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# The Aesthetics of Reception and the Horizon of Interpretation in the Novel The Kingdom of the Butterfly by Waciny Laredj.

# جماليات التلقي وأفق التأويل في رواية مملكة الفراشة لواسيني الأعرج

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**Abstract** :

The theory of reception has attracted the attention of contemporary literary criticism, as it aims to connect the text with the recipient, opening up the horizon of interpretation and producing renewed meaning that does not stop at a single reading. This has encouraged contemporary criticism to highlight the role of the reader in relation to the literary text, as an active partner in the production of meaning, in contrast to textual approaches that focus on the closed structure of the text, far removed from external contexts.

Among the literary genres that have embraced reception theory is the novel, as it is a genre open to interpretation through the reader's participation in constructing meaning and producing connotations and interpretations, making reading a productive and renewable process for the literary text.

Based on the above, I will address the aesthetics of reception and the horizon of interpretation in contemporary Algerian novel through an analytical reading of the novel The Kingdom of the Butterfly by Waciny laredj.

**Key Words:** Reception, Interpretation, Novel, Algerian, Contemporary.

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**الملخص:**

استقطبت نظرية التلقي اهتمام النقد الأدبي المعاصر، كونها تهدف إلى ربط النص بالمتلقي، وفتح أفق التأويل وإنتاج المعنى المتجدد الذي لا يقف عند قراءة أحادية، وهذا ما شجع النقد المعاصر في إبراز دور القارئ أمام النص الأدبي، كشريك فعال في إنتاج المعنى، عكس المناهج النصية التي تركز على بنية النص المغلقة، بعيدا عن السياقات الخارجية.

من الأجناس الأدبية التي انفتحت على نظرية التلقي نجد الرواية، كونها جنس أدبي قابل للتأويل، وذلك من خلال مشاركة القارئ في بناء المعني، وإنتاج الدلالات والتأويلات، مما يجعل من القراءة عملية إنتاجية متجددة للنص الأدبي.

تأسيساً على ما سبق، سأتطرق إلى جماليات التلقي وأفق التأويل في الرواية الجزائرية المعاصرة، وذلك من خلال قراءة تحليلية في رواية (مملكة الفراشة) لواسيني الأعرج.

**الكلمات المفتاح:** تلقي، تأويل، رواية، جزائرية، معاصرة.

## 1. Introduction:

Contemporary Algerian novels, with their multiple contexts, are fertile ground for reception and interpretation, as they draw on diverse sources and and different fields of knowledge, giving it a characteristic of interpretive openness and multiple meanings through the dynamic interaction between the reader and the text, which has contributed to broadening the circle of reception and raising the level of contemporary literary discourse.

Working on the aesthetics of reception and interpretation in contemporary literary texts has enriched the literary experience by reconsidering the reader as an active partner in the creative process.

From this perspective, I will address, through study and analysis, the aesthetics of reception and the horizon of

interpretation in the Novel The Kingdom of the Butterfly by Waciny Laredj, by delving into its texts, investigating its structures, and revealing its patterns and implications. My goal is to enrich literary and critical studies related to contemporary Algerian novels.

The research problem The subject of the study revolves around a series of questions, the most important of which are:

1- What is the theory of reception, and what is hermeneutics in the context of contemporary literary criticism?

2- What are the aesthetics of reception and the horizon of interpretation in the Novel The Kingdom of the Butterfly by Waciny Laredj?

This research relies on several approaches, the most important of which are: the descriptive-analytical approach, the interpretive approach, the semiotic approach, and the cultural criticism approach, as they are scientific approaches that help in understanding literary texts through analysis and interpretation.

## 2. Reception Theory from the Perspective of Contemporary Literary Criticism.

It is a literary critical theory that focuses on the aesthetics of reception in literary texts by involving the reader in the production of meanings and connotations, rather than focusing solely on the structure of the text and its internal study. This theory emerged in southern Germany in the late 1960s, specifically at the University of Konstanz, where it focused on the reader and what they expect from the text based on their references and cultural background, in addition to filling in the gaps and blanks to bridge the open gaps in the text, the multiplicity of meanings and interpretations resulting from exceeding the horizon of expectation, and attempting to understand the literary work. "The process of reception is not a purely aesthetic pleasure focused on form, but an existential participatory process based on the dialogue between the recipient and the work. The process of reception opens up a new world for us and expands our horizons and our understanding of ourselves at the same time. We see the world (in a new light) as

if we were seeing it for the first time"[1]. There is no doubt that the principle of participatory interaction between the reader and the text is the basis of reception theory. The aesthetic response to the text stems from the principle that "A literary work has two poles, the artistic pole and the aesthetic pole. The first is the author's text, and the second is the reader's interpretation"[2].The actual literary work is embodied at the midpoint where the structure of the text meets the imagination and interpretations of the recipient.

There is no doubt that understanding the relationship between literature and society is the qualitative shift brought about by reception theory, thereby transcending classical theories. "The answer that reception aesthetics seeks to resolve the question of the social function of literature and the question of social creativity transcends the capabilities of traditional representational aesthetics. Thus, the aesthetics of reception will see that its endeavor to establish a new mediation between literary history and social research will be facilitated by the role played by the concept of the horizon of expectation"[3]. Understanding the social function of literature is not achieved through how literature depicts society, but through the concept of the horizon of expectation.

## 3. The Reception Theory of Hans-Robert Jauss and Wolfgang Iser:

The reception theory was well received by Hans-Robert Jauss and Wolfgang Iser after its inception at the University of Konstanz in Germany. This theory focused on the reader, as "The role of the recipient was no longer a passive, consumerist one in relation to the text, and his response to the text was no longer a spontaneous response that satisfied his aesthetic thirst and satisfied his tendency toward personal reception, which was both intense and individual. Rather, this reader became a participant in the creation of the text, Their response to the text forms the fabric of the critical position as a whole, influencing future texts, because the processes of continuous reception shape the consciousness of both the creator and the reader, and

develop their sense of the deep dimensions of the text, which continue to give infinite meanings that allow for interpretation in a circle in which the text is not closed but is renewed with each reading"[4].The reader has been given a fundamental place in reception theory, becoming a central partner in the production of meaning and significance, in contrast to formalism or structuralism, which focused on the study of the text alone.

Hans Robert Jauss focused on the collective reader, since readers in a given society share a common taste and a common sociological and historical framework. The collective reader is a general act of society toward literature. If a literary work consists of the author, the literary work, and the reader, Jauss considers the third element to be a participating factor, and even considers it to be the center of the energy of the work presented[5].It is clear that Jauss downplayed the individuality of the reader and focused on the collective reader as the common taste of society.

As for Wolfgang Iser, he divided readers into types, the most important of which are: the implied/imaginary reader and the actual reader. The imaginary reader is the one imagined by the author, who creates and includes them in the text, as if the author were drawing up the ideal reading of their literary text. The text is not merely descriptive transitions drawn from the outside world by the creator, but rather internal experiences from their life. The actual reader, on the other hand, is the real reader of the text. "The implied reader is the reader that the text creates for itself, while the actual reader is the one who receives specific mental images during the reading process"[6]. Thus, literary work flourishes between what the text demands through the implied reader and what the actual reader offers in terms of mental images and different meanings based on his culture and personal background.

Meaning arises in Yaus through the interactive relationship between the reader and the text, through matching expectations or exceeding expectations, where matching expectations means that the literary text matches the reader's expectations. whereas exceeding expectations means that the literary text does not

match the reader's expectations, creating an aesthetic distance that results in multiple meanings, by modifying the reader's expectations. "The recipient and the literary text have something in common: life experience. This experience is subjective for the recipient, but it determines the cognitive conditions that they cannot transcend. On the other hand, this experience is objective in the literary work, and the process of understanding is based on a kind of dialogue between the recipient's subjective experience and the objective experience manifested in literature"[7].Literary understanding is embodied through the reader's life experience; the deeper their experiences, the more meanings there are, with multiple levels of understanding.

Iser was also interested in literary meaning, acknowledging that the text contains three fundamental dimensions for achieving meaning. "He found that the text contained dimensions that could not be overlooked in the process of achieving literary meaning. The first dimension was represented by the possibilities contained in the text, the second dimension related to the actions that the text elicited in the process of reception, and the third dimension included the specific structure of literature in accordance with the conditions for achieving its communicative function"[8]. The communicative function is a dynamic interactive process between the reader and the text, which contributes to the realization of literary meaning.

**4. Hermeneutics:**

Critical concepts of interpretation have evolved and diversified, starting with Edmund Husserl and his phenomenological approach, which sees interpretation as the extraction of hidden and concealed meanings in a text, focusing on description through intentionality, a return to the things themselves, and verbal intuition. Martin Heidegger, on the other hand, believes that understanding is the revelation of the hidden, through which meaning is revealed within our historical contexts. For Hans-Georg Gadamer, interpretation is not only a tool for interpreting texts, but also a profound philosophy that is manifested in man's understanding of his world and history.

The process of interpreting and understanding texts and forming a horizon of interpretation takes place through the reader's interaction with the text, through careful reading. This is what hermeneutics calls for, since interpretation goes beyond the literal meaning of the text to the meaning hidden within it, by understanding its parts and wholes, which allows for a horizon of understanding and interpretation. "In order to understand the partial elements in the text, it is first necessary to understand the text in its entirety, and this understanding of the text in its entirety must stem from an understanding of the partial elements that compose it"[9]. This is called the interpretive circle, which is based on three fundamental pillars: understanding the symbols of the text, then interpreting and analyzing them according to a set of contexts related to the text, and finally linking the meaning arrived at to the reality of the contexts of the person performing the interpretation. "The interpretive circle means that the process of understanding the text is not an easy task, but rather a complex and composite process, in which the interpreter starts from any point he wishes, but must be willing to adjust his understanding according to what he discovers as he moves through the details and multiple aspects of the text"[10]. Through the interpretive circle, the reciprocal movement between the text as a whole and its parts is embodied, and between them meaning grows and develops based on constant and continuous dialogue.

As for the contemporary interpretive circle, it transcends the traditional closed circle and replaces it with a spiral movement, as Paul Ricoeur argues, seeing that each cycle of understanding elevates us to a higher level of understanding and perception. This can only be achieved through careful reading, since "Reading is a mental activity practiced by the reader"[11]. It is a cognitive process, not a consumptive one, based on understanding meanings through scrutiny, analysis, and inference. "It is not permissible for the reader to remain a mere recipient subject to the authority of the text, ... like a sponge that absorbs everything that comes its way"[12]. Therefore, the active recipient starts from the actual reading of the text and moves on to the act of interpretation and the production of meaning.

## 5. The Aesthetics of Reception and the Horizon of Interpretation in the Novel The Kingdom of the Butterfly by Waciny Laredj.

In the past, literary criticism focused on the author as the owner of the text, or on the text itself based on its linguistic structures. With the emergence of reception theory, critics became interested in the dynamic interaction between the reader and the text of the novel, which contributes to the aesthetics of reception and the multiplicity of meanings and interpretations.

The novel The Kingdom of the Butterfly by Algerian author Waciny Laredj is an ideal example of the application of reception theory to literary texts, based on a set of structural, artistic, and cultural characteristics that make it a broad space for interpretation and reception.

The Kingdom of the Butterfly was published in 2013 and won the Qatar Prize for Arabic Fiction in Qatar. It is considered one of the most important Algerian novels dealing with the literature of adversity, in a style that blends reality and fiction. The story revolves around the life of an Algerian girl named Yama, who studied pharmacy and loved literature, novels, and music. She lives in a social context marred by turmoil and social and political unrest, which has caused her to sink into virtual isolation on Facebook with her virtual friend, a theater director named Fadi, with whom she experiences psychological alienation in her virtual kingdom.

Among the mechanisms of aesthetic reception and interpretive horizons in Waciny Laredj's novel The Kingdom of the Butterfly, we find the following:

**5.1. Narrative Fragmentation:** This is one of the modern techniques in contemporary novel writing, which breaks the chronological sequence of events and presents the text as fragmented parts, through anticipation and delay, or by creating time gaps, or by manipulating the narrative movements in the text (summary, ellipsis, pause, scene). These techniques disrupt and dismantle the traditional sequence of events, creating space

for interpretation and allowing the reader to participate in reconstructing the events of the story.

An example of this can be found in the novel Kingdom of the Butterfly, in which the protagonist, Yama, talks about her return to the headquarters of the Depot Jazz band, saying: **"Returning to the Depot Jazz band brought me great comfort. It is my home and my memory, even though many of those I loved are no longer with the band today. There were beautiful moments in the jazz Depot" [13].** A few pages later, the heroine recalls how she opened the headquarters of the Depot Jazz band, saying: **"When we broke in, we almost fainted from the smell of mold. The warehouse was completely neglected and full of moisture, but within two weeks it became operational after we all worked together to renovate it.... We reorganized the warehouse and painted it white to let in more light. We opened two large windows in its rough wall overlooking the street and the sea. We named it Depot Jazz, because the word depot means warehouse in French" [14]**. Since flashbacks connect the past of the story to its present, forcing the reader to understand the text by piecing together fragments of the story, "Formalists believe that the episodes of the story are held together by their connection to what precedes and follows them"[15].

Among the fragmented narrative structures that Waciny employs in his novel, we find an overlap of times and places, where Waciny blends historical and contemporary narratives containing a fragmented collection of knowledge and cultures, requiring the reader to piece together this cultural fragmentation in order to understand the author's intent. since "The narrative contains something of the author's intention that is not lost on the reader"[16]. One such example is what the author tells us about the history of the construction of the Atlas cinema in Algeria, formerly known as the Majestic cinema, in a conversation between the young men Basta and Yama: **"Joseph Saibira was passionate and crazy about the seventh art. In record time, he built one of the most beautiful, spacious, modern, and elegant movie theaters in the world, Le Majestic. In the**

**1930s, he realized his long-held dream. He gave the city of Algiers the most beautiful and largest cinema, with a capacity of 4,000 people. To carry out this great project, he needed 1,500 square meters of land in the Bab El Oued neighborhood. He brought in skilled labor from all over the country and Italy. It was the tenth largest cinema in the world. With technology that was strange and unique at the time, it amazed all lovers of the seventh art. The auditorium has no ceiling. The height is completely open to the sky and the scent of the sea, measuring 23 meters by 13 meters. In case of rain and wind, it takes only one minute for the two metal pieces to meet silently and close tightly" [17].**

Through this dialogue, we notice that Waciny conveys historical information about this architectural edifice to the reader, with the aim of documenting historical information and incorporating heritage into his novel, as "There are many factors that led the author to draw inspiration from heritage in the novel. These factors can be divided into artistic, political, social, national, and other factors that have led novelists to draw on heritage, incorporating it into the fabric of their novels either with the intention of reviving this heritage and extolling its glories, or by using it as a means of expressing the present reality"[18]. This demonstrates the strong connection between fiction and history, and the use of cultural heritage in contemporary Arabic fiction provides fertile ground for cultural and historical promotion.

One example of cultural diversity in the novel The Kingdom of the Butterfly is the author's inclusion of the character Cleopatra in a conversation between Yama and her friend Selini. Yama says: **"Do you know where your beautiful name, Selini, comes from?**

**She smiled, her childlike features lighting up:**

**- Of course, Selini was the daughter of Cleopatra, who married our Berber king, Juba II, and founded the kingdom of Mauritania with her" [19].**

Through this dialogue, we see that the use of historical figures in contemporary narrative is an artistic and historical tool, the aim of which is to connect the past with the present.

In the context of narrative fragmentation, the novelist takes us from Cleopatra and her husband Juba II to Suleiman the Magnificent, in a dialogue between In a conversation between Yama's mother , known as Virginia, and her daughter Yama, the heroine of the novel, in which Virginia says: **"Have you seen your great grandfather, Suleiman, master of the new laws? The Lawgiver... this great man, the tenth sultan of the Ottoman Empire, who ruled for the longest period from November 6, 1520 until his death in 1566, succeeding his father, Sultan Salim Khan I. He ruled the East and West with his seal. He was a prominent ruler who led the Ottoman Empire's military, political, and economic power. He conquered strongholds and fortresses in Belgrade, Rhodes, and the Kingdom of Hungary before stopping at the siege of Vienna in 1529. He even reached Algeria, where he established his great fleet, with which he fought the most brutal wars until he controlled the Mediterranean, the Red Sea, and all the sensitive crossings" [20].**

Historical figures have become essential components of contemporary literary narratives, due to knowledge of historical events, where "Contemporary Arabic novels have focused on historical figures in their narration of historical events, and historical figures have varied according to the variety of historical events employed. There are historical figures who represented challenge and confrontation, and the struggle against the forces of injustice and oppression, and there are figures who represented the weak or tyrannical ruler, and there are figures who represented the just ruler"[21]. Readers are no longer merely consumers of historical information about a particular character, but have become active partners in interpreting the literary work by investigating the information and what the novelist presents.

**5.2. Multiple narrative voices:** This technique allows for multiple perspectives in the novel, creating a cognitive dimension through multiple points of view. Since storytelling is a tool in the author's hands, they have the right to divide the roles among a group of narrators. "Multiple narrators often lead to multiple perspectives on a single story"[22]. The primary function of multiple narrative voices in contemporary novels is to present multiple perspectives from characters who are completely independent of the author's authority.

From the text of the novel The Kingdom of the Butterfly, Fadi says to the heroine of the novel, Yama: **"I am a man who has spent his entire life directing and writing plays. My whole world is tragic. This is the path I have chosen..." [23].** Fadi then adds information about his play The Curse of Granada, saying to Yama: **"The Curse of Granada took a lot of effort. You must come. You will like the play very much. It is strongly based on the Spanish Civil War of 1936. Garcia Lorca was a prominent Republican..." [24] .**

What is noticeable in this passage is the independence of Fadi's consciousness and the disappearance of the narrator's voice from the narrative process. It should be noted that Fadi is a fictional character who has been living in Granada for ten years, where Yama has been corresponding with him via Facebook for more than three years. He promised to meet her when he returned home to perform his play, The Curse of Granada.

In another narrative passage, the protagonist Yama tells us about a conversation between two people, which goes as follows: **"I heard a young man say to his girlfriend, who was staring at him with empty, stupid eyes.**

**- Do you know the Blue Danube?**

**- A brand of perfume, ha ha ha?**

**I laughed naively. I laughed with her, avoiding embarrassing her.**

**- I'm not talking about that music. It's not for nothing that Germany is the most important European country. If only Nazism had been a little more merciful, humanity would have changed for the better. But that madman Hitler wanted**

**everything, in a short time and against the whole world. Adults are like that, they don't accept half measures.**
**- Oh my God. Hitler. He's a monster in human form.**
**- Those who stood up to him were no angels. Their hatred was no less than his crimes..."[25].**

This narrative passage highlights the importance of dialogue in expressing different points of view. Many contemporary critics therefore believe that dialogue transforms a text into a philosophical arena of knowledge that expresses multiple perspectives.

**5.3. Symbolism:** Waciny Laredj chose (The Kingdom of the Butterfly) as the title for his novel, to match its narrative content, which delves into the worlds of Algerian literature of suffering. It carries deep and intense symbolic meanings, with the butterfly symbolizing beauty, freedom, and fragility, while the kingdom symbolizes self-power, authority, and domination. **"Sometimes I drown in the wedding of butterflies bathing in the colors of trees, flowers, and air, and I race them in their absolute fragility" [26].** The title is a source of interpretation. It is a symbolic reference, the first threshold of the text, and an important element in shaping its meaning. It is thus a communicative sign that helps to understand the contents of the text, as an integrated semiotic system whose primary goal is to entice the reader and draw them into the narrative game before they begin reading.

Another symbolism appears in the novel, an indirect one, whose purpose is to convey a coded message to the reader to express certain political and social views. The novelist symbolizes authority with the devil (Mephistopheles), whom he borrowed from the play Faust by the German writer Goethe. Fadi was tempted by power to return to his homeland to trap him, just as happened to Faust with the devil (Mephistopheles), says Maya, in a conversation with the Chinese lady who owns the bookshop, after she killed a cockroach with her shoe:

**"-Nothing. I killed Faust. The real Faust who sold himself to the devil.**

**I don't know why I answered her that way. The Chinese lady laughed.**
**- You mean Mephistopheles, he deserves it because he is the reason for the whole game" [27].**

We can infer from this passage that the novelist used symbolism as a literary cover to convey criticism of the authorities, through the intertextuality of Fadi's character with Faust. "Intertextuality, in its simplest form, means that a literary text includes other texts or ideas that preceded it through quotation, inclusion, allusion, reference, or similar cultural references familiar to the writer, so that these texts or ideas merge with the original text and blend into it to form a new, integrated text"[28].

### 5.4. Transcending the Horizon of Expectation and Opening up the Horizon of Interpretation:

Transcending expectations occurs when the text defies the reader's expectations, creating an aesthetic space open to multiple interpretations and new meanings, depending on the reader's expectations and cultural and intellectual background. An example of a text that transcends the reader's expectations can be found in the novel The Kingdom of the Butterfly, which reads: "**We call the place where the jazz band rehearses the Depot... Before Daoud died, I named him Dave, who played the harmonica and electric guitar under mysterious circumstances. To this day, his friends still put his guitar and red gauz of the Touareg in their usual place, as if he were still with them" [29] .**

This narrative passage opens up interpretations for the reader, the most important of which is why Dave (From the Touareg) was killed and the circumstances surrounding his assassination, despite his simplicity and lack of involvement in any problems, as he was an ordinary person, a harmonica and electric guitar player. The horizon of interpretation is shaped by the reader, their cultural and intellectual references, as well as their psyche and environment. All these factors open up the horizon of interpretation for the reader and help them generate new

meanings by liberating the text from the author's intention and giving it to the reader to reshape the text based on their own awareness and logic.

Another open interpretation in the novel The Kingdom of the Butterfly is that the protagonist, Yama, wonders about the absence of the character Faust, who is Fadi himself, from his homeland for a long time, and why he returned to present his play The Curse of Granada, and what are its contents and events?, and Who persuaded him to return to his homeland?. All these questions are sufficient to capture the reader's attention and open up a horizon of interpretation, as Yama says: **"I felt a strange futility in the world. Why was Faust absent from his homeland for ten years? Here he is, finally returning to his homeland to present his play The Curse of Granada and sign his book for those who want to learn about the play in writing" [30].**

From this passage, we conclude that the reader's questioning and surprise play a fundamental role in creating aesthetic distance. Hans Robert Jauss therefore believes that the artistic value of a text lies in the aesthetic distance it creates, which transcends the reader's horizon. Wolfgang Iser, on the other hand, believes that textual gaps are spaces left blank by the writer, silent spaces that encourage the reader to fill in these textual gaps/blank spaces through multiple interpretations.

## 6. Conclusion:

Through my study of the aesthetics of reception and the horizon of interpretation in the Novel The Kingdom of the Butterfly by Waciny Laredj. I conclude my research with a summary of the results I have reached, as follows:

- Reception theory is a contemporary critical approach that focuses on the reader and the text, since a literary work is only complete through the genuine interaction between the text and the recipient, which creates interpretation and produces meaning and significance.
- Hans Robert Jauss and Wolfgang Iser were interested in reception theory because it focuses on the reader. Hans Robert

Jauss focused on the collective reader, as readers in a given society share a common taste. Wolfgang Iser, on the other hand, focused on the implied reader, whom the author includes in the text, in addition to the actual reader and the different mental images and meanings they produce during the reading process.
- Hermeneutics is concerned with the process of interpreting and understanding texts through the hermeneutic circle, through which the reciprocal movement between the whole and the parts of the text is embodied, and between them meaning grows and develops, based on constant and continuous dialogue.
- Aesthetic distance is one of the most important elements of the aesthetics of reception in a text. Hans Robert Jauss believes that the artistic value of a text lies in the aesthetic distance it creates, which transcends the reader's horizon.
- Textual gaps are among the most important elements of the aesthetics of reception associated with aesthetic distance. Wolfgang Iser sees them as gaps that are not explicitly stated by the author, through which the reader is encouraged to fill these textual gaps through multiple interpretations.
- From a contemporary critical perspective, titles are a source of interpretation, as they are symbolic references and the first threshold of the text, as well as an important element in shaping meaning. They are therefore a sign of communication and a semantic condensation that helps the reader understand the content of the text.
- Through his novel The Kingdom of the Butterfly, Waciny Laredj has succeeded in transforming the act of reading into an act of interpretation, using a set of aesthetic reception mechanisms that have made his text a broad space for meanings, connotations, and multiple interpretations.

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