



The Analysis of Dramatic Discourse from the Perspective of Narrative Semiotics The Play *Al-Litham* by Abdelkader Alloula as a Model

Ridha RAHMOUNI

Mohamed Boudiaf University – M'sila –

<https://orcid.org/0009-0001-6534-0482>

ridha.rahmouni@univ-msila.dz

Abstract:

*The interpretation of the signs of a dramatic text in terms of the narrative component is an interpretation of the text's message and the writer's own vision. Here emerges the role of the active reader in reading the deep significations allowed by the text through its various formal signs, and in interpreting them according to his own critical perspective, within the limits of the critical method applied to the corpus. For this reason, it was necessary to choose a dramatic text that corresponds to Greimas's critical propositions, so that the analysis proceeds with full freedom and openness in exploring its aesthetics and dramatic components. The choice thus fell on Abdelkader Alloula's play *Al-Litham*, in which dramatic potentials suitable for treatment and interpretation were observed.*

Keywords: structure / narration / theatre (drama).

L'analyse du discours dramatique du point de vue de la sémiotique narrative La pièce *Al-Litham* d'Abdelkader Alloula comme modèle

Résumé :

L'interprétation des signes d'un texte dramatique, du point de vue de sa composante narrative, revient à interpréter le message du texte et la vision propre à l'auteur. Dès lors, le rôle du lecteur actif se révèle : il s'agit de saisir les significations profondes que recèle le texte à travers ses divers signes formels, et

de les interpréter selon sa propre perspective critique, dans les limites de la méthode critique appliquée au corpus. C'est pourquoi il s'est avéré nécessaire de choisir un texte dramatique conforme aux propositions critiques de Greimas, afin que l'analyse puisse se dérouler en toute liberté et ouverture dans l'exploration de son esthétique et de ses composantes dramatiques. Le choix s'est ainsi porté sur la pièce d'Abdelkader Alloula, Al-Litham, dont le potentiel dramatique se prête à une analyse et une interprétation riches.

Mots-clés : *structure / narration / théâtre (drame).*



Introduction:

The dramatic theatrical texts in Algeria are a fundamental tributary of theatre in the Maghreb in particular, and in the Arab world in general, yet they have not yet received the sufficient research and study they deserve from a semiotic perspective.

Drama has its own secrets in its verbal space, which makes writing about a dramatic text filled with much pleasure and difficulty at the same time. *“The text hands you the keys to enigmas in its verbal spaces, woven with a dramatic language, a world in which you speak about verbal worlds with verbal tools”*¹. The language of Abdelkader Alloula’s dramatic theatrical writing is thus a language, rich with a high degree of hybridity.

Accordingly, *“the artistic work is not closed upon itself but rather falls within social and cultural contexts; therefore, semiotics does not stop at the external structure without the internal one”*², but converses with the text across all its narrative axes and reveals the motives behind the emergence of this work.

Semiotics has taken shape through various historical stages, and

*“these transformations have enriched semiotic theory and made of it a nurturing framework for texts with different dimensions — social, political, and religious — so that it has become necessary for anyone who adopts it as a vision and method to take into account its epistemological foundations”*³, as a historical given for the early birth pangs.

On the other hand, the reader is also required to have broad knowledge of the text, for it is an important condition for correct and fruitful reading: *“the reader is required to read*

the inner aspect of the text just as he reads its outer aspect, in order to be able to imagine it and interpret it in a creative semiological way"⁴.

This is done through

*"giving the text a precise reading agreed upon ... by initially grasping the writer's communicative intentions, then the other intentions that pass from the writer's hand to the reader's hand, who performs the act of deconstruction and reconstruction — or, in semiotic terms, performs the act of deconstruction"*⁵, in order to reach the deep meaning of the dramatic text.

Accordingly, the dramatic text — the subject of this study, *Al-Litham* — is characterized by being:

- *"a narrative text and not a dialogical text,*
- *with the character narrating his/her own story or the story of another,*
- *and by its lack of an auxiliary text"*⁶.

These characteristics are what will lead us to rely on the tools and procedures of analysis developed by narrative semiotics in Greimas's theory. This assumption drives us to dialogue with the dramatic text *Al-Litham*, which we preferred to work on and to test in order to measure the extent of its embodiment of narrative semiotic theory, while investigating the narrative trajectory.

The Greimasian theoretical apparatus is distinguished *"by its significant procedural capacity, for it is broad and comprehensive enough to justify its employment in the study of texts as diverse as the texts that fill the cultural scene"*⁷, particularly Alloula's dramatic texts.



1. Segmenting the Dramatic Text:

We will deal with the dramatic text according to mechanisms for dividing it into segments, which serve as transitions for moving from one process to another.

The dramatic text *Al-Litham* consists of three narrative segments. The segment, from the perspective of Abdelhamid Bouraoui, is: *“a set of sequences subject to various forms of relations; it is an integrated structure, and it constitutes the true unit of the story’s content at the semantic level. It enjoys relative freedom in its relation to other segments”*⁸. Thus, meaning is constructed in its totality only through segments that are semantically coherent and consistent, regardless of the size of the linear sequences. The segment is *“the best possible space, where meanings can be observed”*⁹ within the single narrative unit.

According to Greimas, the segmentation of the text is linked to criteria, the most important of which are:

*“the textual spaces, the successive themes in the proliferation of the text’s discourse, the different discursive components (...), and everything that can affect the discourse’s signification and create effects of meaning that contribute collectively to the construction of the text’s signification”*¹⁰.

Thus, the dramatic text’s ideas are generated in harmonious and successive proliferation: it is the overall meaning that emerges from the partial semantic segments.

1.1. The Opening Segment:

It extends from its beginning until: *“... ma yaghsh fi l-‘amal ma yitghayyab ‘ala l-khidma”* → *“he does not cheat at work, nor is he absent from duty”*¹¹.

It is revealed by the following passage: *“hadha ma yishbahsh lil-akhrin... ha rah za fan mshanif rafiḍ el-waḍ‘ el-ḥali... ‘ala ḥsab eṣ-ṣaqra: rah ṣamid... musallaḥ...”* → “this one is not like the others... here he is, angry, frowning, rejecting the current situation... according to the sparrow: he is steadfast... armed...”¹²

The opening segment can be divided into two sub-segments:

- Sub-segment (A): Extends from the beginning of the text until: *“... yihiss bnaḥsu ṭayer fi l-mskan ‘ayem fi l-hawa bayn es-saqf w el-ḥsira”* → “he feels himself flying in the dwelling, floating in the air between the ceiling and the mat”¹³.
- Sub-segment (B): Extends from: *“Barhoum el-khajul wled Ayyoub el-aṣram zawwjuh”* → “Barhoum the shy, son of Ayyoub the stern, they married him off”¹⁴, until: *“ma yit akhar ma yitghayyab ‘ala l-khidma”* → “he is never late, never absent from duty”¹⁵

The reason for dividing the opening segment into two sub-segments is the temporal aspect, namely: the colonial period and the independence period.

1.2. The Main Segment:

It extends from: *“ya esh-shrifā... ya esh-shrafiyya”* → “oh noble lady... oh honored one”¹⁶ until: *“yitghallab ‘ala l-ḥshma w haj hajma waḥda”* → “he overcomes shyness and makes a single attack”¹⁷.

This segment represents the core and essence of the dramatic text, for it summarizes the dialogue and discussion that took place between “Barhoum” and the “unionists” regarding the repair of the dough machine, Barhoum’s fear of this task, and his realization of the true intentions of the



Soumission : 22/03/2025 Acceptation : 02/06/2025 Publication : 25/08/2025

unionists: *"humma tlata: el-Filali l-'arj w el-Bakkush, tuhminhum b-t-tashwish, amma f-l-ħaqq humma mukhlişin, yimutu 'ala waţan-hum w mtamannin el-khir w es-sa'ada lil-'ummal (...) maqşud-hum el-maşna' yzid fi l-intaj"* → "they are three: El-Filali the lame and El-Bekkoush, accused of sabotage, but in truth they are sincere, they would die for their homeland and wish for the workers' good and happiness (...) their intention is that the factory increases production"¹⁸.

The main segment can be divided into two sub-segments:

- Sub-segment (C): From *"ya esh-shrafiyya... ya esh-shrifa"* → "oh honored one... oh noble lady"¹⁹ until: *"'andek t'aţţis raha ttiħ 'alina qirmuda"* → "if you sneeze, a roof tile will fall on us"²⁰
- Sub-segment (D): From *"aşbah Barhoum wled Ayyoub el-aşram yit'amal b-luţf"* → "Barhoum, son of Ayyoub the stern, began to act kindly"²¹ until: *"yitghallab 'ala l-ħshma w haj hajma waħda"* → "he overcame shyness and made a single attack"²².

1.3. The Final Segment:

It includes the remainder of the text, from: *"hani khuya hani"* → "here I am, brother, here I am"²³, until: *"nkhaf ana Daħham khuya"* → "I am afraid, Dahham, my brother"²⁴.

Here we come to the conclusion that this segmentation is nothing but *"an arbitrary segmentation of interwoven and overlapping levels at the same time"*²⁵. Nevertheless, in our view, it enables us to follow the meaning smoothly and coherently.

2. Iconic (Graphic) Data

The primary visual perception of the dramatic text plays an important role in determining its literary appearance. If the reader picks up a printed play, "the first thing that attracts his attention is the cover, and what it includes in terms of a title, generic classification, or an image..."²⁶. All of these elements are important from a reading perspective; therefore, it is necessary to pause at these textual thresholds and attempt to interpret and understand them.

2.1. The Semiotics of the Title

Before addressing the title as a technical term, we point to its linguistic synonym. In *Lisan al-‘Arab*, it is said: "‘anantu al-kitab wa-a‘nantu-hu li-kadha: I dedicated it to him and directed it towards him. And ‘anna al-kitab ya‘unnu-hu ‘annan: like ‘anwantahu, and ‘anwantuhu and ‘alwantuhu all carry the same meaning, derived from one root. Al-Lihyani said: ‘anantu al-kitab ta‘ninan wa-‘annaytuhu ta‘niyatan idha ‘anwantahu..."²⁷.

Terminologically: it represents "a part or a segment that refers to the text or leads to it, being a linguistic fragment smaller than a sentence, yet it represents a text or an artistic work. The title can be considered from two perspectives: in context and outside context. The contextual title is unified with the work on the semiotic level and carries an interpretive function in general"²⁸.

Thus, semiotic critics have paid attention to titles, considering them as texts that can be studied, analyzed, and questioned. Their thought and research have centered on investigating the dynamics of titles as procedural keys that



cannot be bypassed, thresholds that carry meaning from the perspective of the text being read.

Titles do not have one fixed characteristic; sometimes they are long, sometimes short, and they may even consist of a single letter or a number. Titling can be interpreted first according to the text itself, and second according to the writer's particularities.

The title "Al-Litham" (*The Veil*) "has primacy and stands out through its form and size. It is the first encounter with the reader... It has become the writer's last act, and the reader's first"²⁹.

The title "Al-Litham" does not have an obvious referentiality; rather, its reference seems symbolic – it reveals while concealing. The title creates a rupture with its referent and retains only its symbolic, veiled, and reticent dimension. A mature reader subjects the title, through its relation to the text, to an interpretive process, even though "titling in poetry often leans towards suggestion, shattering the reader's expectations, remaining secretive, pleading and affected; while titling in prose is often more faithful to reference and designation, and less inclined towards evasion and concealment"³⁰.

Thus, the play *Al-Litham* embodies the experience of political and economic struggle over the structures of the state and their use for personal ends, as well as the side effects this struggle leaves on the social fabric.

The meaning of the word *litham*, according to *Lisan al-'Arab*, is: "the woman drawing her veil over her nose, and the man wrapping his turban over his nose... Al-Farra' said: *al-litham* is that which covers the mouth from the *niqab*,

while *al-lifam* is that which covers the nose tip... The *mulaththam* is the nose and what surrounds it"³¹.

The play's title is devoid of verbal action; it is a semantic structure of a static nature – a stability rooted in the code of meaning embedded in its nominal essence, which differs from verbal dynamism carrying traits of temporality and movement. We notice that this title is a defined noun, like other titles (*al-khubza* "the loaf," *al-ajwad* "the noble ones," *al-aqwal* "the sayings"...). The choice of "Al-Litham" by Abdelkader Alloula was not arbitrary. The *litham* is an item of clothing used by men or women to cover part of their face; it is a garment.

"Clothing sends signs or signals used to identify a given character, their gender, nationality, and sometimes their religion, not to mention their social and professional status"³². The term *litham* as clothing carries multiple connotations: woman, desert, modesty, secrecy, shyness, fear. The title is launched with the weight of silencing mouths, gagging freedoms, and suppressing individual opinions.

Thus, the term *litham* suggests constraint and loss of freedom. The title is deeply entangled in ideology – and rightly so – as it raises the issue of stolen public freedoms, not only of the Algerian citizen but as a model of the Arab citizen from the Atlantic to the Gulf.

The play's title is a revolutionary, provocative slogan, affirming the political militant stance. The linguistic sign becomes a militant reality and a behavioral reference. As we delve into the events of the dramatic text and its tragedy, we realize that "Al-Litham" is a symbol of violated values, suppressed freedom, and an oppressed people.



Soumission : 22/03/2025 Acceptation : 02/06/2025 Publication : 25/08/2025

The title also symbolizes the psychological state experienced by Alloula, as one of those who suffered from the afflictions of his people. He sought his freedom through writing for the theater and performing upon its stage, and that desire remained aflame in him until he fell victim to treacherous bullets.

The play's title reveals a playwright and director sharpened by experience, haunted by a million linguistic sparks. The word "litham" surrendered itself to a writer who fed from the womb of his society, observing its ethereal particles, pondering its conditions, its pains, and hopes, moving within its universe night and day. "A word upon the soul acts like a wound upon the body – it leaves a trace upon the soul just as a wound leaves a trace upon the body... A word that has no effect is like dry clay"³³.

The title "Al-Litham" carries us into the feminine domain. It covers a woman's beautiful face, and therefore, anyone daring to harm the beauty of Algeria must be rebuked. One must protect the sources of her beauty, close one's mouth so as not to provoke uncontrollable jealousy for this homeland.

The term "Al-Litham" condenses the dramatic text – it states it all at once. This applies to the play *Al-Litham*, where the central character "Barhoum" becomes the pivot of events. His nose is mutilated as a result of action – action that uncovers the labyrinths of truth. By donning the *litham*, he becomes a symbol of dispossession of freedom, marginalization, and the silencing of militant voices that set their eyes on truth and refuse to yield to corruption.

Thus, in Alloula, we perceive a form of rejection and resistance against reality, aiming to indict it, revolt against it,

and transform it. His plays are essentially political and social treatments.

2.2. The Semiotics of the Opening

The introductory passage of the play *Al-Litham* provides us with a scenic image, offering essential information to shape the narrative imagination in the reader's mind and consciousness. A play does not necessarily begin "from the beginning." For example, we notice that *Al-Litham* starts by recounting events from before Algeria's independence, specifically the colonial period and the suffering endured by Algerian families under the loss of freedom. A clear example is the family of Ayoub al-Aşram.

These events depicting the colonial era form part of the dramatic plot; they are the outcome of sequential actions in the dramatic past, events that took place before the play begins but are registered as part of its opening. An opening often blends past events with ongoing events in the realistic dramatic world that is presented to us. Flashback is "a temporal paradox that takes us back to the past from the present moment — a retrieval of an event or events that occurred before the current moment." Recording past events on the tongues of characters is a common convention of the tragic genre, where dramatic plots center around a particular moment of tension, and where the past exerts an inescapable force that weighs upon the characters, especially in the course of developing the play's narrative and dramatic structure.

Roland Barthes, in his translated book *Textual Analysis*, states: "The opening is a dangerous zone in discourse. Beginning a discourse is a difficult act; it is the exit from silence... It is the bleeding of the mother, the birth of a



creative work carrying diverse cultural and intellectual charges for its creator.”

The opening lines of *Al-Litham* state:

“Barhoum el-khajul weld Ayoub el-Aşram zad hadaw ethnin w-rb‘in ‘am b-taqrib, wledatu el-farziyya yemmu b-el-fajr f-er-rbi‘ dakhil ghaba kathifa...”

“Barhoum the shy, son of Ayoub al-Aşram, was born around the year forty-two. His Persian mother gave birth to him at dawn, in the spring, inside a dense forest...”

Through these verbal sequences, we find significant markers:

- “Barhoum el-khajul weld Ayoub el-Aşram” identifies the main character who plays the central role in the development of the dramatic story. It also provides a description – that he is shy, a psychological trait tightly attached to his persona.
- “ethnin w-rb‘in ‘am” (*forty-two years old*) and “el-fajr” (*dawn*) establish the temporal framework.
- “ghaba kathifa” (*dense forest*) provides the spatial setting.

The writer “begins by presenting characters as blank in terms of meaning, but little by little, he fills them with attributes, information, names, and classifications.” From the perspective of semiotics of opening, we notice that Alloula immediately starts with outlining the general and essential traits of the main character, rather than postponing them for later development in the course of narrative and dramatic unfolding.

The writer places us directly in the heart of the action. He does not leave us space to wander with questions or imagination. He provides us with a complete scenic image

from which the narrative and dramatic journey takes off, in its dialogic, conflictual, and evolving plot manifestations.

2.3. The Dramatic Genre

Among the formal features that distinguish dramatic writing is “the style through which content is organized within the text (...). Drama is divided into acts and scenes. The playwright may sense the idea of the play before composing it, and thus the dramatic form that this idea acquires depends on the type of theater the writer deems suitable for it”³⁴. This is what led Alloula to write in a manner consistent with his alienation-oriented ideology.

Accordingly, creative texts “often declare their belonging to a particular literary genre on the cover page. In this field, authors are accustomed to classifying their works under a dramatic type, or at least placing the label ‘play’ alongside the title”³⁵. This is what we notice in the works of ‘Abdelkader Alloula, where it is written in bold red letters at the top of the cover page: “*From the Plays of Alloula.*” The red color signifies revolution and change. It is the color of blood, the color of sacrifice and struggle with both life and spirit.

At times, however, “the visual aspect of the text – its graphic appearance or iconic form – has been neglected. Yet modernist engagements with the text restored the value of this aspect, considering the layout of text upon the white page as meaningful”³⁶. This, in one way or another, expresses the intentions and ideas of the creator.

From another perspective, “the relationship between form and content is developmental and dialectical. Every change in content demands a form proper to it, and every form generates a specific content. This was clarified by Zondi (...) when he showed that the changes that affected 19th-century



drama were a reflection of ideological transformations (...). From this angle, the radical change brought by *Brecht* can be explained, for the transformation in the structure and content of his plays required the search for a new theatrical form: epic theater"³⁷.

This is why Alloula, after exposure, training, and artistic experience, employed Brechtian techniques in his theater. He engaged with Algerian heritage, delved into its roots, and explored the hidden dimensions of traditional thought. Our tales, after all, are theater in essence, though written in narrative form. Alloula rejected the technique of the "fourth wall" and embraced *estrangement*, so that the audience or reader would not be absorbed into the play, but rather would argue consciously in order to revolt against their reality and transform it.

3. The Internal Structure of the Dramatic Text:

3.1. The Concept of Narration:

Abd al-Malik Murtad states that the origin of narration (*al-sard*) in the Arabic language is: "*continuity proceeding on a single path, and 'sard' of speech and reading.*" From this etymological starting point, the term "narration" came to be applied to narrative works, to everything other than dialogue. Then, in our own times in the West, the concept of "narration" developed into a more technical meaning, broader and more comprehensive, so that it came to denote the narrative, novelistic, or story text in its entirety. It is as if narration is the manner chosen by the narrator, the storyteller, or even the popular creator to present the event to the recipient. Narration thus became the fabric of speech, but in the form of storytelling³⁸.

The term thus migrates in meaning while its form remains, in order to keep pace with the evolution of critical movements across the ages. With this, Abd al-Malik Murtagh has given us a general concept and traced the shift in the meaning of the term.

In another derivation, we find that “narrativity” (*Narrativité*), according to the concept of Greimas: “is based on two sets of successive utterances and on the enunciations employed therein, corresponding to a series of actions aimed at the realization of a project”³⁹ – a project of constructing a clear meaning that conveys the reader to a particular goal.

3.2. Balance and Disruption in the Narrative Body:

Based on the two concepts of “*movement (Mouvement)*” used to denote a change of strategic situation, and “*force,*” we can identify the narrative component (*Composante narrative*)⁴⁰ as follows:

The play *Al-Litham* begins in excerpt (A) of the opening section with a succession of utterances that reflect the disrupted condition of the father of “Barhoum the Shy” and his family. The hypothesized state of disruption can be understood in one of two possibilities:

- Either Alloula began with a retrospective narration of the French colonial past in Algeria, imprinting the play with a tone of darkness, since the theme of the play will stem from this initial disruption.
- Or, although colonialism has disappeared and ended, another colonialism has arisen – an internal colonialism that corrodes the institutions and structures of the state and diminishes the worth of the Algerian individual.



Soumission : 22/03/2025 Acceptation : 02/06/2025 Publication : 25/08/2025

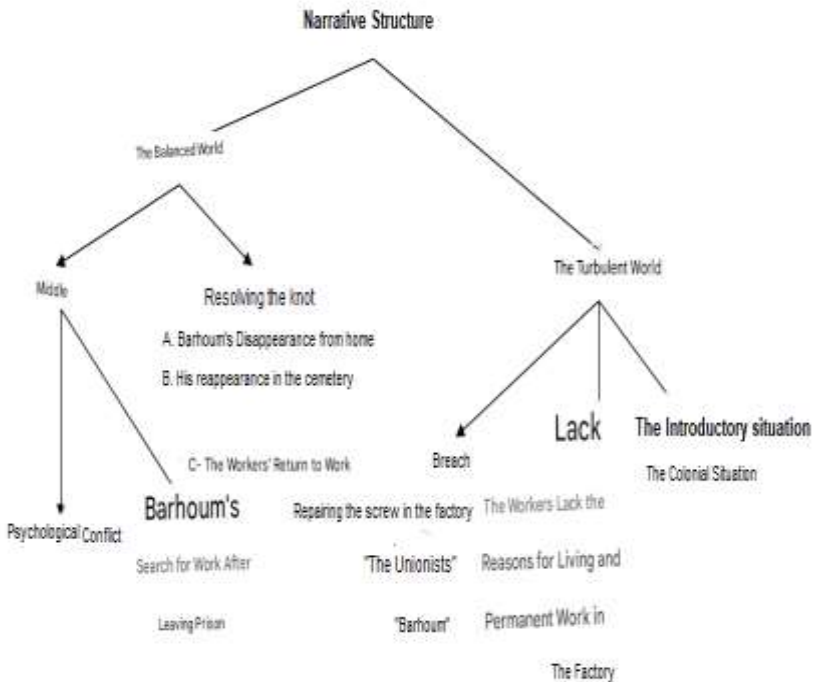
This disrupted situation ends, at the beginning of excerpt (B) of the opening section, with a state of balance, which comes as a result of the marriage of “Barhoum the Shy” after independence and his obtaining a job as a mechanic in the factory. But soon, forces come to break this balance and create a new tension at the beginning of excerpt (C) of the central section, when the union members – “al-‘Arj,” “al-Filali,” and “al-Bakush” – select Barhoum to repair the malfunction and fill the gap. He falls from the top of the cauldron, breaks his leg, and is beaten by a group of people who mutilate his nose. After being transferred to the infirmary, he ends up confined to the hospital for several days.

The disruption grows more severe in excerpt (D) of the central section, after Barhoum learns that he is wanted by the police on charges of disturbance and sabotage, leading to his imprisonment. Then comes the final section, where the events proceed toward creating balance after Barhoum’s release from prison, followed by his escape from home and his life in the cemetery, where he found his peace and serenity.

The narrative component from the very beginning rests upon

“tracing the anchors of the text and capturing the levels that have a close connection with the deep meaning of this text. But before that, it must be based on the succession of ideas and their sequencing, then on linking the linguistic signifiers to their signifieds.”⁴¹

According to narrative structure, one can trace the narrative component in the following diagram:



By connecting the general axes of the dramatic text, we can notice that the **narrative structure**, in some of its essential aspects, highlights from the very beginning a confrontation between two opposing sides: the subject "*Barhoum the Shy*", who undertakes the role of repairing the machine, and the "*anti-subject*" (*Anti-sujet*) represented by the *factory director* and his administrators (authority).

Formulating the structure in this way leads us to question the nature of the "value object" (*Objet de valeur*), over



Soumission : 22/03/2025 Acceptation : 02/06/2025 Publication : 25/08/2025

which these forces struggle—in other words, what is the object possessed by the subject that the *anti-subject* (*Anti-sujet*) seeks to seize?

The answer is not straightforward; rather, we find it highly complex, such that we cannot resolve the problem without resorting to the perspective adopted by each side in the conflict.

A - The first perspective: “The Factory Director”

The perspective adopted by the factory director does not appear, at first sight, to be that of an *anti-subject* (*Anti-sujet*). He is exercising a legitimate profession that entitles him to monitor the situation in the factory. He has the right to dismiss a disruptive worker and refer him to justice according to the legal procedures in force. However, *Alloula* departs from this logic and leans toward focusing on other narrative possibilities.

B - The second perspective: “Barhoum the Shy”

The latter is an ordinary citizen who defends his right to work, to food, to drink, and to a dignified life. Yet the discovery of his situation—when he fell from the vat after repairing it—leads to the loss of his (legitimate) right to work, to his physical destruction through deliberate beating, and to his psychological destruction through imprisonment and deprivation of his family. To dismiss him from work, beat him to the point of death, and throw him into prison simply means stripping him of life itself.

The letter that *Barhoum* sent to his family after fleeing to the cemetery reflects this. In it, he speaks, according to the *qawal* (storyteller):

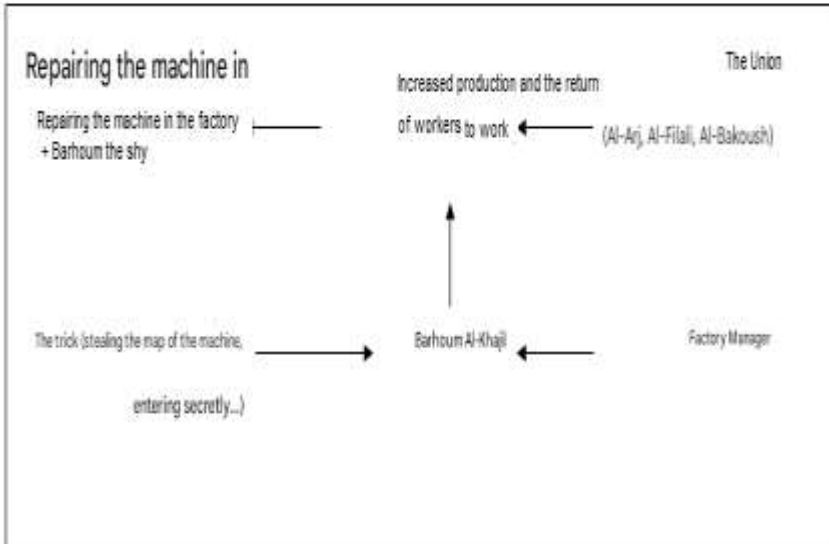
“... he speaks of an ideal society... of a village full of roses... a green, tree-filled tower... a fortress that cannot be taken... he speaks of internal order, of freedom of expression and creativity...”
42

From the foregoing, we can conclude that the text dissolves the stakes of the conflict into a single value-based subject: freedom of expression and social justice. Social justice, in turn, becomes the genuine sender of the declared conflicts in the dramatic text.

Here’s the translation following your rules (keeping numbers, French terms with English equivalents in parentheses, no omissions):

The Actantial Model:

We can frame the narrative analysis in the form of an actantial model (*modèle actantiel*), which encompasses the entire text, bearing in mind that “narrative analysis does not entail imposing the actantial model on texts and subjecting them to a preconceived framework into which they are forcibly inserted. Rather, it is no more than a general conception whose function lies in guiding us toward the type of narrative discourse and its characteristics”⁴³. This is what we shall attempt to do by tracing the actantial structure.



4. Constituent Units of the Actantial Model:

- **The Subject - Object of Value:** The relationship between the subject and the object of value “constitutes the core of the actantial model and, according to Greimas, appears charged with the semantic load inherent in desire”⁴⁴. This abstract example illustrates the role of the subject, *Barhoum the Shy*, who strives and desires to obtain the object of value by repairing the machine to increase production and ensuring the workers return to their jobs to secure their livelihood from the wages the factory provides monthly.
- **Sender - Receiver:** The presence of these two actantial units in the narrative suggests a world governed by a system of values, where actions are judged negatively or positively, classifying them as

forbidden, permitted, or obligatory. The sender's function is to preserve, uphold, and ensure the continuity of these values by transmitting them to the receiver of the subject or imposing them upon them⁴⁵. The parties in this relationship—the subject and the object—are defined by the process occurring between the sender agent, embodied in the union members “La'arj, Filali, Bekkouch,” and the receiver, which may be the location (the factory, through the repair of the press) or *Barhoum*, who plays a dual role in the actantial configuration. In this context, it is important to note that the union's function—the sender—is to unite the workers, defend their rights, and prevent harm.

- **Opponent - Object of Value:** The opponent includes the “factory manager” or ruling authority, who provokes the workers and tries to thwart their efforts to achieve the object of value.
- **Helper - Object of Value:** The helper acts in opposition to the opponent and is represented by “the trick,” through which the subject succeeds in obtaining and reclaiming the object of value, previously under the control of the opponent, the factory manager.

5. The Narrative Program (Project of Transformation):

After identifying the key units constituting the actantial model, we must address its dynamic, primarily based on transformation—the movement of states from one stage to another through “separation” or “connection.” Separation can occur at the level of characters (in cases of departure, absence, or death) or between a character and a place (e.g.,



Soumission : 22/03/2025 Acceptation : 02/06/2025 Publication : 25/08/2025

when the hero leaves a location). It may also happen between a character and their possessions. In all cases, separation results in a form of deprivation, whereas connection occurs between two or more characters or between a character and their possessions ⁴⁶.

This establishes the basic narrative program underpinning the story, which can be symbolically represented as follows:

$$S \rightarrow [(S \text{ Sep} \rightarrow O) \leftarrow (S \text{ Con} \rightarrow O)]$$

Here, the function of the action for the state action (the press in the factory) leads to an achievement within the course of the story due to the practical subject *Barhoum the Shy*, who establishes a connective transformation toward the object of value (repairing the machine to bring back the workers and increase production), despite having previously been disconnected from it.

An important observation arises here: *Barhoum the Shy*, the practical subject, could have repaired the machine alone but refrained due to fear of the possible consequences. He avoided this to prevent potential pitfalls that could endanger all the workers, whose fate would have been threatened with dismissal under the authority of the factory manager, especially if he failed to repair the machine or if his efforts were discovered. However, circumstances favored him with the presence of a helper, whether it was the union members "La'arj, Filali, Bekkouch," who provided him with a schematic of the machine, or the complicity of Barhoum's wife, who was ready to support this action. This enabled the subject to demonstrate competence and sufficient capability to accomplish the task of repairing the machine.

6. Competence of the Subject:

The story, after repeated and careful reading, allows us to examine the subject's competence through two dimensions: will to act and obligation. Reducing this to the capacity to act and knowledge of action is necessary because *Barhoum's* physical strength is insufficient for repairing a large machine, which requires a collective effort. In terms of knowledge of the action, *Barhoum* is somewhat unaware of the potential disastrous outcomes if security personnel doubt his intentions or uncover the secret of the machine repair.

A subject must possess specific competence before performing an action to become an effective actor. According to the logic of motives, the assumption of action by the subject presupposes competence to perform it. This competence manifests in the requirement that, for the subject to act, they must first be able to act, obligated to act, know how to act, or have the capacity to act⁴⁷.

On this basis, *Barhoum* occupies the position of active, organized resistance, balancing the necessity of performing the action and the desire to do so, which constitutes the positive aspect of the narrative trajectory.

7 – Achievement and Stages of the Test

The achievement comes to prove the competence of the subject through the test undertaken by *Barhoum the Shy*, which is founded on the interplay of acquisition and dispossession, both generating conflict and tension between him and the anti-subject (*the Factory Director / bureaucratic authority*). After the anti-subject had been connected to the value-object by seizing it by force, he became separated from it and deprived of it. The reason lies in the subject's use of



cunning, which enabled him to reclaim his right that had been usurped by the opponent.

This can be written, according to symbolic formulation, as follows:

- $S \rightarrow [(S_1 \text{ Acq} \rightarrow O) \leftarrow (S_1 \text{ Act} \rightarrow O)]$
- $S \rightarrow [(S_2 \text{ Act} \rightarrow O) \leftarrow (S_2 \text{ Acq} \rightarrow O)]$
- +
- $S \rightarrow [(S_1 \text{ Acq} \rightarrow O) \leftarrow (S_1 \text{ Act} \rightarrow O)]$

Simplified, the transformation project between two subjects confronting one object may be expressed in the following abstract formula:

- $S \rightarrow [(S_2 \text{ Act} \vee S_1) (S_2 \text{ Acq} \vee S_1)]$

This duality of narrative programs illustrates how the conjunction of one subject with the value-object necessarily entails the disjunction of the other. It highlights the essentially *agonistic* (conflictual) nature of every narrative transformation and every story.⁴⁸

Based on the data presented above, we can outline the three stages that constitute the core of this test. *Greimas* classified three types of tests: “the qualifying test, through which the hero acquires competence and capacity for achievement; followed by the decisive test, which remedies deprivation; and finally the glorifying test, in which the true knowledge of the hero is revealed and rewarded”⁴⁹.

- **The Qualifying Test:** Occurs when the union members choose *Barhoum* as the person capable of repairing the press, due to his possession of knowledge and capacity for action.
- **The Main Test:** Defined by the process of repairing the machine and the trick employed by *Barhoum* and

the union members to prevent harm and perform the action entrusted to the subject.

- **The Glorifying Test:** Concerns the triumph of *Barhoum* and the union members in operating the machine, even though the narrative path followed a different trajectory. Nevertheless, *Barhoum* remains an active, struggling subject within a – perhaps it can be said – violent narrative course, ultimately achieving victory by living within the tomb that houses all his hopes and dreams, enabling his return to the embrace of society.

8 – The Triggering and the Persuasive Act

At the outset of this section, we clarify that the problem posed is: *How can we justify the act of the trade unionists who entrusted “Barhoum the Shy” with the task of repairing the machine, despite knowing of his shyness and fear, and that this operation would risk the stability of the workers’ employment?*

The answer lies in the fact that the driving force is “triggering” (the act of acting) for the sake of a radical change in the course of events, so that they would not remain as they were. Without this driving force, the workers would have remained under a total threat of losing their positions and being dismissed from work. Thus, the ultimate beneficiary would have been the anti-subject (the Factory Director and his bureaucratic entourage).

The “triggering” emerged through the fiduciary contract (Contrat fiduciaire), which the trade unionists pursued, considering themselves as “receivers” (*destinataires*) and defenders of the workers’ rights. Soon, however, they come to embody the Sender, while “Barhoum” becomes the



Soumission : 22/03/2025 Acceptation : 02/06/2025 Publication : 25/08/2025

Receiver, and finally “Barhoum” himself is established as the Subject.

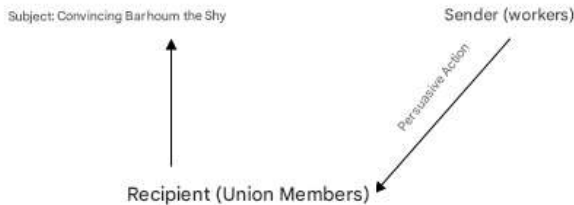
In this framework,

“the Sender carries out a persuasive act (Faire persuasif), which is interpreted by the Receiver (...), where the Receiver accepts the Sender’s discourse without doubt as to its truth, in all cases of this type it is always of a verbal nature, and here the performative value of the discourse becomes evident”⁵⁰.

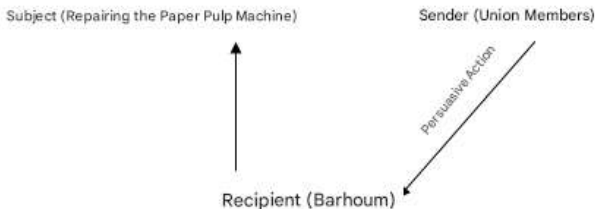
This is exactly what took place in the conversation at “Barhoum’s” house to persuade him to undertake this task.

We may thus conclude that the persuasive act is characterized by a dual nature:

First:



Second :



Thus, we can see the act of manipulation associated with the intervention of "Barhoum" in both cases: Manipulation is “linked to evaluation, since the current

relationship between the Subject and the Object is not only established in terms of union and disunion, but also in terms of its truthfulness. For this relationship may sometimes be true, at other times false, or even void... without altering the nature of that current relation, because the apparent manifestation may not correspond to the inner reality. We infer in our statement from what the narrative text provides us with in terms of features and data, which reveal a set of evaluative judgments aiming at setting up epistemological mechanisms concerning credibility, manifested in truth, falsehood, secrecy, and invalidity." ⁵¹

9 - The Square of Truth and Falsehood:

Truth and falsehood appear in the story of "Barhoum" as follows:

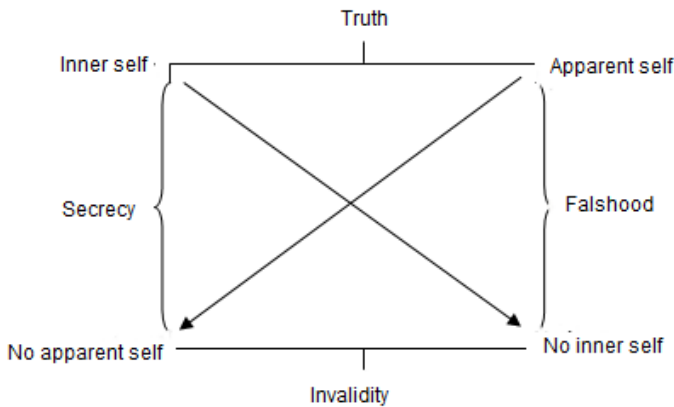
- **Truth:** The sincerity of the union members appears in entrusting "Barhoum the shy" with repairing the machine and giving him the blueprint of its internal mechanism. "Barhoum" could have denounced them to the "Factory Director," but he did not.
- **Falsehood:** Falsehood is represented in the "Anti-Subject," embodied by the "Factory Director," who deceived the workers by claiming that no one had damaged the machine, that it had simply broken down, and that he would bring in a foreign specialist from abroad to repair it: "They said they would bring in a specialist technician from abroad to fix it..." ⁵².
- **Secrecy:** This is manifested in "Barhoum's" failure to explicitly reveal to the union members his fear of the potential harm that might result from undertaking this task.



Soumission : 22/03/2025 Acceptation : 02/06/2025 Publication : 25/08/2025

- **Invalidity:** This can be represented in "Barhoum the shy's" claim, when he was living in the cemetery, that it was a beautiful world, an ivory tower, and other such descriptions, while in fact it was void.

The following diagram summarizes all these aspects:



Conclusion :

Through the analysis of the dramatic text *Al-Litham* according to the semiotic method, we conclude that:

The actantial model enabled us to highlight the actantial roles within the dramatic narrative segments, and to show their impact on the various actants in the dynamics of the narrative. This made the dramatic text segments interconnected through the internal elements that constantly seek disturbance and transformation. The resolutions obtained at the end of each segment were replaced by new disturbances, and the narrative path also embodied sudden and unexpected reversals.

We notice that Abdelkader Alloula clearly demonstrated his control over the reins of dramatic narration, especially through the technique of the *qawal* (the storyteller). He was able to penetrate the characters, describe their conflicts, disturbances, and transformations, and masterfully handle the descriptive details related to other characters. The *qawal* is his second self, which he established to narrate on his behalf, as he delegated his artistic world and dramatic imagination to it.

Accordingly, the dramatic narrative path of the play went through several stages, the most important of which were:

- The first stage, marked by Barhoum's miserable condition of poverty and suffering.
- The stage of stability, where transformation occurred through his participation in union activity, which then led to another transformation into a disturbed state, when the anti-subject discovered the act of repairing the machine. This failure, however, remained limited to the actant himself.
- The final stage, which determined the counter-revenge against the actant: the escape from social life and the choice to live among graves, in a realm of supreme spiritual and liminal laws. In this way, victory occurred and the *object of value* was achieved: revenge against society.

We also notice that Abdelkader Alloula relied in his writings on the vernacular language. The effect he left is that his dramatic works carry an inciting spirit, and this revolutionary poetic touch within the words could only be uttered by a man who bore the cause of a homeland and a nation. His dramatic writing was infused with a popular,



Soumission : 22/03/2025 Acceptation : 02/06/2025 Publication : 25/08/2025

inherited language drawn from the womb of society, in order to enlighten and stir it.

Thus, it is worth saying that the function of dramatic narration in *Al-Litham* is social and critical, as the author observes the transformations of society and calls for revolt against the miserable situation in order to change for the better.

The narrative segments indicate a space filled with violence, despair, absurdity, frustration, authoritarianism, oppression, and deprivation. Abdelkader Alloula insisted throughout his creative experience on being the distinctive narrative voice of the deprived, exposing their worlds and revealing the reasons for their miserable conditions.

Endnotes

- ¹ Al-Samoudi, M. (2000). *Theatrical readings*. Arab Writers Union. p. 30.
- ² Allaq, F. (2008). *On the analysis of poetic discourse* (2nd ed.). Dar al-Tanwir. p. 96.
- ³ Al-Abid, A. M. (2008). *Studies in semiotics* (1st ed.). Dar al-Qarawiyyin. p. 33.
- ⁴ Al-Ghadhami, A. (1998). *Sin and atonement: From structuralism to deconstruction* (4th ed.). General Egyptian Book Organization. p. 51.
- ⁵ *The term is a neologism derived from “demolition” and “construction,” coined by Saeed Boutadjine as an equivalent to the French term “Dé-construction,” and cited in his study Actantial Operations, Ikhtilaf Publishing, 1st ed., October 2000, p. 166.*

-
- ⁶ Khallafi, H. (2011). *Rhetoric and discourse analysis* (1st ed.). Dar al-Farabi. p. 26.
- ⁷ *The dramatic text is the author's written text, whereas the theatrical text is that of the director and the performance.*
- ⁸ Dalimi, F. (2005). *The structures and functions of the text: A semiotic approach to Abdelkader Alloula's "The Sayings"* (1st ed.). Dar Kan'an. p. 21.
- ⁹ Al-Jimi, M. N. (1991). *On narrative discourse: Greimas's theory*. Arab Book House. p. 109.
- ¹⁰ Bouraoui, A. H. (1986). *Popular tales in the Biskra region: A field study*. National Publishing Company. p. 96.
- ¹¹ Barthes, R. (2009). *Textual analysis: Applications to texts from the Torah, the Gospel, and the short story* (A. E. Al-Sharkawi, Trans.). Dar al-Takween. p. 13.
- ¹² Al-Abid, A. M. (2008). *Studies in semiotics* (1st ed.). Dar al-Qarawiyyin. p. 60.
- ¹³ Alloula, A. (n.d.). *The Veil*. In *Collected Plays*. p. 163.
- ¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 158.
- ¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 160.
- ¹⁶ *Ibid.*
- ¹⁷ *Ibid.*
- ¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 163.
- ¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 201.
- ²⁰ Alloula, A. (n.d.). *The Veil*. In *Collected Plays*. p. 172.
- ²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 163.
- ²² *Ibid.*, p. 186.
- ²³ *Ibid.*
- ²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 201.
- ²⁵ *Ibid.*
- ²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 231
- ²⁷ Ben Malek, R. (n.d.). *Narrative semiotics*. p. 46.
- ²⁸ Yousfi, H. (n.d.). *Reading the theatrical text: A study in Tawfiq al-Hakim's "Scheherazade"*. World of Knowledge Library. p. 44.



-
- ²⁹ Ibn Manzur. (1999). *Lisan al-Arab* (Vol. 9, 3rd ed., A. M. A. Abdullah & M. S. Al-‘Abiri, Eds.). Dar Ihya’ al-Turath al-‘Arabi / Arab History Foundation. Entry “‘anan,” p. 441.
- ³⁰ Aloulou, S. (1984). *Dictionary of contemporary literary terms*. University Library Publications. p. 89.
- ³¹ Al-Ghadhami, A. (1998). *Sin and atonement: From structuralism to deconstruction* (4th ed.). General Egyptian Book Organization. p. 263.
- ³² Fattous, S. M. (2001). *The semiotics of the title* (1st ed.). Ministry of Culture. p. 117.
- ³³ Ibn Manzur. (1999). *Lisan al-Arab*. Entry “latham.” p. 263.
- ³⁴ Hassan Yousfi: *The Theatrical Text*, p.13.
- ³⁵ Elin Aston George Saqouna: *Theatre and Relations*, p.21.
- ³⁶ Hassan Yousfi: *The Theatrical Text: Previous Reference*, p.45.
- ³⁷ Marie Elias, Hanan Kassab: *Dictionary of Theatre*, p.107.
- ³⁸ Ma‘la Muhammad, N. (2000). *On theatre... on theatrical performance... on the theatrical text: Critical issues* (1st ed.). Alexandria Center for Books. p. 12.
- ³⁹ Sahraoui, A., et al. (2002). *The authority of the text in the collection Al-Barzakh wa Al-Sakin* (1st ed.). Houma Publishing. p. 223.
- ⁴⁰ Ben Salem, A. (2001). *The components of narration in the new Algerian short story text*. Arab Writers Union. p. 58.
- ⁴¹ Al-Jimi, M. N. (1991). *On narrative discourse: Greimas’s theory*. Arab Book House. p. 35.
- ⁴² Ben Malek, R. (n.d.). *Narrative semiotics*. p. 88.
- ⁴³ Khemri, H. (2011). *Narratives of criticism in the analysis of mechanisms of contemporary critical discourse* (1st ed.). Ikhtilaf Publishing. p. 76.
- ⁴⁴ Alloula, A. (n.d.). *The Veil*. In *Collected Plays*. p. 221.
- ⁴⁵ Al-Jimi, M. N. (1991). *On narrative discourse: Greimas’s theory*. Arab Book House. p. 73.

⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 40.

⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 42.

⁴⁸ Marzouqi, S., & Shakir, J. (n.d.). *Introduction to narrative theory: Analysis and application*. Tunisian National Publishing House / University Publications Office. pp. 75–76.

⁴⁹ Symbols are treated as follows: Ft = transformational act; F = Barhoum (the shy one); F1 = the machine (the factory cauldron); F2 = factory director; M = value object “repairing the machine, return of workers, and increased production”; M1 = repairing the machine; M2 = increasing production; M3 = deception and disguise in the dead of night; M4 = conflict; 8 = junction symbol; V = disjunction symbol; → = transition arrow; () = state utterance; [] = action utterance.

⁵⁰ Fadl, S. (1999). *The rhetoric of discourse and the science of text*. World of Knowledge. p. 290.

⁵¹ Boutadjine, S. (n.d.). *Actantial functioning: A semiotic study of Ibn Hadouqa’s “Tomorrow is a New Day”*. Ikhtilaf Publishing. p. 70.

⁵² Marzouqi, S., & Shakir, J. (n.d.). *Introduction to narrative theory: Analysis and application*. p. 72.