

**From the Authority of the Text to the Authority of the Reader:
Deconstructing Narrative Structure in Interactive Literature
Shadows of the One by Mohammed Sanajleh as a Model**

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Abstract:

This study aims to explore the transformations of contemporary narrative in light of the emergence of interactive literature by examining its concept, characteristics, and its relationship with digital developments that have reshaped the nature of the literary text and the function of the reader. It also seeks to analyze the shift in the centrality of meaning from the author to the reader in light of modern critical theories, highlighting its impact on the construction of new narrative texts. The study adopts the novel “*Shadows of the One*” as an applied model to reveal the features of these transformations, analyzing its narrative structure in terms of the fragmentation of temporal linearity, the multiplicity of voices, and the prominence of symbolism; particularly the symbol of the “shadow” as a signifier of the division of the self. The study also relies on two main critical approaches: a semiotic approach aimed at uncovering the semantic structures and organizing binaries of the text, and a deconstructive approach that seeks to highlight the destabilization of meaning and its openness to multiple interpretations. Thus, the study aspires to provide a critical reading that demonstrates the interaction of contemporary narrative with digital and theoretical transformations and reveals the dynamic nature of the literary text as an open space for meaning production.

Keywords: contemporary narrative; deconstruction; digital text; interactive literature; semiotic reading.

Introduction

Narrative writing has witnessed profound transformations in recent decades, closely linked to the development of digital media and changes in modes of reception. The literary text is no longer a closed structure based on fixed linear narration; rather, it has become an open space in which narrative paths multiply and levels of discourse overlap. This has led to a reconsideration of the traditional relationship between author, text, and reader. The emergence of digital and interactive literature has contributed significantly to this transformation, as the reader has become an active element in shaping the text and producing its meaning, after previously being limited to reception and interpretation.

In this context, the concept of the “authority of the reader” emerges as one of the central notions in contemporary literary criticism. This concept is primarily associated with theoretical

shifts in narrative, semiotic, and deconstructive studies. The French critic Roland Barthes proclaimed what he termed the “death of the author,” emphasizing that the text should not be read as an expression of authorial intention, but rather as a space where multiple voices intersect to produce meaning through reading. Accordingly, texts do not possess a fixed, final meaning; instead, they are structured through an endless network of references that constantly defer meaning.

These theoretical perspectives have provided a suitable framework for understanding the transformations that have affected contemporary narrative, especially with the emergence of digital texts based on branching and choice. In interactive literature, the text no longer follows a single predetermined path but branches into multiple paths that allow the reader to navigate between them, making reading a constantly evolving narrative experience.

Among the narrative experiments that reflect this transformation is the novel “*Shadows of the One*” by the novelist Mohammed Sanajleh, whose structure is based on multiple narrative paths and overlapping narrative voices. In this text, the narrator no longer maintains absolute authority over the story; instead, narrative gaps are left for the reader to fill through their choices within the text. As a result, the novel becomes an open narrative space characterized by multiple beginnings and endings.

The importance of this study lies in its attempt to analyze this narrative transformation through a critical approach that combines structural, semiotic, deconstructive, and pragmatic analysis, with the aim of revealing how authority shifts within the text from the author to the reader in the context of interactive narrative.

Based on this, the study seeks to address the following two questions:

How are the manifestations of the shift from the authority of the text to the authority of the reader reflected in the narrative structure of the interactive novel?

To what extent can traditional critical approaches accommodate the specificity of non-linear narrative texts?

First: Interactive Literature and Transformations of Contemporary Narrative

1.1 Concept of Interactive Literature

The term *interactive literature* refers to a mode of literary writing that is fundamentally linked to the transformations brought about by digital technology in the methods of producing and receiving texts. In this context, the literary text is no longer a closed linear structure based on a fixed narrative sequence; rather, it has become an open structure formed by a network of interconnected textual segments that allow the reader to navigate among them through multiple paths. Thus, the text is transformed into a dynamic space with multiple reading possibilities, moving beyond the concept of the printed page to become a hyper-textual structure in which texts, media, and links intersect.

Interactive literature is often based on what is known as *hypertext*, a writing system that relies on linking textual segments through electronic connections that enable the reader to move from one segment to another, either within the text or beyond it. This mode has contributed to changing the concept of traditional reading; reading is no longer a linear movement that begins

at the start of the text and ends at its conclusion, but rather a process of free navigation within a network of narrative paths.

The American scholar George P. Landow defines hypertext as “a system of interconnected textual segments through which the reader can navigate freely, so that the text becomes a network of possible paths” (Landow, *Hypertext: The Convergence of Contemporary Critical Theory and Technology*, Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006, p. 3). This definition indicates that the interactive text does not present a single narrative path; instead, it allows the reader to choose the path they follow within the text, resulting in multiple forms of reading and varied outcomes.

Accordingly, it can be said that the interactive text does not possess a fixed narrative structure; rather, it is composed of a set of paths determined by the reader’s choices during the reading process. Each choice made by the reader opens a new narrative path, making reading a constantly evolving experience. Hence, the idea of the “final text” recedes in favor of the concept of the open text, which remains subject to reconstruction with each reading.

In the same context, the American scholar N. Katherine Hayles argues that electronic literature represents a radical transformation in the concept of the literary text, because the digital medium is not limited to transmitting or displaying the text, but becomes an active element in shaping its semantic structure (see: N. Katherine Hayles, *Electronic Literature: New Horizons for the Literary*, University of Notre Dame, 2008, p. 5). Thus, the medium does not function as a neutral channel; rather, it participates in the production of meaning through its technical features, such as hyperlinks, multimedia elements, and the possibility of direct interaction with the reader.

From this perspective, the digital text becomes a dynamic entity that changes according to the reader’s interaction with it, as its final structure is determined through the reading process itself. Consequently, the boundaries between authorship and reading become intertwined; the author is no longer solely responsible for shaping the text, but the reader becomes a partner in its production through their choices within different narrative paths.

This transformation has also led to a reconsideration of several critical concepts related to the nature of the literary text, such as narrative unity and the chronological sequence of events. In interactive texts, multiple beginnings and endings may exist, and the reading experience may differ from one reader to another depending on the path chosen within the text. This makes interactive literature closer to a network structure than to traditional narrative structure.

A number of scholars have observed that this mode of writing poses new challenges for literary criticism, as traditional analytical tools developed for reading linear texts are not always sufficient to understand hypertextual texts. These texts are based on multiplicity and interaction, which calls for the development of critical approaches capable of accommodating the nature of the digital text and its evolving structure.

Accordingly, interactive literature can be viewed as a new stage in the evolution of narrative writing, where technology intersects with literary creativity to produce narrative

forms that go beyond the limits of the printed text and open the way for new reading experiences based on participation and interaction.

2.1 The Shift of Authority from the Author to the Reader

The idea of the *authority of the reader* is associated with profound theoretical transformations that literary criticism has undergone since the second half of the twentieth century. Literary studies began to move beyond traditional conceptions that positioned the author as the center of the creative process and the ultimate source of meaning. Classical criticism viewed the text as a direct reflection of the author's intention and experience, which limited the reader's role to discovering that intention and reproducing it through interpretation. However, the transformations introduced by modern critical theories have led to a reconsideration of this relationship, such that the author is no longer the sole authority in determining the meaning of the text.

In this context, Roland Barthes proclaimed what has come to be known in contemporary criticism as the concept of the "death of the author," calling for the liberation of the text from the authority of its creator. He argued that meaning does not reside in the text as a closed message carrying a single intention, but is generated in the very act of reading itself (see: Roland Barthes, *Image–Music–Text*, trans. Stephen Heath, London, 1977, p. 146). Barthes further maintains that the literary text is not a homogeneous unity, but rather "a tissue of quotations" in which multiple cultural voices intersect, making the reader the agent who reassembles these elements and assigns them meaning within the act of reading.

This idea constituted a significant turning point in literary studies, as it shifted the center of attention from the author to the reader, and from searching for authorial intention to analyzing how meaning is produced during reading. In this sense, the text is no longer a fixed entity with a single meaning, but becomes an open space for multiple interpretive possibilities.

In the same vein, Umberto Eco emphasized that literary texts possess what he termed "interpretive openness," that is, their capacity to generate multiple meanings depending on different readings. He expressed this idea through the concept of the "open text," which holds that the literary work does not present a closed, final meaning, but rather offers a range of semantic possibilities activated by the reader during the reading process (see: Wolfgang Iser, *The Act of Reading: A Theory of Aesthetic Response*, Baltimore, 1978, p. 167). Nevertheless, Eco notes that the reader's freedom is not absolute; it operates within the limits of the textual structure that guides interpretation.

Reception theory has also contributed to consolidating this shift, as several critics have focused on the reader's role in constructing meaning. Wolfgang Iser argued that the literary text contains semantic "gaps" that are only completed through the act of reading, making the reader an essential component in the realization of the text (see: Hans Robert Jauss, *Toward an Aesthetic of Reception*, Minneapolis, 1982, p. 23). These gaps allow the reader to participate in shaping meaning by filling them with their own perceptions and experiences.

Similarly, Hans Robert Jauss emphasized the historical dimension of reception, asserting that the understanding of a literary text changes according to what he termed the “horizon of expectations” of readers—that is, the set of cultural and aesthetic norms that govern the reception of a text at a given time (see: Umberto Eco, *The Open Work*, Cambridge, 1989, p. 19). This implies that the meaning of the text is not fixed but evolves over time in accordance with changes in readers and their cultural contexts.

These theoretical perspectives paved the way for the emergence of new narrative forms in which the reader plays a more active role, as in interactive literature. In this type of literature, the reader’s role is not limited to interpreting the text but extends to direct participation in shaping its narrative structure. The interactive text is based on multiple paths, allowing the reader to choose among different options that lead to various developments of the story.

Thus, in interactive texts, the reader becomes a structural element within the literary work, since their choices determine the narrative path the story follows. Consequently, authority gradually shifts from the author to the reader, and the text becomes a shared space formed through the interaction between the writer, the reader, and the digital medium.

This transformation reflects a profound change in the nature of the literary process. The text is no longer merely a completed product issued by the author; rather, it has become a dynamic process shaped through reading and interaction. From this perspective, it can be argued that interactive literature represents a practical embodiment of critical theories that emphasize the centrality of the reader in meaning production, as reading shifts from an interpretive act to a creative act that participates in constructing the text itself.

Second: Narrative Structure in the Novel “*Shadows of the One*”

The novel “*Shadows of the One*” reveals a narrative experience that belongs to the horizon of contemporary writing, which seeks to transcend the traditional linear storytelling model. Narrative is no longer based on a fixed chronological sequence of events; instead, it relies on an open structure in which narrative paths overlap and levels of time and narrative perspective intertwine. Consequently, the novel appears as a narrative space with multiple reading possibilities, where the reader can reorder events according to the path they follow within the text. This type of narrative construction reshapes the relationship between story time and discourse time, and opens the way for a reading that reveals the fragmentation of temporal linearity and the transformation of narrative into a network of intersecting moments in which memory overlaps with the present and imagination with reality.

Contemporary narrative is no longer governed by the logic of linear chronological succession; rather, it is based on the “deconstruction of temporal structure and its reorganization within an open textual system where times overlap and paths multiply” (Said Yaktin, *Analysis of Narrative Discourse*, Casablanca: Arab Cultural Center, 1989, p. 67). This makes the novel a dynamic structure that can be reshaped by the reader, rather than a story told according to a fixed sequence.

This perspective contributes to understanding the narrative structure of “*Shadows of the One*”, where the fragmentation of temporal linearity and the overlap of narrative levels transform the text into an open space with multiple reading possibilities.

2.1 Reconfiguration of Narrative Time and the Fragmentation of Linear Sequence

The novel “*Shadows of the One*” is built upon a narrative structure that goes beyond the traditional temporal model based on the logical succession of events from beginning to end. Events in this text do not progress in a straight line; rather, they are distributed across scattered narrative segments that interconnect, creating a form of temporal fragmentation that compels the reader to reconstruct the narrative sequence during reading. It is thus based on the “deconstruction of traditional chronological sequence and its replacement with a narrative structure in which times overlap and narrative levels intertwine” (Salah Fadl, *Rhetoric of Discourse and Textual Studies*, Cairo: Dar Al-Shorouk, 1992, p. 145). In this way, time is no longer merely an external frame for events but becomes a semantic element contributing to the production of meaning within the text.

This temporal fragmentation is manifested through the novel’s reliance on continuous shifts between different narrative moments, where past and present overlap, and moments of self-reflection merge with scenes of narrative action. Through this overlap, time in the novel becomes more psychological than chronological, as its significance is determined by the character’s experience and perception of events rather than their linear order.

Through this overlap, time in the novel becomes more psychological than chronological, as its significance is determined by the character’s experience and perception of events rather than merely by their temporal order.

In one of the narrative passages, the narrator states: “I was walking through the city as if searching for my shadow, but the shadow always preceded me and chose the path before me” (Mohammed Sanajleh, *Shadows of the One*, Amman: Arab Institution for Studies and Publishing, 2001, p. 37).

This passage reveals the nature of the relationship between the self and time within the novel, as the narrator appears in a constant search for the meaning of his existence within a shifting narrative space. The shadow here is not merely a descriptive element; rather, it becomes a symbol of the internal division experienced by the character, reflecting a state of hesitation and disorientation that drives the narrative along unpredictable paths.

This temporal tension aligns with the nature of interactive narrative, which does not rely on a single narrative trajectory but allows multiple possibilities for the development of the story. The reader does not receive events in a predetermined order; instead, they reconstruct them through the act of reading, giving narrative time a flexible and reconfigurable character.

Gérard Genette points out that narrative is fundamentally based on the relationship between story time (the sequence of events in the narrative world) and discourse time (the manner in which these events are presented in the text) (see: Gérard Genette, *Narrative Discourse*, trans. Mohamed Moatassim, Casablanca: Arab Cultural Center, p. 33). When discrepancies arise between these two temporal levels, narrative phenomena such as flashback,

foreshadowing, and temporal fragmentation emerge—techniques that contribute to the production of meaning within the text.

From this perspective, it can be argued that “*Shadows of the One*” employs these techniques to dismantle temporal linearity and reorganize events according to a new narrative logic based on fragmentation and overlap. Instead of following a clear, logical sequence, the narrative shifts between different moments of experience, prompting the reader to participate in reconstructing the story by linking scattered segments together.

Moreover, this manipulation of time is not limited to a technical dimension; it is also deeply connected to the underlying meaning of the text, as it reflects the existential fragmentation experienced by the main character. Fragmented time mirrors a fractured self that is unable to perceive the world as a coherent whole, but rather experiences it as a series of disjointed moments.

Thus, the temporal structure of the novel becomes a semantic element that reveals the nature of the existential experience expressed in the text. Time here is not a neutral frame for events but part of the very structure of meaning, through which the character’s internal conflict and their tension with the surrounding world are manifested.

Through this fragmented temporal construction, one of the fundamental features of contemporary narrative becomes evident: the shift from closed linear narration to open narration that allows for multiple reading paths. As noted by Said Yaktin, modern narrative “no longer adheres to linear chronological succession, but is based on the deconstruction of time and its redistribution within the text through a structure in which temporalities overlap and fragment” (*Analysis of Narrative Discourse*, p. 67). This situates the novel within the horizon of modern narrative writing that seeks to rethink the concept of time within the literary text.

2.2 Multiplicity of Narrative Voices and the Dec-entering of the Narrator

The phenomenon of the multiplicity of narrative voices is one of the most prominent features of contemporary narrative. The novel is no longer based on a single voice that monopolizes narration; rather, it has become a space in which multiple voices coexist, exchange narrative roles, and participate in constructing meaning. In this context, “*Shadows of the One*” by Mohammed Sanajleh belongs to this narrative mode characterized by the overlap of voices and multiplicity of perspectives, which leads to the deconstruction of the traditional authority of the narrator and its redistribution within the text.

In the novel, the narrator no longer retains their position as the sole source of the story; instead, their voice intertwines with the voices of the characters and their internal reflections. Different levels of narrative discourse coexist, making the text appear as a network of interacting voices. This multiplicity creates a form of internal dialogue within the novel, where different perspectives coexist and compete in interpreting events.

In one narrative passage, the narrator states: “I no longer know whether I am the one telling the story, or whether the story is telling itself” (Sanajleh, *Shadows of the One*, p. 52).

This passage reveals a state of narrative fragmentation experienced by the narrator within the text, as their position as the center of narration recedes, and they become part of the

narrative structure in which the story unfolds. Here, narration does not emanate from a single controlling authority but appears to form spontaneously through the interaction of multiple voices. Salah Fadl observes that the contemporary novel has undergone a qualitative shift from a single central voice to a pluralistic structure in which narrative authority is distributed among multiple voices. The narrator is no longer a transcendent entity monopolizing knowledge but becomes part of a narrative network where perspectives intersect. He further emphasizes that “the modern novel is no longer built upon a single narrative certainty, but upon multiple possibilities that coexist without canceling one another” (*Rhetoric of Discourse*, p. 145). Mikhail Bakhtin also notes that the modern novel is based on what he termed *polyphony* or *dialogism*, where multiple voices with different worldviews coexist within the text, none of which is subject to a final authority.

In this context, Roland Barthes introduced what is known in contemporary criticism as the concept of the “death of the author,” calling for the liberation of the text from the authority of its creator. He argued that meaning does not exist in the text as a closed message with a single intention, but rather is generated through the act of reading itself. Barthes further maintained that the literary text is not a unified whole but a “tissue of quotations” in which multiple cultural voices intersect, making the reader the agent who reconstructs these elements and grants them meaning during the reading process. This idea marked a major turning point in literary studies, as it shifted the focus from the author to the reader, and from searching for authorial intention to analyzing how meaning is produced in reading. Thus, the text is no longer seen as a fixed entity with a single meaning, but as an open space for multiple interpretations.

Similarly, Umberto Eco emphasized that literary texts possess what he called “interpretive openness,” meaning their capacity to generate multiple meanings depending on different readings. He expressed this through the concept of the “open work,” where the text does not offer a final, closed meaning but rather a range of semantic possibilities activated by the reader. However, Eco also noted that the reader’s freedom is not absolute; it operates within the limits imposed by the textual structure. In the same vein, Wolfgang Iser argued that literary texts contain “gaps” that are only completed through the act of reading, making the reader an essential component in realizing the text. Likewise, Hans Robert Jauss highlighted the historical dimension of reception, asserting that the understanding of a literary text changes according to the reader’s “horizon of expectations,” shaped by cultural and aesthetic norms of a given period.

These theoretical perspectives paved the way for the emergence of new narrative forms in which the reader plays a more active role, as is the case in interactive literature. In this type of writing, the reader’s role goes beyond interpretation to direct participation in shaping the narrative structure itself. The interactive text is built on multiple pathways, allowing readers to choose between different options that lead to diverse developments of the story. Thus, the reader becomes a structural element within the literary work, as their choices determine the narrative trajectory, gradually shifting authority from the author to the reader. Consequently, the text becomes a shared space formed through the interaction between the writer, the reader, and the digital medium.

This transformation reflects a profound change in the nature of the literary process: the text is no longer a finished product by the author, but rather a dynamic process shaped through reading and interaction. Interactive literature can therefore be seen as a practical embodiment of critical theories that emphasize the centrality of the reader in meaning production, where reading shifts from a purely interpretive act to a creative one that contributes to constructing the text itself.

Second: The Narrative Structure in *Shadows of the One*

The novel *Shadows of the One* by Mohammad Snajleleh reveals a narrative experience that belongs to contemporary writing seeking to move beyond the traditional linear storytelling model. Narrative is no longer based on a fixed chronological sequence of events but on an open structure in which narrative paths intersect and temporal and perspectival layers overlap. The novel thus appears as a narrative space offering multiple reading possibilities, allowing the reader to rearrange events according to their chosen path. This type of structure reshapes the relationship between story time and discourse time, revealing the fragmentation of linear temporality and transforming narrative into a network of intersecting moments where memory merges with the present and imagination with reality.

Contemporary narrative no longer follows a linear chronological logic but instead relies on the deconstruction and reorganization of temporal structure within an open textual system. This makes the novel a dynamic entity that the reader actively reconstructs rather than a fixed story told in a predetermined order. Within this framework, *Shadows of the One* demonstrates a fragmentation of temporal linearity and an overlap of narrative levels, turning the text into an open field of interpretive possibilities.

2-1 Reconfiguring Narrative Time and Fragmenting Linear Sequence

The novel is built on a narrative structure that transcends the traditional temporal model of sequential events. Instead of progressing in a straight line, events are distributed across fragmented narrative segments that interconnect, creating temporal discontinuity. This fragmentation compels the reader to reconstruct the narrative sequence during reading. Time is no longer a mere external framework but becomes a meaningful element contributing to the production of significance within the text.

This temporal fragmentation is evident through constant shifts between different narrative moments, where past and present intertwine, and introspective reflections merge with narrative action. As a result, time becomes psychological rather than purely chronological, defined by the character's perception rather than by objective sequencing. In one passage, the narrator states: "I walked through the city as if searching for my shadow, but the shadow always preceded me and chose the path before I did." This reflects the relationship between self and time, where the shadow symbolizes internal division and existential uncertainty.

This temporal tension aligns with the nature of interactive narrative, which does not follow a single storyline but allows multiple possibilities for development. The reader does not receive events in a fixed order but reconstructs them through reading, giving narrative time a flexible and reconfigurable quality. Gérard Genette explains that narrative is based on the

relationship between story time and discourse time, and when these diverge, narrative techniques such as flashback, anticipation, and fragmentation emerge, contributing to meaning production.

Thus, *Shadows of the One* employs these techniques to deconstruct temporal linearity and reorganize events according to a fragmented and overlapping logic. This fragmented temporality reflects the protagonist's existential disorientation, as the disjointed structure mirrors a fractured self unable to perceive reality as a coherent whole. Consequently, time becomes an integral component of meaning, expressing the character's internal conflict and unstable relationship with the world.

2-2 Polyphony and the Decentering of the Narrator

Polyphony is a defining feature of contemporary narrative, where the text no longer relies on a single authoritative voice but becomes a space for multiple voices interacting and contributing to meaning. In *Shadows of the One*, the narrator does not maintain absolute control; instead, their voice intertwines with those of characters and internal reflections, forming a network of dialogic voices.

In one passage, the narrator states: "I no longer know whether I am the one telling the story or whether the story is telling itself." This illustrates narrative fragmentation and the loss of central authority, as storytelling appears to emerge organically from the interaction of voices. Mikhail Bakhtin described this phenomenon as "polyphony," where multiple independent voices coexist without a single dominant perspective.

This multiplicity transforms the text into an open interpretive space, where meaning emerges from the interaction between voices. It also introduces a metafictional dimension, as the narrative reflects on its own process of construction. The reader, in turn, engages with these voices to produce meaning, reinforcing the participatory nature of interactive narrative.

2-3 The Symbolism of the Shadow and Semantic Division

The motif of the shadow is one of the most prominent symbolic elements in the novel, functioning as a semiotic sign that reflects the protagonist's internal division. The shadow is not merely a physical reflection but a symbolic representation of a parallel self, embodying existential duality. In one passage, the narrator remarks: "Whenever I approached the shadow, I discovered it was not تابعا لي, but another life walking beside me." Here, the shadow becomes an independent entity, symbolizing the split between the lived self and the observing self.

This symbolism can be analyzed through the semiotic model of Algirdas Julien Greimas, who argued that meaning emerges through binary oppositions. In the novel, the self/shadow dichotomy generates multiple semantic oppositions, such as self/other, presence/absence, reality/possibility, and consciousness/unconsciousness. These oppositions create a dynamic field of meaning, reflecting the fragmented identity of the protagonist and reinforcing the novel's thematic focus on existential dislocation.

Ultimately, *Shadows of the One* exemplifies the shift from linear, author-centered narrative to open, reader-centered textuality. Through fragmented time, polyphonic voices, and symbolic structures, the novel constructs a dynamic narrative space where meaning is continuously produced through interaction, interpretation, and participation.

These binaries reveal that the shadow is not merely a reflective image of the character, but rather represents the hidden dimension of identity—that aspect which does not appear in outward behavior yet remains deeply present within the psychological experience. The symbolism of the shadow can also be understood in light of transformations in contemporary narrative, where the novel has become increasingly concerned with portraying the fragmentation of modern identity. The fictional character is no longer a coherent, unified entity as in traditional narratives, but instead exists in a state of internal tension shaped by conflicting desires and multiple perspectives on the world.

Within this context, the shadow becomes a sign of the multiplicity of the self in the text. It represents that elusive part of the character which cannot be fully grasped, yet persists as a constant presence accompanying every movement. Thus, the shadow performs a dual semantic function: on the one hand, it reveals the character's internal division; on the other, it expresses the unstable and fluid nature of contemporary identity. Its presence in the novel is often associated with moments of introspection and existential awareness, where external narration pauses to allow the character to reflect on their relationship with both the world and themselves. In these moments, the shadow becomes a symbolic mirror through which the character perceives an alternative version of the self. This aligns with what Abdel Fattah Kilito describes as the “narrative self,” which does not appear as a complete unity but as an entity that is continually formed and reformed through storytelling. Accordingly, the shadow functions as a parallel narrative image—an “other self” emerging within discourse.

In this way, the shadow transcends its descriptive role to become a structural element in meaning-making within the novel. It operates as a semiotic sign that reveals the existential experience of the protagonist while reflecting broader transformations in the concept of identity in contemporary narrative. Through this symbolic deployment, *Shadows of the One* does not merely present a story but constructs a network of symbols and meanings that enable multiple interpretations. The shadow, as a recurring motif, becomes a central semantic axis that uncovers the depth of the human experience expressed in the text.

Third: A Semiotic Reading of *Shadows of the One*

The semiotic approach is one of the most significant critical methods for uncovering the mechanisms of meaning production in literary texts. It views the text as a system of signs that interact to form a coherent network of meaning. Among the key contributors to this approach is Algirdas Julien Greimas, who argued that meaning in literary texts arises through oppositional relationships between semantic units.

From this perspective, *Shadows of the One* by Mohammad Snaijleh can be read as a semiotic structure built upon a network of recurring signs and symbols that establish its deeper meanings. The narrative does not merely present events but constructs a symbolic system that reflects the tension of identity and the fragmentation of the self within the fictional world.

3-1 Oppositional Structure in the Narrative Text

A semiotic reading of the novel reveals a clear presence of binary oppositions that

organize the structure of the text and guide its interpretive trajectory. Among the most prominent are:

Self / Shadow

Presence / Absence

Reality / Possibility

These binaries do not function as isolated elements but interact to form a complex semantic structure reflecting the narrator's internal conflict. In the first binary (self/shadow), the shadow appears as a sign of internal division. The self is not portrayed as a unified entity but as split, sensing the presence of another version of itself moving in parallel. This is illustrated in the narrator's statement: "I felt that my shadow did not entirely follow me, but walked beside me as if silently observing my steps." This passage highlights the tension between the character and the shadow, which becomes a sign of the "other self" accompanying the narrator and revealing inner fragmentation.

3-2 The Binary of Presence and Absence

Another important semiotic opposition in the novel is presence versus absence, closely tied to the existential condition of the narrator. Characters may appear physically present yet emotionally or psychologically absent, reflecting a disconnection between the self and the surrounding world. In a reflective passage, the narrator says: "People crossed the street before me, but I felt they were merely passing shadows in a city that remembers no one." This conveys a sense of urban alienation, where others become fleeting, ghost-like figures lacking meaningful presence. As noted by Abdullah Al-Ghadhami, modern culture has contributed to producing a self that is physically present but symbolically absent. This duality underscores a crisis of communication, where existence is reduced to surface presence without depth or connection.

3-3 The Binary of Reality and Possibility

The third binary shaping the semiotic structure of the novel is that of reality versus possibility. The narrative does not present events as fixed or absolute but instead opens up multiple narrative possibilities, prompting the reader to question the boundaries of reality within the text. Events unfold in a way that blurs the distinction between what is real and what is imagined, creating a fluid narrative space where meaning is not predetermined but continuously negotiated.

Through these interacting binaries, the novel constructs a layered semiotic system in which meaning emerges from tension and interplay rather than stability. This reinforces the idea that *Shadows of the One* is not a closed narrative but an open textual field inviting the reader to actively participate in producing meaning.

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3-4 Semantic Tension and the Crisis of Identity

The convergence of these semiotic binaries within the text generates a form of semantic tension that constitutes the deep structure of the novel. The self searching for its shadow, presence concealing inner absence, and reality remaining open to possibility all reveal the identity crisis experienced by the narrator. Hassan Bahrawi argues that modern narrative structure is based on “deconstructing the centrality of the character and reconstructing it through a network of relationships,” which implies that identity in the novel is not a pre-existing given but rather a product of these semiotic relations. The shadow, absence, and possibility all contribute to shaping this network, continuously redefining the self.

Thus, identity in the novel is not a fixed entity that can be easily defined, but an ongoing process of searching for the self within a changing world. The narrator appears in a constant state of questioning, seeking to determine their place in the world and the meaning of their existence. From this perspective, *Shadows of the One* constructs its narrative world through a network of signs that reflect the tension between the self and the surrounding world. The shadow, absence, and possibility are not merely narrative elements but semiotic signs revealing the nature of the human experience expressed in the text.

Accordingly, the semiotic reading allows for a deeper understanding of the novel’s semantic structure, demonstrating that meaning is not produced solely through visible events but through the symbolic relationships linking the various elements of the text.

Fourth: A Deconstructive Reading of the Text

The deconstructive approach is one of the most important critical movements that sought to destabilize the idea of fixed meaning in literary texts. It is based on analyzing the linguistic structure of the text to uncover internal tensions that render meaning unstable. This approach is primarily associated with the work of Jacques Derrida, who argued that texts do not carry a final, closed meaning but rather consist of a chain of signifying references that endlessly defer meaning.

From this perspective, *Shadows of the One* can be read deconstructively, particularly since its narrative structure is based on branching and overlapping pathways, making the text an open space for multiple interpretations. The novel does not present a single, complete story; instead, it constructs its narrative world through a series of segments that lead the reader toward different narrative possibilities.

4-1 The Destabilization of Meaning in the Text

One of the key principles of deconstruction is the destabilization of the “center” within the text. Instead of a fixed meaning that can be easily identified, the text becomes a field of multiple, overlapping interpretations. This is clearly evident in *Shadows of the One*, where no final meaning of the story can be determined, as each narrative path leads to another.

In one passage, the narrator remarks: “Every door I open leads me to another story, and every story leads me to a new shadow.” This passage reveals the nature of the novel’s narrative structure, where the story becomes a series of interconnected pathways without a definitive endpoint. Each narrative opens onto another, making the text resemble a network of interwoven possibilities rather than a linear, closed structure.

From a deconstructive perspective, this narrative multiplicity can be understood as an expression of the fragmentation of the semantic center within the text. Meaning does not settle in a single location; rather, it shifts from one segment to another and from one signification to another, making reading a continuous search for meaning without reaching a definitive conclusion. From a perspective close to deconstruction, Salah Fadl affirms that the modern literary text “resists the final determination of meaning through its openness to multiple interpretive possibilities,” which renders meaning in this novel dynamic and incapable of being fixed within a single semantic center.

4.2 Semantic Deferral and the Movement of Meaning within the Text

Jacques Derrida introduced the concept of difference, which suggests that meaning is not formed directly within the text but emerges through a chain of relationships between linguistic signs, remaining constantly deferred. This principle is evident in the novel *Shadows of the One* through the way meaning moves from one passage to another without stabilizing at a fixed point. The narrative offers multiple semantic cues; however, these cues do not lead to a single final meaning but instead open the text to a range of possible interpretations. In one reflective passage, the narrator states: “I thought that the closer I came to the end of the story, the more I would understand it, but I discovered that the end is merely another beginning.” This statement reflects the deconstructive nature of the text, where the ending does not serve as a definitive closure but rather becomes the starting point for a new interpretive trajectory. Meaning thus appears as a continuous movement within the text that cannot be fixed in a single signification.

4.3 Deconstruction of Binary Oppositions in the Novel

Deconstruction also involves analyzing binary oppositions—such as presence/absence or origin/derivative—that structure Western thought, in order to reveal the tensions within them. A deconstructive reading of *Shadows of the One* reveals several binaries that are destabilized throughout the text, including: truth/illusion, presence/absence, and self/shadow. At first, these binaries appear clear and distinct; however, the narrative gradually destabilizes the boundaries between them. The shadow, which initially seems to be merely a reflection of the self, transforms into an independent entity, while what appears to be truth becomes increasingly questionable as the narrative progresses. In one passage, the narrator states: “I am no longer sure whether the shadow follows me or whether I am the one following my shadow.” This reflects the collapse of boundaries between origin and image, making it difficult to distinguish between the self and its shadow. Here, one of the central ideas of deconstruction becomes evident: binaries that appear stable on the surface conceal complex relations of overlap and exchange.

4.4 The Text as an Open Space for Interpretation

Through this fragmented structure, the novel becomes an open space for multiple readings. The reader does not encounter a ready-made meaning that can be easily extracted; instead, they are faced with a network of signs and signals that require continuous reinterpretation. This perspective aligns with the nature of interactive literature, which grants the reader a more active role in shaping meaning. The reader does not merely receive the narrative but participates in constructing it through choices and interpretations. From this standpoint, *Shadows of the One* can be seen as a model of contemporary narrative that transcends the idea of the closed text with a single meaning, transforming the text into a dynamic space with multiple reading possibilities. The novel thus becomes both an aesthetic and intellectual experience based on semantic play and the deconstruction of narrative certainties.

Conclusion: Key Findings of the Study

The study demonstrates that interactive literature represents a qualitative transformation in contemporary narrative structure, shifting from a closed linear form to a branching structure based on multiplicity and interaction, making the text resemble a network of intertwined narrative paths. It reveals that theoretical developments in modern literary criticism—particularly those of Roland Barthes, Umberto Eco, and Wolfgang Iser—have reinforced the centrality of the reader in meaning production, a principle that finds practical application in interactive texts. The analysis of *Shadows of the One* shows that its narrative structure is based on the fragmentation of linear temporality and the reconstruction of narrative time through discontinuous segments that allow multiple reading paths. The study also demonstrates that the multiplicity of narrative voices contributes to the deconstruction of the traditional narrator's authority, transforming the text into a dialogic space in line with the concept of Mikhail Bakhtin.

Furthermore, the semiotic reading reveals that the novel is structured around a network of binary oppositions such as self/shadow, presence/absence, and reality/possibility, which generate semantic tension reflecting the narrator's identity crisis. The symbolism of the shadow emerges as a central semantic theme, functioning as a sign that reveals the character's internal division and expresses the tension between self and world. The deconstructive reading, based on the ideas of Jacques Derrida, shows that the novel operates through the deferral of meaning and the multiplicity of interpretations, where meaning does not settle in a single point but moves across a network of narrative references. Ultimately, the analysis demonstrates that the novel becomes an open space for interpretation, offering no fixed final meaning but allowing multiple readings depending on the paths chosen by the reader. Finally, the study highlights that a pragmatic approach, drawing on speech act theory as developed by J. L. Austin, helps explain interaction within the text, as the reader's choice of a narrative path functions as a performative act that directly influences the development of the story.

The study concluded that traditional critical approaches—semiotic, deconstructive, and pragmatic—remain capable of analyzing interactive texts; however, they need to further

develop their methodological tools in order to accommodate the nature of digital texts, which are based on branching structures and interactivity

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