

**Visual Storytelling in Husayn's *Al-Ayyam (The Days)***

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The objective of this paper is to take us on a journey with one of the modern Arabic autobiographies, *Al-Ayyam (the Days)* by Taha Husayn—Egypt's most prominent man of letters, whose controversial works instigated dispute. Administering a close textual analysis and a substantial critical evaluation of Husayn's narratology and the type of narration in *Al-Ayyam (The Days)*, the present paper aims to go beyond being a mere survey of his well-known sympathetic struggle against blindness, poverty, and ignorance. Instead, it aims to get to the bottom of the premises behind his unique narrative technique. For this purpose, the study administers a new perspective by highlighting Husayn's peculiar implementation of the first- and third-person methods of narration interchangeably, and his unusual utilization of a vivid quantity of special visual cinematic descriptions. Exploring the premises of Husayn's utilization of this innovative narrative technique, the present study finally reaches the conclusion that the noticeable distance between the author and the narrator of the autobiography provides Husayn with the space to describe his life experiences in a visual cinematic manner, rather than creating a generic ambiguity.

**Key Words:** Narratology, Autobiography, Types of narration, Husayn's Blindness, Visual Cinematic Description.

### المستخلص:

تهدف الدراسة الحالية إلى الغوص في أعماق واحدة من أهم السير الذاتية العربية الحديثة، "الأيام" لطف حسين - رجل الأدب الأبرز في مصر، والذي أثارت أعماله المميزة الكثير من الجدل. من خلال إجراء تحليل نصي دقيق وتقييم نقدي جوهري لطريقة سرد حسين ل (الأيام)، تهدف هذه الورقة البحثية إلى ما هو أبعد من رصد رحلته المؤثرة المعروفة في الكفاح العمى والفقر والجهل إلى الوقوف على حيثيات استخدامه أسلوباً سردياً فريداً. لهذا الغرض، تتبع الدراسة منهجاً جديداً من خلال تسليط الضوء على الاستخدام غير المعتاد للمؤلف لطريقة السرد بصيغة المتكلم والغائب بالتناوب، واستخدامه غير المألوفة لعدد واضح من الأوصاف البصرية السينمائية المحددة. ومن خلال الوقوف على الفرضيات استخدام طه حسين لتقنية السرد المبتكرة، تتوصل الدراسة الحالية إلى استنتاج مفاده وجود مسافة ملحوظة بين مؤلف السيرة الذاتية وراويها وذلك لإمداده بمساحة كافية لوصف تجاربه الحياتية وليس الوقوع في فخ الالتباس النوعي.

**الكلمات المفتاحية:** علم السرد، السيرة الذاتية، تقنيات السرد، حسين وفقدان البصر، التوصيف المرئي السينمائي.

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**Introduction**

**I.1. Research Problem:**

Taha Husayn's *Al-Ayyam (The Days)* is the most famous Arabic autobiography discussed in the Arab world. Utilizing a third-person method of narration throughout the three volumes of the autobiography, while applying the first-person method only in a few chapters, implies that there is a generic ambiguity which necessitates debate and discussion. Since the third person method of narration is not the typical narrative technique of an autobiography, there ought to be something else to clarify that the text is an autobiography. According to Phillippe Lejeune's article "*Autobiography in the Third Person*" (1977), the author should create a shared identity among himself, the narrator, and the protagonist of the autobiography (1). "It is this identity and the pact that it creates between reader and author, not the use of first- or third-person narration, which constitutes the text as an autobiography" (Douglas: 95). This shared identity is called 'the autobiographical pact'. By this pact, the author declares to his readers that the narrated events are really part of his real-life experiences i.e., the author has to indicate that he intends to write an autobiography. Although *Al-Ayyam (The Days)* appears to be a complex narrative, as the narrator is not the central character, it is obviously an autobiography, which describes a clear chronological development in Taha Husayn's life. Both his emotional and educational developments are described. This means that there is no doubt about his *Al-Ayyam (The Days)* being an autobiography. The matter, then, is about the way he portrays his life experiences. Husayn's blindness entails a dependence only on the verbal expression to write his autobiography. However, the oppression he suffered after the publication of his controversial book *On Pre-Islamic Poetry* (1926) encompassed a defense with a special nature.

## I.2. Objectives:

For this purpose, the present study tackles Taha Husayn's uncommon narrative technique in *Al-Ayyam* (*The Days*), with the aim of probing the grounds of his interchangeable utilization of the first- and third- person methods of narration in the text. By exploring the way by which Husayn narrates his life experiences, and by gaining insight into the principals of writing a standard autobiography, this paper's major objective is to understand the interactive relationship between literature and cinema.

## I.3. Research Questions:

Taking Husayn's *Al-Ayyam* (*The Days*) as a case study, this paper aspires to address the following research questions. **First**, in what ways does Husayn's autobiography represent an artistic innovation by breaking the principals of writing a standard autobiography? **Second**, what are the premises of Husayn's interchangeable utilization of the first- and third-person methods of narration? **Finally**, how does literature and cinema interact in Husayn's autobiography?

## I.4. Rationale:

The basic underlying reasons behind selecting this area of study is the uncommon method of narration utilized by Husayn in *Al-Ayyam* (*The Days*). The researcher felt that there is something troubling about the use of this narrative technique that must be discussed. Moreover, Husayn's visual descriptions along the three volumes of the autobiography instigated the researcher to navigate the symbiotic relationship between literature and cinema. However, what inspired the researcher even more is the fact that Husayn was the Arabic literature laureate known for writing controversial works.

### Theoretical Frame work

## II. Narratology and Husayn's Narrative Technique:

Before exploring the challenging narrative technique used by Husayn in *Al-Ayyam* (*The Days*), the researcher deems it appropriate to first present the concept of narratology and the different types of narration.

### 2.1. Definition of 'Narratology'

Since the narrative technique is the main concern of this study, it is pertinent to deeply investigate the nature of narratology in the field of autobiography. To investigate a structure, or to present a 'structural description', Todorov Todorov, in his article "Structural Analysis of Narrative" (1969), maintains that the narratologist dissects the narrative phenomena into their component parts and then attempts to determine their functions and relationships (70-76). He also defines narratology as

“the theory of the structures of narrative” (Phelan 2005: 1-18). In other words, it investigates the formal features of the narrative. Further, in his article “Structuralist Narratology” (2016), Nasrullah Mambrol gives narratology the same definition, and illustrates how a story's meaning develops from its overall structure (the langue) rather than from each individual story's isolated theme (the parole) (6). In addition, according to Gordon Pradl's book, *Narratology: The Study of Story Structure* (1984), narratology is defined as “the structuralist study of narrative aimed at understanding how recurrent elements, themes, and patterns yield a set of universals that determine the make-up of a story” (2). As such, there must be a clear understanding of how the different elements of a story are arranged in order to do such a structuralist analysis of the narrative. Setting, plot, characterization, method of narration, and themes are the most important of those narrative elements (1). Moreover, G. Prince's book, *Narratology: the form and functioning of narrative* (1982), states that narratology examines what all narratives have in common and what allow them to be narratively different (7). In other words, it studies the basic characteristics that give shape to what a narrative is and what distinguishes it from other forms.

Narratology is not concerned with the history of particular novels or tales, or with their meaning, or with their aesthetic values, but rather with the traits which distinguish narrative from other signifying systems and with the modalities of these traits (5).

Significantly, narratology can be classified into two main categories: discourse narratology and story narratology. First, discourse narratology analyzes the stylistic choices that determine the form or realization of a narrative text (performance in the case of films and plays). Story narratology, by contrast, focuses on the action units that arrange a stream of events into a trajectory of themes, motives, and plot lines. This notion of ‘employment’ plays a crucial role in the work of theorists and cultural philosophers (Panggabean:1-7). Jonathan Culler in his book, *The Pursuits of Science: Semiotics, Literature, Destruction* (2001), describes narratology as comprising many strands.

implicitly united in the recognition that narrative theory requires a distinction between ‘story’ as a sequence of actions or events conceived as independent of their manifestation in discourse, and ‘discourse’, the discursive presentation of narration of events (189).

Furthermore, there are two phases of narratology: the classical and the post classical. The classical phase extends from the mid-1960s to the early 1980s. In this phase, narratologists were particularly interested in identifying and defining narrative universals. At this era, narratology is

defined as “a set of general statements on narrative genres, on the systematics of narrating (telling a story) and on the structure of plot” (Ryan & Von Alphen 1993: 110). However, a decade later, narratology was described as a theory, a method, or a discipline. In the post classical phase, narratology is limited to only one theory. From a post classical perspective, narratology is considered a discipline which is wide enough in scope to be applied to other disciplines. As Rimmon Kenan (2004) puts it, “the transition to post classical narratology is a shift from a fairly unified discipline to one characterized by a diversity of approaches” (47).

In narratology, a narrative is analyzed from the point of view of its constituent components. M. Jahn in his book, *Narratology: A Guide to the theory of Narrative* (2005), suggests three broad categories. The first of these is narration (voice), focalization (mood), and narrative situation. The second is action, story analysis, tellability. The third broad category is about tense, time, and narrative modes. Remarkably, for the specific purpose of investigating Husayn's method of narration in his autobiography, the category of ‘narration’ is the one that will be explained in detail in this study.

## **2.2. Methods of Narration**

In order to understand the structure of any narrative, narratology gives a special importance for the relationship between the narrators and the figures they narrate. Closely linked up with the speech act of narrating and with the figure of a narrator is the ‘narrative’ which is derived from ‘narrate’. The narrative could, then, be defined as “everything narrated by a narrator” (mention reference). In order to conceptualize an explanation for the relationship between the narrator, the author, and the protagonist in a narrative, it is important to identify the different types of narration used in literature: first-person, second-person, and third-person narration.

### **1-The First-Person Method of Narration:**

The first-person method of narration focuses on existing events that are authenticated by the author's account of them. The author is not only present in the here and now but was present when they occurred. It refers both to the narrator (the one who is telling), and, at the same time, to one of the main characters (the one who is experiencing). Since a first-person narrator is one of the characters in the plot, Gerard Genette, in her book *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method* (1980), describes the first-person narrative as ‘homo diegetic’ or ‘auto-diegetic’ (the narrator is a character in the story) (50-52). When the main protagonist is giving an account of an adventure he was personally involved in, he would be classified by Genette as an ‘auto diegetic’ narrator.

In a homo diegetic narrative, the (homo diegetic) narrator tells a story of personal experience. In other words, he or she is also one of story's acting characters. A homo diegetic narrator, therefore, splits up into a narrating - I (on the level of telling the story) and an Experiencing-I (on the level of action) (182-185).

Remarkably, “first-person narrators are restricted to ordinary human limitations: they cannot give witness accounts of things that happened in different locations, they don't know what will happen in the future, they cannot (under ordinary circumstances) narrate the story of their own death, and they cannot know for certain what other people think or thought” (Lanser 1981: 161). Also, in some stories, the first-person narrator is an observer of the character around whom the story is centered. F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* is an example. The first-person narrator (Nick Carraway) is an observer of the character around whom the story is centered (Jay Gatsby).

Equally important, there also three types of the first-person method of narration. In the ‘first person protagonist’, a character relates events that occurred to them; the "I" is the main character, telling his or her own story such as: “I missed the bus that morning because I couldn't convince myself to get out of bed. It was just too cosy under the comforter, with the cat curled up next to me. I was going to have to walk all the way to work”. But, in the ‘first person witness’, the story of the main character is told by another character observing the events such as: “She missed the bus. She'd probably spent an hour arguing with herself that she really should get up. I could picture her there, curled up in bed with the cat next to her. Now she was going to have to walk to work”. Furthermore, in the ‘first person re-teller’, the story is told, not by a witness to the events, but by someone who has heard the story from yet another person.

## 2- The Third-Person Method of Narration:

Although the first-person narrative is a principal method of narration in most narratives, there are also stories in which we relate events that happened to others, who tell us about them. In this case, the narrator and the protagonist are different individuals. Genette refers to these as ‘hetero diegetic’ narratives (the narrator is not the protagonist) (50-52). Here the author uses a narrator to tell the story. It gives him or her more chance to open up the hearts and minds of several characters. Their thoughts and feelings are exposed to the reader who is able to discover and evaluate. The ‘hetero diegetic’ narrator (third-person narrator) is supposed to be trustworthy almost by definition.

In a hetero diegetic narrative, the story is told by a (hetero diegetic) narrator who is not present as a character in the story. A hetero diegetic narrator can have a Narrating-I (using the first person on the level of fictional communication) but s/he cannot have an Experiencing-I. In other words, a homo diegetic narrative must have an experiencing -I, whereas a hetero diegetic narrative must not have an Experiencing-I (182-185).

Getting inside the mind of a character and experiencing a story from their perspective would trigger higher levels of sympathy. Third-person narratives may offer a reader a variety of character perspectives, furthering their chance to develop empathy. There are different ways for an author to use a third-person narrative. One type is third-person omniscient, in which the story is told from many different character perspectives. Another is third-person limited, also known as third-person limited omniscience, in which the story is told from the point of view of one character. Both of these perspectives can produce empathy within a reader in different ways. Describing the emotional state of a character from a third-person perspective can create affective empathy as effectively as a first-person perspective. Omniscient and limited omniscient third person narrator maintain distance, if only through the distance inherent in the third-person pronoun (Hantzis:7).

### 3. Second-person Method of Narration:

There are also second-person narratives where the author uses a narrator to speak to the reader. The You /Second-person narrative is the one in which the protagonist is referred to in the second-person method of narration. Here, the story always begins by addressing the reader and then continues with a description of how this reader went to a bookstore and purchased the book being read. It uses a lot of 'you can' and 'you should'. Moreover, it treats the readers as if they are part of the story. However, it is not quite popular like the first- or third-person types of narration.

You-narrative/second-person narrative: a narrative in which the protagonist is referred to in the second person. Functionally, you may refer (a) to the narrator's experiencing Self, (b) to some other character in a homo diegetic world, or (c) to a character in a hetero diegetic world. (Note, we are not talking here of the 'general' "you", meaning 'anyone', nor the "you" that first-person or authorial narrators use for addressing their narratees). You-narratives are special forms of homo diegetic and hetero diegetic narratives (182-185).

In other words, the reader is immersed into the narrative as a character involved in the story or even the protagonist him/herself. The second-person method of narration is usually used in nonfiction or spoken



language but rarely used in fiction and is less known. Like the third-person method, the second-person method of narration is not often used in autobiography.

### 2.3. Method of Narration in Autobiography:

Significantly, an autobiography is always supposed to be an ‘auto diegetic’ narrative. Rather than being written by somebody else, an autobiography comes through the person’s own pen, by his own words. However, one of the most significant achievements of narratology is the fact that nowadays we can distinguish between the author and the narrator in an autobiography. Basically, in the modern period, the distinction between the author and the narrator can only be regarded as innovative in the third-person narrative. In terms of narratology, this last development is a product of modernism. So, within narrative theory as a whole, the author/narrator distinction cannot be regarded as constitutive. It is a more recent development which has, in the meantime, come to predominate.

Autobiography as a genre is considered to be Western. The professor of religious studies at the University of California, Dwight F. Reynolds in his article “*Interpreting the Self: Autobiography in the Arabic Literary Tradition*” (2001), maintains that from the mid-twentieth century, autobiography was considered to be a genre unique to modern Western civilization (18-19). Gusdorf, also remarked that autobiography as a genre is not to be found outside our cultural area; one would say that it expresses a concern particular to Western man (1980:28-30). Since these Western critics base their opinions on modern Western self-consciousness, rather than on human beings in general, the characteristics they define as characteristics of a proper autobiography are restricted to Western culture. Thus, non-Western autobiographies would not be considered a proper autobiography.

In his article “The Autobiography in Modern Arabic Literature and Culture” (1993), Thomas Philipp states that the first Arabic autobiography probably was written at the beginning of the century. In 1930, it was considered to be a genre on its own and it reached its culmination as a literary genre in the 1950s. The first generation of authors representing the first milestone were all born in the last two decades of the nineteenth century (573-74). Moreover, the early Arabic autobiographies were called ‘tarjama saxiyya’, ‘dhikrayat’, or ‘modhakirat’ (1993:573).

Procedures

**2.3. Tracing the first- and third-person methods of narration in *Al-Ayyam*:**

**Method of narration:**

The three volumes of Husayn's *Al-Ayyam* (*The Days*) are told in the third-person method of narration, only a few chapters are told in the first person. As usual, autobiography, as a literary genre, is supposed to be told in the first-person method. So, Husayn's unusual narrative technique has a specific significance. In Thomas Philipp's article "*The Autobiography in Modern Arabic Literature and Culture*" (1993), he maintains that the narrator and the main character of Husayn's *Al-Ayyam* "occasionally melt into one" (537-604). In contrast, the narrator is a sighted narrator, while Husayn, the hero and the author of the autobiography, is blind. This sighted narrator, who tells the life story of the blind Husayn, seems to be an omniscient narrator. Without that sighted narrator, Husayn would not be able to remember every detail he tells us. Moreover, the way that narrator describes certain things proves that, unlike the main character, he is sighted. For instance, in the last chapter of volume one, the narration wavers between the first-and third-person method. Talking directly to his daughter in the beginning, Husayn uses the first-person method of narration. In this particular point of his life, he is no longer weak or helpless. He, now, enjoys a stable life. He becomes confident enough to transfer his experience to his daughter.

You, my little daughter, are innocent, uncorrupted, and pure in heart. You are nine years old, and at this stage child admire their fathers and mothers and make them their ideals in life, imitating them in word and deed and trying to be like them in everything (*Al-Ayyam*: 84).

But later on, in the same chapter, to tell the daughter about the bitter life Husayn lived when he was a student at Al-Azhar, the narrator describes things he has seen. He must have seen the young Husayn to be able to give such an appearance description. Husayn might have used this specific technique (third-person method) because, like any father, he does not want his daughter to feel his helplessness.

He was conspicuous for all this, but nevertheless pleasing to the eye when its gaze fell on him, notwithstanding his ragged state and sightless eyes, with his untroubled brow and smiling mouth, hurrying with his guide to Al-Azhar (*Al-Ayyam*:86).

Significantly, there are different premises regarding Husayn's employment of a third-person narrative. Philipp, in the aforementioned article (1993), maintains that Husayn feels the need, right up to the end, to distance himself from this social and intellectual environment which

constituted his own origins (588). From the beginning, he does not like to be treated like the blind. He feels that he was not one of them. So, he tries to act like any “sighted” person. Because of the harsh stereotyped attitude against the blind in the Egyptian society, Husayn refuses to be associated with them. When he felt that he was different from his brothers and sisters who could see everything, he realized his special need. Remarkably, Husayn’s psychological problems resulted from his parents’ ignorance and negligence. Their poverty made them cruel with their handicapped son.

It was not long before he learnt the reason of all this, for he perceived that other people had an advantage over him and that his brothers and sisters were able to do things that he couldn’t do and to tackle things that he couldn’t. He felt that his mother permitted his brothers and sisters to do things that were forbidden to him. This aroused, at first, a feeling of resentment, but ere long this feeling of resentment turned to a silent, but heartfelt, grief-when he heard his brothers and sisters describing things about which he had no knowledge at all (*Al-Ayyam*:16).

To be able to reveal these thoughts and feelings without triggering the readers’ feelings of sympathy, he, thus, needs someone else to narrate his autobiography. His handicap affects his self-confidence and leads to a continuous refusal of being classified with the people with special needs. In his childhood, it prevented him from living a normal life in which one can even eat freely. When he discovered the reason behind his family’s attitude towards him, he became deeply frustrated. A feeling of inferiority caused him to have a sensitive and extremely cautious personality. In order to overcome this painful feeling, as well as to compensate for his lost sight, Husayn resorted to his sense of hearing, exploiting it fully in listening to stories and legends. And this may be the reason for his fondness of literature later. He also avoided eating with his family fearing his brothers’ laughing at him. Moreover, fearing sympathy and ridicule, he avoided lots of sports and games.

He was ashamed to drink at table, fearing that the glass might upset in his hand or that he would take hold of it clumsily when it was handed to him. Therefore, he always ate his food dry at the table until such time as he got up and went to wash his hands at the tap, drinking there to his heart’s content (*Al-Ayyam*:18).

Moreover, Husayn’s description of ‘Our Master’, the teacher of the village ‘Kuttab’ reveals to what extent he has a negative feeling or attitude toward the blind. This man was blind as well, but the narrator tells us that he would act as if he was sighted. This triggered Husayn’s mockery and criticism. To express one of the reasons behind Husayn’s

hatred of the 'Kuttab' teacher, the narrator mentions a situation in which 'Our Master' sent one of the boys to a cobbler to fix a shoe for him. 'Our Master' talked as if he was seeing the shoe:

Nevertheless, although this man opened and shut his eye, he couldn't see anything, or at any rate very little, for he was completely blind except for the faintest glimmer of sight in one eye, so that he could discern shapes without being able to distinguish between them. Not but what he was very pleased with this dim sight of his, and deceived himself into imagining that he could see as well as other people. However, this did not prevent him from relying on two of his pupils to guide him on his way to and from the school (*Al-Ayyam*: 22).

Making fun of this blind old man, the narrator gives the reader a quote in which the man seemed to be sighted and then he comments on this quote saying that 'Our Master' fooled himself. This comment not only indicates the man's incompetence, but the stumbling the blind suffer. Accordingly, it is normal or even better for Husayn not to tell these experiences in the first-person method of narration in order to distance himself from the situations he hated.

The fact that Husayn wants to avoid giving the impression of being arrogant could be another reason for using a third-person method of narration. Having a difficult childhood and harsh youth, Husayn, thus, had to fight hard to achieve what he wanted. These hardships were due to his impediment and his rural, ignorant, and poor background. Managing to overcome all the hardships and obstacles, Husayn's "transition from the countryside to the capital finally leads to the highest qualifications, not only in his own country, but also in Europe" (Ostle, et al 1998: 135). Having a typical heroic life story—the story of a poor little blind boy who, through his own achievements, happens to become one of the best-known Egyptian intellectuals—it might sound rather arrogant if Husayn describes his own life that way. And, by using another person as narrator, it is easier for him to express himself and his achievements without sounding arrogant. He expresses his triumph over blindness, ignorance, and poverty by referring to himself by 'our friend' and 'the boy' and 'the young man'.

Our friend would sit at a respectful distance from them, and although they were oblivious of his presence, he was in no way unmindful of what he heard or even of the impression these stories made upon the audience (*Al-Ayyam*:19).

In her book, *Taha Husayn: His Place in the Egyptian Literary Renaissance* (1965), the author and critic Pierre Cachia thinks that Husayn makes a trick by talking about himself at first in the third-person

method of narration and then by talking to his daughter in the first in the last chapter of his autobiography's first volume. Cachia attributes this to his desire not to thrust his adult personality into his childhood. He wanted to distance his present ability from his childhood inability to portray his suffering for real. Husayn the writer, wants to keep all the characteristics of his painful childhood experiences as they really were.

Husayn's trick of speaking of the child in the third person and of the narrator in the first- "enables him to speak to his reader without projecting his adult personality into the experience of his childhood. Each memory—and there are some humorous and delectable along with the painful ones—is given its appropriate emotional atmosphere; the deep silent sorrow that was his faithful companion then does not often intrude upon the narrative (30).

For this purpose, just like what he does in volume one, Husayn, in volume two, tells the reader about his adolescence hardships at Al-Azhar in the same third-person method of narration. When he joined Al-Azhar, Husayn's initial enthusiasm quickly turned to disappointment due to the narrowness of the teachings at al-Azhar. Husayn states that "this manner of life was painful not only for himself but for his brother too. The boy was dissatisfied with his progress at Al-Azhar and wanted to attend more lectures and broach new subjects" (*Al-Ayyam*:175). So, when he heard of the lectures by the social reformer Muhammad Abduh, this opened up to him a whole new world of knowledge that made the traditional teachings of Al-Azhar seem shallow to him.

Ending with a dialogue of Husayn's advising his son that he would meet a new lifestyle in Europe rather than what he was used to in Egypt, the last chapter of volume two confirms the utilization of the same technique of the first-person method of narration again. This time, the advice is used to confirm how strong Husayn became after all these childhood and adolescence hardships. Just like the way he addresses his daughter before, he becomes more confident and knowledgeable to monitor his son's decisions and wishes now. Husayn succeeds at the end to change himself and wishes to change others.

let me present you with this story. From time to time, when you are worn out with study and tired of Latin and Greek, it may perhaps bring you some comfort and relaxation. You will see in these pages an aspect of Egyptian life which you have never yourself known and be reminded someone who has many a time been comforted by your presence and found in your gaiety as in your seriousness unparalleled delight (*Al-Ayyam*:224).

Moreover, Husayn's study at the university changed him and made him always eager for change. Used to criticize Sa'd Zaghlul and his policies concerning the British occupation of Egypt, Sheikh Abd al-Aziz Jawish, an editor at a nationalist newspaper at which Taha began to write, was the one who nourished Husayn's desire for this change. Husayn maintains that Sheikh Abd al-Aziz Jawish had wrote him a poem in jail to satire Sa'd. Here the first-person method of narration is used. Husayn says:

returning to the Ministry or becoming president of the Council of Ministers. I can only remember the opening lines, and pretty vile they are. "as you can see: "if it is true what I hear from the news-mongers, we are going to come under the rule of the scurviest." (*Al-Ayyam*:264).

However, the whole chapter is told in the third person method. For instance, it is the narrator who states that Husayn became a writer because of Abd al-Aziz Jawish and Lutfi al-Sayyid. They were the ones who encouraged Husayn's criticism of Al-azhar conservatives and who blessed the beginning of his writing career. "By dint of the kindness of these two—Lutfi al-Sayyid and Abd al-Aziz Jawish, he became a writer" (*Al-Ayyam*:266).

By the same token, Husayn's unique method of narration clearly appears in the presentation of his journey to Europe and the description of the huge difference between the Egyptian and French cultures. The reader is able to imagine the influences of this exciting journey through the narrator's juxtaposing of the Egyptian political conditions along with the characteristics of the European civilization and modern lifestyle in volumes two and three. In order to describe his happiness and fascination with the European civilization and innovative sciences, Husayn employs another person (the narrator) to express his maturity and lifechanging experience.

He went to the university and audited classes, as God willed, in French language and history. Every session he felt he had learned something new, adding to his existing store fresh items of knowledge.... he was taken up with the contrast between the old life and the new, pre-occupied with how great the difference was (*Al-Ayyam*:322).

### Findings:

By exploring the premises of Husayn's utilization of a unique narrative technique in his autobiography *Al-Ayyam (The Days)*, the present study reaches the conclusion that Husayn's creation of a noticeable distance between the autobiography's author and narrator provides him with a space to describe his life experiences in a visual cinematic manner rather than creating a generic ambiguity. So, the study

finally affirms the symbiotic and interactive relationship between literature and cinema; they inspire and enrich each other.

Discussion

**III. Visual Storytelling and Husayn's Visual Cinematic Descriptive Technique:**

**3.1. Definition of 'Cinematic':**

The term 'cinematic' comes from cinema, thus, pertaining the characteristics of cinema. So, everything using the techniques associated with cinema will be cinematic. Cinema is a visual medium meant to be experienced by an audience in a movie theatre. Having the qualities and characteristics of films, the cinematic style is employed in the art of visual storytelling. It highlights the visual qualities of the text. Nevertheless, Berys Gaut, in his book *A Philosophy of Cinematic Art* (2010), defines cinema as:

the medium of the moving images. In the etymologically rooted sense of the word, 'cinema' is related to the notion of kinematics, the study of things that move. 'Moves' and 'motion pictures' are terms that capture the phenomenon: we are discussing pictures that move (1).

He, also, states that "cinema, despite its mechanical photographic basis, is an art form (21)." The perception of cinema as an art derives partly from the intertextual relationship between cinema and other art forms and partly from the technological aspect that is more closely linked to the cinematic form, represented mainly in editing. This calls us to deal with the artistic features of cinema both thematically and formally; to take into account the significant relations between film and other traditional art forms (Al-Mutaher)

**3.2. Difference Between 'Cinema' and 'Literature':**

While literature has been a way for artistic expression for centuries, cinema is doing the same job for quite a few decades now. When literature was a popular form of expression during the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, cinema has taken its place by the 20<sup>th</sup> century onwards. Significantly, cinema and literature are distinct, but the two are equally works of art. Absent in literature, the advantage of visually showing the whole picture on the screen that helps the audience connect with the moment more closely is one major and effective tool in cinema. In other words, while literature takes its reader on a journey of imagination that is away from the real world, cinema shows such an imaginative world before the audience, and they do not have to put much pressure on their minds to delve into their imagination because they basically view the film through the imagination of the filmmakers. While many novels are turned into screenplays, they are intended to allow readers to imagine the story

in their own minds. Moreover, though literature and cinema have certain differences, both have a similarity of taking the readers/audience to a different world. If literature is an art developed through writing, cinema brings to life those writings through sound, music, and acting.

Remarkably, the visual qualities of the text are what gives it its cinematic characterization. When an author visualizes a scene, he/she employs a cinematic technique through details, background, feelings, senses, sound, effect and light. A novel, for example, has to convey with words what a movie can convey with images. Herbert Read, in his book *A Coast of Many Colours* (1965), underlies the main characteristic of good writing or good literature as lying in the author's ability to visualize his or her scenes. Words are transferred to images through detailed descriptions to capture the moment.

If I were asked to give the most distinctive quality of good writing, I should express it in this one word: visual. Reduce the art of writing to its fundamentals and you come to this single aim: to convey images by means of words. But to convey images is to make the mind see... that is a definition of good literature... of the achievement of every poet... from Homer and Shakespeare to James Joyce or Henry Miller. It is also a definition of the ideal film (231).

In addition, in literature, characters are revealed through internal monologue and descriptions whereas screen writers develop their characters through dialogue and action. In the novel, the speaker is often implied through the text. The book is like the camera and the author has the mic to report everything not only what the characters say and do but also what they think about. Moreover, both literature and cinema employ point of view as an important narrative device. The cinematic perspective in literature is a narrative point of view meant to simulate the experience of watching a movie. "first-, second- and third- person narration is possible in print (literature), but it can use only one at a time; film tends to mix first and third person method of narration (Huss and Silverstein :1970: 151).

### **3.3. Husayn's Blindness and the Concept of Compensation:**

Husayn did not suffer from his personal blindness as much as he suffered from his society's blindness. If he was physically handicapped, his society was culturally handicapped. That is why when he travelled to France—despite the regular returns that were due to the shortage of his Egyptian university's financial support—and discovered to what extent the European civilization and renaissance was advanced, he felt disappointed about his backward society. So, he started to disregard his



blindness and think of his society's compared to the sightedness of the European society.

The primary binary opposition is between personal blindness and social blindness. Malti Douglas shows that this opposition underlies and informs others, for example, modernism and tradition, a superior West and a moribund East, sightedness and blindness (Cooke 1990: 780-81).

Accordingly, he might have used an unusual narrative technique intentionally to help broaden the space for portraying the role of that society in shaping his life. Based on the utilization of a third-person method of narration throughout *Al-Ayyam*, Husayn employs a cinematic style by applying lots of detailed visual descriptions. Husayn's method of narration makes his life experiences seem like you are watching them on a screen. Although Husayn's eyes are damaged, his descriptions in the autobiography indicate that his eyes are not only good but also cinematic. He might have noticed things that no one else in the world have seen. The film director Sebastian Lelio articulates how the cinematic device works as follows:

There is something about using the cinematic device as a tool to connect with the dimensions of the world that you don't know too well, you're not too familiar with. It's like creating a bridge, or a spaceship to travel to the unknown (Peretz).

As Husayn is blind, he lacks the knowledge of most of the things around him. So, in order to convince the readers and affect their attitudes, he must have used an unusual technique as a compensation to that shortage of knowledge. He, thus, tends to give detailed visual descriptions of everything he wants the reader to know. These visual descriptions, instead of troubling the reader with imagining the scenes, facilitate his or her acquiring as if he/she sees them on a screen. This is called the cinematic style. In order to transfer the written words to images i.e. visualize his experiences, Husayn has to include the elements of the cinema. He accomplishes this cinematic technique by providing detailed descriptions with the help of his senses such as feeling physical as well as imperceptible items (air), hearing sounds and even realizing smells (smoke). He also makes use of specific backgrounds and sound effects. This could not have been done through the use of the first person method of narration. So, instead of creating a generic ambiguity, the utilization of the third-person method of narration helps Husayn to cinematically write his autobiography.

### **3.4. Tracing the visual cinematic descriptions in the text:**

From the very beginning Husayn tends to describe where he lived in detail. His description of the stalks of the fence was very imaginative.

Those stalks turned into a prison he could not escape. He wished then he would become a rabbit to be able to cross that fence. In the same way, his physical blindness was a prison for him. Husayn's visual description of the fence and the rabbits gave the reader the impression that the narrator is not blind. He describes things as they really are.

He remembers how envious he was of the rabbits which used to go out of the house, just as he did but were able to traverse the fence by leaping over it or by squeezing between the stalks to where they could nipple what was behind it in the way of green stuffs, of which he remembers particularly the cabbage (*Al-Ayyam*: 10)

Moreover, there is a clear visual description provided directly by the narrator when he talks about "Our Master". In order to express the faults and stumbles of the 'Kuttab' teacher, the narrator introduces a prominent visual scene including the personal physical traits of its hero ('Our Master'), place (school or house), and time (morning and evening). Husayn wants to visually share with the reader the whole experience of his suffering with a careless and cruel teacher like 'Our Master'.

Strange indeed was the sight of 'Our Master' on his way to the school or his house in the morning and evening. He was a bulky, corpulent man and his overcoat increased his bulk. As we mentioned above, he put his arms over the shoulders of his two companions, and as the three of them marched along, the earth resounded beneath their tread (*Al-Ayyam*:22).

In the first chapter of volume two, in addition, the narrator describes the way to Al-Azhar in which Husayn heard, smelled, and felt things he was not familiar with. At first, he vividly describes the 'narghile' which was difficult for Husayn to recognize in the beginning. The narrator asserts that the smoke, sound, and heat that came from that 'narghile' delighted Husayn for several days. This detailed description gives the scene a spirit and life and helps the reader to not only imagine the situation but also see and experience what Husayn himself did not see.

Once through it, he became aware of a gentle heat playing on his right cheek, and a fine smoke teasing his nostrils; while on the left he heard an odd gurgling sound which at once puzzled and delighted him. For several days, morning and evening, he listened curiously to this sound, but lacked the courage to inquire what it might be. Then one day he gathered from a chance remark that it came from the bubbling of a narghile smoked by tradesmen of the district (*Al-Ayyam*: 105).

A similar cinematic sketch of Husayn on his way to Al-Azhar for the first time is provided by the narrator when he tells his daughter about the hardships he encountered in his life. Husayn's weakness and handicap in childhood makes him ashamed to talk about them directly in the first-

person. He might have thought that he can express this freely on the tongue of the narrator, who, in turn, does it skillfully. Through this visual description, the reader, thus, becomes capable of imagining to what extent Husayn suffered.

He was thin, pale, with a neglected appearance, and rather on the poor side. Indeed, he was conspicuous in his dirty cloak, and his cap which had changed from white to black, and also in his shirt, which showed from under his cloak and which had become multi-colored owing to the quantities of food that had been spilled down it and a pair of worn-out and patched shoes (*Al-Ayyam*:85-86).

When Husayn tells his daughter about the bread and the black honey of Al-Azhar, another example of the detailed descriptive scenes is employed in the last chapter of volume one. His words give a clear description for the reader to sympathetically sense his miseries. Husayn, thus, gives the reader the opportunity to not only read but see, feel, and hear his experience of eating unhealthy food which was full of insects. Through a crafty visual scene, he praises his daughter's being ignorant of that bad type of food. Here, the narrator and the author are definitely two different persons. The narrator talks to Husayn's daughter about her father describing his food in Al-Azhar and advising her not to know what it is.

Your father spent weeks and months living on nothing but bread of Al-Azhar, and the Azharites were lucky if they did not find in it various kinds of straw and pebbles and all manner of insects. For weeks and months, he only dipped this bread in black treacle. You don't know what black treacle is, and it is a good thing for you that you do not (*Al-Ayyam*:86).

Nevertheless, Husayn's touching of the pillar at Al-Azhar while having a lesson, demonstrates that the narrator adopts the blind protagonist's way of dealing with things, i.e., touching. This means that the touch here becomes the basic way of dealing with visual situations. Since the touch is always used in 'blind writing', then Malti Douglas is true in her acclaim that *Al-Ayyam (The Days)* is a mixture of visual and blind writings.

During one of his classes, the young man was sitting next to a marble column. "He touched it and liked its smoothness and fineness." Thinking about his possible future in the Azhar, "he wanted to touch" its pillars to see if they were similar (1:143). Touch here has become the primary way of relating to an architectural, hence normally visual, phenomenon. The feel of a column has become its essence (Douglas:117).

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According to Douglas, by employing the sense of feeling, blind writing is also clear in the very first pages of volume two. Here, the narrator describes the room through the sense of feeling of the blind protagonist. Husayn felt the heat on his cheek and the smoke teasing his nose. Even the sound he heard aroused his feeling of wonder. Feeling, here, which is known as the sole capability of the blind to recognize things around them, is also used by the sighted narrator to explain Husayn's sufferings.

When he crossed that door, he felt on his right a light heat which reached his right cheek and a light smoke which teased his nostrils, and he felt on his left a strange sound which reached his hearing and which aroused in him a feeling of wonder (*Al-Ayyam*:108).

Additionally, the narrator's description of how Alwa Pasha received Husayn to tell him that he would be travelling to France after many trials interprets his craft of knitting a visual scene by the help of facial expressions. In the tenth chapter of volume two, the reader finds the narrator describing Alwa Pasha's smiling as if Husayn had the ability to see. Husayn writes:

I went apprehensively, in haste, to meet 'Alwa Pasha who received me with a friendly smile and informed me that I would be traveling to France within a few days (*Al-Ayyam*: 317).

The visual, detailed description of the university professors in the third volume of *Al-Ayyam* (*The Days*) affirms the narrator's sightedness versus Husayn's blindness. Husayn describes their clothes and their facial expressions as if he was seeing them. How could the blind Husayn give this detailed description of the different professors? It proves that it is the sighted narrator who has given this specific description. So, Husayn excels to attract the reader's attention to his modern thoughts without troubling him/her with a process of imagining and guessing.

The Egyptian professors differed sharply from one another. some were turbaned and others already favoured tarboush, while others again were in a state of transition between the two styles. Among them were men of the austere, stern type, whose faces rarely relax into a smile while others were the genial and jovial who hardly ever wear a frown.... (*Al-Ayyam*:282).

Over and above, volume three of the autobiography is also full of detailed descriptions that provoke the reader to visualize the scenes Husayn knits to refer to the onset of happiness in his life. Describing the voice of the girl he met in France—who would be later his wife—Husayn adopts a decent style full of delicate and fine words. He shares with the reader the feeling that she was like an angel filling the city with light. He

portrays her in detail as if he draws a picture of a beautiful soft rose. This cinematic description is used skillfully as a tool of sharing Husayn's following happiness with the reader as if he was actually seeing her.

And here was this voice, chasing from within me all the thoughts of darkness, pessimism and despair that Abu-l- 'Ala' had ever planted there, as if, that spring day, it was the very sun rising, dispelling from the city the louring clouds that reared above it in thundery gloom and storm, making everyone afraid, until, as morning came, the seen was bathed in light. I heard that voice one day, reading to me from the poetry of Racine. I felt as if I were made anew. From the hour I first heard that voice here was no way despair could take hold of me (*Al-Ayyam*:328).

### **Conclusion**

To conclude, the present study has tried to conceptualize narratology and its function in autobiography. It administers an analysis of the structure of Husayn's autobiography *Al-Ayyam (The Days)* and the unusual method of narration he utilizes to express his life experiences. Husayn's utilization of the third-person method of narration in the whole autobiography except for some chapters, which are told in the first-person method, is a unique technique that has succeeded to enrich a 20<sup>th</sup> century Arabic autobiography with a cinematic style.

By investigating narratology and the different types of narration, Husayn's motives behind the employment of the third-person method of narration in his autobiography are clarified. Husayn hates being looked upon as a blind, believing that the real blindness is actually jailing ourselves in traditions and universals under the pretext of religiosity. Through showing the difference between personal and social blindness, Husayn tries to get rid of the bitter feeling of being classified with the blind. He also hates to look arrogant in order to be convincing and defend his modern views. Finally, hating to project his adult personality in his childhood experiences, Husayn adopts another person to narrate his autobiography. Being sighted, this narrator is able to provide the reader with the opportunity to not only live the same cruel circumstances of the blind Husayn but also the same journey of success despite his blindness.

To sum up, by administering a close textual analysis of Husayn's narratology in *Al-Ayyam (The Days)*, the present paper reaches the conclusion that Husayn employs an unusual narrative technique to express his different life experiences in a visual cinematic descriptive manner. In other words, the noticeable distance created between the autobiography's author and narrator provides Husayn with a space to apply a visual cinematic descriptive style rather than creating a generic

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ambiguity. Husayn's peculiar implementation of a vivid quantity of cinematic descriptions throughout the three volumes of *Al-Ayyam* functions as a compensation for his handicap. It helps him to clearly introduce his life experiences despite his blindness and to convince his opponents of his modern thoughts concerning Al-Azhar curricula and ways of teaching. Remarkably, in spite of the fact that the reader knows he is blind, Husayn's autobiography is not only based on using what Douglas called the blind style of writing, but it is also based on the sighted style through the narrator's different visual descriptions of people, things, and places. Through writing his autobiography, Husayn draws a picture of his sufferings that necessitated change. *Al-Ayyam* compensated for Husayn's years of pain, suffer, and deprivation both in the village and also in Al-Azhar.

Accordingly, the study finally affirms the symbiotic and interactive relationship between literature and cinema. They inspire and enrich each other. That's is why if literature gives a verbal expression of life experiences, cinema gives the visual copy of these experiences. By exploring Husayn's autobiography's method of narration, it becomes crystal clear that cinema makes literature more realistic and touchier.

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