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Watching Through a Frame: Windows and Balconies as Motifs in Contemporary Diasporic Arab Literature

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***Abstract*—The purpose of this study is to examine the use of windows and balconies in Layla AlAmmar's *Silence Is A Sense* (2021) and Rawi Hage's *Beirut Hellfire Society* (2018). In these two works, written by diasporic Arab writers, the two literary motifs of the window and the balcony play a significant role in framing the political, social, and cultural conditions the characters live in. The two motifs have long been recurrent in literature, carrying a variety of connotations. However, when it comes to diasporic Arab writers, windows and balconies would carry entirely new implications in the contexts of war or in diaspora. Through a close reading of the two texts, this study focuses on the representation of windows and balconies. It focuses on the role the window and the balcony play in helping characters either to connect with or disconnect from the outside world.**

***Index Terms*—Diaspora, war, windows & balconies, Layla AlAmmar, Rawi Hage**

I. Introduction

Windows and balconies are defined as framed openings that grant the individual the ability to witness events and observe the world around him/her. The two frames have been used as motifs in many literary works. They have been omnipresent constantly in western literary texts, including poems, novels, and plays. The window, for instance, had captured Victorian writers' interest. In "Victorian Frames: Windows and Mirrors of Browning, Arnold, and Tennyson" Joseph (1978) highlights two different tropes in Victorian literature when it comes to windows. First, in poetry, windows in houses are highly allegorical except in a few unique works. Second, in lyrics, drama, and paintings, windows become psychological frames for the characters (Joseph, 1978, p. 72). When it comes to contemporary diasporic Arab literature, however, windows and balconies can carry a variety of connotations. Experiences of war and displacement make issues of immigration, trauma, and hopelessness recurrent themes in diasporic literature. Hence, in diasporic novels, windows and balconies have been employed as motifs and tropes for aesthetic and thematic ends. Arab writers in diaspora have also highlighted how windows and balconies can play significant roles in developing plot lines and constructing narratives. Thus, the purpose of this study is to examine the use of windows and balconies in Layla AlAmmar's *Silence Is A Sense* (2021) and Rawi Hage's *Beirut Hellfire Society* (2018).

As Abu Amrieh (2022) puts it, in the works of diasporic Arab writers "issues of diaspora, nostalgia and memories dominate the characters' daily experiences, punctuate their conversations, and shape their self-definition quests" (Abu Amrieh, 2022, p. 625). Thus, the use of windows and balconies by Arab writers in diaspora is mainly influenced by what these writers have experienced in their homelands at times of war or by their experiences in their host lands where matters of homesickness, nostalgia, and disconnection from the outside world inspire them to use windows and balconies in different ways. This has triggered diasporic Arab writers to employ windows and balconies in their literary works as motifs to reflect these themes. Diasporic Arab writers' employment of the two motifs differs according to whether they are set in times of war or they are set in diaspora.

II. Cultural Significations of Windows and Balconies

The literary motif of the window has been used by authors for a long time to present metafictional questions (Zocco, 2013, p. 1). The window enables the person to take the position of a distant observer who can gain information about the world around him. Yet, the position of an observer still requires a creative and active way of observing and watching the world outside, and it does not make him a passive object (Zocco, 2013, p. 1). The architecture of the window also plays an important role in the overall design of the house. Without it, homes would turn dark and stuffy. The frame of the window which allows light and air has symbolic meanings. Windows' glass also in this respect plays a central role in any analysis of the meaning of the window.

In *The Media City, Media, Architecture and Urban Space*, Mcquire (2008) highlights the notion of visibility: "The capacity of glass architecture to blur the boundary between interior and exterior space has since been manifested in the

production of new modes of public display, but also in a new degree of visibility about private life" (Mcquire, 2008, p. 162). Glass architecture obfuscates boundaries between the inside and the outside. Thus, people's privacy inside their own houses becomes threatened by visibility.

In his article "Windows" Kenzari (2005) points out that "the analysis of the theme of window symbolism from an architectural standpoint was first undertaken by the theologian Joseph Saucer, who, according to the scholar Carla Gottlieb, was the first to have delved into the past of the subject" (Kenzari, 2005, p. 38). He draws the reader's attention to the debate that took place in the early 1920s between the French Architect Auguste Perret, and his student Charles-Edouard Jeanneret, known as Le Corbusier, concerning the significance of fenestration and its appropriate nature (Kenzari, 2005, p. 39). Perret argues that the extent of excess that a window provides can differ from one individual to another. The window, according to Perret, is regarded as a man in the sense that it is framed in accordance with his shape; the vertical window is associated with the line of life, whereas the horizontal line is the line of death and rest (Kenzari, 2005, p. 39). The horizontal window can be seen as a sign of participation and directness, which might be considered as a balcony too as it provides more excess. The vertical window is a symbol of exclusion and contemplation. Kenzari also highlights Le Corbusier's view of the vertical window and the horizontal one. Le Corbusier asserts that while in the vertical window the gaze turns on itself, in the horizontal one (the balcony), it becomes a gaze of dominion over the exterior world because the horizon is wider (Kenzari, 2005, p. 40).

Similar to windows, balconies have always captivated the attention of architects over the years. Just like windows, balconies provide accessibility and blur boundaries between the public and the private spheres. This enables a sort of connection and engagement with the outside world. In their book *Rhythm Analysis Space, Time, and Everyday Life*, Lefebvre and Elden (2004) express how a balcony acts as a bridge between the private sphere of the inside and the public sphere of the outside. Lefebvre's words emphasize the idea that a balcony works as an apparatus that grasps rhythms and visions of the city outside (Lefebvre & Elden, 2004, p. 28).

Both windows and balconies serve as recurrent motifs in literature. By the end of the nineteenth century, the symbolism of the window had become concrete in many arts. Balconies also had always been a source of inspiration for poets and writers. In "The Balcony of Charles Baudelaire" Oxenhandler (1952) discusses Baudelaire's poem *Le Balcon* which was written originally in French and was later translated into English. Oxenhandler explains that the balcony in Baudelaire's poem *Le Balcon* exemplifies a case of suspension between the conciliation and the appeal of desire between the poet and his lover (Oxenhandler, 1952, pp. 57-58). Thus, windows and balconies play a crucial role in literary works. In this sense, they are not just ordinary tools. They form an integral part when it comes to the settings of the work and combining the meaning of the text.

The usage of these two motifs in western literature has been mostly romanticized. Diasporic Arab writers also employ windows and balconies in their literary works as motifs to reflect on different themes. To understand the context of the works of diasporic Arab writers, one should be aware of the Lebanese Civil War and how it has affected the literature of those novelists. Whether they have lived through the war or have parents or relatives who did, diasporic Arab writers' representation of the civil war was an integral part of their literature (Salaita, 2011, p. 12). Arab diasporic novelists like Rabih Alameddine, Rawi Hage, Nada Awar Jarrar have "[c]chronicled the lived experiences of Lebanese characters during and in the aftermath of the country's fifteen-year civil war […] by dramatizing […] the dilemma of a nation wrecked and divided by an inerasable traumatic memory" (Awad, 2016, p. 99). For instance, to understand Rawi Hage's novel *Beirut Hellfire Society*, one needs to have knowledge about the civil war with all its effects and how it entered the writer's unconsciousness and affected his literary works. In novels that are set in war zones, windows and balconies offer characters and readers alike the chance to witness the atrocities and the destruction caused by these armed conflicts. The employment of windows and balconies in literary works imbues them with new aesthetic and thematic functions.

Salaita adds that "even though each writer employs a distinct aesthetic, their work does share an important feature: the transportation of readers into a particular space that is chaotic, violent, redeeming, and, finally, universal" (Salaita, 2011, p. 31). Diasporic Arab writers, on the one hand, keep their original culture, and on the other hand, they find themselves bound to embrace a new culture which is that of the host land. In this context, in *The Arab Atlantic: Resistance, Diaspora, and Trans-cultural Dialogue in the Works of Arab British and Arab American Women Writers*, Awad (2012) sheds light on the idea of Arab writers' contrapuntal vision which enriches the diversity of their literature. He further asserts:

> With a contrapuntal vision, Arab writers [in diaspora] try to bridge the gaps between cultures and to leave corridors of dialogue open. Their belief in the potential of open dialogue and its role in preserving harmony are prompted by their contrapuntal perspective shaped by their hyphenated identities (Awad, 2012, p. 18).

This also offers a chance to deploy new motifs and symbols such as windows and balconies to further represent the experiences of diasporic characters in the new environment.

In representing diasporic experiences, Arab writers use windows and balconies differently. The writings of diasporic Arab novelists usually depict the daily experiences of alienated characters who attempt, albeit unsuccessfully, to insulate themselves from the outside world. They are often hesitant to merge with the larger community that surrounds them, and therefore, they are inclined to stay at home and observe what happens around them through their windows

and balconies. In this sense, the window and the balcony are the only means for displaced and traumatized characters to either connect with or disconnect from the world outside.

III. Layla AlAmmar's *Silence Is A Sense*

Layla AlAmmar is an academic and a writer from Kuwait. She is known for her two novels: *The Pact We Made* (2019) which was longlisted for the authors' Club Best First Novel Award, *and* her recent novel *Silence Is A Sense* (2021) which will be discussed in this paper. In her novel, *Silence Is A Sense*, she introduces us to the story of a Syrian female refugee and her journey of escaping the civil war in Syria to settle in England. The traumatized young woman who does not speak finds a sort of safety in staying at her apartment, watching her neighbors through the window and the balcony. As a traumatized refugee, Rana "struggles[s] to survive the consequences of the Syrian war and to keep […] sense of self" despite the hardships she has encountered in her journey to seek refuge and safety (Louati & Abu Amrieh, 2022, p. 183). As Gatrell reminds us, "[r]refugees were not epiphenomenal but central to the history of the twentieth century" (Gatrel, 2015, p. 19). Hence, Gatrell encourages us to read the "shifting matrix of relations and practices to which refugees themselves have contributed" in order to properly contextualize their experiences (Gatrel, 2017, p. 184).

Windows and balconies in diaspora are means either for the character's integration within the community or for his/her exclusion and isolation. In this respect, in her article "Exile, Return, and Nationalism in *A Goodland*," Balaa (2015) highlights the idea of "'catastrophic change'" that immigrants could face abroad. This depends on the immigrant's capacity to work through and adapt to his new environment. This creative potential could give such immigrants a chance for rebirth (Balaa, 2015, p. 96). An example of this is in Layla AlAmmar's *Silence Is A Sense* where her protagonist, who has recently settled in England, spends her days observing her foreign neighbors through her window:

How alone is that old man? Is he the last living soul in his family, like I might be? It seems unlikely. He looks like a native of this place, if such things can be discerned through a window. He doesn't look like me or the old couple next door, not like he might be from a country that was systematically killing its people, or a place where it is not out of the realm of possibility that your entire family might perish (AlAmmar, 2021, p. 51).

AlAmmar's protagonist Rana Halaby is projecting her feelings of fear and insecurity as an immigrant on what she sees through her window. The window, as shown in this quotation, is the protagonist's medium for interaction with home through the reveries that are triggered by what she sees. The window is also the tool that connects her with the outside world as she speculates on the identities of her neighbors. Thus, the view of the old man is the starting point for this immigrant to either engage with this community or withdraw from it.

The protagonist spends most of her time watching her neighbors through the window and the balcony. This situation may restrict a person's interaction with the outside world, making him/her a mere onlooker whose life is confined by what he/she sees with no plans to go outside. Thus, one may argue that windows and balconies in novels set in diaspora are Janus-faced: while they connect a person with the outside world, they may be confining and restrictive. However, the character does not stay a mute onlooker for so long because the connection she starts to create with her neighbors was inevitable. Henceforth, the window and the balcony in this novel are not just referred to frequently as part of the novel's setting. They do have a function in the novel. They link the character to the new environment and people. They serve as an opening and a gate to delve into the character's memories and recall them. Furthermore, they do play an important role in commenting on the protagonist's diasporic state.

In his article "Diaspora, Memory, and Identity, A Search for Home," Agnew (2005) states that "[t]he past is always with us, and it defines our present; it resonates in our voices, hovers over our silences" (Agnew, 2005, p. 3). Similarly, Rana's memories, and experiences of loneliness, displacement, trauma, and fear are constantly present in her mind. In the host land, though she chooses to remain silent, such memories and incidents keep revisiting her constantly. The window and the balcony participate in these encounters as Rana recalls her memories whenever she witnesses an incident through these two frames. The protagonist creates a new way of understanding and linking the past with the present. Cornered by memories, and "caged in by recollections" (AlAmmar, 2021, p. 22), the persecuted mind finally finds a way to let out things through both the window and the balcony.

In AlAmmar's novel, the protagonist's memories are similar to an old archive of stories and incidents, and each incident she witnesses through her window brings out one of them. The window allows Rana to experience different feelings and to conjure images from the past through the vision and the pictures it provides for her. In "Diaspora as a process: (De) constructing Boundaries," Mavroudi (2007) expresses that "[r]remembered places . . . often serve as symbolic anchors of community for dispersed people. This has long been true of immigrants, who use memory of place to construct their new world imaginatively" (Mavroudi, 2007, p. 469). The protagonist in *Silence Is A Sense* would not have been able to remember places and incidents from the homeland without the window and the balcony. The two literary motifs in this novel serve as a gate for the character through which she keeps shifting from past to present and vice versa. The two frames in this case are creating the character's world.

The window, for instance, helps Rana in many scenes to render an imagined situation, scene, or incident as a present moment. Thus, in a way, it creates a link between the character's inner thoughts and her present: "At times my mind feels like a refugee all on its own, left to wander harsh and hostile landscapes" (AlAmmar, 2021, p. 173). In many incidents, the layered scene from the window satisfies little curiosity for the character and gives only fragmented stories.

This leaves the protagonist's mind with little truth to build on. Therefore, she runs wild with her imaginations. This image, however, is influenced by her background, which most of the time offers the worst imaginations. The phrase "Left to wander harsh and hostile landscapes" (AlAmmar, 2021, p. 173) expresses how the window proves to reflect the protagonist's mind. Through the window's glass, the protagonist is not only looking at others, but she is watching herself too. Hence, we can argue that the window here provides a better look into the self, opposite to a mirror that reflects only the outside shape which might only distract from the inside of the mind.

The protagonist has a sort of obsession with safety and maintaining personal space. The statement "a movement outside the window catches my eye" (AlAmmar, 2021, p. 59) is a refrain that is repeated in the novel. This confirms Rana's strong bond with the openings of the window and the balcony. Thus, the window offers the protagonist's only way to escape the darkness and isolation in her flat.

The meaning of the word safety for Rana is relative because it is shaped by her experiences as a refugee. The following quote supports the fact that the protagonist has reached a point where she doubts the meaning of the word itself:

> I know I'm safe here, although the meaning of that word has a habit of slipping through my hands like water. I can't explain, even to myself, my hesitation, my continued sense that I'm still living in some indefinite holding room (AlAmmar, 2021, p. 169).

Rana has that feeling of being in a holding room; of being in a small square room of interrogation, with a one-way window. She cannot ignore nor overcome the feeling that she is being watched. Even though she remains glued to the window, she feels blind to the world outside.

In *Beginnings, Intention, and Methods*, Said (1975) explains that "knowledge of an event comes to the mind in small pieces, and is only gradually pieced together" (Said, 1975, p. 122). The following quotation from AlAmmar's novel supports this idea:

> There is a theory, Freudian perhaps, of compartmentalization. It says that memories can be hidden in different parts of the mind, where the waking consciousness can't reach them. It is a way of containing contradictory components of the mind, a way to avoid cognitive dissonance if you will. I imagine it as a kind of grand estate, and the flats all have people in them, and the ones in flat A are unaware of what's happening in flat B (AlAmmar, 2021, p. 69).

For Rana, each scene triggers a memory; however, she is afraid to connect those scenes and the people she sees through the windows because consequently, her memories will come to the final realization of herself. This also means that the protagonist's present and past would be welded together, which is a thing she is afraid of, and still not prepared to face. The fragmentation that Rana experiences is principally a product of sitting by the window, depending on how far off she stands from the window. Thus, the window constructs her passage to either overcome her fear and connect the present with the past, or to stay hanging between the two. Hence, the window contributes to the fragmentation of scenes that she faces every day, depending on her position and distance.

The window and the balcony in this novel represent the main tools of interaction for the protagonist with the exterior world. They become part of her struggle to maintain a relationship with the outside world:

> I can't help watching them. I tell myself that watching these people is what got me into this mess, to begin with, that everything was fine before, but the truth is I don't even remember a 'before'. Or rather, there are too many 'befores' to consider" (AlAmmar, 2021, p. 187).

This explains how the connection Rana creates with the window and the balcony becomes inevitable. Rana observes most of the events through the window rather than the balcony. This may be explained by the fact that since the balcony is identified more with participation and directness, Rana has a fear of being there. This takes us to what Kenzari addresses in his article "Windows" (2005) when he introduces to us the debate that took place between the two French architects Perret and Le Corbusier regarding the significance of fenestration. According to Le Corbusier, in the horizontal window, which we may consider here as a balcony, the gaze becomes a gaze of dominion over the exterior world because the horizon is wider. The onlooker in this case becomes a direct participant. In the case of the vertical window, however, the gaze turns on itself (Kenzari, 2005, p. 40). This explains why the protagonist prefers to hide behind the window's glass, and steal looks whenever she can. However, the character's connection with the balcony changes in the process:

> I don't leave my flat. I move through the rooms like a spirit, wandering into the kitchen to stare at the contents of my cabinets, to the bedroom to convulse beneath the duvet, to the bathroom mirror to check I'm still here, to the balcony to watch the sky and the people in the windows (AlAmmar, 2021, p. 187).

The balcony, in this case, is transformed from an obligation for the character whenever she looks for a larger view into a desire. Balconies are not just framed to provide access to the outside world, but they also grant people a new angle for contemplating and observing the world around them. The balcony puts the onlooker on display. The person standing on his balcony can be viewed by others while he is observing them. This explains why Rana fears being there at the beginning.

Kenzari reminds us of Perret's argument that the extent of excess a window provides can differ from one individual to another (Kenzari, 2005, p. 39). The protagonist relies a lot on what she sees through the window. She chooses indirect contact over direct one because she can know more about them via the window. This explains why she prefers

to keep watching them from afar and that is why she considers this safer than real interaction. Rana does not only use the balcony and window as an apparatus that grasps visions of people in the new environment, but she starts to dig deep, looking inside flats and houses. This activates her memories and imaginations.

While Rana used to associate the outside world with fear and unsafety and to regard the inside as a safe haven, the window, and the balcony have shifted the meaning of the inside and the outside for her:

> I can't. I can't manage to do anything but sit there while my body shivers and my heart tries to climb out of my throat and launch itself across the room, out of the window, off the balcony, and up into the heavens. I don't want to be here anymore" (AlAmmar, 2021, p. 180).

This explains how the window and the balcony construct a liberating medium for Rana and enables her to break the boundaries she has created for herself behind the flat's walls.

The protagonist compares herself to the character Clara in Allende's *The House of the Spirits*, who goes mute and feels she is "filled with the silence of the whole world". Rana admits that she experiences the same feeling of silence, but "it was not that of the whole world" (AlAmmar, 2021, p. 126) because for her everything can be silent except the noisy and chaotic world. In the protagonist's words, "the world is the furthest possible thing from silence. And it seemed to me that the only way to counter this cacophony was to go quiet, to express nothing. The only reasonable response was to fill myself up with silence" (AlAmmar, 2021, p. 126). Through silence, Rana creates a borderline between herself and the chaotic world, but the two frames blur this line and shift Rana's desire from being silent to participating in the surrounding environment.

In the "Street Window," Kafka (1913) reminds us:

> Whoever leads a solitary life and yet now and then wants to attach himself somewhere, whoever, according to changes in the time of day, the weather, the state of his business, and the like, suddenly wishes to see any arm at all to which he might cling—he will not be able to manage for long without a window looking on to the street (Kafka, 1913, p. 384).

Through the potential influence of the window and the balcony, Rana's vision transcends the borders of her apartment and escapes the fate of being isolated from the outside world. Without the window and the balcony, Rana would not have been able to overcome loneliness and isolation. She comes to know that the outside may be as safe as the inside. Through the framing magic of the window and the balcony, the protagonist reconciles her traumatized and alienated self with the new version of herself.

IV. Rawi Hage's Beirut Hellfire Society

Rawi Hage is a Lebanese-Canadian novelist, journalist, and photographer. He won the 2008 International Dublin Literary Award for his novel *De Niro's Game.* He also won the Hugh MacLennan Prize for Fiction in 2008 and 2012 for his two novels *Cockroach* and *Carnival*. His novel *Beirut Hellfire Society* was a shortlisted finalist for both the Governor General's Award for English-Language fiction and the Rogers writers' Trust Fiction Prize. Hage's novel *Beirut Hellfire Society* tells the story of Pavlov, an undertaker's son who spends his days burying the dead and witnessing death and war raging outside through his window and balcony.

In novels that are set in war zones, windows and balconies offer characters and readers alike the chance to witness the atrocities and the destruction caused by these armed conflicts. Simultaneously, the employment of windows and balconies in literary works imbues them with new aesthetic and thematic functions. To illustrate, in the first section of Rawi Hage's novel *Beirut Hellfire Society*, significantly titled "At the Window," the omniscient narrator says:

> The man who had been given the name of Pavlov by his father stood at his window above the road that led to the cemetery, and waited for the bells to toll. Upon hearing that sound, he swallowed his saliva and settled in to watch the procession going by" (Hage, 2018, p. 23).

This quotation reflects the protagonist's constant fear and terror due to what he witnesses daily from his window. In this sense, the window is his gateway to the world of destruction and death outside. Moreover, since his family's house is built inside the perimeters of the cemetery, his window overlooks the graveyard, and he is in constant touch with death through his window. The window which is supposed to give him fresh air and a nice view become a tool to witness death processions and funerals every day.

Pavlov, who was sixteen years old when his mother passed away, became "the custodian of the window of death, the sole observer above the cemetery road" (Hage, 2018, p. 24). He was the only one left to observe the coffins of the dead after his father had also died (Hage, 2018, p. 24). As Letaief and Awad (2021) put it, Pavlov is "an existential, hedonist, [and] self-alienated character" (Letaief & Awad, 2021, p. 250).

Both the window and the balcony become sites for contemplation and realization of the meaning of life for Pavlov. The position of a distant observer, whether from his window or balcony, grants Pavlov superiority and a feeling of a "perverse privilege" (Hage, 2018, p. 24). The outside represents weakness manifested in the mourning women underneath his window and balcony, whereas the inside resembles the privilege of being untouched, a false sense of safety with the ability to travel beyond reality and to question the meaning of the whole world: "Death and tears, he thought—that's what it takes for this world to be made humble" (Hage, 2018, pp. 24-25). The protagonist reminds us of an incident of contemplation and realization by Thomas De Quincey when he visited his dead sister lying motionless on her bed. Through the window in the room where De Quincey's sister was lying dead, he was forced to face the

boundless universe. In other words, the view from that window humbled De Quincey as he stared at the empty large space through the window, reminding him how small a human being can be. De Quincey would not have achieved that realization had it not been for the framing power of the window (Joseph, 1978, p. 70). This presents the window as a literary motif that has been used by authors for a long time in literary works to answer metaphorical questions (Zocco, 2013, p. 1).

Windows, in some situations, may reflect fear if the onlooker witnesses a chaotic situation outside. Here, the safety that people feel inside their little havens is threatened to be destroyed at any moment by the large, noisy world outside. In the following quote, Pavlov's peaceful moment while standing at the window to enjoy a "sunny morning" has been soon interrupted by a bomb that landed directly below his window and broke the momentary safety he felt: "Glass shattered and fell on Pavlov's head, and he saw a cloud of grey, dense smoke, and then he sensed a ponderous silence in his chest" (Hage, 2018, p. 63). This explains how in literary texts, the transparency of glass exposes the character to the danger outside and, at the same time, it threatens him inside his house.

In another episode, Pavlov hopelessly repairs his broken window and stands there to watch the Christian militiamen who were facing his balcony. In this sense, the character is struggling to maintain an illusionary sense of safety, which according to him can only be achievable behind his window's glass (Hage, 2018, p. 69). A bullet was fired by one of the militiamen and was aimed at Pavlov when the militiaman noticed Pavlov staring at them through his window. It missed Pavlov by a couple of centimeters. This again reveals the vulnerability of glass. Symbolically, it supports the fact that the feeling of assurance does not last long because the glass's fragility does not guarantee it. As soon as the glass is shattered, the purported security and safety that Pavlov feels inside his haven vanishes into thin air. The episode itself borders on the uncanny since Pavlov's life lies at the mercy of a thin layer of glass.

The frame of the window which allows light and air has symbolic meanings. A character staring out of the window may start longing for what might exist beyond the horizon. Since childhood, Pavlov had the habit of watching others through the window confidently without being noticed or touched. Windows can also stand for a character's longing or desire for something. Similarly, by standing at a window that is "above the line of death and shotguns," Pavlov is longing for memories filled with a sense of assurance that can no longer be attained in "the fertile presence of war" (Hage, 2018, p. 70). Another incident that provides a new perspective on the window's function in the novel is when the writer states how Pavlov had adopted the way of a dog and made a point of never showing fear or hesitation in moments of pain or danger (Hage, 2018, p. 73). As a spectator, the false sense of security on the other side of the window reinforces a belief in Pavlov that as a viewer of a scene, he will not be harmed. The window gives Pavlov the courage to watch any danger without the distractions of fear or hesitation. Thus, he has an advantage over the regular viewer.

Pavlov's position as an onlooker renders the scenes around his home theatrical whereby, he is the sole spectator and the raging war outside is a stage on which the players act insanely:

> I know you, Pavlov. They say you belong to a secret society, but I know you are alone in this world. You enjoy the warmth of cadavers. You are torn between the spectacle and participating in it. But you killed Faddoul, so I guess you're no longer just an observer. You are only half-delusional, and I admire you for that. Now, where are these falling bombs? The Bohemian went out onto the balcony with his camera in hand. Let's stop their narrative of death, he said. Let's catch the bombs and stop them from falling (Hage, 2018, p. 198).

The window's borders function as a tool that detaches the observer from the scene, the same way a stage in a play is set within borders that separate the actors from the audience. This analogy turns Pavlov who watches the raging war outside from his window and balcony into a spectator attentively watching a tragedy that unfolds in front of his eyes, albeit with a false sense of safety. In his imagination, Pavlov is taking the position of a nonparticipant behind his window glass too: "At the sound of the largest bell in the universe, the bell of the second coming, Pavlov had imagined he would surely be standing at the window, facing the cemetery, as the earth started to crack open" (Hage, 2018, p. 103).

In the above quotation, Pavlov has taken the role of an observer to a heart, in relation to everything that happens in the world. This numbs his feelings as a member of humanity and ascends or descends him as an observer of it. In the following example, he ascends as a Greek god watching a play unfold: "All the stories of the dead now seemed ordinary to him. The trope of war had been played and replayed since Homer—a play for the Gods to observe from on high" (Hage, 2018, p. 104). Thus, the image of Pavlov observing the madness of the war unfold under his balcony reflects his superiority to other humans. At other times, he descends to something lower than human, i.e., to a dog. Pavlov never puts himself in other people's place, and that is why he even imagines himself inside his home behind his closed window, contemplating resurrection. Furthermore, staring from the window permits a better view of the scene unhindered by the emotional fear of getting killed. Thus, it provides a better understanding of the scene. Even if the assurance of home is questionable, for Pavlov it does not matter. His statement "what a naïve species we are, Pavlov thought. The stories we die for" (Hage, 2018, p. 104) illustrates how watching war within the luxury of the home has provided him with a good opportunity to contemplate, question, and think about the tragic events he witnesses every day.

The view that the window permits provides access to reality and enables us to have more reliable information on the world outside (Zocco, 2013, p. 8). Pavlov got used to waking up every morning to the sound of falling bombs beneath his window and balcony:

> He didn't need to listen to the news—war and its constant mayhem inevitably ended up parading itself beneath his window. Tales of combat deaths, sniper deaths, deaths by misadventure, old age, accidents, car crashes, massacres, drowning, collapsing houses, stillbirth, hunger and gluttony, execution, slaughter—all converged under his balcony (Hage, 2018, p. 115).

This takes us to Zocco's argument where she states that the window in the above case is similar to artistic media which imitate reality as it is, and more importantly create new and imaginative ones. Moreover, both the window and the balcony develop a specific image of the outside world which transforms reality into artificial space (Zocco, 2013, p. 10). Such a statement suggests that the two spaces are not merely a world divided by a frame, but two different worlds that can only access each other throughout this frame.

In this regard, Jutte (2016) asserts that "being at the window meant being informed of what was happening in one's neighborhood and more generally in the city. It was, in a certain sense, of existential importance" (Jutte, 2016, p. 613). This emphasizes the importance of the window and balcony in Pavlov's life.

The window for Pavlov which was an opening associated with stability, peace, and beautiful childhood memories, now cannot be separated from chaos and death manifested through all the processions, funerals, and falling bombs that land daily beneath his balcony. Each of the window and the balcony becomes a gate to nightmares where the horror of war manifests itself as "a creature of death roaming the streets, reaching inside doors and windows, swinging his long cane" (Hage, 2018, p. 138). When Pavlov noticed a fly trapped inside his window, he hoped for it to find the crack in the glass and escape through it. After he directed it to it, the fly reached the opening and escaped. The crack in the glass represents the fragility of the window, and the capacity of war to break this thin glass that separates the inside from the outside (Hage, 2018, pp. 163-164). Back on his balcony**,** Pavlov is still thinking of the fly:

> The weak sun hit his face and he wondered if the fly was aware of the relationship between interior and exterior if it contemplated the question of false transparencies or ever asked why the visible universe could not be attained because of the treachery of glass if it was grateful to Pavlov for his grand act of altruism (Hage, 2018, p. 164).

Pavlov is questioning the fly's awareness of the relationship between the exterior and the interior. The protagonist's contemplation proves how he, like the fly, is unaware of the relationship between the exterior and interior. He is unaware of the fragility and weakness of the transparent glass that gives him illusionary security and false safety. In war zones, the exterior and the interior are the same, and the feeling of security inside homes and behind the glass of the window or on a balcony becomes questionable and needs to be contemplated.

The window and the balcony are supposed to connect the observer with the life outside his home; however, in Pavlov's case, they become sites of imaginary dialogues with the dead bodies in the cemetery beneath his balcony. We see in the following quotation how the war changes the function of these two frames for Pavlov:

Man, and dog sat at the window and listened to the voices of the dead beyond the balcony. Do you hear the murmuring and all the talk? the dog said to Pavlov. They are eager to tell stories of their lives. Yes, Pavlov said, I hear them all the time. Then he stood and shouted from the balcony, No one is important, none of you! (Hage, 2018, p. 194).

For Pavlov, there is a special link between the window and the balcony. They are inseparable. The window becomes a place for observations, and monologues, in this case with a dog, and in the balcony his observations and dialogues turn into realizations of the meaning of life and death. He is questioning whether the thing they are fighting for is worthy of death. At some points, Pavlov's mute monologues make him question the reliability of what he sees from the balcony. An example of this is when he doubts whether his father one day while digging, was waving to him or to another son (Hage, 2018, p. 16).

The balcony takes a dramatic role when it turns into a setting for war. Balconies may turn from a place to observe the chaotic atmosphere of war, to sites for massacres: "A bomb had landed in front of the priest and shredded him. The body was lying on the ground without a head, decapitated. The priest's shoe, filled with his five toes and an ankle, had landed on Pavlov's balcony" (Hage, 2018, p. 63). In this incident, Pavlov turns from his usual position as a distant onlooker to a participant in the scene itself. The balcony blurs the boundary between the two spheres. This takes us to Lefebvre's argument that was mentioned earlier on how a balcony acts as a bridge between the private sphere of the inside and the public sphere of the outside (Lefebvre & Elden, 2004, p. 28). However, this opposes Benjamin's claim in his book *The Arcades Project* (2002) when he argues that: "The balcony took on special significance in nineteenth-century life and literature as the place from which one could gaze but not be touched, could participate in the crowd yet be separate from it" (Benjamin, 2002, p. 392). The incident of the priest's death reveals that the balcony is not only a place from which one witnesses war and death, but it is also transformed into a gate that breaks the borders between the danger outside and the illusionary safety inside.

While Rana in AlAmmar's novel is capable of blurring the line between inner and outer space due to the framing power of the window and the balcony, Pavlov experiences a situation of in-betweenness. He remains blind to the relationship between the inside and the outside and the difference between the two until he faces his death by the end of the novel. Though both the window and the balcony serve as the protagonist's bridge and sites of interaction, whether willingly or unwillingly with the destruction and the war outside, Pavlov remains bound to his illusionary safety inside his home. Hence, despite the framing power of both the window and the balcony, and the privilege of being untouched

and insulated from the chaos outside, Pavlov stays disconnected from the outside world. In a way, he has created a new world behind his window and balcony, where he has imprisoned himself from the war and the destruction outside.

V. Conclusion

Windows and balconies play a significant role in the selected works by diasporic Arab writers. The characters' lives in the two novels are shaped by the power these two frames have imposed on them. The two literary motifs in these works share the ability to combine each character's situation with his/her fate. In Rana's case, the change she faced was inevitable. Both the window and the balcony are the catalyst; they prove to be the best way for the character to connect with the outside world. By the end, Rana reaches a point through which there is no borderline between inner and outer spaces. Thus, she becomes capable of connecting with the outside again. The two frames have served as a bridge between memory and imagination and between the present and the past. Therefore, the window and the balcony were important to determine the protagonist's fate. In Pavlov's case, the two frames shape his own world; they are the tools through which Pavlov embraces a world far from the bitter reality. Though both the window and the balcony put Pavlov in a situation of inbetweeness that he could not be either in or out, the two frames help him to embrace a fantasy world which is according to him better than the reality he lives in. Though he ends up being disconnected and embraces a world that he could not escape, both the window and the balcony give Pavlov the privilege of being both participant and nonparticipant in the war. Thus, they play an important role in his life. Be it in times of war or in diaspora, the unique relationship each character has with both the window and the balcony creates either engagement or connection with the outside or disconnection and withdrawal from it. Thus, they introduce to us a new perspective on how Arab writers in diaspora employ windows and balconies in relation to the sociopolitical, cultural, and historical conditions and circumstances in which these novels are set.

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