatments of literature aesthetically. This organization cannot be understood except through an understanding of the literary system within the representational systems of society. The concept of multiple systems—the literary and artistic canon involved in the formation of novelistic production—will reveal a reading of what lies inside and outside the model, through which some of the cultural formations of the history of the Algerian novel can be uncovered, while also bringing to light many of the historical matrices used in periodizing the Algerian novel. In discussing the model and the canon, the ways in which literary form operates and genres are transformed become visible, as does the contribution of these transformations to the shaping of collective consciousness and to the construction of Algerian narrative identity.

Keywords: intertextuality; constitutive poetics; deceptive system; soft transition; prose genre.

Introduction:

Intertextuality activates the relational mechanism of literary texts that was disabled by the periodizing machine. In seeking to establish a parallel between its two subsystems, it describes the relations existing within the institutional system of historical consciousness. If we consider intertextuality as the production of meaning arising from the conflict and reconciliation between contextual meaning and meaning between texts, resolving the contradiction between the text and

the intertext, then we are dealing with a specific practice that cannot be separated from the other social practices with which it constitutes a universal historical reality. From this perspective, contestation is also a production of meaning arising from conflict and reconciliation between institutions and their organizational or mediating forces, whether through settlement, decision, acceptance, or influence. In this sense, contestation is likewise a specific practice that cannot be separated from textual/intertextual practices through which a historical reality is constituted.

Accordingly, following Nader Kadhim, we shall read the text as a discourse contaminated by the world and involved in cultural issues through their various discursive and non-discursive practices. “The idea of intertextuality undermined the singular existence of the work, the idea of the creative genius who produces the work from his own thoughts and feelings, and the idea of the organic unity contained within the literary work. Intertextuality destroys all of this; the text, in this sense, consists of a network of proliferating texts, writings, and quotations that intersect and conflict within it, without which the text would not be a text. It can be itself only in its difference, which does not mean its isolation, but rather its relations of intertextuality with numerous texts.” (Kadhim, 2006, p. 16). Does this mean that beginnings undermined the idea of genius or of “genius texts”? Did the Algerian novel lose its genius with its beginnings, on the assumption that what came afterwards consisted of intertexts with those beginnings? Does intertextuality thus eliminate forms of non-textual connections and continuities?

The periodization proposed by critic Amer Makhoul for Waciny Laredj’s novel *Nawār al-Lawz* provides evidence of an earlier state, a state of presence in which the first texts acquired a stable identity. This moment provokes our understanding of the development of narrative practice in Algerian narrative. The dynamic relations between a particular layer of early texts and their past and identity raise new questions for critical and historical inquiry, and consequently generate new strategies for confronting these texts and for developing the narrative practice of the Algerian novel.

These strategies are recorded through an examination of the problematic relationship connecting the early texts with Algerian narrative theory. They take different forms corresponding to the identity of national literature and narrative. They also reveal the construction of a postcolonial or post-colonial inspiration. The development of narrative practice in Algerian theory therefore requires examining the relations formed within the layers of early texts through the reciprocal dependence between early texts and contemporary texts, and by examining the characteristics registered in the dynamic relations of gender and genre in the early texts as internal intertextual properties, as well as relations between culture and history (external intertexts).

Fatiha Al-Azouni argues that readers have taken *Nawār al-Lawz* as a foundation for identifying the generic characteristics of the modern Arabic novel, which derives its living material from heritage, with varying levels of reception. This text resists chronological periodization and imposes resistance to any critical organization that does not question its synchronic structure. The title illuminates and even directs the path of reading. Saïd Yaqtin acknowledges in his work *The Novel and Heritage: Toward a New Awareness of Heritage* that the subtitle “The Epic of Ben Amer al-

Zawfri” provokes more response than the main title Nawār al-Lawz because of what it evokes in Arab culture. This leads to the question: what are the epistemological, historical, and generic limits of the relationship between the tale of the Hilali Epic and the novel Nawār al-Lawz? (Al-Azouni, 2020, p. 17).

Abdelhamid Bourayou’s approach in *The Logic of Narrative* also reads Nawār al-Lawz from several points of entry, the first of which concerns the title, opening, and chapter headings. He approaches the title within the text by reading the opening as discourse and as a sign pointing to the time of the novel. Fatiha Al-Azouni, meanwhile, places before the reader the directive: “Give up a little and read the Epic of Bani Hilal,” confronting the reader with popular artistic heritage of an epic character that signals the central conflict on which the novel is based: the tension between ruler and ruled resulting from the absence of democracy in Arab society. From this perspective, the opening contains an ideological viewpoint, in the reader’s sense, suggesting the author’s alignment with one side of the conflict. It also seeks to persuade the recipient of the principle of historically imitating the lived reality of individuals. (Al-Azouni, 2020, p. 21)

The referential code of the Bani Hilal epic shortens a long critical distance toward the memory of genre, since it evokes a relationship between two memories: artistic/literary and political/historical. This relationship operates at two levels: text and system. Thus, the periodization and modernity of the novel were not present in Laredj’s individual memory or in Amer Makhoulf’s critical memory; rather, they were present in the objective memory of the literary genre operating within the functional system of textuality. We move beyond the single text to speak at the level of the relationship between texts—intertextuality.

“There has been a transition from the text to the literary system,” understood as a set of laws and conditions that successively alter the relations among the system’s terms, functions, and formal elements, so that their development leads to the substitution of the system, in Tynianov’s terminology. (Moisan, p. 47).

Nawār al-Lawz enabled Waciny Laredj to develop the relations between social poetics, history, and the concept of constitutive dialogism. Amer Makhoulf’s purpose was not to analyze works through precise historical periodization, but to place them within history through a modeling of dominant systems. His critical project instead remained tied to the systems encompassing literary genre in its soft transition from biography in its epic form to the modern Arabic novel in its mature systemic form.

Intertextual relationship created a constitutive dialogism carrying a relatively independent generic indicator in relation to the critical and symbolic position of the literary genre produced in the novel. Experience has demonstrated that studying texts in isolation is no longer acceptable, confirming that any form of textual analysis presupposes an observed system possessing communicative capacities and operating within socio-cultural and experiential situations. It is not easy to understand Niklas Luhmann’s proposition that communication refers to communication: either it reformulates what is still known today as intertextuality, or it repeats the idea of Husserl and Schutz

that we can never begin from a void, since we already exist and communicate within a culturally interpreted reality. (Ahmed Bouhassan, p. 128).

The textual opening of the novel—"Give up a little and read the Epic of Bani Hilal"—points to the conflictual motivations of genre in its soft formation from an epic structure toward its organized systemic complexity.

This textual opening carries us toward an organic situation of the development of simple forms at the level of realization. The simple form has always been rooted in all cultures and becomes an actualized simple form to become material for individual creativity; it then becomes a learned form through the internal coherence it achieves at the highest level of artistic activity that does not repeat itself. (Jolles, cited by Claude Bremond, p. 138; cited in Mohamed Kadik, 2020, p. 64).

The novel provided an applied space in Rachid Ben Malek's dissertation *Semiotics between Theory and Practice: Nawār al-Lawz as a Model*, in which he connected heritage with Western critical production, as a form of demonstrating the precedence of Arab criticism in addressing the question of the soft transition of literary genre. This textual opening contains an epic conflict drawn from the first genre in order to reproduce it within the parallel text: the central conflict around which the novel is constructed, namely the tension between ruler and ruled resulting from the absence of democracy in Arab society, within a systemic insertion into a narrative sequence that preserves the literary chain while wagering on disruption within generic structure.

The conflict that moved from the individual's conflictual condition to a generic condition developed here. "This violation means that philosophical thinking of the type under discussion has excessively broadened the word 'world' by joining it to history; the word has not exceeded its semantic competence so as to become universal, insofar as it remains a regional experience in writing history within a specific mode of thinking about the past." In other words, we sought to transform thinking about the past into a singular meaning until it expanded to become a literary genre. (Rana Jit Guha, 2003, p. 66).

The basic system is neither the work nor the genre, but the individual itself. Ranajit Guha sought to move us from the façade of the novel and the genre back to the individual. Does this not push us from genre and periodization toward a social poetics? Amer Makhoul's project appears to move from social periodization toward a constitutive poetics.

The periodization of the two novels seems to be grounded in the history of genre theory, particularly in Brunetière, who approaches genre from a specifically gendered perspective. This strengthens our proposition that Nawār al-Lawz constitutes a social poetics that transcends biological gender and presents the development of the novel as a gendered development; it becomes instead a development from genre and gender toward the individual and identity, and consequently toward a constitutive poetics of the novel—from biography to the novel.

This becomes clear in the conflict represented by the two novels: (1) the line of feudalism and the bourgeoisie hostile to national and democratic transformations and progress, represented by al-Hajj al-Mukhtar al-Shariya in *What Remains of the Biography of al-Akhdar Hamrourh* and by al-Sibai in *Nawār al-Lawz*; and (2) the line of the exploited and oppressed party, represented by al-

Akhdar Hamroush, who was killed by his friend under pressure, and by Saleh al-Zawfri, who represents another face of al-Akhdar Hamroush and the line of growth, life, and the future or the forces of good. (Amer Makhoulf, *The Novel and Transformations*, p. 54).

The novel's subtitle, as a threshold toward reading, was a genuine provocation of generic transition as a moment of systemic transcendence, through an immanent intertextual process organized by a set of historical determinants and by the organization of national consciousness at the time. It is a disruption within structure occurring at the level of literary genre according to a synchronic systemic movement through which a cognitive conception of organization was formed. This organization responded to moments of transition as responses to transformation at their artistic/literary and historical/social levels.

Gadamer explains that transformation is not simply an alteration of the essential components of structure, nor is it necessarily a long-term disruption. The disruption introduced into a structure means that the structure being disrupted is preserved and maintained even though it changes completely; disruption occurs within the generic domain (*Qualität*). (Mohamed Kadik, 2020, p. 247).

The transformation that affected the structure of genre was a movement from the past toward the future and from artistic heritage toward literary modernity, producing a generic tradition that translates a soft horizon in which the generic domain moves gradually toward an organized identity in a reciprocal relationship with the literary system within which it operates. The literary status of an event depends on its differential quality (*Differentielle Qualität*), corresponding to its relations with the literary or non-literary series.

As Mohamed Kadik states, the movement of transformation in artistic structure may occur according to the playful structure's capacity to present a new model that cancels the previous model, or according to the temporal ceremonial nature that can preserve the same model whenever it is repeated; consequently, the transitional process produces radical transformations in the literary work. (Kadik, 2020, p. 250).

It appears that Amer Makhoulf saw in the two novels merely a conceptual summary of conflict between two moments. He perceived the relationship between social organization in its two moments, but overlooked the complexity of its artistic and economic superstructure, when the economic system generates its contradictions toward the organizational system of writing. The novel thus becomes a developmental path of genre within theory as practice. He overlooked the processual nature of the genre in which the novelist wrote, while emphasizing the temporal overlap of writing through retrospection.

One of its functions is to create a second time different from the real time inhabited by the fictional character. Since the literary text by nature belongs to the imaginary, retrospection creates an imaginary within the imaginary, or another degree of the total imaginary. Most of *What Remains of the Biography of al-Akhdar Hamroush* is written on the basis of retrospective procedure in the two circumstances experienced by the principal character. (Amer Makhoulf, *The Novel and Transformations*, p. 52).

The interwoven text embraces two historical moments and lays the groundwork for a serious conception of generic development according to the processual direction proposed by the two novels. Literary texts contain deceptive systems that embrace central processes. “Concepts of literature emerge from complex socio-cultural processes of canonization, socialization, and ideological orientation.” (Ahmed Bouhassan, 2006, p. 127).

The subsequent categories remain connected to the meaning of presence that emerges at a specific historical moment and is provided with the means for realizing the new system. We argue that generic transition, according to Fischer’s theory, takes place within the temporal interval between two moments whose generic characteristics interact according to historical requirements: the first is the moment in which the new genre is realized, and the second is the moment in which the subsequent category is realized and grants it legitimacy. The “non-generic” category itself becomes the historical marker signifying the “moment of transition,” because the non-genre is negated by the concept of presence. For this reason, we must examine the concept of the “hybrid text” in order to complete the picture of transition. (Mohamed Kadik, 2020, p. 265).

If great texts are non-generic texts, can we then say that periodizing texts are normative or canonical texts? Can this be described and reconsidered in order to arrange what is compatible with the periodizing phenomenon of the novelistic genre?

The greatness of the novelistic text lies in the element of astonishment at the level of artistic and technical creativity, that is, at the level of the difference occurring between the old and the modern. Yet our classificatory judgment concerning the “great text” is itself subject to a prior standard and canon—standards that place the presence of such a text within an aesthetic transcendence over previous texts, whereas the movement between earlier and later texts is what produces this aesthetic effect of astonishment.

If we consider that the newly formed hybrid genre is linked to an interval of time in which a state of presence is achieved and which concludes with the realization of a subsequent category that places the hybrid within the general generic system, it becomes clear that what Luvio and postcolonial scholars regard as “hybrid poetics,” assuming continuity and development outside the generic system, is merely that natural historical interval within a process of generic transition in which different conditions operate. Identity may be one of its questions. (Kadik, 2020, p. 271).

The generic position of the Algerian novel in Waciny Laredj’s *Nawār al-Lawz* requires investigation of the archive, as in the work of Ivan Zohar and Michel Foucault, through searching memory and invoking textuality in order to enter the necessary contracts for establishing a new generic and narrative position through symbolic exchanges within the writing contract. This novelistic text reconsiders the history of the popular hero Abu Zayd al-Hilali.

Nawār al-Lawz is read in light of the heritage text, the Hilali Epic, within the possible world of the epic, in order to impose a deceptive system that circumvents the authority of censorship. The interwoven textuality between the two novels—or the two textualities—in condemning the princes of Bani Hilal and the men of authority in the fictional world of *Nawār al-Lawz* becomes, in turn,

a second-order monitoring system for condemning the men of authority who successively ruled Algeria.

Nawār al-Lawz intersects with the language of the epic in its explicitness and obscenity, so that the violence of the event and the violence of language intertwine. The use of heritage and folklore constitutes an anthropological feature that enriches the distinctive narrative and places it within its environment through an autonomous consciousness rooted in it, making the narrative a genuinely local production that asserts difference.

Amer Makhlouf, however, adopts a contradictory and unclear position regarding universality. In *The Time of Nimrod* he sees locality as directed toward universality, whereas in this novel he argues that locality cannot serve universality at all. "It is true that one cannot reach national and universal dimensions through locality, but locality in the artistic perspective does not mean naming things by their names." (Makhlouf, *The Novel and Transformations*, p. 38).

Conclusion

In conclusion, the study of Nawār al-Lawz is, according to Saïd Yaqtin, a search for an authentic formal experience. Hence the wager on this novel as a marker for the birth of modernity in the Arabic novel, in the critic's formulation, disrupts the clichés of early periodization and destabilizes the initial epistemologies of renaissance and modernity disseminated through periodizations that regard *Zaynab* as the first Arabic novel. Through the artistry of this narrative form, its textuality, body, and style, Nawār al-Lawz carries a distinctive conception of writing and system. At the same time, through the intertextual relationship between Nawār al-Lawz and the biography of Bani Hilal, it embraces the written form of popular biography and, at a higher level, textuality as a systemic reference.

In the subtitle, *The Epic of Saleh ibn Amer al-Zawfri*, what is the actual representation of metaphor in the epic between biography and the novel? Waciny Laredj's simulation produces a transformation at the level of genre, from biography to the novel, and also a transformation at another level of opposition, which Saïd Yaqtin identifies as a distinctive feature of Laredj's experience in Nawār al-Lawz. This practice was already undertaken by earlier Arab writers in poetry and prose. The disruption within structure gave the novel its independent identity through a writing consciousness and a generic consciousness carried by the form and genre of writing into cultural references and an independent social organization.

Khalifa Qurtifi, in his study *The Limits of Intertextuality and the Structure of Discourse in Waciny Laredj's Nawār al-Lawz*, draws attention to the structural differences between the two novels/texts. Individual heroism is consolidated in the Hilali biography, whereas defeatism becomes a structure accompanying the character of Saleh ibn Amer al-Zawfri through misery and deprivation. Time in Nawār al-Lawz is no longer the time of heroism represented in the Hilali biography. This is due to the generic transition from biography to the novel, which suppresses the epic in favor of the novel. Perhaps Laredj's project approaches the major moment of deviation witnessed by literary genres with the appearance of *Don Quixote*, where the end of the age of heroism and chivalry and the beginning of the age of the novel were announced. Nawār al-Lawz may perform a similar role by

announcing the end of the age of Abu Zayd al-Hilali and the entry into the age of Saleh ibn Amer al-Zawfri. (Qurtifi, p. 185).

This is the generic impulse that we have called the “soft transition”: a systemic insertion affecting both structure and theme. The discursive interaction between the two novels raises the issue of analogy between literary phenomena as forms of regulation of activities and genres, through testing models and considering the regularization of genres as soft transitions.

The intertexts between the two novels imposed a soft transition toward world-building positions, in which the interacting systems wagered on planting agents of similarity and correspondence, while simultaneously producing opposition and contradiction. “This intertext was constructed upon a biographical paradox through which the voice moved from third-person narration to indirect quotation, hinted at through the phrase ‘those who fought for kingship and lied to us.’” The lie is initially attributed by the narrator to the narrators of the biography who distorted the history of Bani Hilal. The intertext then turns from the description of Saleh’s journey to Sidi Bel Abbès to a recollection of the Hilali journey, and finally closes upon a semantic opposition between the Hilali Epic, which was a journey of domination and the search for wealth and kingship, and Saleh’s epic, which he undertook unwillingly because of poverty. The opposition reaches its peak when the first narrative establishes a distance from what is narrated about Hilali history in order to deconstruct and project it, so that the world of the Hilali Epic, with its deteriorating values, becomes a symbolic representation of all evils without history or identity, because it is simply an extension of the logic of eternal conflict. (Kharab Linda, 2021, p. 254).

These interrelations established rules of substitution and reciprocal correspondence for the transition of worlds through intertextual images. They restore the law of connection between literature and life: certain social institutions determine aesthetic effects that have no apparent formal analogy, while narrative forms test and transmit cultural and aesthetic expectations to the world according to a deceptive or deliberate systemic organization.

The extensive quotations from other texts in the novel constitute a doubled violence within literary culture and the symbolic means employed. They clearly express a search for a productive alternative in literature, an alternative production that seeks to elevate models, forms, and templates into a distinctive structure competing with social realism. The deceptive systems that dominate the text defeat hierarchy within the model and genre and move toward the primary genre through a systemic insertion into the present text, attempting to establish and renew it and to re-regularize the system.

The division of genres is not merely classificatory, because it rests on a reciprocal value enjoyed by the novel in relation to other genres. This is the same relationship identified by Robert Escarpit, who explained that belonging to literature, or to secondary literature, is not determined by abstract merits of the writer, work, or audience, but by a mode of exchange. The intertextual relationship therefore constitutes a formative dialogism carrying a relatively independent generic indicator in relation to the critical and symbolic position of the literary genre produced in the novel.

Finally, awareness of intertextuality within the articulations of periodization developed by Amer Makhoulouf in his book *The Novel and Transformations in Algeria* produces a heightened aesthetic that translates the systemic insertion of textuality into history, where the history of aesthetic forms replaces real history.

References

- Al-Azouni, Fatiha. (2020). The Algerian Novel in Light of the Aesthetics of Reception: Nawār al-Lawz by Waciny Laredj as a Model. *Abhath Journal*, 6(2), 17–21.
- Bourayou, Abdelhamid. (n.d.). *The Logic of Narrative*. University Publications Office.
- Bouhassan, Ahmed. (n.d.). *Literary Theory*.
- Bremond, Claude. (n.d.). [Work cited in relation to André Jolles].
- Guha, Ranajit. (n.d.). *History at the End of World History and Other Essays*.
- Jolles, André. (n.d.). [Work cited by Claude Bremond].
- Kadik, Mohamed. (2020). *From Epic to Novel: Mechanisms of Generic Transition*. Dar al-Tanweer, Algeria.
- Kadhim, Nader. (2006). *Identity and Narrative: Studies in Theory and Cultural Criticism*. Sheikh Ibrahim bin Mohammed Al Khalifa Center for Culture and Research, Kingdom of Bahrain.
- Kharab, Linda. (2021). The Intertextuality Pact between Waciny Laredj's Nawār al-Lawz and the Biography of Bani Hilal. *Al-Mi'yar Journal*, 12(2), 254.
- Makhoulouf, Amer. (n.d.). *The Novel and Transformations*.
- Moisan, Clément. (n.d.). *The Phenomenon of Literature*.
- Qurtifi, Khalifa. (n.d.). *The Limits of Intertextuality and the Structure of Discourse in Waciny Laredj's Nawār al-Lawz*.
- Vaillant, Alain. (n.d.). *Literary History*.
- Yaqtin, Saïd. (n.d.). *The Novel and Heritage: Toward a New Awareness of Heritage*.