

'ut pictura poesis' and Aesthetic Kinship: A Case from Modern Arabic Prose

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Abstract: This paper responds to the ancient question about the relationship - or lack of it – between history and art, avoiding the partiality of many single-talented disciples of these creative endeavors. This matter is examined in *The Tattoo (Al-Washm, 'alwašm)*, a collection of prose narratives written by Hind Abu-Sha'ar, a Professor of history, a painter, a poet, and an established short story writer. It examines the effect that her versatile experience, as a historian and painter, has on her language, by tracing the historian-painter, not as character, but, rather, as the essential writer of her narratives. In particular, it investigates the interrelatedness of the scriptural, sculptural, visual, and historical in her stories where the painter and the historian cooperate in injecting their visions into the essence of the language textures of the narratives. Abu-Sha'ar's versatile talent produces a distinctive utterance in which the advantages of painting and graphic art are employed to achieve a visual dimension in the lexicon as the *scriptural* becomes *sculptural*; and history is exploited to enrich the painted narratives with visions from the heritage of the past. Thus, rather than being a record of *dead* past times, history is turned into an ever-present live-picture by the language of painting, an achievement that uncovers a psychological vision of notions of memory and recall and, hence, of history.

Keywords: ut pictura poesis; ekphrasis; Hind Abu-Sha'ar; artistic versatility; aesthetics

He tried again, all masses of paint in his hand turn into a butchery (carnage)... the dreams turn into tragic massacres, and the heads of the trees roll just like the heads of the dead with dry skulls... the masses of red paint congeal like the blood river which never stops... it flows on the cloth (canvas) and seeps... seeps until it paints (colors) the horizon... it dares not stop... he paints and paints.
(Abu-Sha'ar 2000: 101)²

The concluding lines of *The Painting ('al-lawhah)*, the penultimate story in the collection *The Tattoo ('alwašm)*, are tactful enough, vividly marking the margins of Abu-Sha'ar's versatile vision; namely, the skilful fusion of history, art and narrative prose. Here one finds an essentially genuine technique in her prose narratives: painting history in the words of the narrative or narrating history in the language of paint.

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²*Al-Washm* is Abu-Sha'ar's fifth collection of short stories, preceded by *Rips in Khadrah's Hand* (1982), *Confrontation* (1984), *The Horse* (1990), and *When Memory Becomes a Country* (1996). The translation is mine and all forthcoming quotations are from the same edition, and they are cited parenthetically. As far as the translation is concerned, I adopted the word-for-word translation method, except for a few cases where, due to ambiguity in the target language version, I had to use the literal approach, by which I incorporated the structure of the target language (English) and hence minimized that ambiguity.

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Distinctively, the painting here is not static at all; it is turned, rather, into live action: 'masses of paint turn into a butchery (carnage) and the heads of the trees roll like the heads of the dead'. The act of painting in the present tense is associated with past (historical) action, where the scene is not only painted but is also interpreted and its symbolic significance explained. Nonetheless, the two activities – those of painting and explaining – are simultaneous rather than consecutive.³ Abu-Sha'ar achieves this simultaneity by means of her carefully structured language; the choice of words which skillfully and accurately describe the visual dimensions (colors, angles, material and shadow) of the painted elements, and simultaneously imply, through their multiple denotations, the symbolic significance of those elements painted in the scene. For example, the phrase 'masses of red paint' seems to suggest 'masses of red blood'. One may even call it a Freudian slip. The two phrases are there, but Abu-Sha'ar uses the one that may suggest both, thereby mixing not only the two words but rather the two processes, those of painting and interpreting. This uncovers, in fact, the mixture of the two activities in the mind of the writer, who instead of describing the work of the painter at one stage and interpreting it at another, takes on the two missions altogether. So, instead of saying that the painter used red paint and then explaining that 'red paint' was chosen to represent 'blood', the writer elliptically essences the two acts in 'masses of red paint', a phrase which clearly achieves the two senses when linked with following words and phrases, for immediately the word 'blood' is used to replace red paint: 'like the blood river which never stops... it flows on the cloth (canvas) and seeps, ... seeps until it paints (colors) the horizon'. Here the act of mixing the two activities continues as 'blood' substitutes 'paint'. Thus painting becomes, on the one hand, a topic or content in the narrative and, on the other, a technique or a means of narrating.

The story depicts a professional painter searching for a topic for his painting, a topic he finds in Jerash, an ancient Roman city rich in history undertones.⁴ The painter draws trees which he, in due course, imagines as Roman soldiers in a battlefield. The narrator dives into the painter's mind to reveal the history essenced in the painted scene as the painter imagines it, an act which raises essential questions about the story: is it a narrative, a painting or a document of history? Since neither can be excluded, the inevitable answer is *all of them altogether*. Nobody can deny that it is a story for it has a plot, narrator, setting, and characters. Though not a document of history in the strict sense, it does refer to history, for which one may call it a 'historical story': it is an imagined story rich with symbolic allusions to the history of its locale.

There remains the following question: is it a painting? Again, it is not a painting in the strict sense. To apply the same method one may say it is a *painting/ed narrative* or a *narrated painting*. The question may be reconsidered as follows: does the narrative explain or interpret a painting or, even, paint? Again the answer is *both*. First, it explains the symbolic significance of the painted scene in the sense that the narrator reveals to the reader the mind of the painter and his *intentions* as he paints. Second, it does paint in two related senses. In the first instance, it describes the act of painting starting with the selection of the topic, the choice of position and angle, the process of mixing paint and applying it on the canvas, altogether in the context of imagining and symbolizing. And it does also paint, though not using brushes and paint, as it employs a distinctive language that acutely and accurately describes the whole process of painting up to the finished work of the artist, where the words faithfully translate the painting by designating color, shadow, material, mass, and shape. Hence the words substitute the brushes, paint, and canvas. The narrative exceeds, even, the capacity of painting as it interprets the painting. In addition, the title (*The Painting*) highlights this mixture of painting and narrative. Superficially, *The Painting* is a story about painting, but a scrutinized reading shows that painting transcends the limits of content and becomes the essential technique employed in writing the story, which hence becomes a *painting/ed narrative* and/or a *narrated painting*. In both cases, a historical vision is maintained, painted and narrated. In other words, history is revealed through painting and narrative: narrated and painted altogether. The mixed process of writing and painting produces a live-picture of *dead* actions from past history. This distinctive mixture of painting and writing narrative and histories is, indeed, characteristic of Abu-Sha'ar in the collection *The Tattoo*, and reveals her attempt to

³A major third activity, which contains the earlier two, is that of narrating.

⁴Jerash is a Graeco-Roman city, Gerasa in ancient times. It is considered the best preserved and most complete city of the Decapolis, meaning *ten cities* in Greece, a confederation of ten Roman cities in the land of northern Jordan, Syria and Palestine dating from the first century BC. Within the city, archaeologists have found the remains of settlements dating from the Bronze Age, the Iron Age, the Hellenistic, Roman, Byzantine, Umayyad, and Abbasid periods, indicating human occupation for more than 2500 years.

unite her versatile talents in one indivisible form. But beyond this unity lies a metaphysical use of language and art, and a philosophical vision of history, as the following pages will attempt to uncover.

Just like the art of telling stories and writing histories, paint is a definitely major experience for Abu-Sha'ar, who has been increasingly aware of the vicarious nature of her art; the extent that her versatile talent determined the shapes, sounds, colors and historical visions of her narratives. Consequently, she has many a time spelled out her reservation against the critical reception of her narratives for having generally marginalized her work within the confines of feminist writing and ideology, ignoring her technical innovations; in a personal interview she told me:

My keys, the main issues in *The Tattoo* are the investigation of 'time', and more importantly, the experimentation with technique. But unfortunately, and so strange and unjustifiable it is, these have never been highlighted by those who read my work.

In *Throats' Anger and Lips' Wormth: Studies in Poetry and the Short Story*, Hassan A Naji discussed the themes of three of Abu-Sha'ar's stories, concentrating mainly on the feminist treatment of the theme of "the wife and the second lady" in *The Bridge* (*al-djir*), showing how a wife prefers her husband's death to his being involved in an affair with another woman. He also detailed the relationship between the themes of death and resurrection in *The Horse* and *The Gazelle Runs towards the Sun* (*al -hissaa* and *alghazaal-u-yarkud-u-bittidjahiššams*) (Naji: 113-122; 235-248).

Nonetheless, Abu-Sha'ar has utilized every possible chance to draw critics' attention to a few overlooked aspects in her work. In a paper presented to the conference on the short story in Jordan, held at Al Al-Bayt University 2001, she wrote:

This beautiful smart art, which is capable of enlightening and revolutionizing, limited in space, concentrated, and successful in involving other types of art... is capable of revealing and affecting in the least possible space, and in the shortest possible time and with the richest and deepest of artistic tools. (Emphasis added, Abu Sha'ar 2001: 16)

She raises the idea that the art of the short story is successfully capable of involving other types of arts, by which she possibly points to painting. Indisputably, this underlines the shadow art was casting over her mentality. It is therefore not surprising that in her "Testimony: My Experience with the Short Story", presented at The First Seminar on Women's Creativity, Abu-Sha'ar attacked all critics and interviewers for having marginalized her work in the category of feminist literature:

I have always been greatly upset in the literature seminars and journal and television interviews, where the starting question I was usually asked never transcended the issue of feminist literature... this hinders my understanding of my role as a writer... as if they are telling me: you are a woman and you have to write about nothing but women... what an act of marginalizing... I allow myself to condemn criticism (critics) of my stories because it/they have always examined my work within this fake circle... When are they going to realize the great essences which a Jordanian writer presents? (Abu-Sha'ar: 9-10)⁵

⁵This fusion is facilitated by Abu-Sha'ar's versatility, which enabled her to overcome the bias of many single-talented disciples, who claimed the superiority of their own crafts. For example, in *The Republic*, Plato incidentally fused painting and literary language: "the poet, knowing nothing more than how to represent appearances, can paint in words his picture of any craftsman so as to impress an audience which is equally ignorant and judges only by the form of expression" (Plato: 331). However, he asserted the superiority of philosophy over all kinds of imitative arts. Similarly, in *De Poetica*, Aristotle claimed the superiority of verse and tragedy. On the other hand, Horace argued that poetic language entails visual dimensions, "a special development of the idea... of *ut pictura poesis*, the theory that poetry and painting are sister arts, fulfilling much the same function, and consequently that a text can illustrate a picture as much as a picture a text" (Hilton: 49; 50; 65; see also Miller). The connection between painting and poetry was also at the heart of Imagism, the modern movement that asserted the importance of the image in poetry: the image is the essence of poetic composition where poetry is to communicate through images. As Ezra Pound, the most prominent disciple of the movement, put it, the image is the vortex that "presents an intellectual and emotional complex in an instant of time" (Bate and Perkins: 715). Hence, the (imagist) poet should visualize verse. In other words, Imagism argued for fusing painting and poetry. Relatedly, the comparatists realized literature's interdisciplinary relationship with sciences and arts, and hence established an interdisciplinary critical approach which analyzes the fusion of different disciplines in works of literature: "The comparatist not only concerns himself with the internal relations of the Republic of Letters,

In an article in *Al-Ra'i* newspaper, originally a public lecture delivered at Petra University, she reiterated once again:

I have an art-bound worry; I worry over my language and techniques in the art of the short story... this worry makes me love and pamper my language... And I usually avoid narrative (chronological) language and enter in the area of the unconscious and dream... I use interior monologue; I live the inside of my characters... I bring the world of poetry into my stories... and I color (paint) the faces, the faces of my characters whom I love and work hard to paint... I mix poetry and graphic art. Sometimes my character come over the stage and act dramatic or cinematic scenes, consecutive and fast...⁶

She is worried over confiscating her own technical innovations. Noticeably, psychology and theatre are at the essence of her narratives, a matter that receives further analysis later. Significantly, she asserts that painting is an essential technique in her narratives, as she attempts to capture, analyze, and grasp time.

The critical reception of Abu-Sha'ar, such as it exists, incorporates few incidental suggestions and claims about the relationship between art and prose in her narratives. In a passing statement, Huda Abu Ghaneema alleged that the major issue in *The Tattoo* is the analysis of the concept of 'time', which Abu-Sha'ar presents "within an artist's vision so that the scene becomes like a painting" (5). Ihsaan Abbas laconically alleged that, in her collection of narratives *Al-Hisan (The Horse)*, Abu-Sha'ar "is a ware that she literally 'paints' a painting, the result of which is that the story develops the same as a painting develops; in the dispersing, emerging, disappearance and dominance of colors... It is not the action that is of importance but, rather, the completion of the parts of the picture."

It is not a coincidence, then, that Abu-Sha'ar starts the whole collection with a female painter – probably herself:

She finishes combing her hair; she looks into the mirror contently. The warm spring colors make her happy. She inspects her face; she feels she has a fantastic artist's hand, as she paints the eyes accurately; she looks into the embroidered sash, luxuriant silk; her heart beats on touching it, and she remembers him with her in (Aleppo), they were together... they walked together as the gentle Aleppo morning walked them to the "castle". (5)

The first word in the collection is a past-tense verb (*finished*) which is followed by three more past-tense verbs in the initial two lines; then come the present-tense verbs which are, significantly, acts triggered by the earlier past incidents. The result is that the protagonist *paints as she remembers* and *remembers as she paints*. Painting turns out to be a means of recalling the remembered past. It is a back-and-forth movement between the remembered past and its present painting; painting initiates the memory of the past, and it requires more of the details and significance of the past. The concept of history is essentially central here as implied in the lovers' walk to Aleppo castle, an emblem rich in history undertones, as is also implied in the parenthetically emphasized (Aleppo) and the singling out of the word "castle" by the quotation marks.

A non-participant omniscient narrator tells us about a female artist actively involved in painting 'eyes', an act which generates a current of 'associated' past individual memories (histories) that constitute the plot of the narrative. The emphasis on 'eyes' reveals that the act of 'seeing' is tantamount with those of writing and reading; a distinctive act of seeing, indeed, for it suggests a close analytical perception of what is seen. The remembered incidents are turned into scenes, images, and masses subjected to the mind's eye therefore transcending the abstractness of past history. History is painted with minute details of color, angle, essence, material, shadow and hence analyzed, interpreted and consequently surpassed, overcome and/or utilized. Hence the expository details mix painting and past-time memories in the texture of the narrative. The act of painting serves here as the starting point of the narrative; the painting initiates the memory and the narrative. And this early appearance of the painter initiates the whole collection and hence serves as an essential and

but also with the connections of literature with other disciplines, notably with the fine arts. Men like Diderot and Lessing, remembering Horace's *ut pictura poesis*, had a strong sense of the harmony between the arts of poetry, painting, and – in Lessing's case – sculpture" (Jost: 37-38; see also Bassnett). In fact, Abu-Sha'ar might be seen in the line of Horace, Imagism, and the comparatists.

⁶no. 11674, vol. 32, p. 27.

successful entrance into the world of Abu-Sha'ar, highlighting the indivisible parts of her uniquely disparate vision: history, paint and literary prose. In fact, Abu-Sha'ar maintains this mixture throughout the whole collection. *The Tattoo*, the she told me, deals mainly with the concept of 'time': "The shadow of time had forced itself on my mind all throughout the writing of the stories of *The Tattoo*. And I could not escape the strong pressure of these shadows. Time is at the essence of these stories." But scrutinized reading shows that the dominant topic is, more specifically, past time remembered; the memory is always triggered by an incident in the present. The stories seem to involve an attempt to define 'time' – past, present and future – using the techniques of narrative prose, art, psychology, and history. The whole collection seems to be a metaphysical perception of 'time', a philosophical investigation of its nature and significance; an attempt to capture it, concrete it, personify it, sculpt it, and/or animate it; to overcome its abstractness. Art and history cooperate in unveiling the mysteries of the concept of 'time' and the relationship among present, past and future, within psychological notions of memory and recall. So while the dominant topic is past time remembered and recalled, the dominant technique is painting the remembered and recalled past.

Throughout the collection, the concept of 'time' is presented in various terms and may be categorized as follows: time-as-age and time-as-history (individual, collective, and literary). The investigation of 'time' starts early in the collection: "A terrifying idea sprang into her 'depths', she shivered as she remembered that all those watches and clocks are ticking around her, ticking around her wrist, ticking in her heart, pumping blood, and that they count time... yes time... *which time... which time...*!" (Emphasis added: 6-7). The exclaimed apostrophe to the reiterated question is strangely obsessive, and narrows down the focus of the rememberer's reaction to the paradoxical vision of time in her mind. The psychological point is simple enough: 'time' is mainly the life span of the individual: 'ticking in her heart, pumping blood'. But the desire for the joyful passage of time-as-age, i.e. happy life, is accompanied by constant fear caused by thinking of that passage as an act of approaching one's own death. Such a sense of time haunts her imagination and the sound of the clock is immediately internalized: "the consecutive ticking was stalking her... tick... tick... tick... six clocks (watches), how cruel... six clocks counting time and stalking her" (6). It, therefore, becomes inescapable: "The ticking of the clock in the dining room stalked her... tick... tick... tick... the ticking mixed with the music of her steps, she shivered... Is this the melody of the last return" (6-7). The reaction comes late: "damn it... when is it (the clock) going to stop counting time" (7). This sense of time as the passing of the life span of Man recurs throughout the collection. In *The Way* (*ât-tariq*), she says: "am I racing life...? I fear the passing of time" (60). And driving her car she finds: "the highway like the line of life" (75). Such a sense of time is so overwhelming: "the moment knocks me down and I shiver" (65).

In the collection, 'time' moves also backwards to the past, whereby it acquires a sense of time-as-history, whether individual or collective, or even literary. In *The Telephone* (*âl-haatif*), related thoughts about death haunt the mind of the protagonist as she remembers her dead father: "imagine that it is the tenth year since he (her father) left us" (11). 'Left us' here is a euphemistic substitute for 'died'. And the reaction against death materializes in finding a substitute for mortality: "he is present in my memory everyday" (11). Memory and recall are developed as self-defense mechanisms against forgetfulness and mortality and past individual history is treasured in "every place where memory can get" (13-14). The body is tantamount with memory: "I have discovered after all this time which has occupied my inert body that it (her body) is a big wonderful world ... a theatre the size of life and the richness of sparkling memory..." (65). The memory becomes the store in which the past, whether positive or negative, is kept. In a Freudian sense, the past is stored in the unconscious to be revived through memories, which are preceded by an act of 'forgetfulness'.⁷ Once needed, the past is reactivated through resurrected individual memories: "unknown faces *get painted* with my grandfather's face" (64). Here one finds the recalled past 'painted', remembering images: "and the consecutive pictures flash into the imagination" (65). Hence memory turns into an internal immortalizing force by which the body becomes: 'a big wonderful world ... a theatre the size of life'. The discovery that

⁷Freud argues that "There is a kind of forgetting which is distinguished by the difficulty with which the memory is a wakened even by powerful external summons, as through some internal resistance were struggling against its revival. A forgetting of this kind has been given the name of 'repression' in psychology.... What is repressed, it is true, as a rule makes its way into memory without more ado; but it retains the capacity for effective action, and the influence of some external event, it may one day bring about psychical consequences which can be regarded as products of a modification of the forgotten memory and as derivatives of it and which remain intelligible unless we take this view of them" (Freud, "Delusions": 34).

Abu-Sha'ar makes here ('I have discovered') reveals her realization of the strong relation between the memorized past and present action, by which the body becomes like an active stage-theatre full of action.

It is indeed worth elaborating on the question of memory here. The past, which is kept in the memory, provides a major *cause* for present action. As Hume puts it: "Had we no memory, we never should have any notion of causation, nor consequently of that chain of causes and effects, which constitute our self or person" (Qtd. in Watt: 21).⁸ It is not surprising hence that the act of recalling faces, voices, scenes, smells, surfaces and tastes dominates the collection. Consider the following cases: "your absent voice comes to me intimately"; "and I recall you"; "and I recall my ancient voice that is full of hope and love... I remember the yearning ... love... I and you" (67). "The things, the times and the actions fall upon me" (68). The rememberer relives once again the recalled memories, which are consequently turned into present, rather than past, activities: "he penetrates with his eyes my depth, he plants its glances into my cells, the ancient moments of happiness grow"; "I remember you and your ancient frightened voice whips me" (78-79). The past and the present coexist, and this bears a psychological understanding of memory which might better be understood in light of Locke's definition of personal identity as an identity of consciousness through duration in time; the individual was in touch with his continuing identity through memory of his past thoughts and actions (Watt: 21).⁹

However, the collection features another sense of time-as-history that transcends the individual to the collective, where the rememberer poses as a historian searching for the details of the collective past: "(did they meet since ages ago... since centuries ago...? at a time which the mind can not remember)" (54). It is the historian's job to search for the answers for such questions about the connections between different phases of the past; to account for its sequence, accord, consistency or contradiction. For example, in *The Painting* the historian-artist tries to link the modern Jerash and the ancient Jerash: "oh god, how can the eye get filled, just like that, and in a single moment, with all this time" (99). Mere laconic details about the history of Jerash are mentioned. But the suggestion of 'all this time' suffices to hint to the need for a comprehensive recall of that history, particularly when the genre of the short story, like the poem, is based on the economy of words and concentrated expression. Hence, the rememberer merely highlights the message beyond that comprehensive recall: "my memory shivered, and I suspected a certain conspiracy in which all attendants participated" (72). And the ultimate conclusion reiterates the common-sense lesson of history: "and I knew that there was nothing new under the sun, and things recur... always recur" (72). This idea that 'history repeats itself' reveals to us Abu-Sha'ar as historian. And Abu-Sha'ar the artist poses a few times as well:

I imagined the teacher was the guide who led Dante in his journey to hell... I do not know... what made me recall this frightening scene... I sneaked into the home library and I started inspecting the volumes, I found a book which stopped me, I shivered as I turned its pages, I read the journey and I was scared (28).

The historian's job becomes like a descent into the inferno, going back in time, into the darkened ages, struggling to shed light on the dead, the long dead. But the reference to Dante here belongs, doubtlessly, to the artist. Such double identity of the artist-historian recurs also when encountered, in Italy, with the question: "are you from the world of *The Thousand and one Night*...!" (53). The oriental point alludes to the notion of literary influence and indebtedness as much as it bears a comment on the cultural relationship between the West and the East; the former's usual stereotypical perception of the latter in the context of *The Arabian Nights*.¹⁰ The bringing together of nations and cultures, East and West, relies upon the historian who may find meeting points in the history of mankind: '(did they meet since ages ago... since centuries ago...? at a time which the mind can not remember)'. And the historian and the artist are also revealed in the reference to the Arab's presence in Spain; here again there are possibly allusions to literary influence along

⁸Originally from Hume, *Treaties of Human Nature*, Bk I, pt. 4, sect. Vi.

⁹Originally from *Human Understanding*, Bk. 11, ch. 27, sects. ix, x.

¹⁰For more on this perception, see the argument of Edward Said, one of the most persuasive champions of this field, as presented in his *Orientalism*.

with political dominance: "and she realized at last... that she was alone just like the palm tree that made Abder-Rahman Ed-Dakhil ('abdirrahmaan 'addaaxil) cry long time ago" (55).¹¹

There is never a lack of rememberers in Abu-Sha'ar's narratives that embody memory and the dislocations of time. The narratives represent an ongoing story of a remembered life; a struggle to remember bits of one's own past, individual and/or communal. Abu-Sha'ar's idea of past time remembered is accompanied by a modern psychological vision of the notion of memory. It is to be noticed that it is not the memory that is of essence. Rather, it is the complex net of remembered states, the interplay between the memory and the present, the simultaneity of pasts and presents and the pluralism of self-perception. In other words, the exploration of personality is carried out by interrelating past and present self-awareness. This is reflected in multiple states of repetition and recall, an act that reveals the inevitability of the multiplicity and fragmentedness of the individual, the rememberer, who becomes no more than a listener for his/her own memories.

Let us consider *The Telephone* ('al-haatif) where the participant narrator is a rememberer nostalgically recalling her father's presence at Christmas family unions before his death. The greatly desired recall is turned into an unachievable goal as she attempts to relive the past and bring the dead father back to life. The attempt to recall the father's body and voice fails and the re-caller starts compromising; she first tries to recall the father's face and, as she fails to achieve that, or as she finds that unsatisfactory, she attempts to recall his voice. The telephone becomes a means of recovering the past voice, as she awaits her dead father to call her by phone, a modern vision of prophecy. The voice of the prophet-figure of the dead father is sought as a source of inspiration. However, among the crowded noisy place and startling smells, the effort to recall the father's voice and face intensifies to overcome the interruption:

The noises of habitual talking started to rise along with little smiles which immediately enlarged; and the smell of the spicy food spread. I could not ignore the absent face, a saint's face in a Byzantine icon, with wide transparent eyes. I knew I was getting closer to madness. I travel in hope I may find him somewhere, in a strange street sitting in a cafe, waiting for me. I intend looking closely into the faces of strangers coming out of cinemas and theatres, so that I may see him... I expect to find him praying in a great cathedral. I, for his sake, inspect the faces of all prayers, one by one... I see them staring at me with fear as I shake them from the shoulder... I ask them about him in languages they do not understand. As the home phone rings I run to it anxiously. I say to myself... that is him... him... that must be dad, with his tuneful sympathetic voice... He can not leave us, that must be him...(12)

Among the noises and smells, the senses are confused and the memory can not be focused. Hence the remembered face is revealed to be no more than a symbolic image rather than a replica of the real one, a saint's face that fails to satisfy the desire to see the real father. The attempt to recall the face and/or the voice continues, forming multiple states of repetition and recall. Then the ringing of the phone opens the way for a substitute: failing to see him, she once again hopes to re-hear his voice. But that again comes to her disappointment.

Nevertheless, she insists and therefore takes the phone to bed hoping that the absent saint would call: "It is midnight, I decide to take the phone with me to bed, I know he will call me tonight, he would do, it is

¹¹Abder-Rahman Ed-Dakhil ('abdirrahmaan 'addaaxil) 731-788, the name of the Marwanid prince who restored the Umayyad dynasty in al-Andalus. He is the son of Mu'awiya b. Hisham and was called al-Dakhil ('addaaxil), meaning the *immigrant*. When his relatives were hunted by the Abbasids, he escaped secretly first to Palestine, then to Egypt, Africa, al-Kayrawaan, and al-Magrib (Morocco) where he sought hospitality from the Berber tribes, taking advantage of his family connections – his mother was a captive woman from those tribes. But the Berbers did not favor the political aspirations of the young Syrian émigré who decided then to try his luck in Spain where he cleverly united the Arab Kaysite and Yemenite parties and enlisted the support of the numerous Umayyad clients who had by then formed a group of Syrian soldiers dominating a large part of the south of Andalusia. Hence he made his entry into several parts of Spain till finally entering the capital (15 May 756), and was proclaimed amir of al-Andalus. The founder of the Umayyad emirate of Cordova was to reign for more than thirty-three years. The news of his success spread in the East and soon a stream of supporters joined him to help in the restoration of the dynasty in the West. He died at Cordova on 30 September 788. The success of the 'Immigrant' made a deep impression in the East, and the Abbasid Caliph Abu Dja'far al-Mansur gave him the name *Sagr Kuraysh* (Hawk of Kuraysh), as an attribute to his courage and achievement. For further information (see Levi-Provencal; Chegne).

Christmas eve, Christmas eve how would he forget me... he would call... he would...!" (13). She then sleeps and meets him in a dream: "At last I sleep, I sleep sickly tired, at last the sympathetic face shows up to me, shows up from a Byzantine icon with transparent eyes... I smile... I am enlightened..." (14). Here one finds a common sense Freudian conception of memory-essenced dreams being the outcome of unsatisfied desires. Meeting the father in the dream compensates for her inability to see him in reality. The richness of the dream can be revealed once its originating sources are figured out. As Freud puts it: "it is only rarely that a dream represents, or, as we might say, 'stages', a single thought: there are usually a number of them, a tissue of thoughts" ("Delusions": 59). He also explains how to psychoanalyze a dream: "It consists in paying no attention to the apparent connections in the manifest dream but in fixing our eyes on each portion of its content independently and in looking for its origins in the dreamer's impressions, memories, and free association" (Ibid: 65). And in the case of the protagonist's dream in *The Telephone*, the desire is to re-see the remembered deceased father. So the ultimate goal of memory and recall is to visualize the face and to re-hear the voice, to recover a live-scene, a speaking picture, image and sound.

In *The Defeat* ('al-haziymah), Abu-Sha'ar reveals an enriching psychological understanding of memory as a healing mechanism; the unnamed protagonist, a man, remembers his past defeats and envisions them as ghosts stalking him everywhere. These ghosts haunt his mind and occupy his steps, becoming "as cruel as the eyes of a dictator capable of executing and confiscating" and:

the steps become like the marching of soldiers, the noise of which strengthens. He hears military orders which deafens his ears, and he realizes that the corpses will haunt him again... the defeats of nameless battles... fell upon him... his steps paced... the same military steps and marshes and the steps, which ran behind him were like the steps of a defeated leader. He slips into the hall and closely looks into the piled faces, countless battalions sit weaponless in the presence of poetry...

The faces line up like a military battalion... he stands up, he withdraws, he moves a cross the pathway, the steps run after him... the same defeated military steps... he breathed with appetite and knew she was with him, they walked together... true that defeat still accompanied them, but he no longer fears. (Emphasis added, pp.21-22)

The protagonist's mind is unveiled through a scene, which translates his fears by means of associated and displaced images and symbols. In other words, past frightening, humiliating, and/or embarrassing memories can be overcome once encountered; and the most functional face-to-face encounter would be achieved by visualizing the frightening faces. So, once the terrifying past is turned into a body and a face, it is then captured and overcome, and it therefore turns out to be frightening no more. Once again memory and imaging are brought together.

Abu-Sha'ar's notion of memory is also highlighted in her narrative *The Memory* ('at'-t'akirah):

Blood congealed in my veins, and my tongue stuck to the upper jaw and I could not trace my frightened heart beats, my eyes were fixed at him, his gigantic soldier boots were stretched on my chest, savagely pressing on the bones of my chest cruelly, while the crater of the machine gun was pointed closely towards my forehead... The steel of his glances poured onto my face, and the damned moment was severed from the human world... The noise of the bullet reached the end of the world... and my devastated skull disseminated like a precious china pot... each bit of my brain reached a universe where mercy can not reach... my memory poured onto the pedestrians' way it flew like a fiery spring erupted from a volcano, and it mixed with blood and soil and tree leaves falling from humanity's autumn... The damned soldier boots moved from the chest to my haunch (71-72).

Here again Abu-Sha'ar comes to emphasize the relation between the body and memory. As mentioned earlier, she believes that memory enriches her body and turns it into 'a big wonderful world ... a theatre size of life'. There is a great deal of painting and detonating within this highly visualized violent scene. The effort put in visualizing is necessary for achieving a violent atmosphere: 'His gigantic (soldier) boot had stretched on my chest'. The oppressor is reduced, caricatured, or even enlarged as 'gigantic soldier boots'. Such 'gigantic soldier boots' carry, along with their symbolic significance, a psychologically telling notion

of memory. The oppressor is remembered in a displaced and associated form.¹² Thus the memory remains vague and the remembered time is dislocated, opening the way for various interpretations; rather than being a reference to a single particular past incident, the 'soldier boots' generally suggest any source of oppression. Then the detonation continues on two levels. First, lots of details about violent shooting, explosions, and destruction dominate the narrative. Second, the language is detonated in order to carry the violent message and hence onomatopoeic lexicon denoting devastation is employed: "scattered/disseminated", "fiery", "Heart of a volcano", and "explosive/exploding" (71-72). Along with the effort to essence the harsh sound to the words, a simultaneous effort is exerted to essence the visual aspects of the violent scene in the language, to bring into the reader's mind and eyes a clear picture of what is seen or imagined. Figurative language is therefore employed to faithfully reveal, in an image, the harshness and cruelty of the meeting with the oppressor: 'the steel of his glances poured onto my face.'

The value of the memory, which is treasured in the brain, is strengthened when presented as a potential source for revolution by the comparison to a 'volcano': 'like a fiery spring erupted from a volcano'. And this suggests beyond doubt the connection between the unconscious and memory. When carried to a larger scale, history becomes no more than the collected memories of a nation, whereby national memory constitutes a potential source for public riot and revolution. These political allusions come along with an implicit comment on the history of the Arab-Israeli conflict, where the killing and torturing of the Palestinians on the hands of the Israelis is only verbally condemned rather than avenged by the Arab governments:

I have become a corpse...!! a cry of condemnation almost slipped off my memory, but it glanced at my disseminated skull, and it calmed down... she watched the attendants racing to carry my corpse, and funeral voices started to mourn me, and she might have heard beautiful elegies, and a few false ones... my memory laughed sarcastically... (72)

In fact, this would be a psychological analysis of a historian who calls for the attention of the readers of history to the necessity of utilizing their past in the present. This historian reveals him/herself in the pessimistic note, which records the lesson that is usually reiterated by historians: 'and I knew that there was nothing new under the sun, and things recur, always recur'. In other words, 'history repeats itself', as mentioned above.

The political insinuation continues hand by hand with the strategic act of imaging the narrated fragments of the recalled memories, which are brought along with associated scenes from the present situation of the Arab-Israeli conflict. *The Meal/The Dining Table* ('al-maa ida) portrays a woman in the company of a few people having a meal. Watching them enjoying the food and breaking the bones of the chicken, she imagines scenes not uncommon on Arab television: images of Israelis torturing and breaking the bones of Palestinians:

The noise of breaking bones rose, she shivered as she remembered them... they were before her on the television screen, their hands tied, receiving the beats with the rear of guns, and their bones were being broken... The noise of breaking bones rose once again... and she resorted to her own world... not knowing why television pictures run towards her memory (80; 82).

¹² 'Displacement' and 'association' are essential Freudian concepts, pertaining to the need to release a suppressed element of the unconscious while, at the same time, avoiding the censorship of the superego: "Whereby one idea or image in the unconscious becomes a nodal point or intersection for a whole cluster of associated feelings, repressed primal memories and desires... a sign, image, word or sound can evoke through its compression a whole range of suppressed wishes, emotions and thoughts" (Morris: 98). 'Association' is a means of embedding motive in a manner that responds to the suppressed desires and also conforms to the dictates of the causes that necessitated their suppression. This psychological technique is a way of a voiding direct collision with the superego, hence turning repressed desires into 'phantasies': "the nature and the origin of the phantasies... are the precursors of delusions. They are substitutes for and derivatives of repressed memories which a resistance will not allow to enter consciousness unaltered, but which can purchase the possibility of becoming conscious by taking account, by means of changes and distortions, of the resistance's censorship. When this compromise has been accomplished, the memories have turned into the phantasies..." ("Delusions": 58).

These lines are overloaded with sense. Psychologically speaking, the 'association' of the scene and the recalled memories reflects awareness that the memories are to be recalled by means of an associated trigger in the present. One also recognizes here that recalling is based on remembering images: 'television pictures run towards her memory'.

This highlights the notion of the 'stream of consciousness', which perceives time not as a series of chronological moments, but rather as a continuous flow in the unconscious of the individual with a mixture of past, present and future, interacting in the form of imagined live-action. The individual experiences present situations while re-experiencing unchronologically memorized pasts. The 'stream of consciousness' is closely related to the concept of 'association', for it stresses the interconnectedness of the elements of the individual's consciousness. Here the television pictures represent how the associated present and past incidents coexist in the protagonist's mind regardless of chronology. Nonetheless, one also finds here abundant images of dismembered bodies and broken bones. The whole scene is then replaced with another one rented from nature, in a metaphor, implying utter cruelty and violence: "But she could not prevent her ears from hearing the noise of the breaking hush bones (of the gazelle), as it were being broken under the canines of the lioness and its cubs" (81). The senses are once again associated and confused. The narrator tells us that 'she could not prevent her ears from hearing' when the lines bring not only the sound but also the picture of the fierce scene which, hence, should be seen as well. In psychological terms, the narrator seems to be frightened at seeing/imagining and hence claims to have only heard rather than heard and seen that picture. As far as the reader is concerned, these lines enclose a visualized scene and the audible is only hearable along with, or possibly after, that scene is mentally imagined. Hence, confusing and associating the senses unites both of the visual and audible: to hear and see altogether.

The image of 'boots' recurs also in *Public Bus* (baaş 'aam), a story which allegorizes the relation between the leader and the people. Abu-Sha'ar imagines the people as riders of a bus whose driver is the leader and according to whose will the road, speed and venture are decided:

As he got on board the bus and took his seat near the driver his feelings were confused. he was close to the authority that determines the fate of the bus passengers, he looked at the driver's muscles and his glances slipped down to his gigantic shoes... one move of the driver can achieve the impossible, he can take the dozens with him to the stations he likes, in the speed he determines... authority... ah how beautiful authority is... He saw the driver lighting a cigarette... he closely watched his (the driver's) rounded face, and stared at his features, which seemed huge in the mirror... (74-75).

Here again Abu-Sha'ar's continues to visualize in an attempt to achieve a stronger effect on the observer (the reader), who is before a scene. The protagonist's seat in the bus is located accurately: 'near the driver', 'close to the authority'. And by means of the protagonist, who 'looked at', 'saw', 'closely watched' and whose 'glances slipped', the reader's eyes are united with the protagonist's; hence both 'closely' see the 'driver's muscles', 'his gigantic shoes', 'rounded face and... his features, which seemed huge'. Consequently, a scene is visualized with close attention to location, shape and size: near, close, at, down, closely, muscles, gigantic, rounded face and huge features. In other words, Abu-Sha'ar imagines a situation in a way that visually represents the idea in her mind and then works hard to paint it in the narrative, so that the reader – as observer – lives the scene and is taken by the atmosphere. Such method insures a more successful reception of the message.

After all, this is what Abu-Sha'ar wants of history: to be live-action, picture and sound. The dominance of visualizing and the heavy employment of explicit and implicit references to history in the narratives reveal an innovative method of teaching history: to achieve a better understanding and, consequently, a better effect of history, one needs to relive it, to recall it visualized. Here the lesson of history becomes like attending a play, watching it on stage. One may call this 'history-as-drama'. The fluid simultaneity of remembered times within the present may be seen in light of the philosopher Henry Bergson's so-called "profound paradox of memory". In his persuasive discussions of memory in *Matter and Memory*, Bergson distinguishes between two main types of memory: 'habit' memory and 'pure' or 'spontaneous' memory. Habit memory is mechanistic, functional and recalls a kind of time that is serial and consecutive. Pure memory, on the other hand, is intuitive, simultaneous and spontaneous. Mary Warnock has explained that difference using a clear example: memorizing an ode by heart is 'habit' memory and recalling the warm summer day in the field while trying to memorize that ode by heart is more of a 'pure' memory. In

Bergson's terms, there is here a great distinction between "that which must be built up by repetition and that which is essentially incapable of being repeated". The earlier is consecutive, i.e. based on consecutive repetition, while the later is spontaneous and simultaneous. In the case of 'pure' memory, as Gilles Deleuze's explains: "[t]he past is 'contemporaneous' with the present that it *has been*... The past would never be constituted if it did not coexist with the present whose past it is". The textually imaged fragments of memory are re-experienced, relived, and imaging and visualizing are essential in this kind of simultaneous recall.

When it is imaged, sometimes with the aid of a metaphor, the memory is objectified, localized, concretized in material form and is therefore made self-contained, redeemable and defeatable rather than elusive and overwhelming, as seen in *The Defeat*. Such objectification of memory not only presents the memory and the act of remembering but also creates a dialogue between living and remembering, present and past, man and memory. St. Augustine's remarks on memory seem relevant here; he thinks of memory as a dualistic activity where one part of the mind recalls the past and the other listens, watches and reacts; for him, memory is:

like a great field or a spacious palace, a storehouse for countless images of all kinds which are conveyed to it by the senses... When I use my memory, I ask it to produce whatever it is that I wish to remember. Some things it produces immediately; some are forthcoming only after a delay, as though they were being brought out from some inner hiding place; others come spilling from the memory, thrusting themselves upon us when what we want is something quite different... These I brush aside from the picture which memory presents to me, allowing my mind to pick what it chooses, until finally that which I wish to see stands out clearly and emerges into sight from its hiding place... and as their place is taken they return to their place of storage, ready to emerge again when I want them. (Augustine: 14)

The past has got a strong hold on the present and both coexist and interact. In addition, the past is recalled in the manner of live-picture. Abu-Sha'ar's rememberers, like St. Augustine's, are often dual beings: a voice and an ear, a speaker and a listener. (And if one recalls that Abu-Sha'ar is a historian, then she becomes the memory and we, the readers, become the listeners, the rememberers of our history). The chasm within the self is that of the division between the memory and the present and, in her narratives, Abu-Sha'ar unites the two parts of the self as she visualizes and hence externalizes and objectifies the memory and then brings both the memory and the rememberer to negotiate selfhood.

Abu-Sha'ar brings memory and remembrance within a focused act of visualizing. She objectifies memory within highly visual organs of remembrance, an act that is rooted into a psychologically bound vision of the respected organs of remembrance. Throughout the narratives in the collection there is a strategy to visualize recalled fragments of memory and turn them into live-action. Therefore, the remembered-past is problematized in these narratives by Abu-Sha'ar's experimentation in physically *imaging* and visualizing memory, an experimentation that requires greater skill in art (mainly painting and sculpture). However, this requires a different artistic skill, which involves the ability to paint and sculpt, using the tools of writing, basically words, in the general sense, language; to essence the visual in the written; to turn the *scriptural* into *sculptural*.

The need to collectively re-see is part of the larger need to re-sense the remembered past, to relive it again. The 'stationary' nature of painting hinders such collective re-sensing and it falls short of recovering the past in the form of live-action. It can only help recalling static images of the remembered past. In fact, Abu-Sha'ar remembers the past in a distinctive way that is characterized by heavy employment of present tense sense-verbs (hear, taste, smell, touch, and see). The senses are actively involved in determining the shapes and visual dimensions of the past which she paints into a live-picture to be re-tasted, re-touched, re-smelled, re-seen and re-heard, whereby history becomes like a television colorful picture that moves and speaks and, even more, smells and can be touched. As she writes, Abu-Sha'ar re-does (and her readers do) taste, smell, touch, hear, see and, consequently, live the remembered history--whether individual or collective. Therefore, the eyes, ears, hands, nose, and tongue are altogether activated in the case of writing as much as in that of reading. In fact, she heavily employs the senses as evident in the language of her narratives. She re-hears past voices: "suddenly, I hear the enlightened tuneful voice calling me" (14). She re-hears her dead father's voice: "your absent voice comes to me intimately"; "I recall my ancient voice which is full of hope and love" (67). "I remember you and your ancient frightened voice whips me" (79). In

addition, she repeatedly times tends to smell, in a story with the telling title *The Smell* ('ar-raa ihah): "your smell still haunts me" (15). She smells the coffee her grandmother used to make years ago: "I smell the coffee"; and she also hears: "and I hear the sound (music) of the *Rabaabah*, the mare neighs close by me, and the birds' nests whisper" (57-8).¹³ But the smell is the trigger of these associated memories, as the smell haunts her nose and mind: "To my nose gets the smell of the *Mihbaas* which stuck to my nose since a very long unlimited time ago" (57).¹⁴ Here she also touches, as she sensitively describes the 'vintage touch' which she paints in the narrative, carefully selecting the words that enable her to do so: "suddenly your hand stretches, with all hands, I shiver when I recall its ancient (vintage) touch" (56).

Visualizing and painting the narrated memory of the past reaches a peak in *The Painting* and in *The Tattoo*. Early in *The Tattoo*, the central narrative which shares the collection its title, Abu-Sha'ar shows that memory and recall are based on association where present incidents recall associated past incidents: "Today is Christmas".¹⁵ Present Christmas recalls past Christmas:

You suddenly besiege me, your ancient winds blow through all windows, and I see you (you rise before my sight) through all eyes. Suddenly your hand stretches with all hands, I shiver when I recall its ancient (vintage) touch, your hand that is tattooed in green or, indeed, greenish blue... I see it stretching towards me with all hands, with its dry and protuberant veins... Grandmother, a century rises with all these protuberant veins and dry skin... You and the fig tree with its long-lived veins which protruded out of earth's womb to the surface like human veins... A century grandmother, a century... you are suddenly resurrected and I shiver... Are you real flesh, blood and veins...? Or did memory imagine you...? I shiver; I hide my hand in my pocket and I recall you...! (56)

In the rememberer's mind, Christmas is mainly associated with the family's usual visit to the grandmother, who is now dead: "I now confess to you that I feared the coming of Christmas, they used to take me with them in the annual visit to the high balcony which looked at the wide plains of Houran, you were always there, sitting in a strange splendor, and in your company sits a whole century" (56). This is undoubtedly Abu-Sha'ar's grandmother; the autobiographical note makes itself felt since the details about the place where the grandmother lived seem personal. In psychological terms, a frightening incident is usually relegated to the unconscious to be released later, in a dream or, possibly, in a work of art, both of which constitute a means of overcoming the source of oppression or embarrassment.¹⁶ This is why it takes the grandmother's death till the rememberer can make the confession that she disliked visiting her: 'I confess to you now'. The rememberer did not wait the proper moment to make that confession. Rather, her relegated bad experience has been recalled by means of association and, having found the proper time, has been released. Recall is based on two conditions: an associated trigger and the absence of the oppressor.

Nonetheless, recall is distinctive here; the details of the recalled memory are relived (re-sensed) employing all senses: re-touched, re-seen, re-smelled, re-heard and re-tasted. Hence, Abu-Sha'ar stimulates the senses of the reader, who is to relive that experience as well. There is, therefore, a great deal of painting, sculpting and tattooing, along with the collective stimulus of the senses:

I shiver when I recall its ancient (vintage) touch, your hand tattooed in green, or indeed, greenish blue... with its dry and protuberant veins... the protuberant veins and dry skin... you and the fig tree with its long-lived and protuberant veins which protruded from the womb of earth to the surface like human veins...(56)

Once again Abu-Sha'ar's fascination with minuteness of detail and exquisiteness of finish makes itself felt as 'nature' is worked into 'art'. Abu-Sha'ar and her readers retouch the grandmother's hands and re-see the colors, an act of re-sensing facilitated by the aid of the 'book of nature' which provides metaphors that

¹³*Rabaabah* is a Bedouin musical instrument, made of animal skin, with a single string, and looks like the guitar.

¹⁴*Mihbaas* is a traditional wooden tool used by Bedouins to grind coffee.

¹⁵Abu-Sha'ar uses the word 'Eid', which assumes an Islamic sense, but I think she means Christmas.

¹⁶Freud explained how a work of art, like a dream, provides a chance for releasing a suppressed unconscious experience: "A strong experience in the present awakens in the creative writer a memory of an earlier experience (usually belonging to his childhood) from which there now proceeds a wish which finds its fulfillment in the creative work" ("Creative Writers": 151).

compare the re-touched and re-seen to surfaces and scenes in nature: "you and the fig tree"; hence the 'book of nature' is turned into a book of knowledge.¹⁷ The writer here works hard to create a scene the reader may share: the wind comes through the open windows of the room in which the protagonist remembers her grandmother. This seems an act of turning the readers into an audience before a stage or, even, an act of turning the narrative into a painting to be seen by the readers. The painting continues with a great sense to exact detail of color: 'your hand tattooed in green, or indeed, greenish blue'. The rememberer is astonished at the exact details of her memory that took place long time ago: 'a century grandmother, a century... you are suddenly resurrected and I shiver'. This is initial fear expected at the beginning of the memory, the coming of which should not be surprising if the concept of association is taken into account. But the rememberer finds the memory surprising and frightening because it recalls the grandmother alive; that is, the detailed memory recreates that figure once again. So the rememberer immediately announces that this is an imagined figure recreated by the memory, which becomes less frightening and, therefore the recall continues despite the fear: 'did memory imagine you, then? I shiver... and I recall you'.

In addition, Abu-Sha'ar employs sculpture: "its ancient touch... with its dry and protuberant veins" (56). A few lines later she resumes painting as she describes the colors and the location: "And you are a strange creature muffled in the endlessly dark black velvet...always in the same chair"(56). However, the scene remains static; it is made dynamic by recalling the details which painting falls short at recalling:

The smell of the Mihbaaš, which stuck to you since a long unlimited time ago, reaches my nose.
The door of the guestroom, with its crimson arches, opens; I smell the coffee; I hear the
Rabaabah; the well breaded mare neighs near me, and the nest of the birds hiding in the old fig
tree whisper... and I slip off your hand and I run to the balcony... (57-58)

First, the nose, the ear and the eye are invited to take part in the recall where the scene is seen, heard and smelled. Second, the language overcomes the statically descriptive note of painting and becomes a dynamical language that describes action. Instead of 'I smell the *Mihbaaš*', she says 'the smell of the *Mihbaaš*... reaches my nose'; and rather than describing the door of the guestroom, it is opened: 'the door of the guestroom, with its crimson arches, opens'. Third, the present tense turns the memory into a present live activity which the rememberer experiences once again: 'I slip away off your hands and I run to the balcony'. Such is a dynamic action which, in the case of mere painting, would be reduced to the end result of that action: the image of the girl in the balcony looking back at her grandmother's stretched hands or, alternately, the image of the girl looking towards the balcony while struggling to slip off her grandmother's hands. In other words, this kind of memory and recall produces a complexity of incidents relived while remembered; the rememberer is temporally dissociated from the present and taken back to relive what took place long time ago and then brought back to the present before being taken again into the past. This oscillation between the present and the past reveals the influence of the latter on the earlier. The message of the past is stronger if relived:

I suddenly realize that I am pleating a white handkerchief with my fingers.... I check my
intertwined fingers and I feel they are strange to me. I suddenly discover that protuberant veins
started to appear on my hand... A cry slips off my lips, as I see the tattoo that has been made on
them (my hands)... is it green...? No, greenish blue. (59)

Once again, Abu-Sha'ar reiterates that history repeats itself. She has replaced the grandmother and received the toll of aging, a message to all younger generations that time never stops and that 'the child is the father of man'.

The Painting opens a venue into Abu-Sha'ar's philosophy of painting. She seems to believe that painting should be rooted into life; to paint life is to analyze, explain, and understand it. In *The Painting*, however, *scriptural* painting only superficially takes place in the present; it starts with painting the present in close association with the past which immediately becomes the target of her attempted analysis, explanation and understanding. In *The Painting*, a painter searches for a topic --scenes from Jerash. But the qualities of that searched-for-scene show that it should provide the chance to go back in time and associate the past with present. It is not surprising hence that Jerash is the locale, a roman city rich in history:

¹⁷Here I recall the following lines from John Milton's *Paradise Lost*: "Cut off, and for the book of knowledge fair/
Presented with a universal blank/ Of Nature's works to me expunged and raised" (Book 3, lines 47-49).

He looks at the lined trees from behind the screen of his car, he looks at all of them once (in a single glance)... oh god, how can the eye get filled, just like that, and in a single moment, with all this time...? He opens the door of the car and gets off carrying the painting; he carries countless numbers of color boxes, and brings out countless numbers of brushes and painting tools... he hears the voice of nature which has been integrated with him; he is taken by fear, just as he always had”(99).

The narrator investigates the capacities of painting. A few points are to be made concerning this investigation. First, painting is static: *‘he looks at all of them once (in a single glance); the eye get filled... in a single moment’*. Second, the scene provides a chance to associate the present with the past *‘with all this time’*, an association that can be accounted for by narrating the painting, not by stationary painting alone. Third, the painter emphasizes that he can paint tens or even hundreds of paintings, which, indeed, highlights the trouble of the painter who needs that great number of paintings to explain and associate pasts and presents; it is problematic because all such paintings should be seen together *‘in a single glance’* and *‘in a single moment’*, and with all links associating them in mind. And that is impossible, or at least, very challenging. And because better explanation and understanding of the remembered past can be achieved by a type of recall that provides the chance for reliving that past, then painting alone can not fulfill the job and therefore narration is required.

Hence painting is essenced in the narrative. The narrative contains the act of painting as it associates the visually recalled pasts. Painting becomes an essential technique in the narration. The artist narrates and paints altogether (narrates the painting and paints the narrative); the two endeavors are hence united, each supporting the other:

He stops and looks at the lined trees. He thinks, for a moment, that he has turned into a cruel Roman general. And that these poplar trees are battalions of hired mercenaries waiting for his orders... how disgusting... What if these trees were the souls of slaughtered soldiers planted here since ages and whom Rome left behind as she dragged the tails of its defeat and decline. (100)

It is evident that the Roman history of Jerash is the content of both the painting and the narrative. The painter’s fear springs from the historical background of the paintings’ locale and this seems to reflect upon his perception, treatment and portrayal of that history; he is both, a historian and a painter. Hence, telling the history continues with the aid of the painter and the narrator:

He tried again, all masses of paint in his hand turn into a butchery (carnage)... the dreams turn into tragic massacres, and the heads of the trees roll just like the heads of the dead with dry skulls... the masses of red paint congeal like the blood river which never stops... it flows on the cloth (canvas) and seeps... seeps until it paints (colors) the horizon... it dares not stop... he paints and paints. (101)

The details about painting and history are mixed together in the narrative. The historian, painter and writer cooperate in writing the story in which the recalled history is narrated and painted.

The artistic method of visualizing the narrated scenes is influenced by Abu-Sha’ar’s talent in painting and photography. It is clear that her mind has been torn between the advantages of painting and those of history and narrative prose and that she has desired to unite the three together. In her narratives, the visualized scenes uncover a transcendental understanding of literary language. By visualizing history in the narrative, combining language and pictures, a more advanced level of perception develops. Her fusion of the historical and the visual, exploiting the advantages of painting and graphic art while avoiding its ‘stationary’ nature, helps designating the material aspect of the recalled, narrated and painted fragments of history, and therefore carry the image to the field of intellectual, along with the visual, appreciation. Instead of using brushes and paint, she ‘models’ words to denote colors and ‘masses’, painting an image that is to be analyzed physically and, hence, intellectually.¹⁸ In the mixture of painting and language, Abu-Sha’ar

¹⁸ Discussing ‘natural’ language, Walter Benjamin says: “All expression, in so far as it is a communication of mental meaning, is to be classed as language. This mental being communicates itself *in* language and not *through* language... Language is the mental being of things” (Emphasis added, Benjamin: 108; 112). The distinction between ‘in language’

poses as a mental observer of the painted and narrated fragments of the recalled history. It turns out that her experience in painting influenced the language of her prose narratives, which hence becomes scriptural and sculptural, the result of her tripartite vision as a painter, a historian and a prose writer, the ultimatum of her attempt to fuse her versatile talents in one form. The vision of history is at the center of this fusion, for it is the history that is narrated and painted. Such a distinctive use of literary language asserts the inseparability of thought and language in literature, and reacts against reductive perceptions of the language of social sciences as being inferior to the language of science.

Abu-Sha'ar's evocative images of remembered times and states, I think, invite us to think intuitively through these images themselves, which do finally reflect upon our own present situation: to live and compare different stages or fractions of our personal and/or collective memory (history) simultaneously and intuitively. Her fragmented, simultaneous, and intuitive images restructure the self into a web of self-defining and self-identifying moments taken from their original context in one's –individual or collective—history and restructured and reinstalled into one's consciousness.¹⁹ The result is, in fact, an innovative method of reshaping our notions of space and time in history, whereby history is turned into 'dynamic' 'never-still' and 'ever-live' visualized fragments of time and space. Hence, the historian is an artist and the artist is a historian.

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and 'through language' pertains to the difference between station and movement; 'in language' suggests essencing the sculptural into the scriptural whereby the language requires deeper thought about the material nature of the concepts inherent within the words or phrases. 'Through language', on the other hand, suggests a superficial sense of referentiality which lacks the additional intellectual depth of 'in language. Benjamin claimed that "the word is simply the essence of things" (ibid: 117), which, on the one hand, has a biblical sense of language being an act of naming things, when names are the essence of things. On the other hand, by naming things, communicating their material essence, the writer communicates his/her thoughts about that essence, creating "certain kinds of thing language," where "we find a translation of the language of things into an infinitely higher language... We are concerned here with *nameless, nonacoustic languages, languages issuing from matter; here we should recall the material community of things in their communication*" (Emphasis added, ibid: 122)

¹⁹This phrasing is influenced by Steven Connor's statement: "web of mutually enveloping, self-quoting moments, each displaced from its originating context, and grafted elsewhere" (130).

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