

RESEARCH  
ARTICLE**Character Depiction and Its Levels in the Novel *I Will Offer You a Gazelle* by Malek Haddad****Abed Naser Ahmed**

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**Doi Serial**<https://doi.org/10.56334/sci/8.8.62>**Keywords**character structure, characterization, Malek Haddad, *I Will Offer You a Gazelle*, Algerian novel.**Abstract**

The study seeks to uncover Malek Haddad's artistic and intellectual vision, and how he employs characters as a means of expressing issues of identity and freedom in the context of the Algerian Revolution. It also highlights the role of women (such as the character "Yamina") as a symbol of the homeland and liberation, and analyzes the relationship between the intellectual and the revolution through the main protagonist.

This research paper adopts the analytical method to deconstruct the narrative structure of the novel, focusing on characterization techniques and their semantic dimensions at the character level, thereby contributing to a deeper understanding of Malek Haddad's narrative style and his position on historical and social issues in Algeria.

**Citation.** Abed Naser A.; Lakhder D. (2025). Character Depiction and Its Levels in the Novel *I Will Offer You a Gazelle* by Malek Haddad. *Science, Education and Innovations in the Context of Modern Problems*, 8(8), 688–695. <https://doi.org/10.56352/sci/8.8.62>

**Issue:** <https://imcra-az.org/archive/375-science-education-and-innovations-in-the-context-of-modern-problems-issue-8-vol-8-2025.html>

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Received: 01.02.2025

Accepted: 01.06.2025

Published: 01.07.2025 (available online)

**Introduction:**

The novel *I Will Offer You a Gazelle* by the Algerian writer Malek Haddad is one of the literary works that provoke contemplation because of the depth of its characters and the richness of their psychological and social levels. Malek Haddad, known for belonging to the generation of the Algerian Revolution and resistance literature, presents in this novel a complex human tableau reflecting struggles of self and identity amid a turbulent colonial reality. Hence, character depiction emerges as one of the most important artistic elements worthy of study, where the author's skill is evident in sculpting multi-dimensional characters that carry within them the contradictions of existence and the questions of freedom, love, and belonging.

In the world of the novel, characters are not limited to being mere names moving within the events of the narrative, but rather living entities that grow and develop, bearing visions and ideas reflecting the author's view of the world. In *I Will Offer You a Gazelle*, Malek Haddad presents characters belonging to different levels—psychological, social, and symbolic—making them highly complex and rich.

These characters range from the main protagonist, who embodies the struggle of the Algerian intellectual between love and revolution, to secondary characters representing segments of Algerian society under the weight of colonialism and cultural alienation. Female characters, such as "Gazelle," also appear as symbols of the homeland, dream, and liberation, adding an aesthetic and ideological dimension to the text.

Through this research paper, we will attempt to analyze the levels of character depiction in the novel, beginning with clarifying the place of character in the literary work and the methods of its presentation, moving through the

techniques of its depiction, and arriving at the levels of the character's presence, interactions, and references, as well as the symbolic connotations carried by these characters, for a deeper understanding of Malek Haddad's artistic and intellectual vision.

### First: The Place of the Character in the Novel:

The character in the novel is like the soul in the body or the blood flowing in the veins. From this standpoint: "No one disputes that the character lies at the very heart of the novel's existence... there is no novel without a character to lead the events, organize the actions, and give the story its narrative dimension." This highlights the importance of the character's presence with all its dimensions, especially the psychological one, which reflects everything social surrounding the character, as well as the physical dimension forming it. "Moreover, the fictional character is considered the only element where all other formal elements intersect, including the temporal and spatial coordinates necessary for the novel's growth and development", and the character "is a constitutive and essential part of narrative cohesion."

This cohesion is clearly evident in the novel *Heads of the Devils*, as it interacts with all the structures composing the narrative text and plays a major role in activating the dynamics of the plot. "And the character in the novel, in particular, is merely a representation of an idea or thesis that enters into conflict with other characters and theses—i.e., the individual as he exists in reality, the living human who acts, lives, and thinks. The character is considered a source of inspiration in the novel; it is the main driver of its events, organizing the narrative and its elements—controlling it—whether fictional or real. The individuals of the novel, story, and play are the ones around whom these events revolve. When the reader of a novel can see himself inside a character or discover an aspect of himself in it, this means that it is a fundamental pillar of the narrative structure. It achieves the organic cohesion between the elements of the novel—time, place, event, and different narrative types that unify them. It is important for the reader, for the more attractive and convincing the character, the more the reader embodies himself or his inner world in behavioral movements focused on the character he identifies with." Idris Boudeba also acknowledges the importance of the character and its prominent role in the narrative architecture, saying: "The fictional character is one of the basic elements in building a story. The writer cannot dispense with it, because he cannot depict life without people who speak and act. The characters of the fictional world multiply as much as the actions and ideas multiply and intertwine; the wider this world, the more the writer needs to create characters to fill it consistently." "No critic or literary scholar can overlook the role of the character in the novel, regardless of the subject on which he focuses. We may even go so far as to say that the development of the art of the novel through different literary schools is manifested in the depiction of fictional characters and the clarification of their role in life and their perspective on it, which reflects the writer's vision and affiliation with this or that school—whether starting from the romantic or realistic method". The fictional character is like the beating heart of every novel. "And the character is one of the most important elements on which the story is based. In reality, the vitality of the story is linked to the existence of characters, because the existence of the story stems from the story's characters. The character is the human being moving within the context of events, and it may be an animal character used symbolically to reveal an underlying human character aiming at moral instruction, as in *Kalila and Dimna* and other didactic stories." Thus, all writers, authors, and critics agree that the character is the backbone on which events are built and through which they interact; there can be no narrative structure without characters. They have a more prominent role compared to other narrative elements that make up the novel.

### Second: Methods of Presenting Characters

The author, in portraying the characters of his story, resorts to direct and indirect means, and each writer has his own style and method. He seeks to present his characters in the best form and most beautiful appearance, as is the case with the novel under study. This is perhaps one of the most important features of the novelistic writing of Ayman Al-Otoun.

#### 1. The Direct (Analytical) Method:

This is when "he draws his characters from the outside, explaining their emotions, motives, thoughts, and feelings, commenting on some of their actions, interpreting others, and often giving us his opinion of them frankly without equivocation," and "it is the method in which the author portrays his characters from the outside, analyzes their emotions, motives, and feelings, and often passes judgment on them."

We also find that Chareibet Ahmed Chareibet says in his book *The Development of the Artistic Structure in the Contemporary Algerian Story*: "It is a direct method, meaning that he draws it from the outside, where the storyteller mentions the character's actions, explains their emotions and feelings in a frank style in which his own

personality is revealed and his guidance of his characters and their ideas according to his need and the aim he has drawn, as their features appear.”

## 2. The Indirect (Dramatic) Method:

The novelist uses it to give his characters room to express themselves and reveal their inner selves. It is the method that “sets himself aside, allowing the character to express itself and reveal its essence through its own speech and actions. He may also clarify some of its traits through the speech of other characters about it and their comments on its actions. These characters here take the role of the chorus in Greek theatre: they comment on the events, clarify their progression, and highlight their moral consequences.”

Thus, the narrator allows the character “to lift the veils from its essence through confessions, stream of consciousness, and inner monologue. In this way, the character is revealed to us through the dramatic method.”

We also find that in modern criticism, the dramatic method is preferred because “revealing the character from the inside out is more effective and more precise in expression than describing it externally.”

The importance of careful observation and lived experiences in crafting the story’s plot and developing it can be applied to character portrayal. A writer who wants to present a lively, truthful character must delve into the study of human nature in general and be aware of human motives and emotions.

Each method has its advantages in shaping what is in the writer’s mind, whether direct or indirect. A skillful writer can choose from each method what suits his desired aim in portraying his characters, in order to illuminate and highlight multiple aspects of their roles. Some authors even combine the two methods in presenting their characters, due to their interest in their characters and in bringing them closer to the reader. The character is what determines the quality and success of the novel and captivates the reader with enjoyment and suspense.

## Third: Methods of Character Portrayal

The methods of character portrayal have multiplied, and each writer has his own method. They are limited here to three methods:

### 1. The Descriptive Method:

The novelist portrays the character through its movement, actions, and its struggle with itself or with others, observing its growth through events and incidents, giving the most attention to the external world.

### 2. The Introspective Method:

This is the method that enables the novelist to enter the inner world of the fictional character and depict what goes on there of thoughts, emotions, and feelings, and the visions, dreams, and memories that alternate within it in their spontaneity, thus revealing the truth of that character. Muhammad Azzam defines it in his book *The Poetics of the Narrative Discourse* as “the method in which the novelist enters the inner world of the fictional character, as in ‘consciousness novels,’ whose roots go back to the discoveries of modern psychology, where these novels rely on the technique of introspection, soliloquy, and the character’s internal monologue.”

### 3. The Reportive Method:

This is the method in which the narrator/author presents the fictional character by describing its conditions, emotions, and thoughts, often determining its general features from the outset and presenting its actions in a storytelling style—that is, in the past tense and in the form of summaries—commenting on its actions and explaining them in a direct manner.

Thus, each writer has his own way of portraying his characters, and each of the three methods has its importance in revealing an aspect of the character—by depicting everything surrounding it internally and externally and describing everything related to it accurately—so that it reaches the reader and leaves a good impression on him, as if it were a real, not imagined, character.

## Fourth: Levels of Character Presence in the Novel *I Will Offer You a Gazelle* by Malek Haddad

### 1. Types of Characters in the Novel:

Type of Character	Characters in the Novel	Explanation of Presence
Main Characters	Narrator / Yamina / Moulay	Central, developed characters with great influence on the plot
Static Characters	Narrator / The Martyred Friend / Mozart / Gisèle Doroc / Ali / Maurice / François de Lizio / Jean Doroc	Support the events but are less developed and influential
Secondary Characters	Elders / Sudanese women / Harkis / French officers / The fiancé / Kabash / Nadia	Do not change or develop much during the story
Stereotypical Characters	Commander Lieutenant Masson / The Sudanese slave / Grada	Represent predetermined ideas or traits

### 2. Analysis of Main Characters

#### 2.1. The Narrator in the Novel:

The voices in the novel are multiple, as an attempt to create a world where the characters driving the narrative merge with the narrator's voice, revealing the tension between the public lives of the characters and their private conflicts, such as Mozart's struggle between loyalty to the homeland and his influence by French culture. He deepens the contemplative tragedy and highlights the suffering of characters such as Gisèle or the Sudanese slave as victims of colonialism and a patriarchal society. He also contributes to the historical connection of the characters by merging individual events with the historical context of Algeria, reminding us of colonial oppression without direct rhetoric.

He is a reflection of the writer's own crisis: like the characters in his novels, Malek Haddad lived the identity struggle between French (the language of writing) and Algerian (the sense of belonging). The narrator in *I Will Offer You a Gazelle* reflects this rift through the twists of the narrative.

#### Rejection of French later:

After independence, Haddad stopped writing in French, considering it the language of the colonizer. This rejection is hinted at in the novel through his subtle irony toward "Frenchified" characters.

The narrator in *I Will Offer You a Gazelle* is not a neutral storyteller but a critical voice conveying the crisis of the Algerian under colonialism, using a style that blends realism and symbolism. Through this narrator, Haddad turns the novel into a space for the question of identity more than just a plot. In the novel, the narrator is not an active character in the events—he does not directly participate in the plot or interact with the other characters. He is an external narrator, often using the third person, acting as an omniscient observer in some parts, revealing the characters' secrets and inner thoughts without having a physical presence in the story.

However, this does not mean his role is passive! The narrator plays indirect but decisive roles in shaping the events and interpreting them:

**A.** Controlling the pace of events and guiding the reader: deciding what and when to reveal, hiding certain motives (e.g., of Gisèle Doroc or Mozart) and revealing them later to create dramatic irony; shifting between past and present to link events to their historical context.

**B.** Interpreting events through language and symbolism: not entirely neutral, directing attention through linguistic choices—describing the "gazelle" as a symbol of the stolen woman/nation, using subtle sarcasm when speaking of the colonizers, adding a tragic dimension through implicit comments on the fate of the Sudanese slave or Yamina.

**C.** Breaking the barrier between reader and characters: sometimes allowing the reader into the characters' stream of consciousness (e.g., Moulay or Nadia), making us feel part of the events despite his absence; in conflict scenes, focusing on silent gestures instead of dialogue to deepen the tragedy.

**D.** Expressing the author's voice: embodying Haddad's critical view of colonialism and identity; scenes where intellectual characters (like Mozart) are incapable of action reflect Haddad's frustration with Algerian intellectuals under colonialism. His poetic language (despite writing in French) reminds us that the novel is itself a struggle against the colonizer's language.

**Can he be considered a "character"?** No—he is not referred to by name or identity, and he does not interact with others. If anything, he is a collective voice expressing the concerns of Algerian society, an invisible witness to history.

**E.** Clarifying comparison: The narrator's role in *I Will Offer You a Gazelle* is not to appear as a character or materially affect events (through dialogue or actions) but to control the reader's perception of the characters and events through narration, symbolism, and emotional guidance. He is a tool for Haddad to convey his political and existential ideas, especially the struggle over identity and language—like a hidden camera capturing events from multiple angles but carefully choosing what to show in order to serve the novel's message: exposing Algeria's wounds under colonialism and the search for lost identity.

## 2.2. Moulay (the fragmented character):

His name suggests Islamic or Arab belonging. He may be a traditional or resistant character, representing authentic values in the face of Westernization. Originally, he was "a bankrupt prince in love who had more palm trees than illusions in the heart of a poem. His parents died, poverty was born, and Moulay became a driver in one of the trans-Saharan transport companies, driving an old Lancia truck with double traction. He is the son of the city of Ouargla— 'a man who crosses the desert, a sailor of the desert and a sailor of hearts.'"

A complex character embodying the Arab intellectual's struggle and the crisis of identity between ideals and reality, between love and belonging, between dreams and collapse. His fragile psychological makeup and ideological affiliation make him a tragic figure who ends in escape as the only solution.

## 2.3. The character of Yamina (the subjugated woman):

Yamina is considered the central character in the novel, representing the Algerian woman who suffers from the contradiction between tradition and liberation. She is a symbol of beauty and mystery, but also a victim of social and political circumstances. Her relationship with the protagonist, Moulay, reflects the struggle of identity and the desire to break free from constraints. "Moulay at that time would meet Yamina"; the character of Moulay engages in conversation with Ali Al-Shahham: "Moulay had a strange pipe made from sugar cane and tin, with its tube immersed in a small container that held rose-scented water. Moulay would cross distances and delve into the desert." Another dialogue between Yamina and Moulay — the Algerian woman, who might be more attached to traditions compared to the character of Giselle. Her common name in Algeria makes her a symbol of the repressed or steadfast woman.

## 3. Dimensions of character depiction in Malek Haddad's novel *I Will Offer You a Gazelle*:

**Nadia:** An Algerian and French woman who represents the role of the beautiful female in the novel — "Nadia was short and beautiful" — whether as an independent character or as part of the network of relationships that affect the protagonist. She may symbolize modernity or hidden resistance.

### 3.1. The Sudanese slave:

A character that may represent slavery or marginalization in Algerian society, bearing symbolic meanings of double oppression (racial and social). His presence highlights the layers of injustice in Algerian society.

### 3.2. Maurice:

His name indicates that he is French or a colonizer, making him a symbol of colonial authority or the complex relationships between Algerians and colonizers; an authoritative character, but his presence raises questions about coexistence and conflict. "He trusts, even believes, in the author," which made him appear in many parts of the

novel and its events. “He insisted more than once that the author was Algerian, saying to him, ‘Then you are Algerian.’” “But he is a poor gentleman, according to the narrator.”

“He was busy with crossword puzzles,” “a frequent conversationalist with the author” due to the narrative relationship between him and the author, “dialogue and questions he posed to the author”; “he loves rosé wine, is downcast, and does not want the writer to exhaust himself completely.”

#### 4. The frame of reference in character formation:

##### 4.1. Jean Doroc (the torn identity):

He is a Frenchman living in Algeria, which makes him a character suffering from a dual identity; on the one hand, he belongs to the colonizer, and on the other, he lives among Algerians and is influenced by them. This duality creates within him a conflict between loyalty to colonialism (which he may represent functionally or socially) and his sympathy for the suffering of the Algerian people.

Haddad shows through him the problem of belonging, especially during the Algerian revolution, when the dividing lines between “enemy” and “friend” were not clear. Regarding the relationship with “the other,” Jean Doroc is sometimes portrayed as a cultural bridge between the French and Algerian worlds, but he suffers from isolation and lack of full acceptance from either side; this isolation may be an expression of the tragedy of the French settlers (*pieds-noirs*) who were born in Algeria but remained strangers to it. This makes him one of the central characters reflecting identity and existential struggles in the context of French colonialism in Algeria. Here is an analysis of his character based on its features in the novel.

##### 4.2. François de Liseau as a symbol of French colonialism and its impact on the Algerian self:

This novel is one of the literary works that reflect the cultural and identity struggle during the colonial and revolutionary periods in Algeria. Malek Haddad depicts François de Liseau with colonial representation; “he is a high-ranking French officer” and a colonial official, embodying the authority of the colonizer and his values. He is portrayed as an arrogant character who believes in the superiority of French civilization and looks down on Algerians, considering them “culturally inferior.” His relationships with Algerian characters reflect inequality and oppression, showing harsh or paternalistic treatment toward them.

**Internal conflict and contradiction:** De Liseau sometimes appears as a complex character suffering from internal contradictions, especially if he feels guilt or doubt about the legitimacy of colonialism. But this does not erase his role as part of the machinery of oppression. In Malek Haddad’s works, French characters are often revealed through their contradictions, showing the falseness of the colonial “civilizing mission.”

**Relationship with the Algerian protagonist:** If De Liseau meets a central Algerian character (such as an intellectual or a revolutionary), the relationship between them may be adversarial or full of challenge, with the protagonist resisting the cultural or political hegemony represented by the Frenchman.

**Historical symbolism:** The name “François de Liseau” may allude to historical French figures linked to colonialism, deepening his symbolic dimension as a representation of abstract colonial authority. What can be concluded is that François de Liseau in Malek Haddad’s novel is not just an individual, but an embodiment of the colonial system with all its violence and racist vision. Through him, the author exposes the psychological and cultural effects of colonialism on Algerians and reveals the contradictions of the French colonial project.

##### 4.3. Kabache as a character from the popular class:

The presence of this character recurs for a functional reason in Malek Haddad’s work. The character of “Kabache,” “the commander’s clerk in the branch, and Yamina did not like Kabache, and he in turn had an ear that listens and sees, and he was Arab but not from the South,” is one of the secondary characters reflecting some social and psychological aspects of Algerian society during the French colonial period.

He lives in an Algerian environment suffering from poverty and colonial oppression, representing the simple human type trying to live despite daily repression; he may symbolize the oppressed person who tries to adapt to a bitter reality without the ability for actual rebellion. Haddad shows through him how colonialism turns a human being into an exhausted creature living on the margins of history. In the novel, Kabache interacts with other



characters who suffer from isolation or the search for identity, highlighting Algerians' inner conflict between belonging and rejecting the colonial reality.

The study of the characters in Malek Haddad's *I Will Offer You a Gazelle* remains open to many readings, with the structure of the character as the main driving force of the narrative. This is what the novelist focused on through his use of characters in the work, with their diversity between main and secondary characters and other types, placing us among different roles that move within a narrative vision seen by the author and imposed by the events of the novel, along with other elements from which the narrative is formed. This is what we sought to clarify through studying the character – its presence, types, conflicts, and dramatic development, and how it was described and depicted in the novel.

### Conclusion:

Through our study of the levels of building and depicting the character in Malek Haddad's *I Will Offer You a Gazelle*, we reached several conclusions as follows:

- The character is an essential element in shaping the narrative text.
- Referential characters dominated the novel, represented in characters with social, metaphorical, and historical references.
- The image of social characters was largely embodied in the novel, while metaphorical ones were represented by the love story between Moulay and Yamina and Giselle's love for the author. The first story expressed true love, while the second was an imagined, illusory love story. Hatred was embodied in the characters of Yamina and Kabache, while the historical aspect was represented in the character of "the author," marginalized in identity and belonging.
- The description relies on the external aspect, represented in the outer appearance of the characters, their actions, and features, while the internal aspect seeks the inner traits, contents, secrets, and psychological conflicts of the characters, including their contradictions.
- The novelist varied his characters' names between Arabic and foreign names, for a deliberate purpose.
- The narrator's presence was evident behind his characters, giving them the shape of multiple voices through which he expressed what was on his mind.
- The novel depicted a social and historical reality experienced by the author in a certain historical period, and we can glimpse his presence in the character of "the narrator," who represents the marginalized human being – starting a journey to search for his identity, foundations, and Arabness through the manuscript he wrote and published without signing his name on it, which hints at the narrator's personality.

### Acknowledgment and Conflict of Interest

#### Acknowledgment

The author, Abed Naser Ahmed, expresses sincere gratitude to his supervisor, Prof. Lakhder Dib, Full Professor at the Department of Arabic Language and Literature, Faculty of Arts and Languages, Amar Telidji University – Laghouat, for his continuous guidance, insightful feedback, and valuable academic support throughout the preparation of this research. Appreciation is also extended to the Laboratory of Arabic Language and Literature at Amar Telidji University for providing the academic environment and resources necessary to accomplish this study.

#### Conflict of Interest

The author declares that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this article.

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