

## **The Collapse of Islam in Granada in Radwa Ashour's *Thulathiyah Gharnatah*: An Analysis**

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### **Abstract**

Radwa Ashour is an Arab writer best known for her novel *The Granada Trilogy (Thulathiyah Gharnatah)* comprising *Gharnatah (Granada)*, *Mariama and Ar-Rahil (Departure)* which centres on the theme of the collapse of Islam in Granada. This trilogy serves not only as a work of fiction, but also as a medium for studying history, exploring the relationship between literary texts and the historical facts. The aim of this research is to reveal the relationship between literary texts and history, as well as to uncover the historical construction of the collapse of Islam in Granada through novels. Employing a New Historicist approach, this research focuses on the dynamic interaction between literary narratives and historical discourse, demonstrating how history is interpreted and reimagined through fiction. The results reveal that Ashour blends factual and imaginative elements to reconstruct the historical context of Granada's Fall. Identity conflict also appears as a central theme explored through the characters in this novel. Besides that, Ashour incorporates intertextuality in *Thulathiyah Gharnatah*, namely from the works of Amin Maalouf and Mahmoud Darwish, using them as analogies for a lost paradise. Her personal experiences, particularly in relation to Middle Eastern conflicts, also influence the narrative. A key aspect of the novel is its gender representation, which contrasts Islamic and Christian perspectives. Islam upholds the equality of men and women, while Christianity is depicted as treating Muslim Women unjustly. Thus, *Thulathiyah Gharnatah* functions not only as a narrative of the fall of Islam in Granada, but also as a profound reflection on identity, power and society relations and gender.

**Keywords:** Granada; New Historicism; Radwa Ashour; Literary Texts; Historical Texts.

### **Introduction**

History and literature are two fields that share certain similarities yet reconciling them is no easy task. Both are often intertwined in creative works to recreate and imagine reality, rendering it accessible and meaningful to readers. History grounded in evidence-based research, offers a referential framework that can be substantiated through verifiable sources. Meanwhile, literature is created based on the author's imagination often infused with personal memories.<sup>1</sup> History lives amid reality which functions to reconstruct that reality, while literature as art in the world of imagination serves to express this imagination. The differences of history and literature are evident in terms of structure and substance. Pollock in his book *The Nature of Literature: Its relation to*

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<sup>1</sup> Jan Thomas Lindblad, "History and Fiction: An Uneasy Marriage?" *Humaniora* 30, no. 2 (2018): 147–57, <https://doi.org/10.22146/jh.34619>.

*science, Language, and Human Experience* says that history is a form of referential symbolism, while literature embodies ecological symbolism.<sup>2</sup> History refers to the outside reality (reference), while literature draws up within itself (expression).<sup>3</sup>

David Harlan in *Manifestos for History* argues that historical novels are a combination of historical records and fiction, but there is strength in review and assessment based on history.<sup>4</sup> Fleishman further differentiates between historical novels and what he calls “novels of the recent past”—works that, while rooted in past events are largely shaped by the author’s personal experiences and cannot be strictly classified as historical fiction. A historical novel, therefore, is defined not merely by its temporal setting but by its deliberate engagement with real historical figures and events.<sup>5</sup> In the Arab literary world, several contemporary authors have contributed to this genre, including *'Azazil* by Yusuf Zaidan, *Kafah Tayyibah* and *'Abs al-Aqdar* by Najib Mahfouz, and *Thulathiyah Gharnatah* by Radwa Ashour. This research will specifically discuss the historical genre novel by Radwa Ashour entitled *Thulathiyah Gharnatah (Gharnatah, Mariama and ar-Rahil)*.

Radwa Ashour's literary work offers profound contribution to narrative style, language and the discourse surrounding Middle Eastern women's literature. A leading figure among the 1970s generation of Egyptian women writers. Ashour produced an impressive body of work including three monographs of literary criticism, one memoir, a collection of short stories and seven novels.<sup>6</sup> Her novel *Thulathiyah Gharnatah* (The Granada Trilogy) received the Best Book Award by the General Egyptian Book Organization in 1994 and won first prize at the Arab Women's Book Fair in Cairo in 1995.

*Thulathiyah Gharnatah* is a fictionalized account of the events following the surrender of the last Muslim ruler in Andalusia, Abu Abdullah Muhammad (known in the West as Boabdil) to the Roman Catholic royal family, King Ferdinand of Aragon and Queen Isabela of Castile in 1492. This novel tells the story of three generations of one family in Andalusia from 1491 to 1609. Elizabeth in Guzman reveals the reason Ashour chose Granada as the object of *Thulathiyah Gharnatah*, because "all the historical accounts talk of Andalusia as a civilization of the senses but without mind, without intellect. Clearly, something was wrong in that presentation." She also emphasizes the tragedy of the 1492 expulsion of Muslims and Jews from Andalusia.<sup>7</sup> There are several ideas of scholars regarding the history of Andalusia. For example, Jose Ortega Y Gasset in Wolf regarding the mention of the term Reconquista (reconquest) used by historical narratives, he said "I don't understand how a thing that lasted eight centuries can be called a reconquest".<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Thomas Clark Pollock, *The Nature of Literature: Its Relation to Science, Language, and Human Experience* (Princeton University Press, 1942).

<sup>3</sup> Kuntowijoyo, "Sejarah/Sastra," *Humaniora* 15, no. 1 (2004): 17–26, <https://doi.org/10.22146/jh.803>.

<sup>4</sup> David Harlan, *Historical Fiction and the Future of Academic History*. In *Manifestos for History*, Edited by Keith Jenkins, Sue Morgan, and Alun Munslow (Routledge, 2007), 109.

<sup>5</sup> Avrom Fleishman, *The English Historical Novel: Walter Scott and Virginia Woolf* (Johns Hopkins Press, 1971), 3–4.

<sup>6</sup> Radwa Ashour's works in the form of criticism include *al-Tariq ila al khayma al-ukhra dirasat fi 'amal Ghassan Kanafi* (1977); *Gibran and Blake: A Comparative Study* (1987); *Al-tab yahnadu: al-riwayah fi gharb afriqiya fi amrika* (1980). His memoir is entitled *Al-rihla ayyam thaliba misriyyah di amrika* (1983). His works are in short story form, including *Ra'yatu an-Nakhl* (1990) and *Tagharir al-sayyida ra* (2001). Nover's works, *Hajar Dafi* (1985), *Khadija wa sawan* (1989), and *Siraj* (1992). The first novel of the trilogy is *Gharnatah* (1994), *Maryama* (1995) and *Ar-Rahil* (1995). *Atyaf* (1999) is an autobiographical novel, *Qira min uruba* (2003).

<sup>7</sup> Maria Costanza Guzman, "Review of Granada: A Novel by Radwa Ashour," *The Arab Studies Journal* 13/14, no. 2/1 (2005): 129–32.

<sup>8</sup> Kenneth Baxter Wolf, "Myth, History and The Origins of al-Andalus: A Historiographical Essay," *Journal of Medieval Iberian Studies* (2019): 1–24, <https://doi.org/10.1080/17546559.2019.1566759>.

Hirschkind in his book *The Feeling of History Islam, Romanticism and Andalusia* reviews the opinion of Emilio Gonzales Ferrin who said that the history of the Muslim conquest in Spain was an invention of Christian ideologues in the 19th century.<sup>9</sup> Francisco Javier Simonet, a Spanish historian and leading Arabic linguist in Spain said in *Sanjuan* "the Spanish nation succumbed in the early eighth century, falling under the yoke of the Muslims. Since then, she continued to suffer for about eight centuries." Simonet believed that the Islamic conquest was a devastating national disaster.<sup>10</sup>

The inspiration for writing *Thulathiyah Gharnatah* was also inspired by the 1991 Gulf War and explained that writers of her generation were very aware that history was not only found in books and notes but could be found in life experiences. *Thulathiyah Gharnatah* attempts to connect the past and present through metaphorical images of loss and resistance.<sup>11</sup> Ashour's work is a reproduction of Andalusia in narrative form and assumes that Arab history is constantly facing constant threats. In depicting history, Ashour combines realism with literary experimentation. She emphasized that history "has entered a phase in which the same disasters keep recurring" since the past's "dispositions toward its future ... continue to permeate the present".<sup>12</sup>

*Thulathiyah Gharnatah* is a compelling work for historical literary analysis. This novel not only recounts the history of the collapse of Andalusia in the 14th century, but through richly drawn characters but also invites a critical examination of how historical realities are represented in fiction. How does Ashour present the story of Granada's collapse in *Thulathiyah Gharnatah*? Is this novel really based on the history of the collapse of Granada? Literary works with historical backgrounds must be used in-depth research to strengthen the historical atmosphere in the story. Therefore, there is a need for further research regarding the story of the collapse of Islam in Granada from a historical and literary perspective. This study applies the theoretical lens of New Historicism which is a literary approach that views texts as products of their historical, social, and cultural conditions.

New Historicism stands as an approach, a theory, or a movement that emerged as a reaction of critics dissatisfied with the American New Criticism, which rethought interdisciplinary, literary and cultural reading as a result of a shift in established norms and procedures.<sup>13</sup> Stephen Greenblatt first coined the term "New Historicism" in his introduction to *The Power of Forms in the English Renaissance*. This approach supports the idea that literature and history develop side by side, and that historical processes can also be traced in various texts. According to the New Historicism theory, historical events can influence the literary works of a society.<sup>14</sup> Apart from Greenblatt, Louis Adrian Montrose was one of the pioneers of the theory of "New Historicism" and defines it

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<sup>9</sup> Charles Hirschkind, *The Feeling of History Islam, Romanticism and Andalusia* (University of Chicago Press, 2020), 84.

<sup>10</sup> Alejandro Gracia Sanjuán, "Rejecting Al-Andalus, Exalting the Reconquista: Historical Memory in Contemporary Spain," *Journal of Medieval Iberian Studies* (2016): 1–19, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/17546559.2016.1268263>.

<sup>11</sup> Radwa Ashour, "Eyewitness, Scribe and Storyteller: My Experience as a Novelist," *The Massachusetts Review* 41, no. 1 (2000): 85–92.

<sup>12</sup> Adam Spanos, "Apprehension of Colonial Modernity: Radwa Ashour's Granada Trilogy and the Retrieval of Past Hope," *The Cambridge Journal of Postcolonial Literary Inquiry* 5, no. 3 (2018): 387–405, <https://doi.org/10.1017/pli.2018.21>.

<sup>13</sup> Ozlem Sayar, "Speaking with the Dead: New Historicism, Its Roots and Development as an Epoch-Making Approach," *RumeliDE Journal of Language and Literature Studies* 14 (2024): 1234–49, <https://doi.org/10.29000/rumelide.1455502>.

<sup>14</sup> Stephen Greenblatt, *Renaissance self-fashioning from More to Shakespeare* (The University of Chicago Press, 2005), 5.

as "a reciprocal concern with the historicity of the texts and the textuality of the history".<sup>15</sup> This theory closely combines literary and historical analysis by paying attention to how power, ideology, and historical narratives interact in literary works.<sup>16</sup> Several studies have engaged Radwa Ashour's *Thulathiyah Gharnatah*, offering various analytical perspectives on the novel. One such study by Muhammad Iqbal<sup>17</sup> Fathin Mashhud<sup>18</sup> Fatimah Az-Zahra,<sup>19</sup> El-Tantawy et al,<sup>20</sup> Ali Husein Najm and Md Sajidul Islam,<sup>21</sup> Hala Ghoneim,<sup>22</sup> Mustapha Kharoua<sup>23</sup> And then Adam Spanos.<sup>24</sup>

## Research Method

This study employs a qualitative research, methods which aims to understand the phenomenon of what is experienced by the object of research both in terms of behavior, perception, motivation and action holistically, and by means of descriptions in the form of words and language in a special natural context by utilizing various natural methods.<sup>25</sup> The theory used in this research is New Historicism, namely reconnecting written historical and literary stories from historical, social and cultural contexts. The data collection technique is carried out using parallel reading techniques, namely a technique carried out by reading literary texts (novels) with non-literary texts. The analysis process in studying Radwa Ashour's *Thulathiyah Gharnatah* is carried out by aligning non-literary texts related to events in the novel to combine them with the literary text to be analyzed.

## Historical Novels in Arabic Literature

The historical novel remains an enduring and significant literary genre, continuously engaging readers through its imaginative reconstructions of the past. Citing Zhachemukova Beshukova's notes in Arytovskaya many literary critics agree that there is no fixed or no canonical definition

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<sup>15</sup> Louis Montrose, *Professing the Renaissance: The poetics and politics of culture*. In H. A. Veenser (Ed.), *The New Historicism* (Routledge, 1989), 20.

<sup>16</sup> John Brannigan, *New Historicism and Cultural Materialism* (Macmillan Press LTD, 1998), 3–4.

<sup>17</sup> Muhammad Iqbal, "Kepribadian Diri Nyata Dan Diri Ideal Tokoh Utama Pada Novel Gornathoh Karya Radwa Ashour (Kajian Psikologi Sastra)," *BAHTERA: Jurnal Pendidikan Bahasa Dan Sastra*, 16, no. 1 (2017): 35–46, <https://dx.doi.org/10.21009/BAHTERA.162.03>.

<sup>18</sup> Fathin Masyhud et al., "Historical Intertextuality and Imaginative Creativity in the Granada Trilogy Novel by Radwa Ashour: Depicting the Human Tragedy of Muslims in Andalusia," *ALSUNIYAT: Jurnal Penelitian Bahasa, Sastra, Dan Budaya Arab* 7, no. 1 (2024): 135–55, <https://doi.org/DOI: http://doi.org/10.17509/alsuniyat.v7i1.67544>.

<sup>19</sup> Fatimah Az-Zahra, "Riwayat Granathah Li Radwa Ashour Wa Kitab Granada: A Pomegranade in the Hand of God (Dirasah Muqaranah Amrikiyyah)" (UIN Syarif Hidayatullah, 2020), <https://repository.uinjkt.ac.id/dspace/handle/123456789/62587?mode=full>.

<sup>20</sup> Taghreed El-Tantawy et al., "Radwa Ashour's Granada Trilogy as a Deconstructive Text," *International Journal of Advanced Humanities Research* (IJHR) 2, no. 1 (2022): 16–27, <https://doi.org/Radwa Ashour's Granada Trilogy as a deconstructive text>.

<sup>21</sup> Ali Husein Najm and Md Sajidul Islam, "Quest for Identity and Individuality in Radwa Ashour's Granada," *Perception Publishing* 5, no. 6 (2021): 39–52, <https://doi.org/10.53032/TCL.2021.5.6.07>.

<sup>22</sup> Hala Ghoneim, "Writing Semblance or Difference: 'Granada Trilogy' as a Case Study of Docile Female Writing," *The International Journal of Literary Humanities* 19, no. 2 (2021): 81–94, <https://doi.org/10.18848/2327-7912/CGP/v19i02/81-94>.

<sup>23</sup> Mustapha Kharoua, "Radwa Ashour's Granada: Concealed Pasts, Foreclosed Futures in the Arab/Muslim World," *Journal of Humanities Insight* 7, no. 1 (2023): 29–39, <http://dx.doi.org/10.22034/JHI.2022.329771.1054>.

<sup>24</sup> Spanos, "Apprehension of Colonial Modernity: Radwa Ashour's Granada Trilogy and the Retrieval of Past Hope."

<sup>25</sup> Lexy J Moeloeng, *Metodologi Penelitian Kualitatif* (PT Remaja Rosdakarya, 2018), 6.

for historical fiction.<sup>26</sup> Similarly, a scholar of Russian literature, Rayhanova, calls the historical genre a confusing question in literary history and theory. Unlike historical scientific works, historical literature refers to the same events and is produced in an artistic form by combining real historical figures with fictional characters.<sup>27</sup>

Historian Qasim Abdu Qasim and critic Ahmed al-Hawari define the historical novel in the book *ar-Riwayah at-Tarikhiyyah fi al-Adab al-'Arabiyy al-Hadith* as an early novel genre that emerged alongside the development of modern Arabic literature. The main aim of this novel genre is to tell historical events and facts related to historical periods or historical figures, especially the Arab-Islamic history.<sup>28</sup> Steves observes that while identifying a work as a historical novel reveals its temporal setting, it says little about the artistry.<sup>29</sup> Lee as cited in Stocker defines a historical novel as a novel where half of the text is set before the author was born, which also applies to the reader.<sup>30</sup> De Groot limits historical novels to those that operate within a fact-based framework.<sup>31</sup>

Historical novels are considered the most sophisticated type of novel because they raise themes to achieve very important goals and attempt to revive the past by presenting contemporary reading. Initially, this novel genre was considered foreign to Arabic literature and followed the Western European style that emerged in the 18th and 19th centuries AD. According to George Lukas, historical novels originated in the early 19th century, but novels with historical themes can be found in the 17th and 19th centuries.<sup>32</sup> And exemplar of this tradition is Walter Scott who chose to write about medieval heroes and included imaginary characters who were different and did not conflict with the historical era he was depicting.

In Arabic literature itself, this novel genre emerged through the translation and adaptation movement. The second half of the 19th century saw enormous activity in the Arabization of the novel. Arab writers Arabized and adapted the content of European novels, including Najib Haddad who Arabized Alexandre Dumas's *The Three Musketeers* and Walter Scott's *Salahuddin (Saladin)* by turning them into theatrical texts. In 1881, Caesar Zenia translated Alexandre Dumas's novel *The Count de Montgomery*, and between 1842 and 1914 he translated 16 novels.<sup>33</sup>

Thus, movement culminated in the work of Salim al-Bustani (1848-1881) who emerged as a pioneer in writing historical novels. Maroun Abboud opined that the novel created by Salim really amazes readers and presents surprises.<sup>34</sup> He published his novel productions in the al-Jinan magazine, among which were *Zanoubia* (1871), *Baddour* (1872), and *al-Huyam fi Futuh al-Syam*

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<sup>26</sup> Victoria N. Zarytovskaya and Ahmed M. Al-Rahbi, "The Evolution of Arabic Historical Literature and Its Current Trends: Canons and Invariants," *RUDN Journal of Studies in Literature and Journalism* 28, no. 2 (2023): 256–70, <https://doi.org/10.22363/2312-9220-2023-28-2-256-270>.

<sup>27</sup> Baian Rayhanova, "The Past and Present in The Modern Arabic Novel," *Zeitschrift Der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft* 154, no. 1 (2004): 71–84.

<sup>28</sup> Hasan Salīm Hindi Ismāil, *Ar-Riwāyah at-Tārīkhīyah Fī al Adab al-'Arabiyy al-Hadīth* (Dār wa Maktabah al-Hamīd li an-Nasyr wa at-Tauzī', 2014), 17–18.

<sup>29</sup> Anne H. Stevens, *British Historical Fiction Before Scott* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 3.

<sup>30</sup> Bryony D. Stocker, "Historical Fiction: Towards A Definition," *Journal of Historical Fictions* 1, no. 2 (2017): 65–80.

<sup>31</sup> Jerome De Groot, *The Historical Novel* (Routledge, 2010), 19.

<sup>32</sup> George Lukas, *Ar-Riwāyah At-Tārīkhīyah* (Dār al-Syuūn al-šaḳāfiyah, 1986), 11.

<sup>33</sup> Abdullāh Ibrahīm, *As-Sardiyyah Al-'Arabiyyah: Bahs Fī al-Bunyah as-Sardiyyah Lil-Maurūs al-Hika'i al-'Arabiyy* (Dār Al-Baidā, 2003), 142.

<sup>34</sup> Maroun Abboud, *Ruwāh An-Nahḍah al-'Arabiyyah* (Dār al-Ilm al-Malāyain, 1952), 195.

(1874). This magazine is considered the first Arabic magazine to focus on translated novels and historical stories. Salim's goal in creating his work is to teach history, as well as through learning.<sup>35</sup> But how far must a narrative reach into the past to be considered a historical novel? There is no unanimous answer, but a general rule suggest that the story should be set at least fifty years before the time of writing, or that the author must rely on research rather than personal memory.<sup>36</sup> Sarah Johnson in her review of the historical novel society said that historical novels should be built around an event that occurred no later than the 20th century.<sup>37</sup>

Historical novels are not just fictionalized retellings of the past. They are neither the author's imagination nor memories. Instead, historical novels aim to recreate an actual reality with more detailed depictions that immerse the readers in the reading. The main characteristic of historical novels is attention to detail and factuality. Besides that, historical novels remain works of fiction that have different goals and functions compared to historical research.

### ***Thulathiyah Gharnatah* and the Collapse of Islam in Granada in through the Lens of New Historicism**

Granada presents a compelling historical setting that Radwa Ashour explores with depth and literary sensitivity in *Thulathiyah Gharnatah*. This novel indirectly tells the moments of Granada's collapse wrapped in a family theme. Ashour presents several imaginative characters and factual historical figures based on historical stories. This imagination runs deep in the Abu Ja'far family. Abu Ja'far was a book craftsman who collected various books. He lived with his wife Umm Ja'far, his son Umm Hasan, and his grandchildren Hasan and Salimah who had to adapt to the rulers of Castille. They must maintain the Islamic religion amidst Christianization. Apart from that, there were astonishing incidents such as the burning of books carried out by the ruler of Castille in Bab el-Ramlah. The Granada inquisition body confiscated Arabic books from mosques, schools and residents' homes. The emergence of the *Thulathiyah Gharnatah* provides a new color to the story of the collapse of Islam in Granada warranting close analysis through the lens of New Historicism. The results of the analysis of the *Thulathiyah Gharnatah* using this approach are as follows:

#### **Historical and Cultural Context**

New Historicism emphasizes that literary texts cannot be separated from the historical and cultural context of their time. This novel focuses on the final period of Muslim rule in Granada towards the end of the 15th century. Granada is one of the regions in Andalusia (Spain) which tells a tragic story for Muslims in 1492. The founding of the sultanate of Granada occurred in the first 13th century AD. The Christian Reconquista movement (reconquest) of Andalusia between 1230 and 1240 and reached its peak point in the conquest of Seville in 1248 AD. Muslims considered the fall of Seville as a major disaster and thought that Islam would collapse in Andalusia. However, the Sultanate of Granada remained strong for the next two and a half centuries.<sup>38</sup>

The conquest of Granada by the Kingdom of Castile was carried out through military strategy and diplomacy. Kings Ferdinand and Isabella gathered a large army from their Kingdoms, then combined the armies of Castille and Aragon. In *Thulathiyah Gharnatah*, Ashour presents the

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<sup>35</sup> Ibrahim, *As-Sardiyah Al-'Arabiyyah: Bahs Fī al-Bunyah as-Sardiyah Lil-Maurūs al-Hika'i al-'Arabiyy*, 237.

<sup>36</sup> Lindblad, "History and Fiction: An Uneasy Marriage?"

<sup>37</sup> Sarah L. Johnson, *Historical Fiction: A Guide to the Genre* (Libraries Unlimited, 2005), 1.

<sup>38</sup> Hugh Kennedy, *Muslim Spain and Portugal: A Political History of Al-Andalus* (Longman, 1996), 273.

process of the conquest of Granada intimately and in depth by providing a picture of Muslim life which experienced major changes after the conquest.

In this novel, the story of the conquest of Granada begins with Boabdil's agreement with King Ferdinand II of Aragon and Queen Isabella I of Castile. This agreement was signed after the siege of Granada which marked the end of the Al-Andalus era. Ashour describes how Abu Abdullah Muhamamd al-Saghir (Boabdil) is overcome with grief as he signs the treaty of capitulation:

بكى أبو عبد الله محمد الصغير وقال: إن الله كتب عليه أن يكون شقيا وأن يتم صياغ البلاد على يديه. انتحب الوزراء والقادة والعلماء ورددوا لا حول ولا قوة إلا بالله ولا راد لقضاء الله.<sup>39</sup>

“Boabdil el Chico wept and said that Allah had made him a wretched man and had befallen the destruction of the country at his hands. All the ministers, royal officials, and scholars who were present joined in the morning while repeatedly saying *la haula wa la quwwata illa billah!*”

The agreement decree declares guarantees to protect the rights of Muslims to trade, worship and live in accordance with Muslim traditions. Nobles, state officials and rich people sold their possessions and moved to other places. The princes and nobles converted to Christianity. Sultan Abu Hasan's sons changed their names to Don Fernando and Don Juan de Granada. After the transfer of power, the Kingdom of Castile installed the sign of the cross on top of the Tower. This makes Muslims in Granada very sad.

قرب الضحى رأى سعيد جنودا قشتاليين يرفعون صليبيا فضيا كبيرا فوق برج الحراسة. وعندما انتهوا من تثبيته رفعوا علم قشتالة وراية القديس ياقب.<sup>40</sup>

“Approaching Dhuha time, Saad saw a Castilian soldier installing a large silver cross on a guard tower. After attaching it firmly, the man put up the Castilian flag and the Saint Yacob Banner.”

The handover of power by Abu Abdullah Muhammad as-Saghir (Boabdil) to Ferdinand and Isabella marked the official end of Muslim rule on the Iberian-peninsula and the start of Andalusia's period as a Christian country. After the surrender, Granada became part of the Kingdom of Castile and Ferdinand and Isabella became known as Catholic kings (Reyes Catolicos) for their efforts to unite Andalusia under Christianity. This handover had a big impact on Muslims in Andalusia who were faced with the choice of changing religion, leaving or facing persecution.

## Identity and Power

In this novel, identity conflict appears as a central theme explored through the characters in the novel. The characters face the challenge of maintaining cultural heritage amidst the rapid social and political changes resulting from the conquest of Granada. Through conquest, many characters must adapt and are forced to comply with the demands of the Kingdom of Castile, giving rise to moral and spiritual dilemmas. For example, all Muslims are no longer allowed to keep books, the Qur'an, either in mosques, schools or at home. Muslims are also required to convert to Christianity and are not allowed to perform Islamic religious rituals.

<sup>39</sup> Radwa Ashour, *Thulathiyah Gharnatah* (Dar al-Syuruq, 2001), 12.

<sup>40</sup> Ashour, *Thulathiyah Gharnatah*, 22.

One of the characters first described by Radwa Ashour in his novel was Musa ibn Abu Gassan. He is a factual figure in Andalusian history, who was a Muslim commander who lived during the final years of the *Reconquista*. He is known for his opposition to the Muslim surrender in Granada. In the book *Islamic Daulah al-Andalusiy* by Muhammad Abdullah Annan, Musa ibn Abu Gassan did not want to see the insults committed by the Christian Kingdom against Muslims. He chose to die in a noble state. He made a speech at the Alhambra Palace saying:

"إن الموت أقل ما نخشى فأماننا نهب مدننا وتدميرها وتدنيس مساجدنا وتخريب بيوتنا وهتك نساننا وبناتنا... الخ  
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"Death is the least of our fears. Our security comes from the plundering and destruction of our cities, the desecration of our mosques, the destruction of our homes, and the assault on our women and girls."

Musa ibn Abu Gassan in *Thulathiyah Gharnathah* is mentioned as a figure who rejected Christian rule over Muslims. He became an important figure in Granada. It is said that the people of Granada for three days and three nights did not stop talking about Musa ibn Abu Gassan. Some say that Abu Gassan left the Alhambra assembly and decided to take up arms against the Castile army. Some also say that he was killed by Boabdil Muhammad el-Chico (Abu Abdillah Muhammad al-Sagir) to fulfil his wish. Some also say that Abu Gassan was not killed but instead fled to the mountains to prepare a resistance movement. Another group said it made no difference whether there was Abu Gassan or not, because now Granada was destroyed.<sup>42</sup>

Besides that, the Kingdom of Castile also suppressed the Muslim community. After the surrender of Granada to the Kingdom of Castile, the Muslim community was forced to convert to Christianity and books were burned. The Kingdom of Castile stole the goods of Islamic civilization and did not want Muslims to find manuscripts written by their ancestors in Andalusia. The Christian kingdom forbade Muslim communities to bury their dead in the Islamic way, as well as holding meetings and gatherings to study their language and religion was prohibited, and even Arabic weddings, henna, and purification rituals.

لم يكن الأمر كما قالت مريمه اسما على الورق يستبدل باسم بل حياة كاملة صارت كل مفرداتها ومعاصي: طهور الصبية، عقد قرانهم على الشرع الواضح، زفهم على إيقاع الدفوف والأهازيج... إلخ.<sup>43</sup>

"The reality is not as Mariama said. Not just a change of name on paper, but every vocabulary of their lives becomes a vocabulary of prohibitions and forbidden things: the purity of young girls, holding marriages according to sharia, holding parties and playing tambourines and nasyid accompaniment..."

In another context, the Kingdom of Castile spread new prohibitions in the form of sheets distributed to the public and hung on the doors of Bab el-Ramlah (Vivarrambra) which contained the prohibition on using Arabic both spoken and written, the prohibition on using Arabic titles, Arabic clothing, bathing, Arabic dances and songs and all traditions related to Arabia. Apart from that, people must open their doors on holidays, Thursday and Friday.

<sup>41</sup> Ashour, *Thulathiyah Gharnatah*, 254–55.

<sup>42</sup> Ashour, *Thulathiyah Gharnatah*, 11–12.

<sup>43</sup> Ashour, *Thulathiyah Gharnatah*, 122.

أذاعوا المرسوم على الناس وعلقوه في ساحة باب الرملة، وكان المرسوم يقضي بحظر استخدام اللغة العربية في الكتابة والتخاطب، في المحافل والبيوت، ويمنع الاحتفاظ بالألقاب العربية واللباس العربي، والحمامات العامة، والرقص والغناء، وكل العادات المرتبطة بأبناء العرب.<sup>44</sup>

“They distributed the royal decree to the public and hung it in the Bab el Ramlah (Vivarrambla) square. The decree prohibited the use of Arabic - both in writing and speaking - in public spaces and in homes, the use of Arabic titles, Arabic clothing, Arab public baths, Arabic dancing and singing, and all forms of traditions related to Arab descent.”

Religion for the Muslim community in Granada is not only because of God, but religion shapes their identity. The forced renaming of individuals symbolised an attempt to erase that identity at its very core. Therefore, they pretended to be Christians to escape the dictatorship and cruelty of the enemy. On the other hand, they secretly carry out Islamic rituals at home. Therefore, changing religion by force is not defeat, but this is one form of resistance of the Andalusian people in the face of oppression.<sup>45</sup>

### **Intertextuality**

Radwa Ashour *Thulathiyah Gharnatah*, is deeply interwoven with intertextual references that enrich its historical narrative and thematic resonance. Ashour in *Kharoua* said he was influenced by Amin Maalouf and Mahmoud Darwish's work on the lost paradise.<sup>46</sup> Amin Maalouf is a writer from Lebanon who has written various works on the themes of identity, history and civilization. One of his works that represents a lost paradise is *Leo the African* (1988). The novel tells the story of a traveler named Hasan al-Wazzan who came from Granada and travelled to various places such as Morocco, Egypt, Mecca and Rome. Like the citizens of Granada, Hasan misses the best times in Granada. He witnessed firsthand the fall of Granada, the fall of the Mamluk kings in Egypt and the Watasi dynasty in Morocco.<sup>47</sup> And then Mahmoud Darwish a celebrated Palestinian poet, is renowned for his eloquent resistance against the Israeli occupation through poetry. His works protest the military violence, colonization, and forced displacement endured by Palestinian. On the other hand, Ashour also wrote a story about Palestinian women with the title *al-Tantouriyah*. Ashour manages to make an implied comparison between the past represented by Granada and the present represented by Palestine. She manipulated the fall of Granada and the suffering of the People to predict today's Palestine divided under Israeli domination.<sup>48</sup>

### **Subjective Experience**

Radwa Ashour's *Thulathiyah Gharnatah* describes the Andalusian tragedy indirectly as it did in Iraq, Palestine and Lebanon. Ashour expressed feelings in accordance with her experience, culture and Islamic perspective. Through the story that is built, readers feel the genocide that is occurring in Islamic societies today such as Palestine, Syria, and Libya. Radwa Ashour described her approach to writing as rooted in three interlinked relationships:

<sup>44</sup> Ashour, *Thulathiyah Gharnatah*, 316.

<sup>45</sup> El-Tantawy et al., “Radwa Ashour’s Granada Trilogy as a Deconstructive Text.”

<sup>46</sup> Kharoua, “Radwa Ashour’s Granada : Concealed Pasts , Foreclosed Futures in the Arab/Muslim World.”

<sup>47</sup> Zakariya Nabih, “Representing the Margin and the Center with Interstellar Hassan Al-Wazzan in the Heart of Renaissance Italy,” *London Journal of Research in Humanities and Social Sciences* 23, no. 25 (2023): 89–100.

<sup>48</sup> El-Tantawy et al., “Radwa Ashour’s Granada Trilogy as a Deconstructive Text.”

“To me writing is about relationship with three things: a relationship with the surrounding reality, that is, the reality that I see, endowed principally with its social and historical conditioning; a relationship with the language and behind it the cultural and literary legacies shaped within and through the language; and a relationship with the craft of writing and the experiences acquired in the daily workshop”.<sup>49</sup>

In *Thulathiyah Gharnatah*, Ashour reconstructs the collapse of Islam in Andalusia using a blend of factual historical figures and imaginative characters. Apart from that, Radwa Ashour also uses the setting of the place and time when Islam collapsed in Granada. The meaning of *Thulathiyah Gharnatah* has a close connotation to *Granadanua Moriscos*, which encapsulates the plight of women and men whose resistance is doomed to failure. For Ashour, the fate of the Moriscos resonates with her own lived experience of historical rupture. The Baghdad bombing, which was accompanied by the 1967 Sinai bombing, the 1982 Beirut bombing, and the prolonged bombing of South Lebanon. This novel is a means of exploring strength, helplessness, and opportunities for survival amidst resistance. Ashour insisted that *Thulathiyah Gharnatah* should not be reduced to a political allegory or confined to the boundaries of a conventional historical novel. She emphasized that the novel was not “an allegory” an “the setting” was not wrap-up.<sup>50</sup>

### **Gender Representation in Islam and Christianity**

In the case with women in the Middle East, Muslim women in Andalusia can involve themselves in various fields that men are involved in, including politics, social affairs, government, literature and arts, as well as intellectual fields. Historian such as Surya and Daya said some sources describe Andalusia as a patriarchal society and power was exclusively managed by men.<sup>51</sup> So, Ashour wanted to emphasize through *Thulathiyah Gharnatah* that Andalusian women were not completely under patriarchal power. Women in Andalusia were generally treated based on the Islamic legal system, namely the Qur'an and Hadith, which also adopted Maliki thought and was influenced by Persian and Roman traditions.<sup>52</sup> Although the legal system limited women, Andalusian Muslim women had the opportunity to participate in politics, society, art and education.

In this novel, after the conquest of Granada, Muslim women experience oppression. Many of them were captured and made slaves. Some are targeted for revenge against Islam. At the opening of the story, Ashour presents a naked woman lying on the bank of the river found by Abu Ja'far.

ذلك اليوم رأى أبو جعفر امرأة عارية تنحدر في اتجاهه من أعلى الشارع كأنها تقصده.<sup>53</sup>

“That morning Abu Ja'far saw a naked woman walking hurriedly down the steep road as if she was heading towards him.”

Besides that, Radwa Ashour presents various female figures by showing the importance of female characters in society. Female characters are depicted as symbols of resilience in facing challenges with courage and playing a role in maintaining culture and identity amidst oppression. Ashour also

<sup>49</sup> Radwa Ashour and Rebecca Porteous, “My Experience with Writing,” *Alif: Journal of Comparative Poetics*, no. 13 (1993): 170–75, <https://doi.org/10.2307/521797>.

<sup>50</sup> Ashour, “Eyewitness, Scribe and Storyteller: My Experience as a Novelist.”

<sup>51</sup> Riza Afita Surya and Daya Negri Wijaya, “Females Roles and Their Social World in Al-Andalus,” *International Journal of Islamic Thought (IJIT)*, no. 23 (2023): 91–98, <https://doi.org/10.24035/ijit.23.2023.259>.

<sup>52</sup> Maya Shatzmiller, “Women and Property Rights in Al-Andalus and the Maghrib: Social Patterns and Legal Discourse,” *Islamic Law and Society 2*, no. 3 (1995): 219–57, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3399469>.

<sup>53</sup> Ashour, *Thulathiyah Gharnatah*, 1.

wants to show that women function as custodians of family traditions and heritage. They contribute to maintaining stability and uncertain situations. Ashour describes Salimah as follows:

كان عقلها نشاطا كطاحونة لا تكف عن الدوران، تراقب وتتأمل وتساءل وتتهمك.<sup>54</sup>

“Her brain works actively like a grinding machine that never stops spinning. She likes to observe, think, ask questions and be serious.”

Her grandfather very loved the figure of Salimah because of her intelligence and ability to memorize the Qur’an at the age of nine. She quickly understood and memorized the lessons taught by her teacher. Mariama too, is portrayed as a highly intelligent and resourceful woman. Her wit and quick thinking earned her the admiration of those around her, and it is unsurprising that she had many friends who appreciated her lively presence and sharp mind.

And Ashour describes Salimah as follows:

اشتهرت مريمة بين الجيران ونساء الحي بمفاجأتها المدهشة.<sup>55</sup>

“Among the neighbors and mothers around her residence, Mariama is known for her surprising surprises.”

Among neighbors and mothers, Mariama was well known for her wit and unpredictable ingenuity. Her intelligence can turn bitter and heartbreaking events into jokes that can make the people around her more enthusiastic. The role of the family also plays an important role in the position of women. During the conquest of Granada, Abu Ja'far still wanted to educate Salimah privately, even though it would cost money. Abū Ja'far wanted his granddaughter to become a female figure like 'Aisyah bint Ahmed. However, Salimah's fate was not what Abu Ja'far expected. He was arrested by the Inquisition Agency on suspicion of practicing magic and storing strange objects. It was feared that she will endanger the security of the Catholic church and state security. Salimah was sentenced to death and witnessed by the people of Granada, both Muslims and non-Muslims.

صخب الأصوات وجلبة الجموع المتحدشة تدق في رأس سليمة كمطارق عالية تختلط بدقات قلبها ونبض معدتها. لا تريد تخشى العيون، عيون قشتالية تبتسم مزهوة تنهياً للفرجة.<sup>56</sup>

“The roar of the crowd was like a hammer hitting Saleema's head, mixed with the rapid beating of her heart. She didn't look around; she didn't want to. She knew the eyes of the Castilian people who were smiling happily and were preparing to watch her execution.”

The narrative above illustrates the harsh treatment of Muslim women under Christian rule following the fall of Granada. They became the target of revenge by making them slaves, killing them and placing them under men. This is different from Islamic teachings which place men and women equally. Granada under Islamic leadership, highly values women in society, as well as in the family environment. Even though many of women's roles are at home, this does not make it difficult for women to interact, work and study.

So, can *Thulathiyah Gharnatah* be categorized as a historical novel? Seeing the story presented by Ashour through several characters and settings and even a plot that is almost the same as the events

<sup>54</sup> Ashour, *Thulathiyah Gharnatah*, 31.

<sup>55</sup> Ashour, *Thulathiyah Gharnatah*, 153.

<sup>56</sup> Ashour, *Thulathiyah Gharnatah*, 245.

during the decline of Islam in Granada, this work can be said to be a historical novel. However, the presence of the story of Abu Ja'far's family in this novel also provides evidence that historical novels cannot be separated from the author's imagination. Ashour desires to show that literary works are cultural memories. Literature functions as an agent of memory and a means of remembering, because literature contains memories and writing at the same time. As a method for describing the past, literature must be understood within the cultural structures in which it was created and contributed to. In a postcolonial context, where society experiences colonialism and other forms of neo-colonial dimensions, literary narratives record everything that happens in society. Literature offers a means of revisiting narratives, enabling the recovery of repressed memories and the exploration of unresolved wounds and conflicts. In *Thulathiyah Gharnatah*, Radwa Ashour reimagines the collapse of Islam in Andalusia not merely as a historical event, but as a collective memory imbued with loss, dignity and resistance.

## **Conclusion**

Based on the analysis above, it can be concluded that *Thulathiyah Gharnatah* can be classified a historical novel, as it engages with the theme of the collapse of Islam in Granada by skillfully intertwining historical fact with imaginative narratives. Through the New Historicism approach, Ashour's work transcends the boundaries of personal storytelling and reflects broader themes such as historical memory, cultural, identity, and political resistance. Ashour uses the historical context of the collapse of Islam in Granada and the loss of Muslim identity under Christian rule based on historical facts. Meanwhile, supporting the creation of this work is the author's experience of the Middle East conflict and the intertextuality of the works of Amin Maalouf and Mahmoud Darwish as an analogy of a lost paradise. Andalusia was considered a paradise for Muslims which no longer exists. There is an important point that Ashour wants to point out, namely gender representation in power, namely Islam and Christianity. When Islam still ruled Andalusia, especially Granada, women and men had the right to live as equals, whereas under Christian rule many women were oppressed by making them slaves. *Thulathiyah Gharnatah* not only depicts historical events, but it also plays a role in redefining the experiences of marginalized communities. Ashour tries to re-imagine the story of the collapse of Islam in Granada in a way that is easy for readers to understand.

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