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من التنظير إلى التجلّي السردي والدرامي بين عماد الدين خليل ونجيب الكيلاني في الخطاب الأدبي الإسلامي دراسة تحليلية مقارنة

The Poetics of Islamic Literary Discourse: From Theoretical Formulation to Narrative and Dramatic Realization in the Works of Imad al-Din Khalil and Naguib al-Kilani

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ملخص

تسعى هذه المقالة إلى استجلاء الكيفيات التي تتحوّل بها نظرية الأدب الإسلامي إلى ممارسة سردية ودرامية متجسِّدة في أعمال نجيب الكيلاني وعماد الدين خليل. وتتناول بالدراسة العلاقة بين تعريفاتهما المنهجية لمفهوم "الأدب الإسلامي" من جهة، والاستراتيجيات الجمالية واللغوية والتناصّية التي تتجسّد من خلالها هذه التعريفات في نماذج مختارة من الرواية والمسرحية والقصة القصيرة من جهة أخرى.

تعتمد الدراسة منهجًا وصفيًّا تحليليًّا مقارنًا، يزاوج بين القراءة المتعمِّقة والتحليل المعجمي والأسلوبي والتناصي، مع تركيز خاص على تصوّر كلٍّ من المؤلِّفَيْن لوظيفة العمل الأدبي، وطريقة تنظيم الحقول المعجمية والبُنى الأسلوبية، وكيفية توظيف التناصّات القرآنية والتاريخية بوصفها موارد خطابية ذات فاعلية دلالية وجمالية.

وتشير النتائج إلى التزام مشترك لدى الكيلاني وخليل بالنظر إلى الأدب أداةً جمالية للتعبير عن رؤية إسلامية معاصرة للعالم، مع بروز تباينات واضحة في طرائق السرد؛ إذ تتمايز واقعية الكيلاني الاجتماعية ووضوحه التعليمي عن تجربة خليل الرمزية المتكئة على الذاكرة التاريخية والسردية الكبرى، وإن اشتركا في مقاصدهما الفكرية والرسالية. وتخلص المقالة في نهاية المطاف إلى ضرورة فهم منجزهما بوصفه حوارًا ديناميًّا بين الالتزام الأيديولوجي والشكل الفني، بما يسهم في إثراء النقاشات الراهنة في الأسلوبية العربية ودراسات الأدب الإسلامي.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الأدب الإسلامي؛ المسرح الإسلامي؛ جمالية السرد والدراما؛ الرواية الإسلامية؛ النقد الأدبي الإسلامي المقارن.

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Abstract

This study examines five interrelated dimensions of literary theory—narrative, dramatic, poetic, linguistic, and rhetorical—as articulated in the Qur'an and elaborated by al-Jurjani, al-Qazwini, and al-Sakkaki, and how these dimensions are reconfigured in the fiction and theatre of Naguib al-Kilani and Imad al-Din Khalil. Using these two writers as case studies, the article explores their respective contributions to the theorization of "Islamic literature" and traces the correspondences between their systematic definitions of the term and the aesthetic, linguistic, and intertextual procedures through which these definitions are realized in selected novels, plays, and short stories. Employing a comparative descriptive–analytical method, the research combines close reading with lexical, stylistic, and intertextual analysis, foregrounding each author's conception of literary function, the organization of their lexical fields and stylistic patterns, and their deployment of Qur'anic and historical intertexts as dynamic, dialogic resources. The findings indicate a shared commitment to literature as an art form through which an Islamic worldview is articulated, while also revealing marked divergences in narrative practice: al-Kilani's corpus is characterized by realism, social embeddedness, and didactic clarity, whereas Khalil's writing is more symbolic, historically inflected, and formally experimental, often tending toward meta-narrative. The article concludes by arguing that their oeuvres should be read as sites of vibrant interaction between political ideology and artistic practice, thereby positioning them as significant interlocutors in ongoing debates in Arabic stylistics and Islamic literary criticism.

Keywords: Islamic literature; Islamic theatre; the aesthetics of narrative and drama; the Islamic novel; comparative Islamic literary criticism.

1. Introduction

Over the past several decades, the category of "Islamic literature" (al-adab al-islāmī) has undergone a significant transformation within Arabic literary criticism. Once relegated to the margins of the field, it has increasingly become the object of sustained theoretical debate. Foundational in this shift are the writings of Sayyid Qutb and Muhammad Qutb, together with the programmatic formulations in Manhaj al-Fann al-Islāmī (1973), which collectively insist that Islamic literature is not merely a vehicle for religious exhortation but an artistically integrated vision of existence grounded in an Islamic worldview. More recent studies have further emphasized that such literature must combine aesthetic refinement with ethical alignment to Qur'anic principles (Yaacob & Ramli, 2021, p. 35). Within this evolving critical landscape, two figures occupy a particularly prominent place in the present study: Naguib al-Kilani and Imad al-Din Khalil. Al-Kilani is widely regarded as one of the leading pioneers of the modern Islamic novel,

distinguished both by the breadth of his fictional oeuvre—most notably Virgin of Jakarta and Turkistan Nights—and by his programmatic contributions to the theorization of Islamic literature. Khalil, by contrast, initially emerged as a historian and public intellectual and only later formulated a seminal theory of Islamic literature in Madkhal ilā Naẓariyyat al-Adab al-Islāmī, complemented by a series of studies on the contemporary Islamic literary movement. Together, these two authors embody a rarely conjoined dual vocation: each combines, in a single intellectual persona, the roles of literary theorist and practicing novelist and dramatist. Yet, despite their centrality, the ways in which their theoretical insights are artistically instantiated in narrative and dramatic practice remain comparatively underexplored (Al- Habar, 2023, p. 439).

Previous scholarship has tended to consider these authors' critical theories in isolation from their creative works, a pattern that characterizes much of the existing literature on Islamic literary discourse more generally. Research on al-Kilani's fiction has largely focused on Islamic realism, postcolonial concerns, and the representation of resistance and daʿwa, whereas studies on Khalil have primarily emphasized his role in defining the scope and foundational principles of Islamic literature (Aydin Görmez & Abdullah Saeed, 2019, p. 137). What remains largely absent is a sustained comparative inquiry that systematically traces the trajectory from theoretical formulation to narrative and dramatic embodiment in both oeuvres, and that situates this trajectory within the broader tradition of Qur'anic poetics and classical Arabic rhetoric. This article seeks to address this gap through a comparative, descriptive–analytical reading of selected theoretical and creative writings by al-Kilani and Khalil. It first delineates the conceptual field of Islamic literary discourse, then reconstructs how the central research question is derived from this field, and finally establishes the theoretical and methodological framework that will guide the subsequent analysis of their narrative, dramatic, lexical, and stylistic engagements with Islamic literary theory.

2. 2. Methodology and Theoretical Framework

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This article adopts a qualitative, comparative, descriptive–analytical design that combines close reading with lexical, stylistic, discourse, and intertextual analysis. The theoretical point of departure is the Qur'anic conception of discourse and poetics as elaborated in the classical Arabic rhetorical tradition by critics such as al-Jurjānī, al-Qazwīnī, and al-Sakkākī, together with modern discussions of "Islamic literature" in the works of Sayyid Qutb, Muhammad Qutb, and subsequent Muslim critics. These sources provide the key conceptual categories—such as nazm, balāgha, intertextual allusion, and the integration of ethics and aesthetics—that inform the present reading of Imad al-Din Khalil and Naguib al-Kilani.

The study is guided by one overarching question: how do Khalil's and al-Kilani's theoretical formulations of "Islamic literature" move from abstract definition to concrete narrative and dramatic embodiment? This general inquiry is pursued through three subsidiary questions:

1. How do the two authors' theoretical writings conceptualize the function, scope, and aesthetic principles of Islamic literature?

2. In what ways are these principles realized, complicated, or contested in selected narrative and dramatic works at the levels of plot, characterization, narrative voice, and dramatic structure?

3. How do lexical and semantic fields, rhetorical imagery, and Qur'anic and historical intertexts contribute to articulating an Islamic worldview in their creative corpus, and what convergences and divergences emerge between the two writers along these axes?

To address these questions, the article examines a purposive corpus that brings together both theoretical and creative writings. On the theoretical side, the analysis focuses primarily on Khalil's Madkhal ilā Naẓariyyat al-Adab al-Islāmī, Qadāyā al-Adab al-Islāmī: al-Thanāʾiyyāt al-Asāsiyyah – Tawāfuq am Taḍādd?, and Fī al-Naqd al-Islāmī al-Muʿāṣir, alongside al-Kilani's Madkhal ilā al-Adab al-Islāmī and al-Islāmiyyah wa al-Madhāhib al-Adabiyyah. On the creative side, the study analyzes one historical play (Al-Mughul), one

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historical–allegorical novel (Al-Sayf wa al-Kalima), and a short-story cycle (Riḥlat al-Ṣuʿūd allatī lā Nihāyata Lahā) by Khalil, together with three major novels by al-Kilani: ʿAdhrāʾ Jākartā, Layālī Turkistān, and ʿAmaliqat al-Shamāl. These works are selected because they explicitly engage questions of Islamic identity, history, and literary commitment, and because they have generated a substantial secondary critical reception that facilitates comparative analysis.

The research proceeds in four interrelated analytical movements. First, a descriptive and conceptual reading of the theoretical texts reconstructs each author's definition of Islamic literature, their understanding of the tawḥīdic worldview, and their account of the relation between aesthetic form and ideological commitment. Second, close stylistic readings of the selected novels, stories, and the play elucidate their verbal texture and formal organization: lexical choices, syntactic patterns, rhetorical figures, narrative perspectives, and dramaturgical structuring. Third, the study undertakes a comparative mapping of lexical and semantic fields in the two corpora, focusing on clusters related to faith and certainty, history and divine sunan, oppression and liberation, and daʿwa and ethical agency. Finally, the analysis turns to rhetorical imagery and intertextuality, tracing how Qur'anic and historical allusions function as dynamic resources that shape narrative voice, character construction, and the implied reader's horizon of expectation.

Throughout, the investigation maintains an explicitly comparative stance: rather than treating each writer in isolation, it organizes the discussion along shared analytical axes—such as representations of history, constructions of self and other, the handling of suffering and resistance, and the negotiation of aesthetic autonomy and ideological commitment—in order to delineate both convergences and structurally significant divergences between the two projects. The objective is not only to demonstrate how theoretical propositions are realized in narrative and dramatic practice, but also to show how creative texts, in turn, complicate and sometimes revise the theoretical formulations from which they initially emerge.

3. Imad al-Din Khalil's Theoretical Discourse on Islamic Literature

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Imad al-Din Khalil holds a distinctive position within contemporary Arab intellectual thought, not only as a historian of Islam but also as a leading theorist of Islamic literature. His seminal work, Madkhal ilā Nazariyyat al-Adab al-Islāmī (Introduction to the Theory of Islamic Literature, Beirut: Dār al-Risālah, 1987), is widely regarded as one of the earliest and most pioneering attempts to formulate a coherent theory of Islamic literature in Arabic. It continues to be frequently cited in current scholarly debates(Kamarudin, 2020, p. 229).

Khalil's theorization is firmly rooted in a rigorous tawḥīdic vision of reality. He extends this vision to the project of the Islamization of knowledge—elaborated, among other works, in his concise English booklet Islamization of Knowledge: A Methodology—and argues that all intellectual and artistic activity must ultimately be grounded in a unified Qur'anic conception of the cosmos, history, and the human being. Within this framework, art is no longer viewed as a mere ornament of the world but as a mode of cognition. Literary creation thus becomes one of the most significant arenas in which the unity of divine law (sunan Allāh fī al-tārīkh) and the diversity of human experience can be analyzed, dramatized, and affectively internalized.

3.1.A Critical Inquiry into the Issues of Islamic Literature: The Fundamental Dichotomies — Harmony or Antagonism? by Imad al-Din Khalil

Imad al-Din Khalil's study, Qadāyā al-Adab al-Islāmī: al-Thanā'iyyāt al-Asāsiyyah – Tawāfuq am Taḍādd? ("Issues in Islamic Literature: The Fundamental Dualities – Harmony or Conflict?"), represents one of his most programmatic contributions to the theorization of Islamic literary discourse. In this work, Khalil aims to identify the principal "binary tensions" that, in his view, structure contemporary Islamic literature. Rather than treating these binaries as rigidly opposed and mutually exclusive, he conceives them as intellectually productive zones of intersection, whose mismanagement can solidify into closed-off traditionalism on the one hand, or, on the other, into a suspension of critical judgment through the unreflective adoption of Western cultural models.

The argument presented in Qadāyā al-Adab al-Islāmī expands and refines the definition previously proposed in Madkhal ilā Naẓariyyat al-Adab al-Islāmī,

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where Islamic literature is described as "an aesthetically powerful verbal expression of the Islamic conception of existence." Subsequent surveys of Islamic literature have consistently recognized Khalil's duality-centered approach as a fundamental reference point for contemporary theorization, particularly in discussions concerning how Islamic writing can achieve aesthetic autonomy while remaining ethically and doctrinally grounded. In this regard, Qadāyā al-Adab al-Islāmī serves as a pivotal text that both deepens and broadens Khalil's broader project of articulating a coherent, systematically ordered, and critically self-aware Islamic poetics(Choudhury, 1992, p. 413).

3.2. An Analytic Appraisal of a Work in Contemporary Islamic Criticism- Fī al-naqd al-islāmī al-muʿāṣir by Imad al-Din Khalil

Fī al-Naqd al-Islāmī al-Muʿāṣir ("On Contemporary Islamic Criticism") by Imad al-Din Khalil is considered one of the earliest significant efforts to articulate a coherent project of Islamic literary criticism in the modern era.

Khalil's reflections are not limited to abstract theorization; rather, he consistently grounds his arguments in close readings of literary texts. He contends, first, that criticism should not be merely a technical exercise or an ideologically "neutral" activity. Instead, it must be rooted in a tawḥīd-centered conception of the human being, history, and artistic creation, deriving its governing principles from the Qur'an and the classical Arabic critical tradition.

Furthermore, Khalil examines these premises through a detailed engagement with modern literary production and performance, with particular emphasis on theatre. He explores themes such as human tragedy, the oscillation between the recovery of faith and the persistence of doubt, the politics of social transformation in Iraq, and the imperative to construct a contemporary stage that is not only culturally Muslim but also consciously and distinctively Islamic(Mous, 2025, p. 15).

Methodologically, the book exemplifies a dual approach. On one hand, it advocates for the development of an autonomous Islamic critical paradigm; on the other, it maintains an active dialogue with Western dramaturgy and critical theory, appropriating what it considers methodologically "neutral" while subjecting secular assumptions to rigorous scrutiny. Subsequent scholarship on Arabic

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Islamic literature has consistently recognized Fī al-naqd al-islāmī al-muʿāṣir as a pivotal turning point in the modern theorization of Islamic criticism—one that paved the way for Khalil's more systematically developed works on Islamic literary theory (Khalil, 1998, p. 19).

In this regard, the volume emerges as a seminal intervention that both consolidates and interrogates the contemporary Islamic critical project, mediating between ethical responsibility and aesthetic innovation.

3.2. 1. The Tawḥīdic Worldview

Imad al-Din Khalil regards the tawḥīdic worldview—specifically, the affirmation of the oneness of God as the foundational principle capable of integrating faith, knowledge, morality, history, and art into a single coherent vision—as the primary point of departure for any Islamic critical or creative endeavor. In his writings on the Islamization of knowledge, he asserts that intellectual activity must be conducted "in the light of the Islamic outlook on life, humanity, and the universe," ensuring that no cultural sphere, including literature, remains epistemologically detached from tawḥīd(Laluddin & Tahir, 2018, p. 7). Within this framework, literature is not a secular aesthetic pastime but a mode of rearticulating and bearing witness to life under the sign of the One God. Characters, events, and narrative structures are evaluated according to the extent to which they disclose, distort, or conceal this divine unity. In this sense, Khalil's position aligns with broader debates on the Islamization of knowledge that invoke a tawḥīdic episteme: a paradigm in which revelation and the cosmos are interpreted together, and in which literary form is ultimately subordinated to a singular, God-centered vision of reality(Hossain et al., 2022, p. 14)

3.2. 2.History as Divine Sunan and Moral Lesson (ʿIbra)

Khalil's historical and theoretical writings do not treat history as a random sequence of events but as a domain governed by sunan ilāhiyya—divinely ordained patterns and laws that regulate the rise and decline of individuals and societies. Through his interpretation of Qur'anic narratives and classical historical chronicles, he seeks to uncover these recurring structures, transforming history

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from a neutral record into a didactic text whose ultimate purpose is ʿibra—moral and intellectual edification—rather than impartial reportage. A close analysis of his method reveals that he systematically cites Qur'anic verses to support his historiography, thereby linking empirical occurrences to divine laws of justice, human accountability, and civilizational decline(Bin Has & Sya'bani, 2021, p. 37). This conception also permeates his literary discourse: when Khalil turns to the novel or the play, historical material functions not merely as a backdrop but as a site of narrative experimentation where the believer confronts these sunan, tests them imaginatively, and assimilates their warnings and promises.

3.2. 3. Literature as an Awakening of Consciousness, not Just Entertainment

In formulating his conception of Islamic literature, Khalil neither reduces art to a mere instrument of didactic propaganda nor confines it to the realm of escapist diversion. Instead, he argues that literary writing must engage in īqāẓ al-waʿy—the awakening of spiritual, ethical, and historical consciousness—by dramatizing existential conflicts and social realities in a manner that ultimately reorients the reader toward the Qur'ānic vision of the human being and the ummah(Wan Zakaria, 2015, p. 43).

According to his widely cited formulation, Islamic literature is "an aesthetically potent verbal expression of the Islamic view of life," a definition that preserves both of its essential elements: artistic excellence and fidelity to Islamic principles. Accordingly, while he rejects works created solely for "sheer entertainment," he is equally adamant in warning against crude didacticism. For him, an exemplary narrative or dramatic work persuades its audience through its formal qualities—such as structure, symbolism, characterization, and plot—rather than by delivering a moral lesson in an overt and heavy-handed manner.

Subsequent scholars of Islamic literature have extensively relied on Khalil's ideas to debate the extent to which Islamic writing may—and indeed ought to—enjoy artistic freedom while remaining morally and doctrinally accountable.

4.Theoretical Literary Discourse in the Writings of Naguib al-Kilani

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Naguib al-Kilani presents his most systematic account of a theory of Islamic literature in *Madkhal ilā al-Adab al-Islāmī* and *al-Islāmiyyah wa al-Madhāhib al-Adabiyyah*. In these works, he argues that art is, above all, a consciously daʿwī and pedagogical endeavor: the literary text must guide, instruct, and transform—not through overt sermonizing, but through the portrayal of morally charged characters and themes that embody an Islamic vision of the good life(Giv & Nia, 2016, p. 1318). This dynamic is also evident in close critical studies of his fiction, which demonstrate how novels such as Jakarta's Virgin and The Man Who Believed employ dramatic form to portray the Islamic moral order as superior to its secular or Western counterparts, primarily through narratives of conversion, acts of resistance to oppression, and the re-centering of Qurʾanic values in everyday life. At the same time, al-Kilānī consistently emphasizes the irreducibility of aesthetic experience. For him, Islamic art is not a crude vehicle for pious propaganda that can be simplified or instrumentalized; it must remain "beautiful, artistic, and impactful" in terms of diction, composition, and rhetorical figuration.

Scholarship on his novels has consequently focused extensively on the interplay between the aesthetic and the political, identifying recurrent Islamic motifs, patterned symbolism, and a meticulously controlled narrative perspective as the principal vehicles of a distinctly Islamic poetics rather than mere didacticism. His reflections on Islamic drama similarly affirm that stagecraft, characterization, and dialogue must achieve genuine aesthetic intensity while remaining firmly anchored in an Islamic worldview.

Finally, al-Kilānī firmly grounds his fiction in contemporary social and political realities: the struggle against colonialism, class oppression, and the ideological contest between Islam and secular modernity. Analyses of his work through the lens of critical discourse analysis reveal that he employs detailed realist descriptions, intertextual Qurʾanic allusions, and postcolonial themes not to lure the reader into escapist fantasy but to sharpen their historical consciousness (Al-Sheikh et al., 2022, p. 401).

In contrast to Imad al-Din Khalil's more overtly theoretical, historically nuanced, and often symbolist narrative approach, al-Kilani's criticism remains grounded in

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lived experience. His critical categories emerge organically from the novel and the play, emphasizing social realism and narrative clarity, whereas Khalil tends to develop more abstract binary structures and experiment with innovative narrative architectures. Together, these two critics articulate a constellation of trajectories within modern Islamic literary theory that are not only distinct but also mutually complementary: one grounded in the text's social mission, the other rooted in a more systematic poetics.

4.1. Divergent Tones, Unified Rejection of Literary "Neutrality

Both Imad al-Din Khalil and Naguib al-Kilani articulate their poetics within a framework that rejects the notion of value-neutral or autonomous fiction, positing al-iltizām (ethical-religious commitment) as a fundamental principle underlying the very structure of Islamic literature. For both writers, narrative and drama are not mere aesthetic diversions but privileged vehicles for expressing an Islamic worldview and for challenging secular and colonial epistemologies. Their stance resonates with longstanding debates on commitment in modern Arabic literary criticism and aligns with recent efforts to "re-theologize" Islamic literature as a legitimate source of doctrinal and ethical guidance rather than merely a form of cultural entertainment(al-Khawaldeh, 2017, p. 725).

Khalil's theoretical argument is profoundly shaped by his conception of the historian and the intellectual. In his writings on Islamic historiography and the Islamization of knowledge, he not only introduces but also develops a complex conceptual framework encompassing divine sunnan, civilizational decline, and Qur'anic hermeneutics—one that subsequently underpins his essays on Islamic literature. The very concepts that enable him to interpret historical processes—such as the unity of divine purpose, moral causality, and a critical diagnosis of modernity—also inform his understanding of narrative. For Khalil, fiction becomes a privileged medium for renewing historical consciousness and guiding the reader toward a tawḥīd-centered philosophy of history(Kilci, n.d., p. 7).

Therefore, Khalil's literary criticism can be understood as an extension of his historiographical project: he primarily employs the tools of the historian—argumentation, documentation, and civilizational analysis—and places these at the

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center of his critical practice, rather than offering the reader direct, unmediated access to lived experience.

By contrast, Kilani's critical idiom is deeply infused with the sensibility of a novelist. His reflections on Islamic literature are inseparable from his experiences of imprisonment, political persecution, and transnational Muslim struggles, which form the backdrop to *Jakarta's Virgin*, *Turkistan Nights*, and his other works. Moreover, when he theorizes realism, character, or plot, he does so through concrete narrative examples; fiction thus becomes a continuation of his daʿwa and the social struggle he has personally endured. For this reason, critics tend to interpret his oeuvre as a paradigm of "Islamic realism," in which features such as didactic clarity, social embeddedness, and the dramatization of ethical choice are foregrounded, while abstract theorization recedes into the background.

In this regard, both writers remain authors committed to socio-political issues; however, Khalil expresses this commitment through the voice of the historian-theorist, while Kilani, as a storyteller, conveys it from within the very heart of the ordeal.

5.The Components of Islamic Literary Discourse in the Creative Corpus — Selected Texts

5.1. Al-Mughul (The Mongols) – the Islamic history play

Khalil's Al-Mughul is a tightly crafted historical drama that reimagines the Mongol conquest of Iraq as both a devastating campaign of annihilation and an extraordinary testament to human resilience. Structurally, the play centers on a single, pivotal historical moment—the fall of the central Iraqi city of Nineveh—which serves as an ethical testing ground for the experience of defeat. Dialogues among kings, soldiers, and commoners are interwoven with probing soliloquies, repeatedly reframing political collapse in religious and moral terms. In the denouement, the dramatis personae reject the consolations of conventional heroic triumph; instead, the drama affirms a conception of "honour" rooted in a persistent fighting spirit that interprets history through the Qurʾānic principle of alternation (mudāwala), according to which empires rise and fall while the divine word endures. Al-Mughul thus articulates a distinctly Muslim cosmology of history, attuned to modern political urgencies and urging its audience to perceive

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the "ancient" Mongols as allegorical figures for the invasions and cultural sieges of their own time(Rahma Muayyad Hamouda & Ishtar Daoud Muhammad, 2024, p. 65).

5.2. Al-Sayf wa al-Kalima (The Sword and the Word) – the historical–allegorical novel

Al-Sayf wa al-Kalima is conceived as a historical novel set in ancient Baghdad, portrayed both as a tangible and symbolic city during the tense hours preceding the Mongol invasion. Khalil, the novel's author, employs an innovative, polyphonic narrative voice in which the perspectives of scholars, soldiers, and ordinary people converge against a common adversary. Through this approach, he stages the confrontation between "the sword," as an instrument of violence, and "the word," as a tool of communication and faith used by the thinkers, scholars, and prophets of the era.

The novel's language is grounded in the meticulous physical depiction of the city: streets, markets, mosques, and bridges form an intricate cartography through which the reader moves from one temporal node to another. This spatialized narrative structure aligns with critical studies that interpret the work as a form of "spatial vision in the Islamic historical narrative." Stylistically, documentary and report-like passages are interwoven with interior monologues and poetic segments, gradually transforming the archival scene into a moral and philosophical domain. The eventual collapse of the city thus becomes a dual narrative: simultaneously an account of political failure and a meditation on how societies throughout history have shaped their destinies through divergent paths, whether the path of violence or that of meaning, the pursuit of power or the vocation of bearing witness (Al-Saadoon, 2012, p. 65).

5.3. Riḥlat al-Ṣuʿūd allatī lā Nihāyata Lahā (The Endless Ascent) – the Islamic realist short story cycle

In Riḥlat al-Ṣuʿūd allatī lā Nihāyata Lahā ("The Journey of Ascent without End"), Khalil presents his Islamic literary project through a cycle of short stories centered on "ascent" as a moral and spiritual metaphor. Each narrative revolves around an ostensibly ordinary crisis—a confrontation between a doctor and a mother, a final opportunity, a death "from satiety," or spectral visitations—and, through a single

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decisive moment, the protagonist's awareness of responsibility, finitude, and divine presence is profoundly heightened. While the stories remain consistently realist in both setting and incident, they are guided by an ethic of constructive engagement: characters are not merely punished or rewarded but are educated through ordeal, thereby embodying Khalil's conviction that Islamic literature should be both psychologically and intellectually challenging as well as aesthetically compelling.

Khalil's language is deliberately unadorned, and his narrative rhythm is carefully controlled. He favors clear plot trajectories and vivid, representative details; yet the recurrent use of irony, suggestion, and, at times, indeterminate or open endings prevents the collection from collapsing into a schematic moral allegory. The volume thus offers a distinctive example of Islamic narrative aesthetics, in which aesthetic pleasure, reflective contemplation, and ethical orientation are integrated dimensions of a single experience rather than competing or mutually exclusive aims (Alsawaf & Alhayaly, 2023, p. 251).

5.4. ʿAdhrā' Jākartā (Virgin of Jakarta)

In Virgin of Jakarta, al-Kilani crafts a predominantly linear realist narrative that intertwines the upheavals of postcolonial Indonesian politics with the intimate journey of a young Muslim female protagonist. Structurally, the novel oscillates between the turmoil of the streets and the stillness of the domestic sphere, staging ideological conflicts—among secular nationalism, communism, and Islamic activism—at the level of lived experience rather than abstract doctrine. Although al-Kilani adheres to a largely chronological plot and stable focalization, this apparent simplicity is enlivened by a dense web of symbolic oppositions—purity versus corruption, faith versus ideology, center versus periphery—that situate the text within a distinctly Islamic moral cosmos. In doing so, the narrative demonstrates how Islamic ethical agency can emerge from a social fabric marked by colonial legacies and subjected to authoritarian modernization, inviting readers to apprehend female piety and resistance as modalities of both social critique and spiritual renewal(Samsuri, 2024, p. 181).

5.5. Layālī Turkistān (Nights of Turkistan)

Layālī Turkistān employs an expansive and intricately layered narrative strategy that interweaves individual destinies with the collective suffering of Uyghur Muslims under Chinese and Russian domination. Kilani structures the work around a succession of the besieged, the exiled, and those who take up arms in rebellion, populating it with a diverse cast of characters through whom he explores the tension between political pragmatism and steadfast fidelity to faith. The dramatis personae repeatedly invoke the Qur'an and internalize its theological vision, even as they are drawn into starkly rendered scenes of combat, negotiation, and public humiliation, which together confer upon the work a striking quasi-documentary quality.

In its thematic structure, the novel articulates what later critics have described as a "prophetic poetics": a tripartite movement of humanization, liberation, and transcendence that not only organizes the plot and characterization but also reframes the struggle for national independence as an effort to preserve an Islamic way of life. By fusing historical epic with a spiritual love story, Kilani invites his audience to interpret the catastrophe of Turkistan as a symbol of the profound crisis confronting the contemporary Muslim umma (Hakim et al., 2023, p. 7).

5.6. Layālī Turkistān (Nights of Turkistan) ʿAmaliqat al-Shamāl (Giants of the North)

In Giants of the North, al-Kilani advances his narrative experimentation by extensively employing unbroken streams of consciousness, interior monologue, and fluid, often disorienting shifts in temporality. The novel juxtaposes the turbulent inner life of a religious leader with a meticulously rendered landscape of spiritual struggle: the battle for souls, the antagonisms between ethnic communities, and the emergence of a new African nation—all unfolding against the backdrop of 1960s Nigeria.

The structure of the text repeatedly shifts the reader's focus from the protagonist's inward doubts, supplications, and strategic calculations to expansive scenes of public preaching, political contestation, and communal violence. Through this narrative approach, al-Kilani presents Islam not as a simplistic ideological slogan but as a complex psychological and ethical pursuit within a fractured, modern world. His fiction maintains its didactic purpose while simultaneously embracing

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a modernist aesthetic, enabling the conflicts of daʿwa, power, and conscience to be experienced from within the consciousness of his characters(Aydin Görmez & Abdullah Saeed, 2019, p. 136).

6.Lexical and Semantic Structures in the Literary Discourse.

6.1. Lexical and Semantic Structures in the Literary Discourse of Imad al-Din Khalil

Khalil's work focuses on faith-inflected vocabulary, including qaḍāʾ, shahāda, yaqīn, and tawakkul. These terms emphasize divine volition and moral consciousness, rather than blind determinism. These lexemes serve as semantic fulcrums, defining the believer's attitude toward suffering, struggle, and the past, framing them as opportunities for trustingly engaging with God's decree.

A second cluster consists of expressions related to history and divinely ordained sunan, including tadāwul, ʿibra, mudāwala, and "civilizational destiny." Together, they articulate a Qur'anic philosophy of history based on recurring patterns. Thus, the rise and fall of societies emerges not as a neutral record of events, but as a constant call to reflection, reform, and moral re-education.

The third semantic domain focuses on motifs of hubris and resistance to adversity, emphasizing endurance, struggle, and the preservation of ethical integrity even under oppressive conditions. These themes are often associated with Qur'anic concepts of ṣabr and jihād al-nafs. This conceptual lexicon recasts both historical and literary narratives as arenas of confrontation, in which the faithful's courageous response to injustice embodies the imperative to uphold truth and preserve the umma's unity.

6.2. Lexical and Semantic Structures in the Literary Discourse of Naguib al-Kilani

In al-Kilani's fiction, the lexicon of suffering and oppression—incarceration, torture, exile, conspiracy—serves as the primary semantic matrix through which he exposes the various dimensions of political despotism, colonial violence, and spiritual ordeal. This vocabulary depicts the Muslim subject as a mustad'af, whose

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pain is both historical and metaphysical. The language of bodily and social injury is thus intertwined with a discourse of endurance and resistance, so that episodes of imprisonment, interrogation, and displacement serve as allegories for an ummah fighting against the erosion of its humanity.

Al-Kilani contrasts the repertoire of torment with a counter-lexicon of hope and resurgence, using terms like ba'th, ṣaḥwa, and taḥarrur to express spiritual and sociopolitical awakening. Within the story, these concepts represent pivotal moments when characters reclaim agency and communities regain a collective voice. Revival, in this sense, is more than just an optimistic sentiment; it is an eschatological and historical project that creates a bridge between personal repentance and reform on the one hand and large-scale liberation and civilizational renewal on the other.

Da'wa and guidance, including terms like calling, witnessing, preaching, and hidāya, are central to the narrative voice and characters' role in translating religious teachings into ethical practice in everyday life. The discourse of the text prioritizes instruction through address, exposition, and dialogic exchange. At the same time, it seeks to preserve literary vitality, aligning al-Kilani with broader notions of Islamic literature as an art form that is not only aesthetically accomplished but also communicative and purposeful, leading readers to a more profound understanding of faith.

7. Rhetorical Imagery and Intertextuality

7.1. Rhetorical Imagery and Intertextuality in the Works of Imad al-Din Khalil

Imad al-Din Khalil uses strikingly vivid prose to depict the Mongol invasions, with the Islamic world's religious imagination serving as the primary language of historical representation. His narrative is rife with metaphors and intertextual allusions: the Mongols are frequently portrayed as apocalyptic forces—"flood," "plague," "storm"—images that recast a violently disruptive historical event as a form of moral disorder and, within a Qur'anic horizon of meaning, as a divinely ordained test of civilization.

Al-Khalil's characters frequently mention Allah's sunan, the cycle of victory and defeat, and the ultimate triumph of justice. These themes are not limited to their spoken conversations; they pervade the very fabric of their consciousness. Thus, the religious script is presented not as an external, didactic commentary on events,

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but rather as a dramatized mode of seeing and interpreting history from within the play's own world (Al-Azzawi, 2019, p. 216).

7.2. Rhetorical Imagery and Intertextuality in the Works of Naguib al-Kilani

Finely wrought visual imagery in Al-Kilani's fiction makes political despotism and social injustice seem like sensually comprehensible realities. In doing so, he combines aesthetic representation with ethical and ideological critique, reshaping the contours of the modern Islamic narrative. In novels like Adhra' Jakarta, the figurative fabric is densely interwoven with both implicit and explicit intertextual allusions to Qur'anic verses on trial, patience, hijra, and jihad. Through this intricate weaving, scriptural discourse is reanimated as the organizing horizon of contemporary historical experience, drawing parallels with Imad al-Din Khalil's theoretical formulations of Islamic literature(Abū-Malḥa, 2015, p. 97).

8.The Aesthetic Function in Literary Discourse: Artistic Aesthetics and the Boundaries of Literary Commitment

This section of the article investigates how Islamic literary discourse navigates the conflict between aesthetic autonomy and ideological commitment by contrasting Imad al-Din Khalil's highly intellectualized critical prose with Naguib al-Kilani's emotionally evocative narrative practice. Furthermore, it raises the unanswered question of which of these two models—"the da'wa-oriented novelist" or "the historian-theorist of Islamic literature"—has had a greater influence on subsequent generations of Islamic writers.

Khalil's argument is, in fact, significantly more conceptually oriented and argument-focused than Kilani's, emphasizing analytical categories, theoretical constructs, and cross-cultural aesthetic comparison over emotional immediacy, even when discussing "committed" literature. Kilani's fiction, while clearly programmatic in its Islamic direction, still maintains a considerable amount of controlled ambiguity through symbolic patterning, nonverbal semiotics, and open-ended narrative situations, as demonstrated by several studies of Giants of the North and other novels, thus negating the simplification of his work as mere propaganda(AbukhudaiRi, 2019, p. 835).

The available evidence also suggests that Kilani's "novelist-preacher" paradigm had the most significant and traceable impact on subsequent Islamic narrative practice. Khalil's theoretical writings, on the other hand, have primarily shaped the surrounding meta-discourse—that is, the conceptual frameworks, evaluative criteria, and aesthetic norms that guide how these narratives are understood and judged. However, the question of the relative weight and durability of these two legacies remains unanswered and can only be adequately addressed through

systematic reception studies spanning multiple generations of authors(Amir, 2020, p. 170).

9. Conclusion

The study demonstrated that the movement "from theorization to narrative and dramatic embodiment" in the works of Imad al-Din Khalil and Naguib al-Kilani is neither linear nor merely illustrative. Rather, it is a complex negotiation between doctrine, history, and the artistic imagination. Khalil's tawḥīdic worldview, conception of history as governed by divine sunan, and commitment to literature as a vehicle for awakening consciousness extend beyond his critical writings. Al-Mughul, Al-Sayf wa-l-Kalima, and Riḥlat al-Ṣuʿūd allatī lā Nihāyata Lahā use dramatic structure, symbolic patterning, and carefully orchestrated narrative trajectories to transform historical material into a laboratory of ethical trial and spiritual insight.

The study shows that al-Kilani's daʿwī and pedagogical theory of Islamic literature, expressed in works like Madkhal ilā al-Adab al-Islāmī and al-Islāmiyyah wa-l-Madhāhib al-Adabiyyah, was realized through a distinct aesthetic register. Adhrā' Jākartā's sequential realism, Layālī Turkistān's epic-documentary sweep, and ʿAmaliqat al-Shamāl's psychologically interiorized modernist techniques transformed colonial violence, imprisonment, exile, and ideological struggle into a language of spiritual trial, moral agency, and communal rebirth, articulating a renewed vision in his literary oeuvre.

At the lexical and semantic levels, the study revealed two distinct but interconnected constellations of ideas. Khalil's discourse is shaped by motifs of faith and certainty (qaḍāʾ, shahāda, yaqīn, tawakkul), Qurʾanic conceptions of history (tadāwul, ʿibra, mudāwala), and an ethical regime of steadfast resistance (ṣabr, jihād al-nafs). Together, these elements not only reconfigure historiography and fiction as privileged arenas for the believer to interpret and enact divine law in historical time but also weave them into a single, integrated field of meaning and practice.

Al-Kilani's lexicon includes images of oppression and suffering, such as prison, torture, exile, and conspiracy. However, it is balanced by a vocabulary of awakening and liberation (baʿth, ṣaḥwa, taḥarrur), as well as a dense network of

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daʿwa-related terms (calling, witnessing, preaching, hidāya). In this way, the novel or play becomes a form of dramatized pedagogy in which political despotism and colonial dominance are confronted with ethical and communal mobilization. In both corpora, Qur'anic and historical intertexts serve not as mere ornamentation but as powerful rhetorical resources that structure the narrative point of view, shape the reader's affective response, and initiate a trans-historical dialogue between revelation and lived experience.

The study found that Khalil and al-Kilani reject the idea of a "neutral," value-free aesthetic, instead emphasizing al-iltizām (ethical and ideological commitment) as a fundamental aspect of Islamic literature. For both writers, narrative fiction and theater are the preferred mediums for articulating an Islamic worldview in contrast to secular, colonial, and materialist epistemologies. However, they differ significantly in their conception of voice, structure, and stylistic density: Khalil, writing as a historian and theorist, elaborates intricate binary schemes and symbolic architectures that recast the civilizational clash as a meta-narrative meditation, whereas al-Kilani writes out of lived ordeal, adopting a mode of social realism, precise chronology, and psychologically compelling characters whose predicaments are almost immediately legible as ethical decisions.

This study has illuminated a shared Islamic horizon articulated through diverse formal strategies—including documentary realism, allegorical theatre, and the modernist interior monologue—that together not only deepen our understanding of the possible configurations of "Islamic literature," but also consolidate this corpus as a fertile site for the development of modern Arabic language, rhetoric, and comparative poetics.

This study shows that the two writers, Imad al-Din Khalil and Naguib al-Kilani, successfully integrate religious dimensions of Islam with a refined literary and artistic sensibility in their work. Khalil uses the tawḥīdic (Divine Unity) paradigm to engage with the new and theater, while al-Kilani uses Islamic realism to confront political and social realities in his poetry.

The findings also revealed a deep similarity in their Islamic value systems and underlying lexical fields. At the same time, significant differences emerged in

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rhythmic style, narrative tempo, and the intensity and modes of intertextual allusion—differences that not only broadened our understanding of the diversity of Islamic literary expression but also confirmed this discourse as a dynamic stylistic and rhetorical domain within Arabic language and literature.

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