



RESEARCH ARTICLE

Section: *Literature, Linguistics & Criticism***Narrating psychological realism and time temporality: A critical study of Shahad Al Rawi's *The Baghdad Clock***

Ahmed Saad Aziz

Department of English, College of Arts, University of Al-Qadisiyah, Iraq

Email: ahmed.aziz@qu.edu.iq**ABSTRACT**

Psychological realism in contemporary prose fiction focuses on the internal life of characters, emphasizing subjective experiences and memory. Time, in such fiction, transcends its mechanical measurement and is instead understood through psychological perception. This paper examines *The Baghdad Clock* (2018) by Shahad Al Rawi through the lens of Paul Ricoeur's theory in *Time and Narrative*, exploring how the novel disrupts linear temporality to reflect the psychological trauma of war. The study argues that Al Rawi constructs a non-linear narrative where the past, present, and future converge, creating a temporal structure that mirrors Iraq's national trauma. Utilizing a structural approach and integrating theories of psychological realism and narrative temporality, the study reflects on how memory, trauma, and time shape both personal and collective identities in post-2003 Iraqi fiction. The significance of this study lies in its exploration of temporal disorientation and narrative innovation as responses to prolonged conflict, trauma, and historical rupture in Iraq's recent past.

KEYWORDS: psychological realism, time representation, narrative temporality, memory, trauma, Iraq, Shahad Al Rawi, *The Baghdad Clock* Research Journal in Advanced Humanities Open Access

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Introduction

A novel is a representation of life as seen by the author. However, when it emphasizes external events without acknowledging their psychological impact on the characters it cannot be considered fully realistic or enlightening. This goes with no exception to psychological novel in which the author explores the issue of a character's responsibilities for his acts, his role in life, and his commitments in the face of conflicting forces:

The modern novel[...]called upon to respond to a new and rapidly changing social situation, it soon escaped the paralyzing control of critics and censors. Indeed, it has constituted for at least three centuries now a prodigious workshop for experiments in the domains of composition and the expression of time. (Ricoeur, 8)

In this regard, psychological realistic novels underscore the assertion that authors of such novels depict realistic, meaningful and enriching worlds by means of a comprehensive portrayal of the human mind and personality more accurately,

Psychological Realism is the literary genre that delves on the internal life of the characters. Realism is lent to the text through a focus on the thoughts and motivations of the characters rather than on their occupations and external settings alone. The principal aim and characteristic of this genre are that the characters who inhabit a novel should be believable and living, breathing human beings who the readers can readily and inadvertently relate to. (Sen, 20)

A writer who pays more attention to his characters' outward actions than their inner thoughts and feelings will fail to capture the emotional depth that draws readers in. Yet, depicting the mental and physical characteristics of characters makes them more believable. Time and memory are major themes in literary modernist canonical works. Consequently, the idea that time is not static but rather emerges from inside the mind began to gain popularity.

The underlying nature of time has been the subject of discussion in human thought. Philosophers such as Aristotle, Augustine, and Henri Bergson exhibited significant hesitation when confronted with the question of time's existence. This skepticism stemmed from the inherently ephemeral qualities of the past, present, and future – the three pillars upon which our temporal understanding is built. They recognized the past as a realm that has ceased to be, the future as an entity yet to arrive, and the present as a fleeting instant perpetually slipping from our grasp.

Henry Bergson distinguishes between duration time (psychological, internal time, subjective) and external time (objective, chronological, historical). While historical time is quantitative, marked by its division into equal units, the psychological one is qualitative in a sense that it flows in the conscious where the past, present, and future are intermingled to constitute a whole structure of memory. Bergson's concept of memory is a central aspect of his philosophy, particularly in his works *Matter and Memory* and *Time and Free Will*. He distinguishes between two types of memory each of which relates to one of the above types of time. Pure memory, relates to psychological time, is not localized in space and does not operate in a continuous, measurable manner because it "imagines":

To call up the past in the form of an image, we must be able to withdraw ourselves from the action of the moment, we must have the power to value the useless, we must have the will to dream. Man alone is capable of such an effort. But even in him the past to which he returns is fugitive, ever on the point of escaping him, as though his backward turning memory were thwarted by the other, more natural, memory, of which the forward movement bears him on to action and to life. (*Matter and Memory*, pp. 82-3)

By emphasizing the non-linear, non-spatial aspects of pure memory, Bergson argues for the existence of free will and creativity in human actions. Habit memory, on the other hand, is developed through repetition and practice, making actions habitual and automatic, like riding a bicycle or typing on a keyboard. Habit memory, quoting Bergson:

I study a lesson, and in order to learn it by heart I read it a first time, accentuating every line; I then repeat it a certain number of times. At each repetition there is progress; the words are more and more linked together and at last make a continuous whole. When that moment comes, it is

said that I know my lesson by heart, that it is imprinted on my memory. (p.79)

In an attempt to transcend the limitations imposed by this linear conception of time, French philosopher Paul Ricoeur proposed a novel approach in which he argued against the exclusive identification of time with the mere passage marked by a clock's hands. Instead, Ricoeur posits a view of time as a configured entity, suggesting a more nuanced understanding that goes beyond the unidirectional flow. For him, time is narrative (Jansen, p.1). Within Kant's transcendentalist approach time as well as space are necessary yet subjective forms of all appearances, space being the a priori condition of outer appearances only, and time as the form of inner intuition being "the a priori condition of all appearances whatsoever" (Graves, p. 368).

Narrative discourse is our most advanced way to shape complex temporal experiences, including remembering. In the narrative framework, time is not considered a universally inherent entity nor a prerequisite for understanding experiences. Instead, it is viewed as a product of symbolic constructions inherently shaped by cultural and historical contexts. As these constructions become more intricate, surpassing fundamental representations of duration, chronology, speed, and frequency, they can encompass the simultaneous interplay of diverse temporalities and time sequences. This includes incorporating possibilities and "subjunctive" realities, a characteristic often found in autobiographical narratives and life stories (Brockmeier, p.119). However, the postmodern narrative discourse problematizes the experience of time which has been destabilized in favor of eluding any potential meaning. The traditional "setting" of a fictional work, or in Bakhtinian terms "chronotope" (literally, 'time-space') is a mobile term that alludes to the way time and space are together conceived and represented. This has been accomplished in distinct and characteristic ways in different kinds of writing, permitting different characteristic narratives and relying upon some characteristic motifs (Dentith, p.50). In such a narrative, the human experience of time is multifaceted. Our lived experience is shaped by the seemingly objective flow of chronological time, while simultaneously grappling with the subjective perception of time influenced by memory and anticipation.

In his seminal work *Time and Narrative*, the French philosopher Paul Ricoeur explores the profound relationship between storytelling and our understanding of time. We experience time in two seemingly contradictory ways: pre-reflective in which our lived experience of time is pre-conceptual, a continuous flow of moments without a clear beginning or end. The other way is reflective in which we also understand time through narratives, which impose structure and order on this pre-reflective experience by creating a beginning, middle, and end. Additionally, Ricoeur argues that narratives function as a form of "mimesis," a way of imitating and giving meaning to experience. Through the act of storytelling, we take the scattered events of our lives and configure them into a coherent whole, making sense of our past and shaping our understanding of the present. Such Narrative Time proposes two dimensions at play in it : The chronological (Episodic) dimension reflects the sequential order of events in the story, the "what happened next." The second dimension is configurational which focuses on the deeper meaning and significance of the events, and how they are woven together into a coherent whole. While acknowledging the limitations of narrative in representing the full complexity of historical events, Ricoeur argues that narratives are still essential tools for understanding, interpreting history, and giving meaning to our experience of time. By providing a framework for organizing and making sense of the past, narratives allow us to learn from it and shape our future (Ricoeur 1979).

The three problematics of time, as outlined by Paul Ricoeur in "The Human Experience of Time and Narrative," related to the specificity of the human experience of time compared to the ordinary representation of time as a linear succession of abstract "nows". This problem arises from the deficiency of the ordinary representation of time, which fails to account for the centrality of the present, the primacy of the future as the main orientation of human desire, and the capacity to recollect the past in the present. Secondly, the dialectic of intentionalities, as described by Augustine and Heidegger, involves memory, attention, and expectation. This dialectic of intention and distraction characterizes human time experience, and there is no speculative means of overcoming it. The last problem lies in the extension and distention of time, which leads to the paradox of extension being a constitutive trait of the most radical temporality. This paradox arises from the dialectic of extension, which is connected to the intentionality of consciousness, and the radical passivity inherent in the human experience of time. These problematics highlight the complexities and ambiguities of human time experience and the challenges in reconciling it with the ordinary representation of time. Ricoeur's analysis delves into the existential and phenomenological dimensions of time, emphasizing the need for hermeneutics of storytelling to reveal the existential traits of within-timeliness over the abstraction of linear time (Ricoeur 1979). By disrupting the narrative patterns that are tied to place and time, fiction tries to avoid or postpone time-related issues by causing temporality to blur the lines between the three conventional time units.

The only suitable candidate here is the narrative model. Ricoeur links narrative's temporal complexity

to Aristotle's characterization of narrative as "the imitation of an action". He explains:

the narrative model I am considering under the title *mimesis* is applied to a new region of the narrative field which, to distinguish it from the region of historical narrative, I am designating as fictional narrative. This large subset of the field of narrative includes everything the theory-of literary genres puts under the rubrics of folktale, epic, tragedy, comedy, and the novel. (1984, p.3)

With the invasion led by the United States and the subsequent toppling of Saddam Hussein's regime in 2003, the aftermath of this year was marked by a significant turning point in Iraq's history. This period of upheaval and transformation brought profound changes to Iraqi society, politics, and culture. Amidst the chaos, Iraqi literature experienced, via innovative modern and postmodern techniques, a new discourse that grapples with themes of war, displacement, identity, and the quest for a new national narrative. Writers have chronicled the horrors of daily life, the destruction of cities, and the loss of innocent lives. Notable works such as those of Sinan Antoon, Hassan Blasim, Batool Khudairi, Latifa Aldulaimi, and Shahad Al-Rawi.

Al-Rawi is an Iraqi author, Anthropologist, and novelist. Her debut novel *The Baghdad Clock* (2016 Trans. 2018) was nominated for the Arabic Booker Prize and was shortlisted, marking herself the youngest author to reach the list at that time. It has also been translated into more than 20 languages. *The Baghdad Clock* then went on to win the First Book Award at the Edinburgh International Book Festival. Al-Rawi displays a deep understanding of her audience, in particular middle-class Iraqi females, and the general Iraqi and Arab population. Her background in the humanities, in particular Anthropology have reflected clearly in her ability to communicate complex ideas through her novels, representing individual and ethnographic changes in pre-war, post-war, and at war populations. Some of these represent the *Mahalla* as a ship at sea, its inhabitants reflecting a demographic voiced through their day-to-day conversations throughout her debut novel *The Baghdad Clock*, in particular. The novel received acclaim for its technical prowess in channeling time as a narrator within an unconventional structure. Its narrative is described by critics as carrying a boldness in which the author goes beyond the logical and temporal succession of events, incorporating dreams, memories and illusions into reality and vice versa, to tell the story of a generation born to war, and raised under the overwhelming conditions of war. *The Baghdad Clock* can be described as a skillful interwoven of fantasy and reality with a fine thread. Al-Rawi draws the reader through the story, leading him from one maze into another, as he staggers along in a state of perplexity, amazement and sheer delight.

Postmodern Time in Iraqi Fiction

The Baghdad Clock exemplifies the conception of time in postmodern fiction with relevance to the theme of war in which spatio-temporality determinants become scattered as they are reconceptualized by the horrible experience of war. Drawing on Paul Ricoeur's concept of narrative time, the novel dismantles linear chronology. The present is infected by the past in the form of memories, and the future is invaded by the past in the form of prophetic dreams. This fragmented time lacks integrity and cohesion, and it represents the psychological trauma that the characters are going through, which is the collapse of the city into chaos. The *Baghdad Clock* itself is a symbol, not of counted time, but rather of a broken normality. The story, which goes beyond the confines of a simple coming-of-age story and is a pretext to the setting of a war-torn Iraqi society, creates a touching image of two young girls, the unnamed narrator and Nadia, who must find their way in the world of friendship, love, and loss in a society crumbling around them. The novel begins in the First Gulf War when the main characters are five-year-olds who are trying to hide in a bomb shelter. This is the first meeting which introduces them and the bond that will serve as a lifeline during their struggle with constant fear of war and its ensuing social and economic outcomes. As the clock hands tick relentlessly, so too do the memories of a vibrant city slowly fade. The once-bustling neighbourhood becomes desolate, families emigrate, and the girls witness the gradual disappearance of their childhood innocence.

In his "Two Essays Concerning the Symbolic Representation of Time", E R Leach foregrounds the absurdity of combining two logically contradictory experiences together under the rubric of a single verbal category such as time. On the other hand, time is conceived sometimes as a "repetition of repeated reversals" which can be rendered intelligible through the geometrical metaphor of a circle (Leach: 126). The title introduces Baghdad's time between past, present, and future within the frame of measurable time, which can be split into fractions of the "physical temporality". Meanwhile, the "Baghdad clock" is a spatial monument

that represents the vicinity of the events. It is a symbol of the city's past glory that becomes a potent metaphor for the erosion of normalcy and stability. The title gives an idea of a theme that embodies the changing of circumstances by the time. The clock is formerly a representation of normalcy and order, therefore its destruction after the American invasion in 2003 marks an important change. The Baghdad Clock stopped when the Americans bombed it "The minutes flowed away from the clock hands onto the ground and time stopped altogether"(Al-Rawi, P.247). Time loses its usual sequence, events occurring randomly without a clear before or after. This incident represents the protagonists' irreversible loss of innocence and the disintegration of their sense of security and belonging, pushing the girls toward a future shrouded in uncertainty. Time itself becomes unreliable, measured not by the clock hands but by the characters' subjective experiences of war's relentless march. Hence, the title combines the two dimensions of the narrative, Baghdad the city specifically by one of its landscapes "Baghdad Clock" and at the same time clock associates the entire city with time. Moreover, the place, or the city of Baghdad in particular, is transformed into something beyond a physical structure and textual space, taking on the role instead of a semi-autobiographical novelistic, and poetic arena-frequently troubled by war tragedies (Hermes, viii). Baghdad is presented as "a centric place of disequilibrium and it tells us how the lives of Iraqis were severely damaged, how they were forced to displace and compromise with exile"(Amran 2019). The novel discusses the duality of place and time and how to select memory out of time and space out of restricted fate,

Geography is a fate that cannot be escaped, but history is made. Adapt to your geography and change your history. 'How do we change history? Do you mean falsify it?' Not at all. Just weave from its cloth a new garment. Gather the good islands together and leave out the painful ones. There, make a fresh memory, a good space for joy. In short, it changes the entire culture. Or at least some of it (Al-Rawi, p.138).

In *The Baghdad Clock*, chronological and configurational time is interwoven to disrupt the linear sense of time and explore psychological temporality and memory as the protagonists are caught between an unknowable future and an unavoidable past. The storyline highlights how the narrator blends the perception of ordinary time with the time of the inner self by contrasting the clock time of Baghdad with extended periods of quiet reflection.

The theme of duality is depicted in the novel to reflect the contrasting realities of the two girls, the protagonists. They find solace in the fantastical world they create through storytelling, using imagination to escape the harsh realities. They converse with deceased family members, weave elaborate stories, and find escape in daydreams. Such fantasy becomes a testament to their resilience, highlighting the potential of imagination even in the face of hardships. The girls are forced to mature rapidly through witnessing the horrors of bombings, food shortages, and the loss of loved ones. Characters are overwhelmed by a world in constant flux and chaos, constantly flowing, characters simply being swept along without any control. They experience a jumble of disconnected events, one after another, surrounded by an overwhelming amount of insignificant details. Besides, characters feel lost and unable to find any order or meaning in their experiences. They are adrift, struggling to make sense of a world that seems devoid of purpose or coherence, "The novelistic character coasting down the river of flux and change, afloat among the fragmented multiplicity of events and the unstable proliferation of details, passing through a random *before/after* a temporal sequence that is ultimately devoid of order and intelligibility (Tobin, P. 4).

Narrative Structure in *The Baghdad Clock*

The novel comprises two chapters. At first, the narrator recollects the memories mixed with the bitterness of war and the separation of families. In the second chapter titled "Book of the Future", the future is personified as a narrator, "I am the future. I live now in a continuous birthing from the womb of the past" (Al-Rawi, p.219). The prophetic voice of the narrative breaks the linear narrative and prefigures the fate of the characters, and emphasizes the feeling of powerlessness that they have in the presence of war. But these pronouncements are not as clear-cut as they may be often done using metaphorical language. Such vagueness shows how the characters are fighting to understand the events that are happening around them and their uncertain future. Finally, the reader is left in a state of confusion as the narrator does not tell the reader the precise outcomes of the future, so the story ends with 'I don't know'; "The future: not every new thing that comes through the workings of time, but rather everything we do not know" (Al-Rawi, p. 213). The Past haunts the present as war casts a long shadow. Characters might be haunted by memories, the loss of loved ones, or the decisions they made

under pressure. The tension between the past and future is prevalently manifested within the complex texture of the novel. The past is not merely a repository of what has transpired. It actively consumes the present, drawing it into its ever-expanding domain. The metaphor of the “past rolling up the present”. The past rolls up the present in a continuous process in which the present moment, fleeting and ever-changing, is absorbed by the ever-growing archive of what has been. The past, like a dust storm, billows forward, obscuring the clarity with which we might perceive what is yet to come. This metaphor implies a sense of inevitability, suggesting the future is not entirely malleable,

It is not only that which has occurred that has settled in the past ..that which occurs in the time to come will likewise settle there too. The past rolls up the present and swallows that which is to come. It advances like a dust storm, billowing up towards the sky and blocking the horizon. No one has the power to block the storm of the past as it presses on to its end one has the power to push the future forward and keep it from its place (Al-Rawi, p. 219).

Al-Rawi’s novel can be an example of a narrative that uses distorted temporality to depict the psychological consequences of conflict on two young girls growing up in war-torn Iraq. To subjectify time, modern fiction adopts Proustian idea of time, as multiple temporalities, exist through the use of memory to connect these different times and create a unified experience that has a great impact on storytelling. Proustian time is a subjective, multi-layered experience, shaped by memory, involuntary recall, and the search for meaning in an ostensibly fleeting existence, “Proust’s pool of time as an allegory of our simultaneous existence in different temporalities, with remembering as the central mode of creating and mediating this simultaneity, may have been an original trope as certainly was much of the narrative repertoire he employed to articulate the sudden time shifts between different pasts and presents” (Brockmeier, p.116).

Future as a Character

Questioning the future, and its duality with the past is a repetitive motif in the novel adding to the presence of the future as a character in the second chapter of the novel,

The future was coming – so harsh and careless – and would make our generation old: old songs, old clothes, even an outdated dialect. Dear God, we too were growing old! The wars had kept us busy, and we forgot that we were growing up. The modern wars retained their vigor as we advanced in age. The rockets were still young as we passed into distant years (Al-Rawi, p. 141).

At the same time, nostalgia for the past still stretches temporalities between the unknown future and the past even with its traumatic memories that are more tolerable and become solace from the unfamiliar future,

Today I will leave the future to everyone else and walk towards the past. I will go walking with Farouq through streets that know me, that I know. I do not want to enter the future. I am afraid of the past disappearing. I am afraid of the unknown. The future is open to all possibilities, and each possibility on the horizon these days frightens me. There are no miracles that the future will realize. It is a sick old man leaning on the crutch of the past as he comes towards us (Al-Rawi, p.145).

The narrative disrupts the linear flow of time, mirroring the characters’ fractured sense of reality. The story switches between the past and the present and is usually provoked by the details of senses or internal monologue. This discontinuous chronology suggests the trauma of the psychology of the characters whose memories are tormented by bombings, displacement, and loss. The ever present potential of violence brings about a feeling of distorted time, in which the time of action seems like a bitter eternity, whereas time of waiting is filled with suffocating fear.

The future is not a swift road that carries us forward. That is nothing more than a foolish and trivial lie. We live a broad an enormous ship. The waves push it around aimlessly. Storms batter it amid the heaving sea of the world’s madness. How can we submit our affair to it when we are falling behind? How many times have we left our future behind and become lost on the road to ourselves? The past is the only truth I am certain of. I know it well, and I find reassurance even in its destruction. I have a vague dread of what is coming. It is a deep feeling of defeat, a

frantic sense that we are passing into chaos. Everything crashes down before our eyes; the fruits of the future rot on the vine and fall to the ground. They seduce me with a bitter taste and an obscure, unknown fate, and I look out towards wide horizons shrinking like a narrow alley in an old Baghdad neighbourhood. I saw that once in Nadia's dream, and I have not forgotten it since (Al-Rawi, p. 145).

Temporality, the way time is perceived and experienced, becomes a device in *The Baghdad Clock's* novel to depict the impact of war. Time is manipulated through different techniques in the novel. For Ricoeur, temporality is that "structure existence that reaches language in narrativity and narrativity to be language structure that has temporality as its ultimate referent. Their relationship is therefore reciprocal (Ricoeur 1980:169). Similarly, time, in the novel, is shaped by the experience of war in the perception of the characters. *The Baghdad Clock* utilizes distorted temporality to portray the psychological impact of war. By dismantling linear time, Al Rawi effectively portrays the characters' disorientation and the city's descent into chaos. The fragmented narrative reflects the lasting scars of war, not just on physical spaces, but on the memories and identities of those who endure it. Therefore, the narrative structure reinforces that distorted temporality to reflect how war can distort the sense of time. Days can feel like years, while moments of action can stretch into an agonizing eternity. Besides, traumatic experiences of war can scatter memories and create gaps in time. Characters might struggle to recall events clearly, or be haunted by flashbacks." All other aspects of time, duration for example, or historical sequence, are fairly simple derivatives from these two basic experiences:(a) that certain phenomena of nature repeat themselves;(b) that life change is irreversible (Leach, p.125). War is often filled with long stretches of waiting and anticipation, punctuated by bursts of violence. This waiting can create a sense of dread and anticipation, as characters grapple with the uncertainty of their future. They might be haunted by memories, the loss of loved ones, or the decisions they made under pressure. By manipulating time, the novelist creates a deeper understanding of the psychological impact of war. The storyline shows how war disrupts the normal flow of time, leaving lasting scars on individuals and societies. Thus, the novel employs alternative temporalities seen in fantasy and dream work exploring war through alternate timelines or time travel. These narratives might ask "what if" questions about the past or future of war, or explore the cyclical nature of conflict,

Our mnemonic life ignores the rules of common time and that memory has its own time. For a human being, "is that ageless creature who has the faculty of becoming many years younger in a few seconds, and who, surrounded by the walls of the time through which he has lived, floats within them as in a pool the surface-level of which is constantly changing to bring him within range now of one epoch, now of another" (Brockmeier, p.116).

The ending of the novel finds the narrator and Nadia migrating to Dubai, leaving behind the remnants of their shattered past. This ironic conclusion helps to highlight how war affects the physical places permanently but also the memory and identity of the people who experience it. Although one cannot say what will happen in the future, the story nevertheless can produce possible temporalities.

New Temporalities

The novel contravenes the chronological time in creating new temporalities through the prophecy of the future that is put in place to create new temporalities. Memories are the entry of the past into the present and prophetic dreams are the intrusion of the future. This disjointed time signifies a sort of mental trauma suffered by the characters which is a reflection of how the city went out of control. As a technique of foreseeing the future, the soothsayer character takes on many faces, morphing to fit the author's intent and the story's themes. Often, they act as harbingers of fate, their cryptic pronouncements foreshadowing future events. These prophecies can spark questions about free will - are the characters bound to their foretold destinies;

Soothsayers (prophets, fortune-tellers, etc.) are generally involved in foretelling the future or determining answers to questions through supernatural means. The word prophet comes from the Greek, meaning "speaker for." Prophets thus, in this sense, are people who speak for another, usually the gods, and reveal their will. An oracle, especially in the ancient Greek sense is "an answer given by a god to a question asked by a human. The answers were delivered through a

priest or priestess, or using signs and dreams. The shrines in which these answers were delivered were also known as oracles” (Garry , p.147).

In a chapter entitled “Letters from the Unknown”, the narrator mentions that “ In those days, many soothsayers began passing through our neighborhood, claiming to know all manner of things.” (Al-Rawi, p.61). Later, in the novel, the soothsayer implies the unknown future which all the characters are fearful of. The soothsayer character falls in the sage archetype. Sages are traditionally wise figures who guide others, often through religious contexts like priests or gurus. However, Soothsayers, those with the ability to predict the future, can also embody the sage archetype. While some religions restrict who can hold positions of wisdom, a true sage prioritizes the good of others and offers sound advice, regardless of gender or profession. Thus, even a soothsayer can be a sage, wielding their knowledge of the future to guide others on their path (literarydevices.net/sage-archetype/). Soothsayers may have some magical knowledge, which they can provide glimpses of the future, or some hidden facts. However, they may be paradoxical or metaphorical in their pronouncement and hidden in mystery and ambiguity that is linked with the future. This mysterious quality may make them rise to leadership roles, and sway characters. They are also able to cast doubts on free will and fate. Will the characters escape their prophesied fate? Soothsayers usually live in the periphery of society and they are depicted as being outsiders whose word is not heeded as madness. This shows the weakness of reason and logic in the presence of the unknown. However, in spite of the fact that their words might be disregarded, they might still be viewed as the agents of change. Their utterances have the power to destroy the status quo as characters face harsh realities and even begin a series of major events. The soothsayer can represent a connection to the divine or the supernatural, the power of intuition, and the subconscious mind as well. The unreliability of knowledge and the limitations of human understanding ;

Our neighbor had not been the same since the soothsayer’s visit. It became somewhat depressed, and its people were afflicted with misgivings about the future, having lost hope that any sense of well-being would return to their lives. The soothsayer was not, in fact, responsible for this dejection. Like a doctor who informs you that you are sick and must take a bitter medicine immediately, he had merely told us that we were unhappy. (Al-Rawi, p. 78).

Another device to articulate alternative temporalities is through fantasy and dream work. Such narratives might ask “what if” questions about the past or future of war, or explore the cyclical nature of conflict. Dreams become a bridge between the past, present, and future, blurring the lines between them. This future is manipulated in time in order to represent the conflict between the characters to accept their broken past and the uncertain future that lies ahead of them. Dreams provide an escape from the war’s hard reality, but they, too, are an inverted reflection of time. The girls spin fantastic tales and narratives, in search of a relief in a world which is no longer limited by the laws of war. Such dreamscapes serve as a sort of dream work, a psychological process of dealing with trauma and experimenting with other possible courses of action. Nevertheless, the dream world is not necessarily something soothing. Nightmares and repeated images of violence recur, confusing the time past, present, and future. Dreams are able to cross through the wall of time and logic and enable authors to explore the other reality or the past of a character. Through the use of dreams, creators are able to develop a multidimensional narrative tapestry, enhance the depth of the story world and explore ideas that cannot be explored by the reality of the waking world. Far more than fantasy is dreamwork in the narrative. It is an effective character development, foreshadowing, and depth and complexity adding device of stories. Exploring the dreamscape, the novel opens the door to the world of psychology, and the readers have a deeper insight into their characters and the world in which they live.

Conclusion

The novelist's time manipulation in *The Baghdad Clock* functions as a deliberate strategy to capture the psychological impact of war on the character's perception of time. As the title suggests time advances in a circular motion. Still, it is not closed, repetitive patterns but open, mutagenic, and subjective. The fragmented chronology, prophetic pronouncements, and dream sequences all contribute to a sense of disorientation and loss. In this perverted form of time, Al-Rawi makes the readers face the scarring effects of the war, and how the characters attempt to recreate their lives in the ruins of the former. The plot flouts the traditional narrative norms by playing with time and depicting the devastating effects of the war on the reality level of the characters. Based on the idea of narrative time presented by Paul Ricoeur, the novel breaks the sequence of events. The past constantly interferes with the present, and a glimpse of the future comes with prophetic dreams. This fragmented temporality is a reflection of the psychological trauma caused by war, and these characters are found to be lost and unable to interpret their experiences. This temporality of the distortion is supported by the narrative organization. The future is symbolized as a narrator, who exists in the same time with the present. The dreams establish a connection between the past and the present and the future, crossing the boundaries between them. Such manipulation of time indicates the conflict between the characters to accept their broken past and the future that lies ahead of them and which is uncertain.

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