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The Aesthetics of Jordanian Place in the Novel *The Flood Notebooks* by Jordanian Writer Samiha Khrais

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***Abstract*—This research studied and analyzed the aesthetics of the Jordanian place in the novel The Flood Notebooks by the Jordanian writer Samiha Khrais. The importance of this novel lies in the fact that it is a social-historical novel that depicts a Jordanian place in the 1930s. Its writer was able to combine truth with imagination to present an artistic work whose events are derived from history, yet it is not a historical document; rather, it is a work of art, and the writer excelled in its construction. The two researchers studied the place in this novel within the framework of specific dualities of both the historical and contemporary place, the open and closed place, and the real and symbolic place. The study of duality, or opposites, is at the heart of the structural studies of meaning, which took as its starting point the duality of phenomena, claiming that it is a characteristic of human thought. However, the present study will not stop at these dualities alone; rather, it will benefit from the current semiotics due to the interest they provide in structure and meaning and the ability to interpret texts according to the context in which they appear.**

***Index Terms*—aesthetics of place, The Flood Notebooks, Samiha Khrais, semiotics, Jordanian literature**

I. Introduction

Born in Amman in 1956, Samiha Khrais is a famous Jordanian writer (Khrais, 2005, p. 13) who has received many awards in recognition of her literary works including the Abu Al-Qasim Al-Shabi Award in Tunisia, the Discretionary State Award for Literature in Jordan, and the Al-Hussein Medal for Excellence, also in Jordan. Her literary experience represents "a landmark in the achievement of Jordanian novelists, and indeed is a great achievement for any Arab novelist in general. This experience derived its distinctive characteristic from the perseverance of Samiha Khrais herself to develop her tools, techniques, and artistic construction of her texts to complete a novel closely related to reality on the one hand and its differences at the level of imagination and formation on the other hand" (Al-Saleh, 2005, p. 8).

First published in 2003, *The Flood Notebooks* is Khrais' eighth novel, and in it, her interest in describing the place is apparent as soon as one reads the title and first few sentences of the book that clearly pave the way for the events of the novel.

As the title suggests, the novel is a collection of papers taken from a notebook. The flood refers to the great deluge that occurred in Amman in 1938, when heavy rains fell for more than seventy days, flooding Amman's city center and leaving the surrounding shops, homes, and Roman ruins submerged for days and many animals and humans dead. After the rain stopped, "people felt themselves first, then checked their things and loved ones. They remained stunned ... tongue-tied for a while before they told the story of the final flood" (Khrais, 2003, p. 289).

Samiha Khrais did not document this event with historical accuracy; rather, she depicted it artistically in her novel, where characters and places changed their features after the flood. She also gave this event symbolic connotations, whose interpretation may differ from one reader to another. As a result, the present study will interpret these symbols according to the two researchers' own reading and understanding.

In the title of the novel, *The Flood Notebooks*, the author attributed the notebooks to the flood, as if the flood was the one recording its story onto the pages along with the stories of the people who lived through it and were witnesses to the devastation it caused to the city of Amman.

Before the story begins, Khrais starts the first page with a disclaimer: "If the names of the characters match others who lived in Amman in the same era, then they are themselves, and if they differ, then these are people who fell from the sky and were not caught by the earth" (Khrais, 2003, p. 3).

First, these introductory sentences provide a great deal of information to the reader of the text. Her novel mixes truth with imagination because some of the characters are real while others are imaginary, created by the writer to govern the construction of her novel and create her narrative plot. She expresses this by saying that they are people who fell from the sky and "the earth did not receive them", meaning that they did not live on the earth even for a day because they were

a product of her imagination only. It was as if their existence was a revelation that came down to her from the sky, so she captured it and recorded it in her narration.

Second, when the writer uses both "earth" and "sky" in the same sentence, it creates a paradox, indicating the writer's awareness of its importance in literature. Indeed, it is so important that some critics believe "all art, or all literature, is essentially ironic" (Muecke, 1982, p. 3).

Finally, in these introductory phrases, the writer sheds light on the city of Amman at a specific time in history to suggest to the reader that she will write the biography of the city of Amman in an artistic way that combines truth and imagination during the time of the flood in the 1930s.

After these phrases, the writer devotes a page in which she quotes a supplication by the Umayyad poet Al-Khatim Al-Ukli in which he says: "I seek refuge in my Lord to see the Levant and Amman after that when the doves sing and chirp." The Umayyad dynasty existed for nearly a century from the year 661 to 750, so by using this quote that mentions the Levant and Amman, Khrais wants to show the importance of Amman's long history throughout different eras.

The novel is divided into sixteen titles, and each title begins with the word "talk". Thus, we find chapter titles such as "Talk About Silk", "Talk About *Halgum* ('Turkish Delight')", "Talk About Shoes", and "Talk About Ink", until, finally, there is "Talk About Rain", and afterwards, "Talk of Today". Clearly, in these titles, the writer creates a narrative in the language of inanimate things. In this way, with such a multiplicity of narrators, it is as if each narrator presents their own flood notebook. In turn, this makes the text of the novel open, and in accordance with the concepts of Shkloofsky, it distinguishes "two main types of writing in stories: on the one hand, there is an open form, to which new adventures can always be added at the end; on the other hand, there is a closed form that begins and ends with the same motives" (Todorov, 1993, pp. 43-44).

The Flood Notebooks is an open-ended novel because it actually recounts the biography of a city and not the biography of a people. Therefore, the author made a big leap in time to the last chapter title, the current "Talk About Today". After writing about the events that took place in the late 1930s, specifically in 1938, the year of the flood, she moved on, summarizing the most important events that the characters of her novel experienced after 1948, the year of the occupation of Palestine and the exodus of large swaths of Palestinians to Amman. Indeed, in the same chapter, she moves further on to the year 2000 to remind people of the torrent of Amman that dried up many years ago. Thus, she writes, "When the excavators penetrated the ground in 2000 to strike the foundations of the Royal Cultural Center, the water spring, a waterfall of the goodness of the past, flooded the workers, who ran in every direction until they understood what was happening. It was the river that dried up and left us, that boycotted us and punished us" (Khrais, 2003, pp. 291-293).

Perhaps most remarkable, however, is the fact that Krais only used three pages of her novel to write about this great leap in time from 1938 to 2000. In doing so, she wanted to say that the story of Amman did not end with the end of her novel. The place still exists, and new stories still happen there every day. People who died in the flood left behind living children and grandchildren, and in the same place, they will have their stories, dreams, and endless ambitions.

This method of making a time jump during narration was mentioned by Girardignet in his talk about the possible relationships between story time and narration time.

> He determines that they may be classified in terms of order; events occur in one order but are narrated at another pace or duration. The narrative devotes considerable space to a momentary experience and then leaps over or quickly summarizes a number of years. (Genette, 1990, p. 11)

The writer excels at depicting the Jordanian place, which helps convince the reader of the events she narrates. Moreover, the personification of the place in the novel is what makes its events more likely to happen in a sense that gives the illusion of realism. Indeed, it plays the same role that the decorations and wood play in the novel. "Theater" (Lhamdani, 1993, p. 65).

II. Historical and Contemporary Places

The city of Amman is a contemporary city. Its areas began to expand, its population increased, and urbanization increased in the 1930s. At the same time, it possesses a long historical memory. Various ancient civilizations arose on its land, forgotten by time, but their traces still remain a witness to the past. One day, she would be in this place. These monuments represent the historical place, as it is "the place that is evoked because of its connection to a past era or because it is a relationship in the context of time" (Saeed, 1982, p. 30).

This place may seem at first glance to be the opposite of the immediate or contemporary place "in which the characters live in their present moment and in which they talk about the events and processes that make up the novel" (Jandari, 2001, p. 259), but in reality it does not contradict it but rather represents its ancient extension over time.

Amman is rich in its historical heritage, containing the Citadel Mountain, the site of the People of the Cave, the Path of the Nymphs, the Roman amphitheater, and other Roman columns and arches. The most prominent of these places in the narrative of *The Flood Notebooks* is the Path of the Nymphs, or, in its archaeological name, "Nymphaeum". It dates back to when Rome occupied the region in the 2nd century AD and was once considered an important, aesthetically pleasing building in ancient Roman cities. However, by the 1930s, the Nymphaeum was not as appreciated as it once was and had fallen into disrepair. In the novel, it is the home of Musaad, a man without identification papers or family. Musaad lives out his days in the Amman market, transporting goods to the merchants, and at night, he takes his mule in search of the mermaids.

The Path of the Nymphs is described by the rope by which Musaad tied his mule, who said: “In the darkness of the mysterious and frightening path of the mermaids, I do not know where I will end up with Musaad, the one who lay down on a rock and sank into a deep sleep as if he had died... and the night was getting longer in search of the mermaids. At dawn, we heard the trickling of water and smelled the smell of urine. The passersby had become accustomed to relieving themselves on the road, and Musaad, who was sleeping like a wolf, noticed the movement and flinched. But he did the same thing minutes later” (Khrais, 2003, p. 56).

In other words, the path of the nymphs was left without lighting or care by the state, and it became a refuge for those who had no shelter. It also became a place for passersby to relieve themselves. This, of course, is not befitting an ancient historical place, nor is it befitting any ordinary street. Musaad knew this and would prevent passersby from doing that sometimes.

Moreover, he also wanted to keep the place and the streets of Amman clean and free of his donkey’s manure. As a result, he decided to “tie a burlap bag around its backside. Musaad loves the cleanliness of the streets, and this will not spoil the Ammani splendor. They will say that he is a civilized, clean man who treats his mule as they do with the horses that pull carts through the streets of Jerusalem” (Khrais, 2003, p. 57).

Although Musaad, having never attended school, is not a learned man, he knows the history of the ancient Path of the Nymphs. This is because he once took refuge in a cave far from the Path of the Nymphs and saw, as if in a dream, fountains that gush and spray their water, and the Nymphs—the goddesses of beauty, giving, and joy—were playing and dancing under the stone arches and columns and bathing in a pool in the middle of the place. “The water nymphs’ laughter rose like wandering goddesses since the dawn of time. Only Massad knew of their existence” (Khrais, 2003, p. 240).

Musaad is a fictional character created by Samiha Khrais to govern the construction of her novel and to present, through what he sees, her own vision of this historical place. The image of beautiful Roman females who play in the water, dance under the stone arches, and bathe in the pool for the sake of nymphs is an image imagined by Samiha Khrais, who wrote it in the form of a vision or dream of Musaad.

In the 1930s, Amman had plenty of bathhouses for women. They may not have been as beautiful as the mermaid’s bathhouse and the mastery of its construction, but their bathhouses brought women together much the same as the mermaid’s bathhouse brought them together. Moreover, their stories are interwoven within it so that it is a witness to their beauty and their secrets. In “Bath of Victory”, the writer describes meeting Tajma, one of the women in the bathhouses and one of the most important characters in her novel, along with Zaza, the seamstress:

> In the preparation and dressing room, she took out her soap and her special loofah from the bathroom bag, put her shoes in it, then put on clogs, exchanged quick words with the women, and laughed at the far-from-polite jokes. She caressed Zaza as she took off the rest of her clothes, keeping on a cotton scarf.
>
> “If the whole world was a dove and people like this disgraced their Lord, how would she live as a seamstress?”
>
> Zaza responded to the joke and responded in weak Arabic, “Separate dressing gowns and clothing”. (Khrais, 2003, pp. 36-37)

The difference in dialect between them was evident in the two women’s dialogue. Tajma speaks in an Arabic dialect that is closer to the Levantine dialect, which indicates her origins. Her ancestors may have come from the Levant to Amman a long time ago, and the grandchildren have retained their basic dialect. As for Zaza, she is an Armenian seamstress whose full name is Zarwak Baltakian. Since she is of non-Arab origins, her Arabic is very weak.

Despite the difference in origins and religion between the two women, they speak with great familiarity and apparent affection, and this is a special characteristic of Amman and its people who are not separated by race or religion.

One of the most prominent historical places in Amman is Jabal al-Qalaa which contains traces of an ancient Umayyad palace. When the flood began, Tambi, the Circassian, decided to take his cart and two oxen to store them in one of the caves in Jabal al-Qalaa. His wife tried to prevent him from doing so but did not succeed, so he embarked on a difficult journey. In the rain, mud, and wind, Melhem, the owner of the ice cream factory in Amman, saw him from the window of his house, so he called him and advised him to return. Nevertheless, Tambi continued on his way until he reached the top of the mountain. However, the heavy rains forced the two oxen and the cart down the mountain.

Still, the old Circassian man miraculously escaped when a number of men gathered together after hearing Melhem’s screams, and they saved him. They left...

> ...the two oxen and the cart to be dragged by the roaring water from the top of the mountain to the bottom of the foothill, picking up the old man who realized that his foot had been broken as well and who started screaming in Circassian, calling for people that no one knew except him. He cried bitterly as he hid himself in Melhem’s sheepskin coat near the charcoal canister and discovered that those moments that passed by him were not in the high mountains of Elbrus...but they were here in Amman. (Khrais, 2003, pp. 287-288)

Furthermore, according to what the author mentioned, there were conflicting feelings in the soul of the Circassian Tambi due to the loss of his revolutionary attempt. This is an indication of his surprise at the occurrence of such a sweeping flood in the quiet city of Amman. After all, it was not common for nature to exercise this much anger in the mountains of Amman, sweeping away people, stones, and trees in its path. He expected to see this scene in the Elbrus Mountains of Russia, not in the mountains of Amman.

Melhem's misfortune was greater than Tambe's misfortune, however. After he heard the old Circassian man’s call for help and saved him from the flood, he received news that his own son, Marwan, had been washed away by the flood and

drowned. Afterwards, his body was hung at the top of a Roman arch in the center of Amman. The young athletes had to swim in against the current, and they fought "the large whirlpools all he way to the bridge, so they faced the waves, which hit their faces and hampered their movement, dragging the small body, and at the highest point of the castle mountain, under the pouring rain, and near the remains of Umayyad palace, the body was buried quickly" (Khrais, 2003, p. 288).

In the scenes of the death of Marwan, the fall of the old man Tambi, and the death of Thoriah, the writer links the incidents of death to archaeological sites. Likewise, the monuments are symbols of previous human civilizations that lived in Amman and then left, yet traces remain to commemorate their passage through this place. Moreover, by juxtaposing the tomb of Marwan with the ruins of the Umayyad palace, which commemorates a great Arab civilization, Khrais creates the feeling of the paradox between death and life, thus increasing the reader's sense of disaster caused by the flood.

A paradox was also created with Tambi's fall from Citadel Mountain and the breaking of his leg, as he was a survivor of the horrors of the towering Elbrus Mountains. However, he lost his two bulls, which for him were his wealth, and broke his leg on Citadel Mountain, a mountain that could not compare to the height of the Elbrus Mountains and the amount of rain and snow that fell there.

Douglas Colin Muecke discussed this type of irony where the writer juxtaposes opposites in order to influence the reader and make him sympathize with something. She exemplified this using Théophine Gautier's words as an example, where he felt the existence of a woeful paradox: that a palace would rise in front of a hut (Muecke, 1982). It is also worth noting here that Samiha Khrais detailed the discussion of historical places in Amman in her novel under the title "Travelers' Talk". In this part of the novel, she conveyed the opinions of historians and travelers about Amman and its antiquities, making the title of this chapter closer to history than to art.

As for the contemporary places at the time of the events of the novel, the writer was keen to mention them to prove their presence in Amman at that time. Among these places is Raghadan Palace, which had its share of the horrors of the flood where trunks of willow trees were split and washed away by the torrent, along with the palace's court. The writer cited the ruling document that was issued in favor of Salem Al-Hamidi after his claim against Musaad of having unknown parentage. The ruling was issued in the name of the Emir of the country, the army camp that surrounded Raghadan Palace, the police station, and the Presidency. It also included ministers, wells and water management schools, libraries, the market, and other places that heralded the birth of an institutional state that respected law and order, valued science and education, and did not ignore the importance of industry and trade (Khrais, 2003). The country's intellectuals were aware of this, and in fact, the lawyer Abdul Razzaq said to his relative, Makram, "Amman is different, brother; there is no future for agriculture. This is a country that wants to become houses and shops, don't you see? We are confused about what to do with departments, offices, and schools, and tomorrow there will be stone houses and other things" (Khrais, 2003, p. 126).

III. The Open and Closed Places

The events and facts presented in the novel are divided into open and closed places. The open spaces "give room for the experience of contact with others" (Awad, 2004, p. 214), while "the closed place often corresponds to the trend towards individualism and privacy" (Awad, 2004, p. 214). Despite the privacy of the closed place, Samiha Khrais' all-knowing narrator knows what is going on within it and conveys it to the recipient through narrative discourse, where "every utterance assumes a speaker and a listener. The former has the goal of influencing the latter in some way" (Yaqtin, 1997, p. 19).

Moreover, the closed places mentioned in *The Flood Notebooks* can be divided into three types:

1. Places that provide the novel's characters with reassurance and protection are represented by homes and holy places.
2. Places that indicate the renaissance of Amman and its progress toward modern civilization. They are represented by stores, factories, the bank, and the hospital. These are closed places, but they are characterized as public.
3. Places that provide the characters in the novel with entertainment and amusement such as cafes and cinemas.

The most important of all of these places may be homes. In "human life, the home removes the factors of surprise and creates continuity. Therefore, without a home, man becomes a fragmented being. It is the home that protects him through the storms of heaven and the horrors of the earth" (Bachelard, 1980, pp. 44-45). In *The Flood Notebooks*, people took shelter from the rain in their homes, and they lit wood-burning and charcoal stoves in those houses to protect them from the harsh winter cold. Women would roast chestnuts over them and "bring out supplies of the jam they had kept and the grains they had hidden" (Khrais, 2003, p. 274). The houses provided provision for the people of Amman in that harsh winter. It provided refuge and protection from the sweeping waters of the flood. It also provided them with warmth from the cold of winter. Indeed, the women's management and storage of food inside their homes protected their families from hunger during the long days of the flood.

In addition to the protection that homes provide, they also give their owners privacy. In the novel's story of the strong woman, her son fled to Beirut, and no one saw her shed a tear. Even her husband, Taqi al-Din, was surprised by her toughness. However, in reality, "Lamia (her daughter) could hear her mother's crying on cold evenings" (Khrais, 2003, p. 224). The privacy of closed rooms was not only for crying but also where girls met to laugh, joke, and smoke cigarettes

in secret. They would even sometimes meet their lovers there, such as in the meetings that took place between the nurse Asmahan and her lover, the lawyer Abdel Al-Razzaq.

Khrais mentions houses and closed rooms quite often and highlights their privacy. For example, no man was allowed to enter a house in Amman without the presence of his male companions (unless, of course, this happened secretly). However, the author does not stop at describing these places except in quick references, such as her description of Saft al-Halqoum (cardboard sweets box) hanging on the ceiling of the room in the house of the chief merchant in Amman, "the merchant Taqi al-Din" (Khrais, 2003, p. 8), or her description of the Najma building on Al-Rida Street. In this building, "the Circassian Tambi was adjacent, occupying the first floor and a storeroom below, and above him was the English Doctor Burnell. Then, two rooms down from the doctor and up a wooden staircase is a room where nurse Asmahan lives.

As for the holy places, whenever Asmahan felt guilty, she would go to the monastery to pray, but when she wanted to confess, she preferred to go to Father Grace Al-Sahouri in the Al-Masdar area. Visiting the monastery or Father Grace would give her peace and psychological comfort.

As for other religious places, Khrais describes the Church of the Virgin in Madaba, a Jordanian city located south of Amman, and the archaeological mosaics that lay within it. It is here that Ahmed Al-Shalabi took his student, Azmi, to the church and told him, "'In front of you now are the four rivers of Paradise. Look carefully, boy. Here are Gijon, Fishoth, the Tigris, and Euphrates.' On the floor of the Church of the Virgin, Azmi could see a map of the world with its seas and kingdoms" (Khrais, 2003, p. 149).

Another descriptive scene is the description of the church in Amman in which Musaad entered. Khrais writes: "He entered the hall of the Virgin Mary, astonished by the church in which the light pouring from the glass windows decorated with colors played in the manner of the lover and the beloved, and how the light fell on the armrests of the wooden seats, illuminating a brilliance on the edges of the church. The statues of the crucified Christ and the Virgin Mary…" (Khrais, 2003, p. 225).

These precise descriptive scenes contribute to impressing the recipient with the realism of the events narrated in the novel, especially since the Church of the Virgin is a real place located in Madaba, and its floor is famous for its amazing mosaic scenes.

As for the shops, there are many in Amman, but the largest and most beautiful shops were owned by Mrs. Najma, which aroused the jealousy of Hajj Taqi al-Din and other merchants, so they took care of the beauty of their stores like hers. "Najma's shops were the most beautiful and spacious in the market, so much so that Hajj Taqi al-Din felt jealous and began to imitate them." Al-Tarish found a wide door to livelihood in light of the intense competition among merchants who revised their perceptions of the elegance of the place with the entry of a sensitive woman like the star of the market fray" (Khrais, 2003, p. 30).

Even places of entertainment and amusement had their share, as Najma and her son Ghaleb were among the most prominent patrons of the Petra Cinema in Amman (Khrais, 2003, p. 32). There were also cafés (though for men only) where political conversations took place, as they do in the rest of the closed places in Amman. "Talks are going on in cafes, homes, and schools about the new change. Every ministry and Amman is fine. The new Prime Minister Tawfiq Abu Al-Huda is changing the staff of those around him, his assistants, and his ministers" (Khrais, 2003, p. 220). Nevertheless, those political conversations did not stop with the formation of the Jordanian government; rather, they went beyond it to talk about the new change. About the British, their support for Zionist gangs in Palestine, and "pursuing the revolutionaries in eastern Jordan" (Khrais, 2003, p. 220).

The open place in the novel *The Flood Notebooks* receives more descriptive pauses than the closed places because the open place is Amman with its seven mountains, its sky, its land, its air, its water, its streets, and its dirt roads. In describing these places, Samiha Khrais seems to be in love with Amman, which is why she has many descriptive pauses. She even goes so far as to describe the breeze of Amman, writing, "The breeze suddenly softened and became fragrant" (Khrais, 2003, p. 190). She continues, "Everything is round in Amman; the hills and the roads are round. Everything returns to its origin, and only in it will it remain," and "My driver's face is looking forward" (Khrais, 2003, p. 205). She describes the Amman evening as "every evening, and Amman is a thousand good ones. She tells her story. Happy, full of sadness, every evening, and Amman hides its secrets in the stillness of the darkness" (Khrais, 2003, p. 232). It is as if the writer sees Amman as the center of the world and the origin of all existence, an indication of her great affiliation to this place.

The author does not ignore the scene of the minaret of the Al-Husseini Mosque as it rises in the sky of Amman. This minaret, with its magnificence and height in the sky, symbolizes successive Islamic eras that passed through this place and left their mark on it. She writes, "The minaret of the Al-Husseini Mosque seemed splendid amid the clouds and permanent fog and the melodious call to prayer of the Hijazi Maqam" (Khrais, 2003, p. 232). The Husseini Mosque took its name from Sharif Hussein bin Ali, the father of King Abdullah I, who came from Hijaz and carried out the Great Arab Revolt against the Turks. Perhaps the sound of the call to prayer emanating into the Amman sky brings to mind those distant Hijaz breezes on which the call to prayer was carried, along with those breezes of the Great Arab Revolt, whose leader was from Hijaz and a Hashemite from the lineage of the Prophet Muhammad (may God bless him and grant him peace).

Among the other open places in the novel are the paved streets of Salt and Jerusalem, of which the Hajj pilgrim Taqi al-Din dreamed the streets of Amman would one day become. Moreover, there is the openness of the pastures of Madaba from which Salem al-Hamidi came, the Tambi farm in Jabal Amman, and Makram's farms in Al-Jubaiha (Khrais, 2003).

IV. The Sky and the Earth

The sky in the novel *The Flood Notebooks* is the sky over Amman, and the earth is its land, but one must pay attention as "reading the novel is a journey in a world different from the world in which the reader lives. From the first moment the reader opens the book, he is transported to an imaginary world created by the novelist's words. This world is located in areas other than the immediate spatial reality in which the reader exists" (Qasim, 1984, p. 74).

When talking about the sky and earth, it must be noted that there is a paradox or conflict between them, and there is also "a conflict within these two spaces: heaven contains, for example, a conflict between heaven and hell. And earth contains, for example, a conflict between a monastery and the place of sin" (Lhamdani, 1993, p. 54).

In order to interpret these paradoxes, it is necessary to understand the context in which they appear, because, as Rodríguez Rosique (2013) posits, "irony is understood as a kind of inappropriateness that must be otherwise relevant with respect to the discourse topic where it arose" (p. 18).

The relationship between heaven and earth must be governed by balance and justice so that the consequences are not great. Everything that falls from the sky is caught by the earth, in contrast to the characters of Samiha Khrais, who "fell from the sky and were not caught by the earth" (Khrais, 2003, p. 3).

The people of Amman believe in the justice of the relationship between the sky (heaven) and earth. Most of them are followers of heavenly religions (Muslims and Christians) and believe that man's deeds on earth reach heaven, and accordingly, their fate in the afterlife will be found in heaven or hell. They also believe that heaven's punishment may be immediate, and people on earth will see it.

Places of worship may be a link between the earth and the sky, such as the minaret of the Husseini Mosque, which the author recorded as rising from the land of Amman to reach the sky amid the clouds and fog (Khrais, 2003, p. 232).

When the month of Ramadan arrives, the spiritual atmosphere is at its peak. When *Laylat al-Qadr* (the Night of Decree) arrives on the twenty-seventh day of that holy month, Amman appears in its most beautiful form and closest to the sky. Indeed, Samiha Khrais depicted it by writing, "Amman was enveloped in a dense, mysterious light a few minutes after the evening call to prayer. It was as if a window had opened from the sky, while the horizon, which was covered with clouds to the point that the sun did not rise that day, suddenly ignited as if lightning had passed as far as the eye could see, then it turned into a garment of veils that covered the city... The bodies of the angels enveloped the universe and isolated Amman from it, aligning it and glorifying it with mercy and light" (Khrais, 2003, p. 233).

With her words, the writer has painted an artistic picture depicting the consistency and harmony between heaven and earth. Amman receives special care from the Almighty Creator, to the point that it is as if angels descended from heaven to earth to provide the city with security and care. It is by the mercy of the sky that rain falls, but if it exceeds its limit and the earth is unable to absorb it, it turns into a sweeping flood that destroys everything in its path, including people, trees, and stones. This is what happened in Amman "in the last month of the year one thousand nine hundred and thirty-eight" (Khrais, 2003, p. 276).

The rain fell for days in a row, and "Amman seemed as beautiful as a pearl... and the face of mercy appeared on the water for days" (Khrais, 2003, p. 271) before nature revealed its harsh face in the form of the flood and the torrents flowed, sweeping away everything in the paths where people made streets between their shops and homes. Indeed, the roads turned into a sweeping torrent of mud that carried a lot of debris in its rush, and the torrents gathered "from all directions, ending with the big torrent at Ras al-Ayn, where all things return to the womb of the city" (Khrais, 2003, p. 277).

Although the flood caused harm to all of the people of Amman and even the willow trees in Raghadan Palace were not spared its wrath, the general public believed deep down in their souls that some sin had occurred on earth, causing the wrath of the heavens and the occurrence of the flood, and this was evident in their talk about the drowning of Marwan, the child also known as Ibn Milhem. After hearing about the incident, the women said:

> This wrath is from God. It is the end of the world, near the Day of Resurrection. God will help us at the hour of resurrection.
>
> As for the men, they prayed to God to lift this heavenly punishment, and one of them commented maliciously about Marwan's tragic death, God does not have stones to beg with. Surely, his father, Melhem, treated him to a coin. Oh, someone who is unjust... Oh, you who cheat with ice cream... God is against the oppressor. Others silenced him sharply, not gloating over his death, and we are all at the mercy of the flood. (Khrais, 2003, p. 289)

The others did not silence him because they did not believe in his words. Rather, they silenced him because they were all afraid of the flood. No one felt safe for himself or his children when natural disasters occurred. If Melhem was guilty and deserved the death of his son as God's punishment, then they were all free from error.

V. The Real and Symbolic Place

The places in the novel *The Flood Notebooks* were real places, where the author lived and knew their past and present, but when she depicted them in her novel, she added a bit of imagination to them, intersecting the real with the imaginary,

and this usually occurs "in the writer's awareness and the methods of investing his artistic tools and techniques while drafting the place on paper" (Saleh, 1997, p. 87).

The writer may also give his places a symbolic dimension, and this is what Samiha Khrais did. An example of this in *The Flood Notebooks* is her focus on The Path of the Nymphs. This place is an archaeological landmark that has historical and aesthetic value; however, the researcher also finds it to be a symbol of women and their role in human civilization since the dawn of history.

Khrais was keen to show the importance of the female character in her novel, starting with Hajjah Silver. Hajjah married a man much older than her until he died, leaving her alone to raise their son, Abdul Al-Razzaq, who became a lawyer and played a prominent role in Amman society and politics.

Furthermore, there is the girl Asmahan, the brave nurse who escaped from a monastery in Bethlehem and lived in Amman alone until she was able to leave her mark in every Ammani home in which she treated a child, woman, or man, and society accepted her. She married Abd al-Razzaq and converted to Islam to please his mother, but she continued to carry Christ and the Virgin in her heart. Still, at the same time, she was convinced that she could be a Muslim and pray to Allah for the Prophet Muhammad before she went to sleep, yet every morning she would open her eyes and utter the words, "In the name of the cross" (Khrais, 2003).

Then there was Najmah, the girl who studied under Al-Sit Fakhriya (Mrs. Fakhriya). When her husband died, she was able to manage his properties, leaving her own influence on all the local market and shop owners who learned to paint the walls and take care of the aesthetics of the places. She also showed Amman's merchants how to store goods, saying, "The Circassian, Levantine, Armenian, Saltati, and Nabulsi women of Amman will raise the ends of the fabric to their noses, then count them in a clear movement of distaste, and they have discovered the smell of thyme and local ghee, those mistakes of beginners that merchants quickly overcome" (Khrais, 2003, p. 8). The writer deliberately mentioned the diversity of the origins of women in Amman to reflect an image of the similarity of people's customs and traditions despite their different origins. Amman was able to absorb the newcomers—Circassians, Armenians, Syrians, and Palestinians—in addition to its original people and imbue them all with a special Ammani character, so that women's behavior became similar when shopping and other things.

Among the other significant symbols in the novel is the Amman flood, the torrent of which ran in every direction in the city and reached every place in it. This flood is a symbol of the Palestinian exodus to Jordan in 1948. During this time, the Zionists occupied the Palestinian Arab lands, displaced more than 750,000 Palestinians from their ancestral lands, and established the State of Israel in their place. A tenth of those Palestinians took refuge in Jordan, which was not prepared to receive such a huge number of refugees. Nevertheless, even though Amman was still such a small city at the time, it embraced them and reshaped them according to its own identity. As Abu Nidal (2005) wrote, "The Jordanian is Arab first, and this is the secret of its excellence and difference, and Amman is the one that melts its residents into one crucible, despite the differences in their components and without eliminating any of these components" (p. 282). Thus, the flood that swept through the city in 1938 can also serve as a symbol of the torrent of Palestinian refugees who flooded the city in 1948.

This all brings us to the last chapter in the novel "Today's Hadith" which begins with "After the war, and after the Jews declared their state in Palestine..." (Khrais, 2003, p. 290) and ends with "The earth said a final word about water, absorbing it until the last drop, preserving it perhaps for a new life in a happy future. O Lord, make us dwell in the garden of your Prophet, your beloved chosen one. We are poor immigrants with disheveled heads and dirty clothes. O Lord... O Lord" (Khrais, 2003, pp. 290-292).

VI. Findings and Conclusion

The study demonstrated that the novel *The Flood Notebooks* is a social-historical novel that depicts the Jordanian place in the 1930s. Its writer, Samiha Khrais, was able to mix fact with fiction to present an artistic work whose events are derived from history. However, it is not a historically accurate novel; rather, it is an artistic work that Khrais excelled at constructing.

Khrais relied on multiple narrators in narrating events and describing people and places; still, her narrators are different from any other artistic work in that her narratives are inanimate objects such as silk, shoes, and ink. Furthermore, these narrators know more about a person than a person knows about himself or herself, thus relying on the style of a knowledgeable narrator.

This study divided the place in *The Flood Notebooks* into four sections:

1. Historical and Contemporary Places

Though Amman is a very contemporary city today that began its rapid growth in the 1930s, it possesses a long and varied history of ancient civilizations that arose on its land. While many may have been forgotten by time, traces of them still remain. Thus, the author excelled in portraying the history of Amman alongside its modernity in her novel.

2. Open and Closed Places

In the novel The Flood Notebooks, the writer appeared to be a lover of Amman in her depiction of its open spaces, as she is a daughter of Amman who is familiar with every place in it and connected to it. Therefore, she was creative in drawing a picture of Amman, its land, sky, air, monuments, and mountains. She also did not neglect to depict closed places and the security and protection they provide for the characters of her novel.

3. Heaven and Earth

The dialectic relationship between Heaven and Earth is complex, and in the beliefs of the people of Amman, what rewards and punishments Heaven dishes out to man is only a result of what he does on Earth. Therefore, when the flood occurred, the general public was convinced that it was the wrath of God and punishment for their sins.

4. The Real and Symbolic Places

The writer depicted real places in her novel, but she also attached symbolic connotations to them. One of the most frequently mentioned places in the novel is the Path of the Nymphs. She wanted to symbolize the role of women in building human civilization since the dawn of history.

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