

The Employment of the Mythic Symbol between the Inevitability of Fate and the Absurdity of Confrontation: The Sisyphean Correlative in Saher Al-Saher's Novel Iseel

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Abstract ;

This article examines the deployment of the mythic symbol in the novel Iseel by the Libyan novelist Saher Al-Saher, proceeding from the premise that the narrative constructs an implicit Sisyphean correlative through which the tragedy of contemporary Arab humanity is represented, suspended between the inevitability of fate and the absurdity of confrontation. The study aims to uncover the mythical structure embedded within the text and to analyze the transformation of the protagonist Saher's struggle with his past and homeland into a Sisyphean rock that he relentlessly carries through an endless and seemingly futile effort, journeying from Sana'a to Baraqish, then Al-Ukhdoon, and ultimately Istanbul, without attaining a form of salvation capable of freeing him from the persistent domination of fate and memory. The research adopts the mythical approach, complemented by thematic analysis, to investigate the Sisyphean correlative and its interconnected symbolic configurations: "Al-Sayyab's Sun" as a symbolic manifestation of the cruelty and inevitability of fate, the character of "Al-A'raj" as a representation of the oppressed and defeated human condition reconciled with the burden of his own rock, and "Iseel" as a symbol of the alternative homeland and the potentiality of salvation. The study concludes that the novel, through the dialectical relationship between fate and absurdity, formulates a vision that transcends nihilistic resignation by transforming love and writing into acts of resistance that restore meaning to seemingly absurd struggles, thereby presenting its Sisyphean figure as a symbol of defiance rather than submission.

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Introduction

The incorporation of myth into contemporary Arabic narrative has moved beyond its conventional function as a form of cultural embellishment or intellectual ornamentation; rather, it has become a profound aesthetic and expressive strategy adopted by writers when ordinary language proves insufficient to convey the complexity and magnitude of human experience. Through the symbolic depth and collective resonance it carries, myth provides the creative writer with a means of expressing dimensions that resist direct articulation and of situating individual suffering within a universal framework that transcends the boundaries of time and space. Within this theoretical perspective, Saher Al-Saher's novel *Iseel* emerges as a narrative text structured around an implicit mythical foundation, transforming the journey of a protagonist escaping civil war into a symbolic representation of the tragedy of contemporary Arab humanity, caught between the inevitability of a fate that relentlessly subjugates him and the futility of a confrontation that appears incapable of producing a definitive resolution.

The significance of this study derives from its engagement with a contemporary narrative work that has not yet received adequate critical examination, while focusing on a specific artistic mechanism: the construction of the "Sisyphean correlative." This concept denotes the implicit parallel established between the protagonist's existential condition and the mythical punishment of Sisyphus, whose endless attempt to push a rock toward an unreachable summit embodies the

perpetual cycle of struggle and frustration. Accordingly, the central research problem is formulated through the following questions: How does Saher Al-Saher employ the mythic symbol to represent the dialectic of fate and absurdity? Does the protagonist ultimately succumb to the inevitability of the rolling rock, or does the narrative transform this very absurd struggle into an act of rebellion capable of restoring meaning to existence? Moreover, what accompanying symbolic systems contribute to reinforcing this correlative and enriching its interpretive dimensions? The research seeks to reveal the mythical structure that shapes the novel, examine the functioning of the Sisyphean correlative throughout the protagonist's trajectory, and explore the symbolic systems associated with it. Given the nature of the subject, the study adopts the mythical approach as an interpretive framework that traces images and characters to their mythical origins while examining their symbolic functions, supported by thematic analysis that investigates the central recurring themes within the narrative, including fate, absurdity, and exile. The spatial framework of the novel unfolds across a fragmented Arab landscape extending from Sana'a and its historical villages to Najran, Beirut, and Istanbul. Its temporal framework corresponds to the post-Arab Spring period and the subsequent experiences of civil conflict and state collapse, a historical moment encapsulated by the foundational cry of "Leave" that marks the beginning of the narrative.

Accordingly, the research is structured into three sections: the first establishes the conceptual framework of the mythic symbol and the tragedy of Sisyphus

through Camus's interpretation; the second investigates the Sisyphean correlative within the corpus of *Iseel* through the triadic relationship between the rock, absurd effort, and the overwhelming force of fate; and the third examines the parallel symbolic systems represented by Al-Sayyab's sun, Al-A'raj, and *Iseel*.

It should be noted that this corpus forms part of a contemporary Arabic narrative movement concerned with representing and documenting the tragedy of collapse that emerged in the aftermath of revolutionary upheavals. In this context, *Iseel* provides an artistic testimony to the fragmentation of Arab humanity between homelands that reject and displace them and exiles that fail to offer genuine refuge. Nevertheless, the novel does not confine itself to the function of direct historical documentation; rather, it transcends the particularity of its experience by elevating it to the level of symbolic representation through an intensive mythical framework that transforms the story of a displaced Yemeni protagonist into a reflection of a universal human tragedy. Hence, the significance of approaching the novel from a mythical perspective becomes evident, as this approach uncovers the profound structural layer underlying the narrative surface and reveals how the writer mobilizes the mythical reservoir to transform a temporary historical reality into an enduring symbolic meaning.

Although the employment of the myth of Sisyphus in modern Arabic poetry has attracted considerable critical attention, particularly in studies examining the works of Eastern Arab poets, the manifestation of this myth in contemporary narrative fiction has not received an equivalent degree of

critical investigation, especially when its presence operates implicitly rather than through an explicit reference to Sisyphus, by incorporating and reconfiguring its underlying structure. Accordingly, the originality of this research lies in its examination of a novel that has not previously been subjected to critical study and in its exploration of the Sisyphean correlative as a profound structural mechanism governing the narrative without appearing directly at the textual surface. Through this approach, the study contributes to the field of myth criticism in Arabic literature by proposing a broader understanding of the function of myth in narrative fiction, rather than restricting its analysis to poetic discourse.

From this perspective, the research addresses a dual critical gap: the first relates to an unexplored literary corpus, while the second concerns an analytical mechanism that has not yet been sufficiently examined within its narrative framework.

2. Conceptual Foundation: The Mythic Symbol and the Tragedy of Sisyphus

2.1. From Myth to Narrative Device

In its original form, myth is founded upon a sacred narrative that seeks to interpret the universe and the conditions of existence while preserving the collective experiences of early communities in their attempts to confront fundamental existential questions. However, literary modernity has reappropriated this inherited symbolic reservoir through an aesthetic process that transforms myth from a system of belief into an artistic mechanism through which meaning is produced and reconstructed. This transformation represents one of the

most significant characteristics of modern Arabic poetry, as poets discovered in myth a means of moving beyond direct expression and rhetorical conventionality, while employing it as an objective correlative that enables individual experiences to acquire a universal human dimension (Abbas, 1978). The Arabic novel subsequently adopted this same mechanism by invoking myths and cultural heritage symbols to enrich its semantic structures, deepen its interpretive possibilities, and provide its fictional worlds with a symbolic density that extends beyond the immediate surface of narrative events.

This employment is closely connected to the concept of the mask, a technique through which the writer distances himself from direct self-representation by adopting the voice of a mythical or historical figure and projecting his own concerns and experiences through that figure. The mask consequently functions as an objective correlative that provides personal experience with artistic objectivity, liberating it from the limitations of immediate self-expression (Daoud, 1975). From this perspective, the mythic symbol in the modern text emerges as a dual-layered structure: its apparent level is constituted by the invocation of the mythical past, while its deeper dimension articulates a contemporary crisis experienced by modern humanity. This is precisely the mode of mythical employment manifested in the novel *Iseel*, where myth does not operate as an explicit narrative subject, but rather as an underlying structural framework that shapes the protagonist's existential

experience and grants it a universal significance.

However, the use of myth in the modern text does not represent a simple reproduction or literal transmission of its ancient narrative content; rather, it involves a process of creative reconfiguration through which myth is reshaped according to the demands of contemporary experience. The writer selects its essential symbolic components and reconstructs them in accordance with his artistic vision, preserving their fundamental significance while excluding elements that no longer correspond to the new contextual framework. In this regard, myth becomes a second language through which the text communicates, a language founded upon suggestion, symbolism, and condensation, enabling the novelist to articulate the tragedy of his homeland through expressive possibilities that exceed the limitations of direct and referential discourse. Therefore, approaching *Iseel* from a mythical perspective requires, first and foremost, identifying the foundational myth that structures its deep symbolic architecture, namely the myth of Sisyphus as reinterpreted through Camus's philosophical vision.

This mythical operation is also associated with Eliot's concept of the objective correlative, which refers to the representation of emotion through an external image, situation, or chain of events that serves as an equivalent expression of that emotion, whereby the presentation of these concrete elements generates the intended emotional response. This concept provides a central methodological framework for interpreting *Iseel*, as the

novel does not directly state the tragedy of its protagonist; instead, it constructs this tragedy through an objective correlative embodied in the image of the rolling rock and the spatial and mythical configurations connected to it. Consequently, the protagonist's entire journey becomes a concrete equivalent of a deeper existential condition: the experience of futile struggle, the absurdity of effort, and the overwhelming inevitability of fate. In this manner, the concept of the objective correlative intersects with the technique of the mask and the mythical approach, forming an integrated theoretical framework that corresponds to the structural and symbolic characteristics of the text.

2.2. The Camusian Approach to the Sisyphean Absurd

The myth of Sisyphus, within its Greek formulation, is founded upon a divine punishment inflicted upon a figure who challenged the established order of the gods. He was condemned to push an enormous rock toward the summit of a mountain, only to witness it roll back down upon reaching the peak, compelling him to repeat the same futile task endlessly throughout eternity. This myth would have remained confined to its original mythological context had Albert Camus not reinterpreted it and transformed it into a philosophical representation of the tragedy of modern humanity. Camus regarded Sisyphus's punishment as a concentrated metaphor for the human condition itself, in which individuals persistently exert effort within a world that remains indifferent to their pursuit of meaning. From the tension between

humanity's desire for significance and the silence of the universe emerges what Camus identified as the concept of the absurd (Camus, 1942).

Nevertheless, absurdity in Camus's philosophy does not constitute an invitation to despair or self-destruction; rather, it represents the point of departure for a new form of heroic consciousness. Recognition of the absurdity of human effort does not inevitably result in surrender; instead, it can become a form of silent defiance through which individuals affirm their dignity and existence. For this reason, Camus concludes his reflection with his renowned proposition that one must imagine Sisyphus happy, as Sisyphus's awareness of the futility of his task, combined with his continued determination to push his rock despite its inevitable return, embodies the very act of rebellion that allows him to transcend his fate and become stronger than the burden imposed upon him (Camus, 1942). Thus, the essence of Sisyphean heroism does not reside in the achievement of the summit, but in the persistence of struggle despite the impossibility of final accomplishment.

In light of this theoretical perspective, the Sisyphean correlative can be understood as a structure composed of two inseparable dimensions: the first reflects the inevitability of fate and the futility of human effort, while the second opens a horizon of resistance, rebellion, and the potential production of meaning. This fundamental duality governs the narrative architecture of the novel *Iseel*, as the text does not merely portray a protagonist burdened by the weight of his past and engaged in an apparently futile struggle;

rather, it simultaneously raises the central question of salvation: does the protagonist ultimately surrender to the relentless power of the rock, or does he discover in love and writing a means through which rebellion can be transformed into a meaningful existential act? Although this conceptual framework has established the principal features of the Sisyphean correlative, its actual operation within the narrative necessitates a transition toward a close textual analysis of the novel itself.

Nevertheless, a thorough understanding of the Camusian perspective requires a distinction between three possible responses generated by human awareness of absurdity. Once individuals recognize that the world remains silent in response to their search for meaning, they may adopt physical suicide as an attempt to escape the experience of futility, philosophical suicide through a leap toward an artificial certainty that suppresses the tension of absurdity, or rebellion, which accepts the absurd condition while maintaining a conscious and continuous confrontation with it without surrender or avoidance.

Camus embraces the third possibility, transforming rebellion into an existential principle through which human beings preserve their dignity despite the absence of absolute meaning. This tripartite distinction provides a crucial interpretive framework for approaching *Iseel*, as the protagonist oscillates between the impulse toward surrender and the desire for escape before eventually reaching a form of rebellion embodied in his attachment to love and writing. Therefore, the novel does not merely reproduce absurdity in its nihilistic dimension; rather, it investigates

the possibility of transcending absurdity through rebellion, thereby aligning itself with the affirmative dimension of Camusian philosophy rather than with a vision based on complete nihilistic resignation.

When integrated with this philosophical perspective, the mythical approach enables a reading of the text that moves beyond the immediate description of events toward the exploration of its deeper symbolic structures. Within this framework, myth does not function as a narrative element that is simply reproduced or recalled; instead, it operates as a generative structure through which consciousness, meaning, and interpretation are constructed. Similarly, the Sisyphean correlative does not emerge as a marginal or isolated image, but rather as a comprehensive semantic system that directs the movement of the narrative from its beginning to its conclusion.

Accordingly, the analytical section examines this system through three interconnected dimensions: the dimension of the rock as a symbolic equivalent of the past and homeland; the dimension of absurd effort as a representation of movement, displacement, and escape; and the dimension of the dominance of fate as an expression of the inevitability of returning to the original point of departure. Through the analysis of these three dimensions, it becomes possible to demonstrate how the individual experience of a single protagonist is transformed into a Sisyphean symbol that embodies the collective tragedy of an entire generation shaped by exile, displacement, and oppression.

2.3. The Collective Unconscious and Archetypes: The Jungian Depth of the Symbol

The conceptual foundation of the mythical approach remains incomplete without taking into consideration the profound psychological dimension introduced by Carl Gustav Jung. Jung linked myth to what he identified as the collective unconscious, a shared psychic structure that preserves humanity's earliest experiences through archetypes or primordial patterns that recur across myths, dreams, and artistic expressions throughout history (Jung, 1968). From this perspective, the significance of the mythic symbol within a literary work does not arise solely from its immediate or explicit meaning; rather, its power derives from its ability to activate this deeper collective dimension, generating within the recipient a response that transcends the boundaries of individual experience and reaches toward a wider field of shared human consciousness.

In light of this conception, the Sisyphean structure in *Iseel* acquires its profound symbolic significance. The rock of Sisyphus is not merely an image appropriated from Greek mythology; rather, it functions as an archetypal representation of the universal human burden, extending beyond the particularity of the Yemeni experience to become an equivalent of every human struggle confronted with the inexorable force of fate. In this sense, what the text activates within the reader's consciousness is not simply empathy toward the suffering of an individual protagonist, but rather the evocation of a primordial pattern rooted in

the collective unconscious: the pattern of a being condemned to perpetual effort and endless struggle. This dimension explains the symbolic intensity of the protagonist's journey, as it transcends the boundaries of individual experience and is transformed into a representation of a broader and more comprehensive human tragedy.

The Jungian perspective further facilitates an interpretation of the novel's parallel symbolic structures as manifestations of distinct archetypal patterns. The character of Al-A'raj assumes the role of the shadow, representing the repressed dimension of the self that embodies what the protagonist refuses to recognize within his own consciousness: the possibility of accepting and reconciling with suffering. Therefore, Saher's encounter with Al-A'raj becomes, at a deeper psychological level, a confrontation with his own shadow and with the suppressed aspects of his own existence.

As for Iseel, she performs the function of the anima, the symbolic representation of the ideal feminine image residing within the unconscious, where the meanings of homeland, salvation, and existential completion converge. Through this archetypal distribution among the novel's characters, it becomes apparent that the text does not merely invoke an isolated mythical reference; rather, it constructs an integrated mythical universe in which psychological, symbolic, and philosophical dimensions of meaning interact. The following applied analysis undertakes the task of uncovering the mechanisms and manifestations of this complex structure.

3. The Sisyphean Correlative in the Corpus of *Iseel*

3.1. The Rock: The Past and Homeland as a Burden

From its opening, the novel is framed by a foundational political cry: the cry of "Leave," a phrase repeatedly articulated by Arab masses during the period of revolutionary uprisings. The text appropriates this collective expression and significantly reverses its semantic direction, as the protagonist gradually discovers that he himself, rather than the ruler, has become the true recipient of this command. Thus, the revolutionary becomes the expelled, and the one who demanded departure becomes the one forced into exile:

"Seven years ago, the revolutionary and bewildered masses from the ocean to the Gulf had persistently filled their chests with the cry: Leave, leave... I never imagined that I was the one meant by the word 'leave.'" (Al-Safer, 2025, p. 14)

This semantic inversion reveals the fundamental nature of the tragedy constructed within the text. The revolution initially articulated as a promise of liberation is transformed into a destructive mechanism that overwhelms everyone, including those who believed themselves to be aligned with justice and change. Consequently, the homeland itself becomes a space governed by absurdity, a place where lives are devastated regardless of the legitimacy of their positions or intentions. Through this narrative reversal, the text situates the individual tragedy within a broader collective framework; Safer's suffering is not presented as an exceptional

case, but rather as a reflection of a wider condition in which the aspirations of transformation have been converted into new forms of exclusion and oppression. From this fundamental reversal emerges the first manifestation of the Sisyphean rock: the homeland that has ceased to function as a source of belonging and protection and has instead become an unbearable burden.

The novel is constructed upon a profound awareness of the oppressive weight of the past and homeland, a weight that is transformed, within the symbolic structure of the text, into a Sisyphean rock carried by the protagonist regardless of the geographical spaces he traverses. This transformation becomes particularly evident in Safer's description of the destruction of his house, where the ruins are not perceived merely as physical remnants of a demolished structure, but rather as fragments of his personal history, aspirations, and lost dreams:

"How painful that moment was when I saw the bulldozers crushing, tearing apart, and carrying away the rubble taken from the years of my life and from the bricks of my dreams. They devoured them greedily and threw them into the truck of a man who had become accustomed to earning his living from the ruins of human dreams. The ruins of my house." (Al-Safer, 2025, p. 19)

This passage reveals the foundational symbolic equation governing the text. The demolished house is not simply a lost physical space; rather, it represents a repository of memory that has been transformed into an existential burden

imposed upon the protagonist, in the same manner that the rock constitutes an unbearable weight for Sisyphus. When Saher decides to sell his land along with its ruins, he explicitly expresses his desire to liberate himself from this burden, declaring his determination to “shake off all this weight from his shoulders” and to sell the land with its rubble to the first broker who appears (Al-Saher, 2025, p. 20). However, this attempted act of liberation paradoxically initiates another cycle of absurdity, as he barely escapes from one manifestation of destruction before encountering another. The rock that he believes he has abandoned inevitably returns in a different form, reaffirming the persistence of the Sisyphean condition.

The symbolic dimension of the rock becomes further intensified when it is associated with a form of ironic and sarcastic fate. The first individual who offers to purchase the land is a religious merchant, whom Saher portrays through a satirical description that exposes the contradiction between outward appearance and concealed exploitation:

“And the irony of fate was that the first broker who came forward to buy was a dignified sheikh with a radiant face, with a generously grown beard... He belonged to a group associated with religious devotion, only for him to discover after completing the transaction that our master had deducted thirty percent of the land’s actual value.” (Al-Saher, 2025, p. 21)

This bitter irony reveals the dimension of fate embedded in the transformation of the rock. The protagonist cannot attempt to release himself from his burden without

becoming entangled in another form of predetermined oppression, as he sells his land to someone who deprives him of a significant portion of its value while concealing exploitation beneath the appearance of religious legitimacy and moral respectability. Thus, the act of escaping from the rock does not lead to genuine liberation; instead, it represents a transition from one form of suffering to another, where the material loss is transformed into an even heavier symbolic burden.

The rock in *Iseel* therefore does not function as a temporary obstacle or isolated event; rather, it constitutes an existential structure inseparable from the protagonist’s condition. Whenever he believes that he has approached the summit of salvation, the rock inevitably rolls back, returning him once again to the point of departure. Moreover, the description of fate as sarcastic reflects the protagonist’s awareness of the presence of an absurd force shaping and manipulating his destiny, an awareness that distinguishes the Sisyphean condition from passive submission and transforms suffering into a conscious existential confrontation.

However, the homeland itself emerges within the protagonist’s consciousness as a doubled form of the rock. It does not only expel him from its space; it simultaneously remains attached to him and obstructs his ability to fully depart. Saher describes this relationship through the image of the homeland becoming a sticky substance that clings to him: whenever he succeeds in freeing one foot, the other becomes trapped within it. This metaphor embodies the Sisyphean predicament in its most visible

form. The protagonist is therefore confronted with a double burden: the rock of a past that continues to weigh upon his memory and the rock of a homeland that refuses to release its emotional and existential hold over him. Both forces continuously pull him downward whenever he attempts to move toward liberation. From this painful attachment emerges the second manifestation of absurd effort: the endless attempt to escape.

The representation of the homeland as a rock reaches its highest symbolic intensity when the text transforms it into a feminine figure whose meaning fluctuates according to the perceptions of its own inhabitants. After experiencing all forms of suffering, the protagonist concludes that the homeland is a woman: some of its children perceive it as a mother, while others perceive it as a prostitute, and their relationship with it is determined according to these conflicting perceptions. This feminization does not function merely as a rhetorical device; rather, it constitutes a central symbolic mechanism that connects the initial representation of the homeland with the later symbol of Iseel at the conclusion of the novel. The text thus establishes a contrast between two feminine figures: the first is the homeland transformed into a rock and a consuming entity that extracts from its children rather than protecting them, while the second is the alternative homeland represented by Iseel, which embodies the possibility of salvation. Through this early symbolic opposition, the novel establishes its deeper structural foundation, organized around the fundamental duality between rock and salvation, fate and rebellion.

The representation of the homeland as a rock cannot be detached from the existential dimension that dominates the entire narrative structure. The protagonist does not encounter the homeland merely as a geographical territory or a physical space of belonging; rather, he experiences it as an inseparable destiny that continues to shape and burden his existence. Consequently, at a moment of profound awareness, he announces that he can no longer find within the homeland anything that justifies his attachment to it, addressing it directly and questioning what remains for it to offer him:

“So, what are you tempting me with, you whom they call a homeland? Do you entice me with the soil burned by the sun of Al-Sayyab?... What need do I have for you, and what need do you have for me? Keep those who remain among your tortured ones; I am leaving.”
(Al-Saher, 2025, p. 30)

This speech represents the decisive moment of rupture with the first manifestation of the rock. The protagonist declares that the homeland no longer contains any source of attraction except the soil scorched by Al-Sayyab's sun, a symbolic image that reduces it to nothing more than the rock and the sun: the weight of fate and its destructive severity. However, this declaration of departure simultaneously reveals the illusion of salvation that governs the subsequent stages of the narrative. The protagonist assumes that abandoning the homeland will enable him to abandon the rock itself, whereas the reality proves otherwise: departure marks not the end of the burden, but the beginning of carrying it into a new

space of exile. The rock is not confined to the geographical homeland; rather, it resides within memory, identity, and consciousness. It is precisely this illusion of escape that generates the second form of absurd effort: the endless attempt to flee.

3.2. The Absurd Effort: Movement and Escape

If the rock symbolizes the burden of the homeland and the past, then the protagonist's continuous movement constitutes the Sisyphean act of pushing through which he expends his strength without ever reaching liberation. From the opening scene, Saher flees Sana'a hidden inside the trunk of a smuggling vehicle while expressing a philosophy that encapsulates the novel's absurd vision:

"Is this oil nothing but the remains of my ancestors' bones? Through it we live, for its sake we die, and because of it we are killed. It is the pleasure of misery and the absurdity of life. Do not stop and do not look back." (Al-Saher, 2025, p. 2)

The phrase "the pleasure of misery and the absurdity of life" condenses the Camusian vision of existence. Although the protagonist fully recognizes the futility of his struggle, he continues moving forward because stopping would signify annihilation. Movement therefore becomes not merely physical displacement but an existential affirmation of life in the face of absurdity.

This perspective is reinforced when Saher distinguishes between death and meaningless death:

"I do not fear death, but I fear dying without a reason or dying without a

purpose. I was not created in this world in vain, nor do I wish to leave it in a meaningless way." (Al-Saher, 2025, p. 18)

His journey is thus motivated not by the illusion of escaping mortality but by the search for meaning within an absurd world. Like Camus's Sisyphus, he rejects neither struggle nor effort, but only effort emptied of significance.

The protagonist's movement unfolds through a succession of symbolic spaces, each reproducing the Sisyphean cycle. His escape from Sana'a to Baraqish fails to provide refuge, as the village itself evokes the proverb "Baraqish brought it upon herself," prompting him to ask:

"And here is Baraqish returning from history to participate in the great national war against me. Did I bring this upon myself, or will Baraqish bring it upon me? Oh, the turns of fate." (Al-Saher, 2025, p. 14)

The geographical location consequently becomes a symbolic reminder that escape itself may generate further tragedy rather than salvation.

This pattern continues through the protagonist's repeated symbolic burials. Hidden first inside the smuggling vehicle and later trapped for two hours at the bottom of an abandoned well, he observes:

"For two complete hours, I was buried for the second time on the same day, but this time at the bottom of a well, not inside a car trunk." (Al-Saher, 2025, p. 18)

Rather than moving toward safety, he passes from one symbolic grave to another, revealing that escape itself functions as a

form of suspended death. The subsequent passage through Najran and Al-Ukhlood further enlarges this symbolism. By invoking the Qur'anic narrative of the People of the Ditch, the novel transforms the landscape into a universal symbol of persecution, connecting the protagonist's suffering with the accumulated memory of historical injustice.

The cumulative effect of these experiences becomes apparent when the protagonist reflects upon his fragmented identity after arriving in Beirut:

“Oh, the turns of fate. Am I the same person who was buried weeks ago in the well of Baraqish? Am I the very same one who was lying terrified in the ditch of Najran?” (Al-Saher, 2025, p. 42)

This question reveals that repeated displacement has fractured his sense of self. Each destination merely reproduces the suffering of the previous one, transforming geographical movement into an endless existential cycle.

The absurdity of this movement is reinforced through the figure of the smuggler-guide Al-Shanfara, whose name recalls the pre-Islamic outlaw poet associated with exile, rebellion, and marginality. His guidance through mountains and hidden routes transforms the landscape into a symbolic labyrinth where ascent inevitably leads to another descent. By invoking Al-Shanfara, the novel links the protagonist's displacement with a much older tradition of rebellion preserved within Arab cultural memory, suggesting that exile constitutes a recurring human condition rather than an isolated modern experience.

The novel also exposes the economic dimension of absurdity. At every stage of the journey, survival becomes a commodity purchased from smugglers, guides, and intermediaries, revealing a world in which hope itself is commercialized and human desperation becomes a source of profit. Consequently, the protagonist carries not only the spiritual burden of the rock but also its material cost.

Finally, the novel extends absurdity beyond physical displacement by portraying oppression itself as an irrational system. During Saher's detention in Sana'a, an interrogator accuses him solely on the basis of a scar, projecting his own guilt onto his victim. Through this episode, the text reveals a world in which justice has been inverted: the oppressor becomes the judge, the victim becomes the accused, and fate itself assumes the form of an imposed political and social order rather than an individual destiny.

Accordingly, the protagonist's movement from Sana'a to Baraqish, Najran, and Beirut never produces genuine liberation. Each ascent is followed by another descent, and every destination reconstructs the burden in a different form. The novel therefore presents absurd effort as a closed Sisyphean cycle, suggesting that liberation cannot be achieved through escape from the rock itself but only through transforming one's relationship with it.

3.3. The Dominance of Fate and the Inability to Break Free

The Sisyphean correlative reaches its fullest manifestation when fate emerges as the force that repeatedly redirects every attempt at liberation back to its point of

departure. In *Iseel*, fate is not an abstract concept but an active presence that governs the protagonist's existence through the smallest details of his life. Even his own name is presented as a choice determined by fate rather than by his parents, as all possible names fail to capture his essence until fate selects one according to its own will (Al-Saher, 2025, p. 3). This fatalistic beginning prepares the reader to perceive the protagonist's journey as an unavoidable destiny that closely resembles the inevitability of the Sisyphean punishment.

The failure of liberation becomes evident when the protagonist's arrival in Istanbul—the presumed destination of escape—does not free him from the burden of the past. Instead, memories continue to pursue him, reconstructing Sana'a within the new city and transforming his emotional relationships into further sources of disappointment. The protagonist thus realizes that the rock he carries exists not outside himself but within his own consciousness, as memory becomes the deepest form of the Sisyphean burden, one that can neither be abandoned nor transferred to another.

The novel further reinforces this Sisyphean condition by portraying every achievement as the beginning of another downfall. This logic is encapsulated in the following image:

“When you fall, life does not provide you with a pillow of ostrich feathers to stand between your head and the asphalt. Rather, the fall is accompanied by the ceiling of a building collapsing upon you, crushing whatever remains of you that has already been broken.” (Al-Saher, 2025, p. 98)

Rather than merely returning the protagonist to his starting point, each fall intensifies his suffering, making every attempt at rising more devastating than the previous one. Like Sisyphus, he is compelled to resume the ascent after each collapse, yet his repeated determination to rise transforms perseverance itself into a silent rebellion against a world governed by crushing inevitability.

The Sisyphean structure also extends to the novel's treatment of time. Disasters recur within the same temporal framework, turning the month of June into a recurring destiny that repeatedly claims those closest to the protagonist: his mother dies, his aunt's husband is killed, his cousin disappears, and his family home is destroyed during the same month. Time therefore loses its linear progression and assumes a circular form, imprisoning the protagonist within an endless repetition of catastrophe. His movement across different spaces cannot free him from this cyclical temporality, just as Sisyphus can never escape the recurring descent of the rock.

This temporal imprisonment is accompanied by the image of the protagonist as an eternal waiting figure, suspended between unfinished action and endless expectation. Echoing the theatre of the absurd, the novel portrays existence as prolonged anticipation of a salvation that never arrives. Nevertheless, the protagonist refuses surrender, reminding himself to remain patient because this is not the first time he has drawn his dreams upon water (Al-Saher, 2025, p. 108). In this persistence despite the certainty of disappointment lies the essence of Sisyphean heroism in Camus's sense: victory resides not in

reaching the summit but in refusing to abandon the climb.

The novel ultimately condenses this absurd circularity into the symbolic image of two battling rams:

“I saw two rams from the rocky mountain goats butting heads... They charged toward each other until, at the moment of collision, they clashed and fragments of their horns scattered. Then they returned to repeat the same act again and again until one of them became exhausted and withdrew. The victor then won the female, only for another with stronger horns to take this temporary pleasure away from him in a later battle.” (Al-Saher, 2025, p. 135)

This scene functions as a visual equivalent of the Sisyphean condition. The repeated confrontation produces no lasting resolution, while every apparent victory remains temporary and destined to be overturned. By projecting this image onto his own struggle, the protagonist recognizes that he too is trapped within an endless cycle of conflict and transient triumphs. Consequently, the novel presents circularity as the governing principle of its fictional universe, encompassing human existence, love, war, memory, and fate alike, and completing the Sisyphean correlative that structures the narrative from beginning to end.

4. Parallel Symbolic Systems

4.1. Al-Sayyab's Sun: The Equivalent of the Cruelty of Fate

The text employs a dominant symbolic system embodied in “Al-Sayyab's sun,” an intertextual reference that evokes the Iraqi poet Badr Shakir Al-Sayyab and his poetic

universe, transforming the image of the sun into a symbolic equivalent of the cruelty of fate and the oppression of reality. The repeated invocation “O Sayyab” functions as a structural refrain that organizes the narrative, recurring throughout moments of major suffering and establishing a connection between the protagonist's anguish and the experience of the oppressed human being represented in Al-Sayyab's poetry. From the very beginning of the novel, Saher addresses the poet, expressing his complaint against an unforgiving sun:

“Ah, Sayyab, if only you could see what your sun does to the backs of the laborers and the destitute. Where is beauty in it? It extracts water from their bodies, lashes them with its whips, and turns the earth into a frying pan beneath their feet.”

(Al-Saher, 2025, p. 2)

In this passage, the sun is transformed from a symbol of life and regeneration, as traditionally established within its symbolic heritage, into a symbol of suffering and oppression. It strikes with its whips and reduces the earth to a burning surface, becoming an equivalent of fate that unleashes its full force of suffering upon the vulnerable. This semantic inversion constitutes a distinct form of mythic employment, as the text draws upon the symbolic power of the sun and reconfigures it in accordance with its absurdist vision. This symbolic function is further intensified through the presence of Al-Sayyab himself as a mask behind which the protagonist conceals his own voice and suffering. The invocation, “O poet of Buwai b,” establishes a connection

between Saher's anguish and Al-Sayyab's Buwai b River, as well as with the poet's world marked by death, loss, and alienation (Awad, 1978).

This symbolic employment reaches its culmination in the village of Baraqish, where the sun is transformed into a hostile cosmic force that rejects the children of the earth and refuses to absorb them, whether in life or in death:

"Your sun, O Sayyab, has become possessed by its own pursuit. It burns the soul within the body, so that we are neither alive nor dead. Our mother earth refuses to swallow us and keeps us upon the surface of her face, which our own deeds have distorted with our hands. So where is beauty, O poet of Buwai b?"

(Al-Saher, 2025, p. 17)

This image reveals the profound absurdist dimension underlying the employment of the sun. It does not merely inflict suffering upon the living; rather, it confines them to a state of suspension between life and death, rejected by the earth and deprived of compassion from the heavens. The expression "we are neither alive nor dead" encapsulates the Sisyphean condition in its most explicit form: an existence suspended between opposing states, condemned to suffering that leads neither to redemption nor annihilation. The sun thus becomes a manifestation of fate that destroys without delivering death, just as the rock burdens Sisyphus without ever freeing him from his torment. At the end of the passage, the protagonist's questioning of the location of beauty exposes the core of his tragedy: the search for meaning within a world deprived

of meaning, which constitutes the central concern of the Camusian vision.

This symbolic configuration recurs throughout the various stages of the novel. Al-Sayyab's sun emerges within the burning landscape of Sana'a, across the desert of Najran where it strikes the protagonist while he remains powerless before its force, and throughout every space he inhabits. Through this continuous recurrence, the sun becomes an inseparable manifestation of fate, accompanying the protagonist wherever he goes, just as the rock remains permanently attached to Sisyphus. The sun and the rock consequently function as complementary symbolic equivalents: the rock embodies the weight of the past that the protagonist is compelled to carry forward, whereas the sun represents the merciless force of fate that consumes him throughout this struggle. Their interaction ultimately completes the representation of an absurd universe: a world that remains indifferent to humanity's plea for mercy and the search for meaning.

Nevertheless, the employment of Al-Sayyab extends beyond the expression of suffering and lamentation; it also incorporates a dimension of resistance and protest. As the protagonist addresses the poet and questions him about the presence of beauty within his sun, he is simultaneously engaging in an act of rebellion against fate by identifying, confronting, and exposing it. Recognizing oppression constitutes the initial step toward resisting it, while awareness of the absurd condition becomes a necessary foundation for attempting to overcome it. Therefore, Al-Sayyab's sun operates

simultaneously as a symbolic equivalent of the cruelty of fate and as a pathway toward the possibility of rebellion. This fundamental tension is further embodied through another symbolic system: the character of Al-A'raj.

This dimension of protest is further intensified when the sun becomes directly connected to the political reality. The protagonist observes the combatants in Aden engaged in conflict on the mouth of a volcano beneath them, while Al-Sayyab's sun melts their bodies above them (Al-Saher, 2025, p. 44), producing an image that unites the absurdity of internal violence with the brutality of an external and indifferent fate. The sun is no longer a neutral natural element; rather, it becomes an active force within the tragedy produced by human beings against themselves, completing the destruction initiated by their own struggles. Through this intersection between human violence and cosmic violence, the text presents the world as a space fundamentally hostile to humanity from all directions: a world in which the human being is crushed between the fire of the earth and the fire of the sky, leaving him with no alternative but to continue carrying his rock or to smile at it, as Al-A'raj does.

4.2. Al-A'raj: The Crushed Human Being Reconciled with His Rock

The character of Al-A'raj in the village of Baraqish represents the most concentrated manifestation of the Sisyphean correlative in the novel. An orphaned and disabled young man adopted by the village sheikh, he is transformed into an instrument for absorbing his master's anger and sustaining

his fabricated prestige. Yet, rather than rebelling against his suffering, Al-A'raj achieves an extraordinary reconciliation with it, becoming the novel's clearest embodiment of the human being who has accepted his rock. This condition reaches its fullest expression in his confession:

"They have dragged my soul across the ground, O stranger, until it left my body and clothed itself in my shadow... and it exhausts me when I push it, along with him, every evening, returning to where I will begin tomorrow." (Al-Saher, 2025, pp. 25–26)

This confession condenses the Sisyphean myth into a single existential statement. By repeatedly "pushing" his soul and returning to the same starting point, Al-A'raj transforms the rock into an internal burden—his wounded existence itself. Unlike the protagonist, he does not seek liberation from this burden but assumes it consciously, thereby becoming the novel's closest equivalent to Camus's Sisyphus.

His uniqueness lies not only in enduring suffering but in smiling at it. He patiently accepts the sheikh's insults, describing himself as a sponge that absorbs his master's anger, while simultaneously inventing heroic qualities to sustain the sheikh's reputation. More importantly, he transforms the ruins of Baraqish into a symbolic kingdom, proclaiming to the protagonist:

"I am your prince, and my command is that you reach the edge of darkness." (Al-Saher, 2025, p. 23)

This kingdom constructed from ruins embodies Camus's notion of the happy

Sisyphus. Al-A'raj creates meaning from destruction, converting the place of ruin into a space of symbolic sovereignty and deriving dignity from the very burden imposed upon him.

The symbolic significance of this vision becomes clearer when contrasted with the protagonist's own position. Observing Al-A'raj smiling while leaving the village despite the mockery of the children, Saher admits:

"This Al-A'raj is braver than me. He did not flee from his reality as I did; rather, he lives with it, and here he is smiling at the whips of fate." (Al-Saher, 2025, p. 29)

Through this contrast, the novel presents two modes of Sisyphean existence. Al-A'raj represents reconciliation with the rock, whereas the protagonist embodies continuous flight from it, remaining trapped within an endless cycle of escape. The opposition raises the novel's central philosophical question: is absurdity confronted more effectively through reconciliation or through escape?

From a Jungian perspective, Al-A'raj also functions as the protagonist's shadow archetype. He embodies the hidden dimension that Saher refuses to acknowledge within himself: the capacity to coexist with suffering instead of fleeing from it. This symbolic relationship explains the protagonist's attraction toward him, his decision to follow him to the ruins of Baraqish, and even his unconscious imitation of Al-A'raj's limping gait, suggesting an implicit recognition that the disabled young man possesses a truth the protagonist himself has yet to discover.

The symbolic kingdom scene further crystallizes this vision:

"Do you want to see my kingdom? ... Burn and burn, and devour the dead from the body of the tree. After death comes light. Burn and scatter this darkness. I am your prince, and my command is that you reach the edge of darkness." (Al-Saher, 2025, p. 23)

By transforming ruins into a kingdom and darkness into light through symbolic naming, Al-A'raj performs a rebellion against fate itself. He no longer perceives suffering merely as punishment but appropriates it as the foundation of his own dignity, thus embodying the Camusian idea that Sisyphus becomes master of his absurdity once he claims ownership of his rock.

The text also reveals the emotional depth underlying this reconciliation. Recalling his experience of rejection, Al-A'raj laments:

"Imagine, O stranger, I am no one? I do not have eyes that gaze upon the beauty of that leg... She said: no one! Despite everything that moved within me at that moment, she says: no one!" (Al-Saher, 2025, p. 26)

Despite this painful awareness, he refuses to surrender. His persistence derives not from ignorance of suffering but from full consciousness of it, thereby reflecting the essence of Sisyphean heroism.

His tragic wisdom appears equally in his explanation of his relationship with the sheikh:

"I am, in relation to him, like a sponge. I absorb the hell of his anger whenever he

becomes enraged or pretends to be angry... And both of us, he and I, know that the matter is nothing more than a performance.” (Al-Safer, 2025, p. 21)

This confession demonstrates that Al-A'raj fully understands the mechanisms of his humiliation yet consciously accepts the role because it ensures his survival. Like Camus's Sisyphus, he recognizes the absurdity of his condition without allowing such awareness to produce despair. Consequently, he emerges as the purest embodiment of the Sisyphean correlative in the novel and as the mirror through which the protagonist confronts the possibility of another mode of existence. While Safer continues searching for salvation beyond himself, Al-A'raj discovers it within his own burden, anticipating the novel's final realization that meaning arises not from escaping the rock but from transforming the act of carrying it into an expression of purpose.

4.3. Iseel: The Alternative Homeland and the Possible Salvation

The text reaches the culmination of its symbolic systems through the character of Iseel, the Caucasian woman whom the protagonist encounters in Istanbul and who transforms from a beloved figure into a symbol of an alternative homeland and the possibility of salvation. The text establishes this symbolic significance from its very first threshold, as the novel opens with a statement that encapsulates Iseel's entire symbolic function:

“Iseel is not merely a woman; she is a homeland for those who have lost their homeland. Iseel is a refuge in a world

sinking into the depths of madness as deep as her eyes.” (Al-Safer, 2025, p. 2).

This opening statement elevates Iseel from the realistic level to the symbolic dimension. She is not merely a woman to be loved, but rather a homeland to be regained and a refuge that protects the protagonist from the madness of the surrounding world. Thus, Iseel becomes the symbolic antithesis of the original homeland that expelled the protagonist and was transformed into a burden weighing upon him. If the first homeland represents a fate that crushes and confines, then Iseel represents a homeland chosen by the protagonist through his own will, a space in which he rediscovers the meaning that has been lost. Accordingly, the love relationship in the novel acquires an existential dimension that transcends the emotional sphere and enters the philosophical realm; Iseel becomes the possible response to the question of absurdity and the source of meaning that renders the act of carrying the rock not only bearable but also potentially significant.

This symbolic significance is further reinforced by the fact that the name “Iseel” is an unusual and uniquely created name that does not correspond to any recognizable realistic origin. The text transforms it from a mere proper name into a conceptual category and a symbolic standard, referring to “Iseelian unity” of time, “the Iseelian way” of speaking, and “Iseelian love” that never dies. This transformation of a personal name into a universal concept demonstrates that Iseel is not merely a character but rather an idea or an ideal: a utopian construct created by the protagonist to compensate for the void left

by the loss of his homeland. In this sense, the title itself becomes an indication of the novel's central nature as a search for an imagined homeland whose name is inscribed into existence, just as every utopia emerges from the fractures and disappointments of reality. The summit toward which Sisyphus strives, "Iseel," is therefore not an already existing place, but rather a name created through imagination in order to make the act of ascent possible.

This interpretation is further reinforced when Iseel is examined through the Jungian archetype of the anima. She is not primarily presented as a realistic woman, but rather as the embodiment of the ideal feminine image existing within the protagonist's unconscious, the image that concentrates his desire for wholeness, belonging, and salvation. For this reason, the text does not represent her time through ordinary measurements of minutes and seconds, but instead through "Iseelian unity," transforming her language and gestures into a new criterion of beauty and expression. Such idealization reveals that she exceeds the boundaries of a conventional realistic character. In this sense, Iseel represents the projection of the anima onto a specific woman; consequently, possessing her symbolically signifies the recovery of the missing dimension of the self and the attainment of the ideal homeland that compensates for the one that has been lost.

The text further develops this meaning through a network of contrasting characters surrounding Iseel and emphasizing her exceptional symbolic status. If Iseel represents salvation and purity, then characters such as Murad and Elif embody

the world of deception, conspiracy, and jealousy that threatens this possibility of salvation. Murad functions as the hidden antagonist seeking to undermine the relationship, whereas Elif represents an unstable feminine figure motivated by immature jealousy. Both characters embody the absurdity and corruption of the social world within which Iseel exists. Through this opposition between the pure figure of Iseel and the corrupted reality surrounding her, the text emphasizes that salvation is not a ready-made gift granted without struggle; rather, it is a value that must be discovered and extracted from within the heart of an absurd world that constantly resists its emergence.

The symbolism of Iseel is accompanied by a symbolic temporal structure founded upon the duality of October and June. If June represents, within the novel, the month of recurring catastrophes that claim the lives of the protagonist's loved ones, then October symbolizes the month of his birth and the origin of his hope. He describes Iseel's influence upon him as "October-like" and asserts that the passage toward the impossible can only occur in October (Al-Saher, 2025, p. 84). Through this opposition between the month of death and the month of rebirth, it becomes clear that Iseel belongs to the temporality of renewal rather than the temporality of destruction, becoming the antithesis of the June destiny that relentlessly pursues the protagonist. This symbolic use of time reveals the novel's profound structural foundation: a confrontation between a crushing fate represented by June and Al-Sayyab's sun, and a desired salvation embodied by October and Iseel. The

protagonist remains suspended between these two temporal poles, pushing his rock from the month of death toward the month of birth without fully attaining belonging to either.

However, the text does not present this salvation as an effortless or freely granted possibility; rather, it makes its attainment contingent upon loss and confrontation. The protagonist does not reach Iseel until after enduring all his struggles and experiencing repeated falls, to the extent that he declares at the end of the novel that love only arrives after one's cities have been destroyed, captured, violated, and one's ships burned. This equation establishes a connection between salvation and rebellion rather than surrender. Iseel does not represent an escape from the rock; instead, she embodies a meaning achieved through the very process of confronting it. In this manner, the novel transcends a purely negative understanding of Camusian absurdity toward a more affirmative formulation, in which salvation does not reside in reaching the summit itself, but rather in discovering a meaning that renders the act of climbing worthy of being experienced.

The symbolic system of Iseel is further completed by a final symbolic structure: writing as an act of rebellion against nothingness. The entire novel is framed by the protagonist's request to his friend Serkan to write his story, while the recurring refrain "Write, O Serkan" transforms into an act of resistance against death and oblivion. This awareness reaches its highest point at the conclusion of the text, when the protagonist articulates his defeat in the form of a testament to writing:

"Write, O Serkan, that my fall was faster than the fall of Baghdad, and that I did not endure as Sirte endured... Write, O Serkan, that I discovered that the soul is crucified twice, afflicted by oppression and loss twice, and defeated once, without being granted the right to achieve victory."

(Al-Saher, 2025, p. 294)

This passage reveals the metanarrative dimension of the novel. The protagonist, defeated within the realm of reality, achieves a form of victory within the narrative space, as he transforms his downfall into a written text that can be preserved and transmitted. When Saher recognizes that his soul is crucified twice, defeated once, and deprived of the possibility of triumph, he turns to writing as the only means through which meaning can be extracted from defeat. Thus, writing, like love, becomes an essentially Sisyphean act: an effort undertaken by the protagonist in confrontation with an inevitable nothingness, yet one that ultimately grants value and significance to his existence. If Sisyphus lacks the power to prevent his rock from rolling back down, he nevertheless possesses the ability to narrate the story of his ascent, and within this act of narration lies his only possible form of victory.

This metanarrative dimension becomes further intensified when examining the narrative structure founded upon the duality of Saher and Serkan. The entire novel is narrated by Serkan, who conveys the story on the basis of his friend Saher's testament, repeatedly expressed through the phrase "Write, O Serkan." Serkan therefore functions as a narrative mask

through which Saher's tragedy is articulated after his departure. This masking structure precisely embodies the function of the mythical use of the mask, whereby the authentic voice conceals itself behind another voice that provides the experience with a degree of objectivity while safeguarding it from disappearance.

Furthermore, the resemblance between the names Saher and Serkan, along with the fact that the protagonist entrusts his story to the one who will eventually write it, transforms the entire novel into an act of symbolic resurrection through which the text resists the death of its protagonist. Writing here is not simply a record of a concluded tragedy; rather, it represents a continuous reanimation of that tragedy, enabling Sisyphus to resume his ascent with every new act of reading. Consequently, the novel itself becomes the rock that is pushed endlessly, yet it is now a rock that the protagonist consciously chooses to carry and push through his own will, transforming it from an instrument of punishment into an expression of life.

The novel concludes by articulating this vision in an intensely condensed form, when the protagonist declares that the Iseelian homeland cannot be lost, asks his friend to kiss the foreheads of all Arab revolutionaries, and concludes that the greatest name for love is Iseel (Al-Saher, 2025, p. 296). Through this conclusion, the novel moves beyond the inevitability of fate and the absurdity of confrontation toward a new horizon of meaning. The lost homeland is replaced by a homeland that cannot be lost, while the rolling rock is endowed with a significance that transforms its movement into an act of love

rather than an act of punishment. Thus, the Sisyphus of Iseel is envisioned as a happy Sisyphus, not because he has reached the summit, but because he has discovered, through love and writing, what renders the eternal act of ascent worthy of being lived.

Through the convergence of these three symbolic systems, the semantic structure of the novel reaches its full realization. Al-Sayyab's sun embodies the harshness of external fate that crushes the protagonist from above; Al-A'raj embodies the possibility of internal reconciliation with this fate through the act of smiling in the face of its whips; and Iseel embodies salvation that transcends fate by granting existence meaning through love and rebellion. Between these three symbolic systems, the protagonist undertakes his Sisyphean journey: the sun overwhelms him, the figure of Al-A'raj invites him toward reconciliation, and Iseel saves him through the discovery of meaning. Through this carefully organized distribution of significance among the interconnected symbolic systems, it becomes evident that the novel is not merely a spontaneous narration of the life of a devastated protagonist, but rather a coherent symbolic construction whose components collectively operate to embody the dialectic of fate, absurdity, and salvation. This dialectic constitutes the fundamental essence of the Sisyphean correlative within the text.

5. Conclusion:

Through an examination of the employment of the mythic symbol in Saher Al-Saheer's novel *Iseel*, adopting a mythical approach supported by thematic analysis, this research has arrived at a set of findings that can be summarized as follows:

- The novel *Iseel* constructs an implicit Sisyphean correlative that does not depend on the explicit identification of the myth, but rather on the reconstitution of its underlying structure, founded upon the concepts of the rock, perpetual pushing, and eternal recurrence. Through this structure, the novel embodies the tragedy of contemporary Arab humanity suspended between the inevitability of fate and the absurdity of confrontation.
- The Sisyphean rock is embodied in the accumulated burden of the past and homeland. The demolished house, the haunting memory, and the adhesive homeland that simultaneously expels and remains attached are all representations of the burden carried by the protagonist, a burden from which he is unable to liberate himself. Whenever he believes that he has escaped from it, it returns to him in another form.
- The protagonist's restless movement between Sana'a, Baraqish, Al-Ukhdoon, and Istanbul is transformed into an absurd act of pushing that does not produce an essential transformation; rather, it reproduces the same existential condition across different spaces, confirming that movement functions merely as a circular trajectory within a closed cycle from which escape cannot provide liberation.
- The text employs the symbolic system of "Al-Sayyab's sun" through intertextual

reference as an equivalent of the cruelty of fate by reversing the traditional symbolism of the sun from a representation of life into a symbol of suffering. Accordingly, it becomes a constant fatalistic presence accompanying the protagonist wherever he travels, thereby completing the symbolism of the rock.

- The character of Al-A'raj represents the purest equivalent of the Camusian Sisyphus, as he pushes his soul forward and returns each day to begin anew, yet he smiles in the face of the whips of fate and transforms his ruins into a kingdom. In doing so, he embodies the model of reconciliation with the rock in contrast to the model of escape represented by the protagonist.

- *Iseel* constitutes the symbol of the alternative homeland and possible salvation, moving the novel from a negative conception of absurdity toward its positive formulation, in which salvation does not consist in reaching the summit but rather in discovering a meaning that makes the ascent itself worthy of being lived. The symbolic system of writing as an act of rebellion against nothingness also converges with this vision.

- The novel ultimately reaches a Camusian vision that transcends the inevitability of fate without denying its existence. It grants love and writing the capacity to provide meaning to absurd effort, allowing its Sisyphus to be envisioned as defiant rather than submissive, and victorious through persistence rather than through the achievement of reaching the summit.

- The text employs a network of masks and mythical and cultural references that extends beyond Sisyphus to include Al-Shanfara, Baraqish, the People of the

Ditch, and Al-Sayyab's sun. Through this network, it constructs an integrated mythical universe that connects the protagonist's contemporary tragedy with the oldest representations of exile, displacement, and suffering within human and Arab collective memory, confirming the universality of this experience.

- The novel's circular temporal structure, represented by the recurring June catastrophes, converges with the repetitive spatial structure represented by the sequence of graves, from the vehicle's trunk to the bottom of the well, in order to embody the notion of futility. Consequently, time and space together become symbolic equivalents of the rock that returns to the bottom whenever it approaches the summit.

The scholarly contribution of this research lies in providing the first systematic critical approach to the novel *Iseel* and in revealing the mechanism of the "Sisyphean correlative" as an implicit narrative structure that does not merely invoke myth as a thematic reference, but rather internalizes its logic in order to organize the entire fictional experience. The research also contributes to broadening the scope of mythical studies by extending their application to narrative fiction rather than limiting them to poetry, while proposing an analytical framework that can be applied to other literary texts that employ myth implicitly without explicitly naming it.

The research opens several avenues for future studies, including the examination of additional mythical systems within the novel, such as its intertextual connections with Al-Shanfara, the tradition of brigand

poetry, and the People of the Ditch; the analysis of the function of metanarrative and the technique of the mask in shaping the narrative through the duality of Saher and Serkan; and a comparative study that situates Saher Al-Saher's Sisyphean correlative within the broader context of mythic employment in contemporary Arabic narrative. It also encourages a psychological interpretation that applies the concepts of the collective unconscious and archetypes to the analysis of the novel's characters and symbolic structures. Thus, this research represents an entry point into a rich fictional work whose multiple symbolic layers continue to invite further critical exploration.

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