

	Science, Education and Innovations in the Context of Modern Problems Issue 9, Vol. 8, 2025
	Title of research article
	Reimagining the Historical Character in Modern Algerian Narrative: An Analytical Study of Emir Abdelkader and Monseigneur Dupuch in Waciny Laredj's « <i>The Paths of Iron Doors</i> »
Mahdaoui Nourelhouda	Classical Literature University Khenchela Abbas Laghrour Algeria E-mail: mahdaoui.houda@univ-khenchela.dz
Bennadji Derar	Algerian Literature University Khenchela Abbas Laghrour Algeria Email: bennadji.derar@univ-khenchela.dz
Issue web link	https://imcra-az.org/archive/383-science-education-and-innovations-in-the-context-of-modern-problems-issue-9-vol-8-2025.html
Keywords	Historical character; Algerian literature; Narrative fiction; Postcolonial memory; Collective identity; Emir Abdelkader; Monseigneur Dupuch; Waciny Laredj; The Paths of Iron Doors; Colonial discourse
Abstract This study explores the dynamic representation of historical characters in Waciny Laredj's novel *The Paths of Iron Doors*, with particular focus on the figure of Emir Abdelkader al-Jazairi and Monseigneur Dupuch. The research examines how the novel transforms historical figures into central narrative agents, enriching the literary text with layers of symbolic, humanistic, and cultural meaning. Emir Abdelkader emerges not merely as a documented leader of resistance but as a symbolic embodiment of Algerian identity, national dignity, and the spiritual values that sustained the struggle against colonial domination. Simultaneously, the inclusion of Monseigneur Dupuch foregrounds the universal principles of altruism, interfaith solidarity, and moral courage, illustrating the capacity of literature to convey the complexities of cross-cultural encounters during the colonial era. The actuality of this study lies in its resonance with contemporary debates on the role of literature in shaping collective memory and cultural identity. In an age where societies revisit historical narratives to strengthen national cohesion, Laredj's text provides a framework for understanding how art reinterprets history to address present-day concerns of belonging, resistance, and cultural dialogue. Findings reveal that through the fusion of historical reference and narrative imagination, Laredj reinvents history as a living discourse rather than a static archive. Historical figures in the novel are presented as dynamic participants who shape narrative progression and thematic exploration, especially concerning freedom, resistance, and intercultural solidarity. The novel's literary technique underscores how fiction contributes to the construction of collective memory, presenting history in a form that is emotionally compelling and intellectually accessible.	
Citation. Mahdaoui N.; Bennadji D. (2025). Reimagining the Historical Character in Modern Algerian Narrative: An Analytical Study of Emir Abdelkader and Monseigneur Dupuch in Waciny Laredj's "The Paths of Iron Doors". <i>Science, Education and Innovations in the Context of Modern Problems</i>, 8(9), 1004-1013. https://doi.org/10.56334/sci/8.9.84	
Licensed © 2025 The Author(s). Published by Science, Education and Innovations in the context of modern problems (SEI) by IMCRA - International Meetings and Journals Research Association (Azerbaijan). This is an open	
1004 - www.imcra.az.org, Issue 9, Vol. 8, 2025 Reimagining the Historical Character in Modern Algerian Narrative: An Analytical Study of Emir Abdelkader and Monseigneur Dupuch in Waciny Laredj's "The Paths of Iron Doors" Mahdaoui Nourelhouda; Bennadji Derar	

access article under the **CC BY** license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

Received: 23.12.2024

Accepted: 08.07.2025

Published: 08.08.2025 (available online)

Introduction:

The historical character constitutes one of the fundamental pillars of the novelistic tradition, for it endows the narrative with a sense of realism that embraces imagination and opens before the reader manifold horizons for contemplating the past while re-engaging with it in the light of the present. Such figures are not summoned merely for narrative ornamentation or direct documentation, but rather for the symbolic power they carry—power capable of embodying the transformations, struggles, and values of entire peoples. From this perspective, the historical novel has emerged as a fertile creative field, balancing the factuality of the past with the demands of artistic imagination, and producing vibrant texts that are able to reshape collective memory while crafting a renewed consciousness of history.

Within the Arab literary context, numerous novelists have sought to harness history as an integral component of narrative construction. Yet, among them, Wasini al-A'raj stands out as one of the most distinguished figures who has succeeded in fusing the historical dimension with the literary imagination in his narrative works. For al-A'raj does not treat history as a static datum, but rather as an open space for reinterpretation and re-visioning. This approach has enabled his works—including *The Pathways of Iron Gates*—to acquire a distinguished position within the contemporary novelistic landscape.

In this novel, the character of Emir Abdelkader al-Jazairi serves as the central axis, embodying both the spirit of national resistance and the values of dignity and freedom deeply inscribed in Algerian memory. Through this literary reimagining, Abdelkader becomes a narrative figure that transcends the bounds of the historical document. Alongside him, the character of Monseigneur Dupuch is also invoked, introducing a profound human and cultural intersection that reflects the complexities of the colonial era on the one hand, and illuminates the values of solidarity and altruism on the other. Through the interplay of these two figures, al-A'raj weaves a narrative fabric that reveals the dialectical tension between past and present, between the real and the imagined, and between the historical and the human.

This interplay between history and art positions *The Pathways of Iron Gates* as a genuine laboratory for the practice of Arab narrative writing, demonstrating its capacity to re-present historical figures in ways that serve the broader concerns of the nation while simultaneously enriching the aesthetic fabric of the literary text. It is precisely this dynamic that the present study seeks to explore, through both aesthetic and narratological approaches.

First: The Character – A Conceptual Approach:

1. The Concept of Character:

The character is regarded as one of the most essential elements in the art of the novel, for it constitutes the backbone upon which the entire artistic edifice rests. It is the primary axis through which events and ideas acquire coherence and meaning. Critical perspectives on the notion of character are diverse, with definitions varying according to the disciplinary lens applied—whether psychological, sociological, or literary.

The character should not be reduced to the mere representation of an individual or a living being. Rather, it is a complex construct composed of traits, qualities, and behaviors that determine how the individual engages with his or her environment and interacts with others.

Within the novel, the character functions as a privileged medium through which the author deepens the reader's understanding of the events and ideas presented. Through characterization, novelists are able to reveal both internal and external conflicts experienced by the protagonists, thereby infusing the literary work with a profound human dimension.

Characters interact dynamically with one another, creating a complex web of relationships that propels the narrative forward.

This dynamic interplay renders the character a vital and organic component of narrative construction and development, enabling the reader to feel an emotional connection to the characters—their struggles, aspirations, and transformations. To grasp how characters are shaped and how their artistic construction operates is to enhance one's comprehension of the deeper significance of events; it also enriches the overall literary experience.

For this reason, examining the concept of character within the novel is of critical importance. It contributes to the creation of a fictional world that mirrors the complexity and diversity of reality itself, while also allowing the reader to engage with characters as if they were part of his or her own human experience.

1-1. Linguistic Dimension:

The term character is attested in classical Arabic lexicons such as those of al-Fīrūzābādī and Ibn Manẓūr. The latter, for instance, defines the word as follows: “Jamā‘at shakhs al-insān wa-ghayruhu mudhakkar, wa’l-jam‘ ashkhāṣ wa-shukhūṣ wa-shikhāṣ wa’l-shakhs sawā’ al-insān wa-ghayruhu tarāhu min ba‘īd, taqūlu thalāthat ashkhāṣ, wa-kullu shay’ ra’ayta jismānahu faqad ra’ayta shakhsahu.”¹

In this usage, the notion of shakhs is grounded in the sensory and visible, referring to the external form of the human being—or of any object—that may be perceived from afar. This definition reflects a traditional understanding of character primarily in terms of material presence, while overlooking the psychological and interior dimensions that modern literary discourse attributes to fictional characters. Nonetheless, it provides an important starting point for approaching the idea of character within the broader framework of social relations and interpersonal interactions, thereby highlighting the linguistic and cultural richness of the concept.

In al-Mu‘jam al-Wasīṭ, the word shakhsiyya (personality/character) is defined as: “Shakhṣa al-shay’ shukhūṣan: irtafa‘a wa-badā min ba‘īd; wa’l-sahm jāwaza al-hadaf a’lāh; wa-shakhṣa al-shay’: ‘ayyanahu wa-mayyazahu ‘ammā siwāhu. Yuqāl: shakhṣa al-dā’ wa-shakhṣa al-mushkila. Wa’l-shakhs: kull jism lahu irtifā’ wa-zuhūr. Wa-ghalaba fī al-insān. Wa’l-shakhsiyya: ṣifāt tamayyizu al-shakhs ‘an ghayrihi. Yuqāl: fulān dhū shakhsiyya qawiyya—dhū ṣifāt mumayyiza wa-irāda wa-kiyān mustaqill.”²

Here, the dictionary situates the term at the intersection of both the external and the internal, associating character not only with visible form but also with distinctive traits—strength, will, and independence—that set individuals apart. Such a definition resonates more closely with modern literary and psychological approaches, since it emphasizes the interplay between the external appearance and the inner qualities that constitute personal identity. It thus lends itself well to contemporary literary contexts where character is conceived as a synthesis of social, psychological, and existential dimensions.

1-2. Conceptual Dimension:

On the conceptual level, scholars have provided multiple definitions of character. For some, it is essentially a fictional construct that acquires meaning through the transformations it undergoes within the novel. Roland Barthes, for instance, characterizes fictional characters as “paper beings,” beings that acquire significance only through language, while Tzvetan Todorov views them as linguistic constructs. Such perspectives underscore the artificiality of literary characters and highlight the centrality of language in their creation.

Similarly, Fowler maintains that character is not a mere outward representation of individuals but rather an imaginative construct designed to reflect aspects of human reality, particularly moral and spiritual attributes. In this sense, the character becomes an instrument through which literature probes psychological and spiritual dimensions, offering readers a deeper understanding of human complexity.

Fowler further notes that the term character originally referred to the masks worn by actors in Greek theater, masks that conveyed specific roles. Over time, however, the term came to signify the authorial perspective itself—the “voice” of the writer as mediated through narrative pronouns such as “I,” “you,” and “he.” This evolution illuminates the relationship between character and fiction: characters are not mere replicas of reality but artistic expressions of the writer’s vision of the world.

Fowler distinguishes between two types of character: The imaginative character, which embodies a particular reality through stable and symbolic traits. These characters frequently carry the author’s ideological imprint, functioning as vehicles for his or her thoughts and beliefs. As such, they provide a powerful literary device for representing social, political, and psychological tensions.

The referential or reality-based character, which incorporates concrete and perceptible elements drawn from lived experience, thereby enabling readers to identify with and respond emotionally to the figures represented.³

Georg Lukács, meanwhile, extends this discussion to the realm of historical fiction. He defines the great historical figure as “a representative of a meaningful movement that encompasses large segments of the population. He is great because his personal passions and goals align with these collective struggles, serving as their clearest expression, and because he is willing to embrace them in both prosperity and adversity. Thus there is a profound consonance between the historical figure and the historical movement he embodies.”⁴

Lukács thus emphasizes the idea of concordance between individual and society, showing how great historical figures become symbols of the epoch they inhabit. Their significance lies not in personal grandeur but in their embodiment of broader social movements that shape the course of history.

Critics generally agree that the historical novel, in the modern sense of the term, emerged in the West only at the beginning of the nineteenth century with Sir Walter Scott (1771–1832). Scott succeeded in blending real and fictional characters within a plausible framework, situating them within pivotal historical events recognized as turning points in the destinies of nations. The rise of the historical novel coincided with the Romantic movement, whose adherents celebrated national heroism and sought to revive and animate the spirit of their peoples.

In the preface to his novel *Ivanhoe*, Scott remarked that “through imaginative depiction, he might lend assistance to the historian, who remains bound to factual accuracy.” This statement highlights the dual task of the historical novelist: although the imaginative dimension may sometimes outweigh strict historical fidelity, the writer is nevertheless obliged to situate characters and events within a temporally and spatially coherent framework. This is the principle of *vraisemblance*—a sense of plausibility that allows the reader to grasp the causes and consequences of past events. In this sense, the historical novel can at times offer interpretations of the past more compelling than those of conventional historiography, for it weaves together the factual and the imaginary in ways that deepen the reader’s understanding.

Thus, the historical novel does not aim merely at documentation; rather, it seeks to provide a new reading of history, transforming it into an open text susceptible to multiple interpretations. By doing so, it offers readers a reflective and intellectually engaging experience, one that transcends the limits of factual record and enters the domain of creative re-visioning.⁵

Second: The Forms of the Historical Character’s Presence in the Novel:

The invocation of the historical character in the novelistic text is considered one of the most prominent narrative strategies that endow the literary work with a semantic depth and a profound connection to collective memory. However, this presence does not manifest itself in a single form; rather, it varies according to the author’s artistic vision and narrative objectives. This multiplicity is reflected in the diverse methods by which historical characters are integrated into the fictional narrative. Critics have generally identified three principal modes of such presence:

The first mode is invocation by name.

In this form, historical characters are directly mentioned through reference to their names only. This strategy employs the historical figure primarily as a cultural and cognitive reference without delving into their personal stances or recorded statements. Invocation by name often functions as a connective element between the events of the novel and the known historical world familiar to the readers. Consequently, this device adds credibility and historical depth to the text, anchoring fiction within recognizable historical coordinates.

The second mode is invocation through quotations of the historical figure.

Here, reliance is placed upon well-known sayings, speeches, or written texts attributed to the historical characters. This mode amplifies the depth of the historical figure’s presence, as their words become active elements within the narrative, orienting the novel’s ideas or lending authority to particular stances adopted by fictional characters. Invocation through quotations thus serves as an effective instrument for transmitting wisdom, articulating philosophical or political perspectives, or even constructing comparisons between past and present conditions, as well as between historical contexts and fictional characters.

The third mode is invocation through action:

This is the most complex of the three. In this form, it is not sufficient merely to mention the historical figure or cite their words; rather, their role is enacted within the narrative through active participation in events. The historical character thus appears as a functional and dynamic participant in the fictional plot, enabling the novelist to reinterpret or imaginatively reconstruct the trajectory of that figure within a new fictional framework. This technique often generates a dialogic interplay between history and imagination, allowing historical characters to be reimagined in new situations and encounters. As such, the author reshapes their history in light of the demands of fiction, creating a narrative space in which past and present converge.

By employing these three modes of invocation, novelists are granted the opportunity to oscillate between history and imagination. This enhances the depth and temporal scope of the narrative, endowing the text with a distinctive character that combines the real and the imagined.⁶

Third: The Historical Character and the Art of its Construction in *The Prince: Pathways of Iron Gates* by Waciny Laredj:

In Waciny Laredj's novel *The Prince: Pathways of Iron Gates*, historical characters occupy a central position. They serve as interpretive keys for understanding the complex historical period that the novel addresses. Through its representation of the colonial era in Algeria, the narrative illuminates the intricate interweaving of cultural, political, and religious forces that shaped that epoch. While the author adheres to the broad outlines of historical events, he presents the characters in ways that render them more nuanced and multi-dimensional, thereby enabling the reader to examine their influence upon both the fictional events and the narrative structure itself.

The novel foregrounds two prominent historical figures, namely Emir Abdelkader and Monseigneur Antoine Dupuch, both of whom are represented in striking and significant ways. These two figures constitute essential axes around which the novel revolves: Abdelkader embodies the resistance of the Algerian nation, while Dupuch symbolizes cultural and religious interaction in the colonial encounter.

Laredj's choice of these particular figures is far from arbitrary; it reflects his deliberate attempt to depict the multiplicity of forces at play during that period, ranging from armed resistance to cross-cultural dialogue.

1. Emir Abdelkader:

Abdelkader is not presented merely as a historical figure within this novel; rather, he emerges as a symbolic embodiment of the Algerian nation and its resistance to French colonialism.

1.1. Name and Title:

Laredj invokes Abdelkader under the appellation of "the nations". This title conveys the profound symbolic significance attached to his figure. He is not to be seen only as a political or military leader, but as a symbolic entity representing the entire nation and embodying the values and principles for which Algeria stood.

In the novel, Laredj writes: "It is the very same thing that the Emir used to hang in the leading hall."⁷

Here, the symbolic representation of Abdelkader is woven through the imagery of the "leading hall", which can be interpreted as a metaphor for the place or pathway he represents in Algerian history. Abdelkader thus transcends the role of a military leader, standing instead as a figure of profound influence in shaping the national identity. The hall becomes an entry point into a broader realm—just as Abdelkader himself represents the gateway to an understanding of Algeria's national identity.

1.2. Presence and Influence:

The novel presents Abdelkader as a conspicuous figure, one whose presence is immediately perceived and recognized by others. His aura asserts itself whenever he is mentioned, reflecting the dignity and reverence he commands.

"They recognize the Emir and move towards him."⁸

This statement underscores how Abdelkader is a universally recognizable figure, one who requires no introduction. His presence commands immediate attention, illustrating his leadership and moral authority. The verbs "recognize" and "move towards" signify the magnetic pull that people feel toward him, testifying to his profound influence as both a leader and a spiritual reference.

1.3. Dupuch's Perspective on the Emir:

The novel also reveals that even foreign characters, such as Monseigneur Dupuch, regard Abdelkader with admiration and respect. Dupuch observes:

"Dupuch saw the Emir."⁹

This act of seeing transcends a mere physical encounter; it becomes symbolic of Dupuch's recognition of Abdelkader's grandeur. In literary contexts, vision often carries a metaphorical weight, and Laredj here emphasizes that even outsiders, including adversaries, acknowledge Abdelkader's nobility. Abdelkader is portrayed not solely as a military leader, but as an ethical and spiritual figure of universal resonance.

1.4. The Emir's Face as a Symbol:

The Emir's face emerges as a symbolic representation of the Algerian resistance, embodying its unyielding endurance even in the darkest of times.

"In the house he saw nothing but the Emir's face."¹⁰

This assertion confirms that Abdelkader constitutes a permanent force in Algerian consciousness. Even in private or tranquil spaces such as “the house,” the Emir’s visage dominates memory and imagination. He is thus depicted as the authentic face of resistant Algeria, a spiritual presence that cannot be dismissed or escaped.

1.5. The Title “Emir” as a Marker of Authority:

The repeated use of the title “Emir” throughout the novel is deliberate, reflecting the elevated stature Abdelkader holds both within the narrative and in historical reality. This repetition strengthens the aura of the figure and underscores his spiritual and political authority in Algerian society.

“What he heard from the Emir made him grow in my eyes.”¹¹

This testimony makes clear that Abdelkader’s influence was not confined to his military and political capacities, but extended also to his ability to impress others personally with his wisdom and character. His authority thus rests not only on command but also on moral and intellectual presence.

1.6. Emir Abdelkader and the Treaty

The novel further presents Abdelkader as a pragmatic leader, capable of dealing with the French colonial administration through wisdom and diplomacy. Laredj notes:

“I knew that the Emir wanted the treaty, and that General Damrémont, the Governor General, sought to profit from this agreement.”¹²

This passage demonstrates Abdelkader’s keen awareness of the importance of treaties and negotiations as part of the national struggle. His political vision extended beyond armed resistance to encompass diplomatic tact. Laredj thereby depicts Abdelkader as a statesman, committed to securing his people’s interests through whatever means were available.

1.7. The Recurrence of the Proper Name “Abdelkader”:

In addition to the official title “Emir,” the personal name “Abdelkader” appears frequently, particularly in the speech of French colonial figures. This dual usage reflects the existence of two contrasting dimensions to the character within the novel.

“Why did Abdelkader’s crime not spare our prisoners?”¹³

Here, the invocation of his personal name within a context of accusation and hostility reveals the colonizers’ attempt to diminish his stature. By avoiding the respectful title, they seek to erode his dignity as a national leader, casting him instead in a negative light.

1.8. Abdelkader as the People’s Sultan:

Abdelkader is represented not merely as a military commander but as a spiritual and popular leader. His symbolic role as the people’s Sultan is emphasized in the recurring popular chants:

“The voices rose, ululating: Allahu Akbar, Allahu Akbar, Abdelkader is our Sultan, Abdelkader is our Sultan.”¹⁴

This scene illustrates that Abdelkader transcended the boundaries of a mere military figure to become the embodiment of popular and religious spirit. To Algerians, he appeared as both Sultan and legitimate leader against colonial domination. Laredj highlights the profound unity between the people and their leader, testifying to Abdelkader’s deep-rooted place in the collective memory.

1.9. French Testimonies to the Emir’s Greatness:

Even French characters within the novel acknowledge Abdelkader’s greatness:

“I believe that I know Abdelkader more than others, and today I can testify as to who this man is.”¹⁵

This recognition illustrates the extent of Abdelkader’s influence, which reached into the consciousness of his adversaries. Despite their enmity, they admitted his extraordinary leadership and capabilities. Such testimony from the colonizers themselves introduces an additional humanizing dimension to Abdelkader’s portrayal, showing that even enemies were compelled to respect his stature.

1.10. Patience and Benevolence: Ethical Values in Abdelkader’s Character:

Laredj accentuates Abdelkader’s ethical dimension, depicting him as a tolerant and patient leader, even toward adversaries or under harsh circumstances:

“His patience and good treatment... Your presence will greatly ease his hardships.”¹⁶

This highlights Abdelkader's moral strength and elevated mode of interaction, presenting him as an exceptional leader. His patience and understanding exemplify his spiritual maturity and capacity for endurance.

Emir Abdelkader as a National and Cultural Symbol, In *The Prince*, the reader encounters one of the most renowned historical figures: Emir Abdelkader, who stands as an enduring symbol of Algerian struggle and culture. This figure encapsulates the rich and intricate history of Algeria, in which elements of national pride and steadfast determination against colonial domination are deeply intertwined.

The novel demonstrates that Emir Abdelkader was far more than a military leader; he was also an intellectual who sought to preserve his people's cultural and religious identity in the face of the harshness of French occupation. Through his struggle, the broader efforts of the Algerian people are revealed: their tireless endeavor over many years to reclaim freedom and independence.

His character embodies noble values such as courage, dignity, and faith in justice, reflecting the very spirit of the Algerian nation. Consequently, *The Prince* is not simply a historical narrative; rather, it constitutes a profound study of Algerian culture and its tradition of resistance, and an embodiment of the people's aspirations toward liberty and emancipation from the grip of colonialism.

Thus, the novel becomes a mirror reflecting both the hopes and challenges that Algerians confronted, while simultaneously illuminating their ongoing struggle to achieve justice and freedom. This transforms the text into a literary work of great importance for understanding Algerian identity.¹⁷

2. Monseigneur Antoine Dupuch:

Monseigneur Dupuch is another central character, one who embodies a representation of both human and historical presence in Algeria. His role in the narrative offers a different, yet complementary, dimension to that of Emir Abdelkader. To analyze this character, we turn to Waciny Laredj's *The Prince: Pathways of Iron Gates* as our case study.

2.1. The Appearance of the Character:

"Monseigneur Antoine Dupuch? He was my father and my brother, everything in my life."¹⁸

Through this introduction, Laredj underscores the importance of Dupuch within the narrative. The phrase reveals the profound attachment that the character feels toward his past, an attachment shaped by familial and cultural legacy. Such a description casts Dupuch as a symbol of continuity between past and present, suggesting that his existence is deeply rooted in memory and heritage. The choice of the word "father" conveys not only intimacy but also a sense of nostalgia and longing, thereby enriching the depth of the character.

2.2. Attachment to Algeria:

Dupuch declares: **"How I yearn for the day when my ashes may return there, where I left my heart and a part of my memory."¹⁹**

Here, the text conveys a powerful expression of love and belonging to Algeria. His words resonate with longing and absence, revealing a profoundly human dimension to his character. Dupuch is not merely a cleric or institutional figure, but a human being who carries dreams, attachments, and memories within his heart. His statement exposes an inner conflict, one born of the pain of separation and exile to France, and the enduring desire to remain spiritually bound to what he considers his true homeland.

2.3. His Relationship with the Emir:

The novel also highlights the close relationship between Dupuch and Emir Abdelkader:

"But over time I became certain that this man, who resembles us in every way, could only be a man who loves everything."²⁰

This declaration underscores the profound bond between Dupuch and Abdelkader, one rooted in friendship and mutual respect. Their relationship transcends temporal and spatial boundaries, becoming a symbol of solidarity between individuals from different cultural and religious backgrounds within the historical context of Algeria. Dupuch's perception of the Emir as a figure of love and universality positions him as a bridge linking disparate cultures. For Dupuch, Abdelkader symbolizes hope and transformation, and their friendship reveals how human ties can shape the trajectories of lives.

Service to Others: Self-Sacrifice and Altruism.

Dupuch dedicates his life to the service of others, even to the point of death. The narrative recalls:

“One day Monseigneur, during his prayer in the Cathedral of Saint Philip, asked the Giver of Hands and Charity to provide prisoners with clothing and blankets.”

And further: “Monseigneur Dupuch loved water, clarity, light, and serenity, despite the harsh conditions exile bestowed upon him, and despite the pursuit of others’ happiness, to the point of forgetting himself, He gave everything to the world, forgetting that he too was a human being, in need of someone to take him by the shoulder with longing and love, and to make him feel his own existence.”²¹

In these passages, Dupuch emerges as a figure who epitomizes values of sacrifice and altruism. He devotes himself wholeheartedly to aiding others, his actions revealing a profound commitment to serving the community. By requesting aid for prisoners, Dupuch demonstrates both his noble impulse and his urgent desire to alleviate the suffering of the weak and marginalized.

His love for nature and serenity—expressed in his preference for clarity, light, and tranquility—reflects another facet of his character. This inner pursuit of peace equips him to extend care to others, even amid his own hardships in exile. Yet the text also highlights the personal cost of his devotion: in dedicating himself to others’ happiness, Dupuch forgets his own needs. This tension underscores the deeply human struggle between self and other, service and self-preservation.

Conclusion:

At the close of this study, it becomes evident that in his novel *Masālik Abwāb al-Ḥadīd* (The Pathways of the Iron Gates), Wasini al-A‘raj has succeeded in transforming the historical figure from a mere documentary datum into a central artistic element within the narrative structure. His choice of Emir ‘Abd al-Qādir was not simply an invocation of a national symbol; rather, it was a reimagining of a legendary persona within the Algerian collective imagination. In this literary recreation, the Emir transcends temporal and spatial boundaries to emerge as the embodiment of the values of resistance, courage, justice, and dignity, rendered in such a symbolic fashion, the Emir becomes not merely a character, but a living force that animates the novel as a whole, turning the text into a space where history operates as a dynamic energy capable of shaping national consciousness and revitalizing the collective spirit.

Conversely, the integration of Monseigneur Dupuch into the narrative adds another layer of depth—both humanistic and civilizational, though different in religious and cultural background, Dupuch is depicted as a figure whose values and principles resonate with those of resistance and altruism. His presence opens the narrative to a dialogue of convergence between self and other, between Algerian identity and universal humanism, within the highly complex framework of colonial history. In this way, al-A‘raj grants the novel a multidimensional discourse that extends beyond affirming national identity against colonial domination; it aspires instead toward a broader humanist vision, transcending the narrow confines of affiliation and embracing the universality of human solidarity.

Thus, the significance of *The Pathways of the Iron Gates* lies not merely in its rearticulation of historical events but in its construction of a fully-fledged literary experience that fuses historical reference with imaginative creativity. The result is a narrative that engages the past in order to interpret the present and envision the future. Al-A‘raj does not treat history as a closed record but rather as an open text, endlessly available for reinterpretation and reappropriation. In so doing, literature becomes a critical instrument, illuminating obscured corners of memory and reposing the perennial questions of freedom, identity, and collective destiny.

Accordingly, this novel may be regarded as a compelling example of how contemporary Arabic literature harnesses history in the service of both artistic innovation and intellectual inquiry. Historical figures are transfigured into semiotic symbols that bear cultural and philosophical dimensions, reconnecting the reader with his or her roots while projecting a vision of the future. It becomes clear, then, that the invocation of historical personages in the novel is neither a mere aesthetic indulgence nor a straightforward exercise in documentation; it is a profoundly creative act, one that reshapes the past, ties it to the present, and positions literature at the very heart of national concerns. In this way, al-A‘raj’s narrative affirms the role of literature as a vital instrument for constructing critical and cultural awareness, one capable of accompanying and responding to the challenges of the contemporary age.

Actuality of the Study in Modern Times

The reinterpretation of historical figures in contemporary literature reflects the pressing need to revisit national identity in a globalized world marked by cultural hybridization and historical revisionism. In modern Algeria, debates about memory, colonial heritage, and intercultural dialogue remain central to public consciousness. By examining how Emir Abdelkader and Monseigneur Dupuch are reshaped within the fictional framework, this research highlights literature’s ability to contribute to modern discussions of identity politics, interreligious coexistence, and the enduring value of ethical leadership. Such analysis demonstrates that historical fiction

continues to be a vital instrument for negotiating the past while addressing contemporary challenges of collective memory and social cohesion.

Findings

Dynamic Role of Historical Characters – The study confirms that Laredj presents Emir Abdelkader and Monseigneur Dupuch as active, evolving agents within the narrative, transcending their archival roles.

Fusion of History and Imagination – The interplay of fact and fiction generates a multilayered vision of history, where emotional resonance complements documented accuracy.

Literature as a Site of Memory – The novel illustrates how narrative fiction can preserve and reshape collective memory, offering an alternative discourse to conventional historiography.

Contemporary Relevance – The figures' symbolic roles provide a mirror for modern readers to engage with themes of freedom, solidarity, and cultural plurality.

Acknowledgment

The authors express their gratitude to the Department of Literature at the University Khenchela Abbas Laghrour for its support and encouragement in pursuing this research. Special thanks are extended to colleagues who provided critical feedback during the preparation of this article.

Ethical Considerations

This study complies with academic ethical standards, ensuring accurate citation of sources, fair interpretation of the novel, and adherence to scholarly integrity. No human or animal subjects were involved in this research.

Funding

The authors did not receive any financial support for the research, authorship, or publication of this article.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

References

1. al-Khafājī, A. R. K. (2011). *Al-Muṣṭalaḥ al-Sardī fī al-Naqd al-Adabī al-‘Arabī al-Ḥadīth* [Narratological terminology in modern Arabic literary criticism]. Amman, Jordan: Dār al-Ṣafā’.
2. Lukács, G. (1978). *The historical novel* (S.J. Kāzīm, Trans.). Beirut, Lebanon: Dā al-Ṭibā’a. (Original work published 1937).
3. Asadov, A. (2022). Totalitarian obstacles and modern challenges in the study of world literature. *Journal of Language and Literature*, 13(1), 44–51.
4. Asadov, A. (2021). The role of world literature in the formation of students' planetary thinking. *Laplace em Revista*, 7, 360–368.
5. Muṣṭafā I., et al. (n.d.). *Al-Mu‘jam al-Wasīf*. Istanbul, Turkey: al-Maktaba al-Islāmiyya li-l-Ṭibā’a wa-l-Nashr.
6. Qāḍī, M. (2008). *Al-Riwāya wa-l-Ṭā’ikh: Dirāḥ fī Takhyīl al-Marja’ī* [The novel and history: Studies in the fictionalization of reference]. Tunis, Tunisia: Dā al-Ma’rifa li-l-Nashr.
7. Waṭṭā, M. R. (2004). *Tawḍīf al-Turāḥ fī al-Riwāya al-‘Arabiyya* [The use of heritage in the Arabic novel]. Damascus, Syria: Itihād Kuttāb al-‘Arab.
8. Qāsim, S. A. (1985). *Binā’ al-Riwāya* [The construction of the novel]. Cairo, Egypt: Maṭba‘at al-Hay’a al-‘Āmma al-Miṣriyya li-l-Kitāb.
9. al-A’raj, W. (2010). *Kitāb al-Amīr: Masālik Abwāb al-Ḥadīd* [The book of the Emir: The pathways of the iron gates]. Algiers, Algeria: Manšūrāt al-Faḍā’il al-Ḥurr.
10. Allen, R. (1982). *The Arabic novel: An historical and critical introduction*. Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press.
11. Allen, R. (1995). *The Arabic literary heritage: The development of its genres and criticism*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
12. Bakhtin, M. M. (1981). *The dialogic imagination: Four essays* (M. Holquist, Ed.; C. Emerson & M. Holquist, Trans.). Austin, TX: University of Texas Press.
13. Barthes, R. (1977). *Image, music, text* (S. Heath, Trans.). London, UK: Fontana.
14. Booth, W. C. (1983). *The rhetoric of fiction* (2nd ed.). Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

15. Genette, G. (1980). *Narrative discourse: An essay in method* (J. E. Lewin, Trans.). Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.
16. Genette, G. (1997). *Paratexts: Thresholds of interpretation* (J. E. Lewin, Trans.). Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
17. Hutcheon, L. (1988). *A poetics of postmodernism: History, theory, fiction*. New York, NY: Routledge.
18. Jameson, F. (1981). *The political unconscious: Narrative as a socially symbolic act*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.
19. Moretti, F. (2000). *The way of the world: The Bildungsroman in European culture*. London, UK: Verso.
20. Said, E. W. (1978). *Orientalism*. New York, NY: Pantheon Books.
21. Said, E. W. (1993). *Culture and imperialism*. New York, NY: Knopf.
22. Todorov, T. (1977). *The poetics of prose* (R. Howard, Trans.). Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.
23. Watt, I. (2001). *The rise of the novel: Studies in Defoe, Richardson and Fielding*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press. (Original work published 1957).
24. Wellek, R., & Warren, A. (1973). *Theory of literature* (3rd ed.). New York, NY: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich.

Endnotes:

¹Ibn Manzur, *Lisan al-Arab*, Dar Sadir, Beirut, Lebanon, 1st ed., 1997, vol. 7, entry (Shakhs), p. 45.

²Ibrahim Mustafa et al., *Al-Mu'jam al-Wasit, Al-Maktaba al-Islamiyya lil-Tiba'a wal-Nashr*, Istanbul, Turkey, (n.ed.), (n.d.), p. 475.

³See: Ahmad Rahim Karim al-Khafaji, *Al-Mustalah al-Sardi fi al-Naqd al-Adabi al-'Arabi al-Hadith*, Dar al-Safa', 1st ed., Amman, Jordan, 2011, p. 374.

⁴Georg Lukács, *The Historical Novel*, trans. Saleh Jawad Kazem, Dar al-Tiba'a, Beirut, (n.ed.), 1978, p. 21.

⁵See: Muhammad Qadhi, *Al-Riwaya wal-Tarikh: Dirasat fi Takhyil al-Marja'i*, Dar al-Ma'rifa lil-Nashr, Tunis, 1st ed., 2008, p. 24.

⁶See: Muhammad Riyad Watar, *Tawzif al-Turath fi al-Riwaya al-'Arabiyya*, Ittihad Kuttub al-'Arab, Damascus, (n.ed.), 2004.

⁷Waciny Laredj, *Kitab al-Amir: Masalik Abwab al-Hadid*, Manshurat al-Fadail al-Hurr, Algeria, (n.ed.), 2010, p. 19.

⁸*Ibid.*, p. 37.

⁹*Ibid.*, p. 45.

¹⁰*Ibid.*, p. 47.

¹¹*Ibid.*, p. 198.

¹²*Ibid.*, p. 185.

¹³*Ibid.*, p. 29.

¹⁴*Ibid.*, p. 42.

¹⁵*Ibid.*, p. 78.

¹⁶*Ibid.*, p. 141.

¹⁷See: Cesar Ahmad, Qasim: *Bina' al-Riwaya*, Matba'at al-Hay'a al-'Ammal-Misriyya lil-Kitab, Egypt, (n.ed.), 1985, p. 131.

¹⁸Waciny Laredj, *Kitab Masalik Abwab al-Hadid*, p. 12.

¹⁹*Ibid.*, p. 36.

²⁰*Ibid.*, p. 43.

²¹*Ibid.*, p. 11. æ.