

The Semiological Signs of Characters in 'Samarcande' by Amin Maalouf

العلامات السيميولوجية لشخصيات رواية "سمرقند" للروائي أمين معلوف

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Abstract: The present paper aims to analyze the semiological structure of the novel's characters in 'Samarcande' by Amin Maalouf, treating them as a system of signs that contributes to the construction of meaning and the shaping of the intellectual vision upon which the narrative is founded. The study undertakes a deconstruction of the typologies of signs through which the central characters are constituted, relying on approaches drawn from narrative semiotics and contemporary models of character analysis—particularly the framework proposed by Philippe Hamon. The paper further examines how Maalouf employs descriptive, psychological, ideological, and narrative signs to produce characters that transcend their merely diegetic function and acquire symbolic and cultural dimensions that illuminate the tensions between knowledge and power, rationality and fanaticism, historical truth and narrative imagination.

Keywords: Sign – Semiotics – Samarcande – Amin Maalouf.

ملخص:

يهدف هذا المقال إلى تحليل البنية السيميولوجية للشخصيات الروائية في سمرقند لأمين معلوف، باعتبارها منظومة علامات تُسهم في تشييد الدلالة و تشكيل الرؤية الفكرية التي تنهض عليها الرواية. ويقوم البحث على تفكيك أنماط العلامات التي تُبنى من خلالها الشخصيات المحورية، بالاعتماد على المقاربة السيميائية ، ويرصد المقال كيفية توظيف أمين معلوف للعلامات الوصفية والنفسية والإيديولوجية والسردية من أجل إنتاج شخصيات تتجاوز بعدها الحكائي إلى بعد رمزي وثقافي يُضيء الصراع بين المعرفة والسلطة، العقلانية والتعصب، والحقيقة التاريخية والخيال السردية. كما يكشف البحث عن دينامية العلاقات بين الشخصيات بوصفها شبكة من الإشارات التي تعكس تحولات الفكر في القرن الخامس الهجري وسياقات القرن العشرين معاً، بما يمنح الرواية تعددية دلالية وانفتاحاً تأويلياً واسعاً.

الكلمات المفتاحية : العلامة- السيميولوجيا - رواية سمرقند-أمين معلوف.

Semiology, as the science of signs, constitutes an effective entry point for exploring the deep semantic structures that govern the narrative discourse, wherein the character is transformed from a mere fictional entity into a cultural and aesthetic sign at the intersection of a network of symbols and concepts. For this reason, the character is considered as one of the most significant components of any narrative work—whether a novel, short story, play, or even poetry. Characters represent the individuals who move within the world of the narrative, carrying ideas, interacting with events, and reflecting various experiences. They elicit empathy or aversion from the reader, yet they always remain a locus of interest.

Thus, the process of constructing characters in the novel requires planning and attention to detail. The narrator strives to ensure that the characters are coherent and internally consistent so that each achieves legibility and ontological presence within the narrative. In this sense, the diversity and differentiation that characterize character names in fiction negate the linguistic principle of the arbitrariness of the sign. This is because the character begins by “*bearing a name, which is its primary distinctive feature, for it is the name that designates the character, renders it identifiable and unique. The personal name may be accompanied by a title that distinguishes it from others.*” (Hassan, 2009, p. 248) It is evident that nothing obliges the novelist to employ personal names for his characters; he may, for instance, assign them professional labels (the merchant, the carpenter, the farmer) or kinship designations (the brother, the father, the sister, the uncle).

The methods of introducing a character follow two main approaches: Direct characterization, through physical and psychological description; and Indirect characterization, wherein the narrator provides information about the character in the manner determined by the novelist. (Mohammed, 2005, p. 19)

From this standpoint, the present study—entitled The Semiological Signs of the Characters in Amin Maalouf’s Samarcande*—aims to analyze the formation of the fictional character from a semiological perspective, that is, to examine the character as a sign. The analysis is grounded in foundational theoretical frameworks, most notably the conceptual contributions of Philippe Hamon, Roland Barthes, Charles Sanders Peirce, and A. J. Greimas, with the objective of deconstructing the dynamics of the sign within the narrative system through the narrative component par excellence: the character.

Accordingly, the study raises the following central problematics:

How is the character constructed in Maalouf's Samarcande as a semiological sign that generates meaning?

What narrative and semantic tools does the author employ in order to compose this sign within the fabric of the novel?

How does the semiological sign operate in shaping the character, and in what ways does it contribute to the production of meaning?

How do the characters in Samarcande manifest as systems of signs, and what semiological functions do these signs perform within the narrative structure?

No narrative work is ever devoid of characters, for the character occupies a central position in literary criticism and in the views of critics. It represents one of the fundamental pillars in the construction of the novelistic text, and it is often the first element that attracts the reader in a narrative work. For this reason, many critical perspectives define the novel as the "art of character," meaning the art that conveys a human experience through the depiction of a group of characters situated within a specific temporal and spatial reality, articulated in an extended prose form with sequential events.

The character, therefore, *"is not merely a realistic entity, but rather an imaginative construct signified by the expressions employed in the novel."* This is why, as Barthes asserts, the fictional character materializes as a set of "paper beings," acquiring its signifying shape through language. It is, according to Tzvetan Todorov (Mohammed, 2005, p. 11) nothing more than a linguistic construct.

A writer's skill is revealed in his ability to create a character capable of convincing the reader of the events of the novel and of representing a state of affairs that resonates with reality. This enables the reader to immerse himself both internally and externally, for the narrator is the only agent fully aware of the characters and capable of grasping them in their entirety. The novelist's mastery is thus manifested in his command of narrative techniques and devices.

Modern studies have affirmed that *"the concept of character has paradoxically remained one of the most obscure categories in poetics,"* (Philippe, 2013, p. 29) a view echoed by Virginia Woolf in her well-known 1925 essay on the novelistic character, where she states: "Let us remember how little we know about character." The character is ultimately an aesthetic construct created by the author within the text, endowed with a name, traits, form, and substance—"a being endowed with human qualities and engaged in human events. (Gerald, 2003, p. 42)

Therefore, due to the ambiguity, complexity, and variability of the concept of character, scholars have been unable to provide it with a single, fixed definition. Each critic approaches it according to his own theoretical orientation and epistemological framework. Among the most significant contributions are those of Philippe Hamon, whose semiological efforts conceptualize the fictional character as a sign. His linguistic foundations constitute the primary source from which he develops his theoretical understanding of character. He defines the character based on the notion of the linguistic sign, asserting:

“Conceiving of the character, *a priori*, as a sign—that is, adopting a perspective that constructs the object by integrating it into an enunciative process conceived in turn as a communicative act, composed of a linguistic sign (rather than accepting it as a given shaped by a critical tradition and a culture centered on the concept of the ego-character)—requires that analysis remain coherent with this project.”

Hamon even goes so far as to declare that *“the concept of character is not a purely literary concept; rather, it is fundamentally linked to the grammatical function performed by the character within the text. Its literary function emerges only when the critic resorts to cultural and aesthetic criteria.”* (Hassan, 2009, p. 213)

From this perspective, Philippe Hamon classifies the character into three types, based on his distinction between three corresponding categories of signs:

1. Referential signs, through which he identifies **referential characters**. These are *“signs that refer to a datum in the external world (a table, a giraffe, Picasso, a river) or to a concept (structure, resurrection, freedom).”* (Philippe, 2013, p. 34) Hamon reinforces this view by stating: *“We may refer to these as referential signs, for they signify something concrete and perceptible (a stable and fixed referent), and these signs can be found in the dictionary.”* (Philippe, 2013, p. 35)

2. Shifter signs (or deictic signs), through which he identifies **shifter characters**. These signs *“have a floating content whose meaning is determined only by a concrete discursive situation (the here-and-now), or by the historical act of speech whose components are defined synchronically (I, you, here, now). These are signs that cannot be defined through the dictionary.”* They operate at the level of enunciation, indicating a subject position within discourse rather than a fixed referent.

3. Anaphoric signs (or mnemonic signs), through which he identifies **anaphoric or mnemonic characters**. These are signs that *“refer to another sign that is external to the*

utterance itself, whether near or distant. This reference may be to a previous segment of the oral or written chain, or to one that follows it. The function of these signs is connective or economical; they reduce the length and volume of the message." (Philippe, 2013, p. 35)

From this point, Philippe Hamon establishes his tripartite classification of characters. He states:

"Character semiology can, at least in an initial phase, recuperate this threefold distinction (referring here to the triadic classification of signs) in order to delimit the field in which it operates—namely, to determine the category of referential characters, the category of shifter (or connective) characters, and the category of anaphoric (mnemonic) characters." (Philippe, 2013, p. 35)

1. The Category of Referential Characters

By *referentiality*, Hamon refers to the return to the historical and social dimension. (Jrioui, 2010, p. 5) This type of character refers to familiar worlds—worlds that are already encoded within cultural texts and the products of personal or collective history. Such characters live in memory, functioning as part of a temporality that can be defined, delimited, and isolated. (Philippe, 2013, p. 14)

Hamon subdivides the category of referential characters into the following types:

1. **Historical characters**
2. **Mythical characters**
3. **Allegorical (or figurative) characters**
4. **Social characters**

When these characters are integrated into a given utterance, they operate primarily as a referential anchoring that points to the larger text of ideology, cultural clichés, or collective memory. (Philippe, 2013, p. 36) All of these characters possess a referential dimension connected to cultural knowledge. This dimension is called the *referential aspect* (Aspect référentiel), and it may be derived from diverse forms of cultural intertextuality. (Al-Sadiq, 2009, p. 190)

2. The Category of Shifter (or Deictic/Connective) Characters

This category signals the presence of the author or the reader—or those who stand in for them—within the text. These are characters who speak on their behalf: the chorus of ancient tragedy, Socratic interlocutors, passing or transitional figures, narrators, and similar entities. Such

characters are often difficult to grasp or define because their function is fluid and their identity is tied to the act of enunciation rather than to stable reference. (Philippe, 2013, p. 36)

3. The Category of Mnemonic (Anaphoric) Characters

According to Philippe Hamon, what defines the identity of this category is the internal referential system of the work itself. These characters weave, within the utterance, a network of associations and reminders that point to other segments of discourse of varying length. Their function is primarily organizational and connective. They are signs that activate the reader's memory and ensure textual cohesion through anaphoric recall and internal referencing. (Philippe, 2013, p. 36)

Based on Philippe Hamon's semiological framework, how do signs contribute to the construction of fictional characters in Amin Maalouf's *Samarcande*, and how do these signs interact with the narrative structure to generate meaning and intensify the intellectual and historical dimensions of the text?

Amin Maalouf's *Samarcande* is among the most prominent narrative works that undertake a reconstruction of history through a narrative architecture saturated with symbols, signs, and interwoven significations. In this novel, the character is not simply an individual entity that drives the plot; rather, it functions as a semiological sign that opens onto deep intellectual and cultural fields—from philosophy to Sufism, from history to the human condition in its struggle between knowledge and power. Thus, the character in *Samarcande* becomes a central nucleus in the production of meaning, through complex narrative mechanisms that unfold across axes of interpretation and tension.

Most of the character names described in the novel are derived from linguistic signifiers related to the profession or social role of each figure. These names often indicate the characters' social status and may correspond—or fail to correspond—to their actions and discourse, producing additional layers of meaning and irony.

Reading *Samarcande* from a semiological perspective allows us to understand the character as a signifying system constituted through a network of linguistic and cultural signs contributing to meaning-making and interpretive generation. Hence the importance of approaching the novel's characters through the lens of Philippe Hamon, who views the character as a semantic and functional structure defined by the constellation of signs that determine its identity within the text. For Hamon, the character becomes a semantic sign moving within a web of relations.

The characters in *Samarcande* are distributed, according to Philippe Hamon's analytic tools, as follows:

First. Referential Characters

1. Characters with Historical Referentiality

These are characters whose origin is rooted in actual history. They are “characters created by the author on the basis of figures who had an effective existence in history.” This historical referentiality branches into several types—political, religious, and cultural. It is also important to note that certain historical figures may possess multiple facets; a single character might simultaneously be a military leader, a political figure, or a religious authority. (Philippe, 2013, p. 31)

In *Samarcande*, this category appears clearly through the figure of Qadi Abu Tahir, one of the key historical characters in the novel. He occupies both a religious and worldly position as *Qadi al-Qudat* (Chief Judge). In the narrative, he is portrayed as stern, imposing, and highly respected within his social milieu. Although he appears to be a secondary character on the surface, he performs a deep semiological and functional role within Maalouf's character system. He embodies the voice of law, religious authority, and official orthodoxy, in contrast to the voice of reason, contemplation, and intellectual inquiry represented by Omar Khayyam. Thus, he functions as a sign of legitimate authority and moral surveillance. Maalouf writes:

“He interrupted his speech to catch his breath and, above all, to restore his authority and instill fear in the hearts of those present.” (Maalouf, 1988, p. 29)

Another historical referential character is Sultan Malik Shah, who plays a prominent role in the first temporal segment of the narrative. Although his role is less visible than that of Omar Khayyam or system of governance, his semiological presence is essential to the construction of the novel's symbolic economy. Maalouf uses Malik Shah as a symbol of power and hegemony, a referential figure embodying sovereign authority.

He functions as a mediating force that heightens the tension between Hassan Sabbah and system of governance. This dynamic is illustrated in a scene where the *vizier* declares:

“Is he not obeyed, thanks to my favor, and respected to the ends of the earth? Yes—go and tell him that the fate of his turban depends on my inkwell” (Maalouf, 1988, p. 137)

Here, the king is depicted as a historical referent of political authority, restricting intellectual divergence and delimiting the boundaries of permissible discourse. His presence reinforces the novel's semiotic structure by providing a reference point for power against which other ideological positions—such as philosophy, mysticism, or rebellion—are articulated.

Among the historical-referential characters in *Samarcande*, we encounter the figure of “**Mahdhar Mahābah**” (محضره مهابة), who functions as a sign of the authority and majesty of the state. The name itself operates as a linguistic sign that conveys a function more than an

individual essence. The term *Mahdhar* (محضر) denotes a summons, testimony, or presentation before authority, while *Mahābah* (مهابة) signifies reverence, awe, and sovereign power. According to Philippe Hamon's semiological tools, this character is identified through his name rather than through psychological depth. Maalouf writes:

"He did not smile as he sat rigidly upon his dark horse, nor did he respond in the slightest to the repeated acclamations of the thousands of townspeople who had gathered since dawn to greet his arrival" (Maalouf, 1988, p. 35)

Alp Arslan

Alp Arslan is one of the most prominent historical figures in the novel. He represents the political and historical pivot around which the transformations of power and thought revolve in the era of Omar Khayyam. He embodies legitimate authority informed by a reformist vision, standing in contrast to the religious extremism of Hassan Sabbah and the philosophical withdrawal of Omar Khayyam. Semiologically, Alp Arslan is a sign of the golden age that precedes collapse:

"His empire stretched from Kabul to the Mediterranean, and none contested his sovereignty; his army was loyal to him." (Maalouf, 1988, p. 61)

Nasr Khan

A character with a distinguished historical status; he was among the virtuous, according to what has been narrated about him. He was an upright sultan and a scholar of religion, just with his subjects, yet still awe-inspiring among his soldiers, benevolent, and eloquent. In addition to this, there are other characters in the novel that appear as historical referential characters according to Philippe Hamon's classification—**Turkan Khatun / Benjamin Lesage / Mirza Reza / Jihan**.

2. Characters with Mythical Referentiality : These are characters whose identity is intertextually linked to heroes of ancient myths, whether through their actions, behaviors, or names. They are *"characters that refer to mythological figures—such as the gods of Greece—and whose study within the narrative requires knowledge of the cultural background associated with them."* (Al-Sadiq, 2009, p. 192)

Omar Khayyam

Nicknamed "Khoja", Omar Khayyam constitutes the central sign around which all the semantic dimensions of the narrative revolve. Maalouf does not present Khayyam merely as a poet; rather, he constructs him as a philosophical and humanistic sign, condensing within him the existential struggle between the human being, time, power, and certainty. Khayyam becomes

the figure through whom history is rewritten from within a free, individual consciousness—the voice of the reflective, bewildered intellectual standing amid chaos and fanaticism.

As Maalouf notes:

“Despite his young age, Omar Khayyam had already become a prominent philosopher.”
(Maalouf, 1988, p. 16)

Hassan ibn Ali al-Sabbah

Hassan ibn Sabbah is “one of the most richly developed characters in *Samarcande*, owing to the complex layers of meaning he embodies—a composite between the historical and the symbolic, the real and the imagined.” His name itself carries a direct historical signification; it is not merely a label but a cultural sign that immediately evokes a network of connotations in the reader’s mind.

Maalouf describes him as:

“Hassan ibn Ali al-Sabbah, born in Qom—once a student of religious sciences in Rayy, on his way eventually to Isfahan.” (Maalouf, 1988, p. 81)

3. Characters with Allegorical (Figurative) Referentiality

Allegorical-referential characters are those that do not possess a direct external referent outside the text, nor do they point to a specific historical or social model. Their presence in the narrative rests primarily on their symbolic nature and on the meanings woven around them by the discourse. The identity of such characters does not derive from an external referential framework; rather, it emerges from the network of signs provided by the narrative—actions, utterances, functions, and relations with other characters—so that they become signifying structures operating within the textual system rather than representations of external reality.

Thus, these characters serve as instruments of meaning-generation, reshaped through interpretive reading—not as real human prototypes, but as symbolic units integrated into the novel’s semiotic economy. They contribute to building the deeper semantic layers of the narrative by functioning as figurative constructs, whose value lies in their symbolic charge rather than in any mimetic correspondence.

Before examining the principal allegorical characters in *Samarcande*, it is necessary to clarify that this analysis proceeds on two complementary levels:

- The Textual Level: Where we examine the relationships among characters and the semiotic interactions that emerge from their encounters.

- The Sentence Level: Where we analyze the lexical and stylistic choices through which the character expresses states, conditions, and transformations.

1/ Love: The allegorical figure of **Love** is prominently embodied in the novel across two distinct narrative periods. This character appears first in the romantic relationship between **Omar Khayyam** and the beautiful **Jihan**, a young widow and poet. Khayyam beholds her from the very first moment with the gaze of a lover; to him, the encounter appears as a blessed moment. Maalouf expresses Khayyam's voice in a deeply lyrical tone:

"One life or three or seven lives—I would spend them all as I spend this one, lying on this balcony with my hand in your hair." (Maalouf, 1988, p. 114)

Both characters sigh with longing, desire, and passionate yearning for one another, turning their relationship into a semiotic embodiment of love itself—at once transcendent and vulnerable within the constraints of time and power.

In the second temporal layer of the novel, the figure of Love resurfaces through the relationship between Benjamin Lesage and Princess Shirin, the granddaughter of the aging Shah. Benjamin is struck with overwhelming admiration when he sees her for the first time—seventeen years old, radiant and captivating. Fate eventually brings them together in a love relationship. Maalouf describes the moment of their union in evocative imagery:

"It was a long kiss, a kiss of passion, a kiss for the years that had passed and the obstacles that had been overcome." (Maalouf, 1988, p. 309)

2/ Hatred

The character of hatred and intense aversion is embodied among the people of Samarkand in their extreme dislike of philosophers. To them, every philosopher is an enemy of religion, a drunkard, and a disbeliever:

"This man is a drunkard, a disbeliever, a philosopher! And he uttered this last word as if it were a curse... We do not want any philosopher in Samarkand!" (Maalouf, 1988, p. 16)

3 / Malice and Revenge

This character appears in the first historical period, at the time of the death of the vizier *Nizam al-Mulk*. The vengeful image is embodied in the list of those who are condemned:

"For example, where should they begin? The list of the disgraced is long." (Maalouf, 1988, p. 153)

4 / Debauchery

We can deduce that this trait appears from the very beginning, for the Persians since ancient times were known for their inclination toward amusement and excess in wine. This meaning appears in the novel in the following line:

“He began cutting pieces from it with all the appetite he had within him, and he kept feeding and drinking fermented wine.” (Maalouf, 1988, p. 155)

5 / Strength

Or firmness—this character is represented in the figure of **Turkan Khatun**. She was never an easy or weak woman. This becomes especially clear at the death of her husband, when she concealed his death in order to secure the right of her son. As the novel states:

“The tone was not that of a woman about to become a widow, but that of the mistress of an empire.” (Maalouf, 1988, p. 156)

6 / Religion

Religion is a system of behaviors, practices, sacred places, and morals connected to each faith. Religion appears in the novel in a comprehensive manner. We find that Omar Khayyam is committed to his belief, as shown in his statement:

“I warn against the excess of the devout, but I have never said that the One is two... This is enough for me and, I think, enough for the Creator.” (Maalouf, 1988, p. 24)

7 / Generosity

This generosity is seen in the special care shown toward Omar Khayyam. It appears, for example, in the following line:

“You may stay here as long as you wish—a night or a season—and you will find bedding, food, and fodder for your mule... You are here the guest of my master... Where can I find this generous host to offer him my thanks?” (Maalouf, 1988, p. 31/32)

8 / Violence

Violence can be noticed from the beginning to the end of the novel. Violence appears in the narrative from its very opening, as seen upon the arrival of Omar Khayyam and the violence he was subjected to due to those physical assaults by the scarred man:

“He grabbed him by the hair and shook his head three or four times, pretending he wanted to smash it against the nearest wall.” (Maalouf, 1988, p. 21)

9 / Conflict

We deduce this character (conflict) as a central axis in the novel as a whole. It first appears in the legend of the three friends during the first temporal period, as stated in the novel, for example:

“She wanted to remove Nizam al-Mulk, considering him to be standing in her way,” “and there was no rival to her in the whole empire except Nizam al-Mulk.” (Maalouf, 1988, p. 125)

Second: Shifter (Deictic) Characters

Amin Maalouf's *Samarcande* is built upon a network of shifter characters whose presence goes beyond the narrative level to become semiological signs expressing the tension of thought, identity, and domination. Here, the character is not merely a narrative element but a semantic structure constructed through the signs, symbols, and narrative functions it performs within the text.

Through our study of *Samarcande*, we have chosen to represent this type of character by the first example: **the narrating character**, given that the narrator is aware of everything that happens. The narrator proceeds from being an imaginary character, and he is *“a technique used by the author to present an imaginary world; he is considered by some to be a mask adopted by the author to express his own vision.”* (kayser, 1977, p. 72)

Therefore, **Benjamin Lesage** represents the principal narrator (the major narrating character or the self-narrator) in the novel, embodying the voice of the contemporary storyteller who conveys past events to the reader, thus connecting the two periods of the narrative.

The time of Khayyam and the Seljuks (11th century)

The time of modern Persian revolutions (19th century)

He also represents the Western “other” who reads the East with the eyes of a loving researcher, not an arrogant orientalist. He is the consciousness that reinterprets history from a human standpoint, given that the narrator *“is that voice which may at times become hidden, and which takes upon itself the task of narrating events, describing places, presenting characters, transmitting their speech, and expressing their thoughts, feelings, and emotions.”* He says:

“And that is the book that I, Benjamin Lesage, shall one day hold in my hands; and to the touch it has always seemed to me the same, I believe...” (Qassem, 1984, p. 158)

The novel also employs what we may call the secondary narrator (the internal narrator), and this appears in the second part of the novel where Maalouf presents the story in the third person regarding Omar Khayyam, that is, through an objective narrator or an omniscient narrator who knows what the characters think and what occurs in time. But this narrator is not separate from the primary narrator; rather, he is his transformed voice within the text. In other words, the contemporary narrator reclaims history through an omniscient narrative

language. Here, the “vision from behind” is used, in which the narrator knows everything in the narrative—whether this knowledge concerns what is outside the characters or inside them. (Maalouf, 1988, p. 292)

Thus, the novelist stands behind an all-knowing narrator through whom he conveys what he wishes to express in his novel, relying on the concept of the omniscient narrator. (al-Eid, 1986, p. 69)

We find, through our reading of the narrative, that the narrator appears using the third-person pronoun “he,” which gives him the function of explanation, clarification, commentary, and description. For example, explaining the character of Omar Khayyam, he says:

“Omar Khayyam was twenty-four, and he had not spent much time in Samarkand.” (Mortad, 1998, p. 118/119)

Amin Maalouf's *Samarcande* raises the issue of the author's presence within the text through the characters he creates, especially the narrating character, which becomes a reflective mirror of his consciousness and his vision of the world. Yet this presence does not exclude the reader; rather, it calls upon him through a network of semiological signs that grant him an active interpretive position in the construction of meaning. To what extent, then, can we say that the narrative structure in *Samarcande* embodies the overlap of roles between the author and the narrator? And how do the semiological signs of the characters contribute to revealing this interpretive interaction?

The second-person pronoun functions as a semiological sign indicating the reader or receiver, as it contributes to creating a kind of dialogic interaction within the text. By tracing the use of this pronoun in *Samarcande*, we notice that the author employs it on the tongues of the key characters, especially when it takes the form of the singular “you” or the plural “you (all),” becoming a means of involving the reader in the narrative act. The author deliberately uses this pronoun to insert the reader into the narrative fabric, thus forming an implicit relationship between the narrator's pronoun “I” and the addressed pronoun “you,” transforming the reader from a position of passive reception to a position of interpretive participation.

This interaction appears in many passages of the novel, including, for example:

“And you, you who were born free in a free land, must understand that.” (Mortad, 1998, p. 15)

We also find that the author uses terms such as “human,” “people,” “one,” “the world,” and “the sons of Adam,” which refer back to him to the extent that he finds himself immersed among the people, as the narrative text states:

"A person now has to hide in order to speak of freedom, democracy, and justice."
(Maalouf, 1988, p. 302)

Third: Mnemonic Characters

Hamon uses the term *mnemonic characters* to refer to those characters that are recalled from memory or from the past within the text—characters whose presence appears through the act of remembering or through figurative narration. *"These characters, within the utterance, weave a network of recall and reference to segments of discourse of varying sizes, and their function is primarily organizational and connective."* (al-Ahmar, 2010, p. 218)

When tracing this type of character in the novel, we notice that it appears through the function of recollection (flashback). At the forefront of these characters is the **central character**, in his attempt to retrieve the past and his desire to define his character more deeply and fundamentally:

"I have already mentioned my name: Benjamin O. Lesage." (Maalouf, 1988, p. 197)

Here he begins to recall all his memories of his parents, which he explains in the following passages:

"How many times they evoked father and mother with emotion and joy in Annapolis, over the 'Ethiopian dish' cooked during the holidays — recalling the piece of elephant trunk they shared on New Year's Eve, which they had bought for forty francs a pound from Ross, the English butcher on Boulevard Haussmann." (Maalouf, 1988, p. 198)

Then he remembers, on his father's tongue, as stated in the novel:

"My father recalls, saying: As soon as I arrived in Paris, I got used to going every morning to the Café de la Rotonde on the Boulevard des Italiens, with a bundle of newspapers under my arm — Le Temps, Le Gaulois, Le Figaro, and La Presse — and I would sit at one of the tables reading every line and secretly recording notes in a small notebook." (Maalouf, 1988, p. 198)

We also find another character who recalls past events, and that is the character of **Jamal al-Din**, as shown for example in his statement:

"He continued to turn his memory slightly towards us, opened his notebook and said: I lived in Paris in a dim room, but it overlooked a wider world. It was a hundred times smaller than this house, yet I felt less confined. And I was thousands of kilometers away from my people."
(Maalouf, 1988, p. 219)

The referential characters added deep meanings to the text and charged the reader's mind with useful ideas, making him understand the text through the various hidden signs with which the narrator fills the narrative—such as symbols and indications.

Conclusion:

Through analyzing the characters in *Samarcande*, it becomes clear that Amin Maalouf does not present figures that are read merely as narrative entities, but rather as semiological signs that participate in constructing a wide semantic network that goes beyond the limits of storytelling to the realms of history, thought, and identity. Between the realistic referential characters, the allegorical ones, the functional ones, and the mnemonic ones, a multilayered narrative structure is formed, reflecting the author's vision of the world and of the complex relationship between human beings, time, authority, and knowledge.

Relying on Philippe Hamon's concepts allows this depth to be revealed, as it shows how the characters turn into semantic structures that do not merely define the fictional world but reshape it through a system of signs that call upon the reader and push him to participate in producing meaning. Thus, character analysis becomes a fundamental entry point for understanding the aesthetics of the novel and its interpretive horizon.

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