

Narrating the Crusades in Two Contemporary Novels: Ideology and Dialogue Between Eastern and Western Perspective

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Abstract—The Crusades, particularly the First Crusade, have long captivated the imagination of writers and poets in both the Christian West and the Muslim East. This study explores how the First Crusade is narrated and invoked in contemporary literature through a comparative analysis of two novels: *The Awakening of the Knight* by Egyptian author Mohamed Tarek (2022) and *Jerusalem* by Italian historian and novelist Andrea Frediani (2013). The research examines the relationship between these works and historical and literary sources on the Crusades, while also addressing their contemporary political and cultural resonances. The findings suggest that contemporary narratives, as exemplified by these two novels, oscillate between ideological uses of classic concepts of heroism and dichotomies such as good versus evil applied to modern contexts, and a more imaginative, entertaining approach that frames the Crusades as an epic, event-driven story in an attempt to bridge connections between East and West, suggesting the potential for intercultural dialogue and peacebuilding. The analysis underscores the enduring impact of the Crusades on contemporary thought and calls for further exploration of this historical period in modern cultural and civilizational discourse.

Index Terms—Crusades, Italian literature, Arabic literature, comparative literature, historical fiction

I. INTRODUCTION

"Réveille-toi, Saladin, nous sommes de retour" (Wake up, Saladin, we're back) is a sentence that many did not bother to document when it was supposedly uttered, but one that is repeated from time to time for a purpose. The historical authenticity of this motivational quotation, allegedly uttered by the French General Henri Gouraud in front of the tomb of Saladin al-Ayyubi at the time of the French occupation of Syria in 1920, is yet to be proved. Despite the lack of evidence supporting the origins of this quote, it still circulates in many writings and among some Arab and non-Arab researchers (see, for instance, Kabbani, 1986, p. 5). It has been passed down orally by many Syrians, Jordanians, Palestinians, and Egyptians over decades until it reached us in various contexts: the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, the occupation of Iraq in 2003, and other events that brought this phrase back to the forefront of many popular debates in these regions and beyond. These events constitute historical and cultural spaces and dimensions that are reflected in what people read and knew about the Crusades. Consequently, the act of reading about occupation or mandate in modern history or experiencing war in the present results directly in the evocation of the Crusades and their resonance in history and literature. There is no doubt that the statement attributed to Gouraud is attractive due to its narrative power, and therefore it is better able to achieve what is referred to here as "historical evocation". In other words, the force of an apocryphal statement is not surprising, since historical evocation transcends the confines of truth.

In his Inaugural Address to the First International in October 1864, Karl Marx invoked the Crusades and recontextualized them within the turbulent atmosphere of the American Civil War, stating:

It was not the wisdom of the ruling classes, but the heroic resistance to their criminal folly by the working classes of England, that saved the west of Europe from plunging headlong into an infamous crusade for the perpetuation and propagation of slavery on the other side of the Atlantic. (Marx, 1846)

Marx employed this expression on several occasions, notable for its consistent alignment of position with reactionary forces as the agents, meaning they were the ones who launched the Crusades against the working class, a connotation emphasizing the term Crusade's negative implication (Marx & Engels, 2003, pp. 43, 91, 243). Decades later, the negativity of the connotation persisted as Vladimir Lenin depicted the Irish bourgeois circles, represented by one of the capital's leaders, William Murphy, as initiating Crusades against labor union leader James Larkin and his followers in Dublin (332-336).

However, the expression does not necessarily always carry a negative connotation. Consider, for example, the legacy these wars have left in international politics, such as the American propaganda campaign launched by General Eisenhower

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in 1950 under the title "The Crusade for Freedom," or in the sphere of intercultural and interreligious relations, particularly following the "crusade" declared by then-U.S. President George W. Bush against Iraq in 2001, when he stated: "This crusade, this war on terrorism, is going to take a while" (White House Archives). This invocation of the Crusades, imbued with historical weight and religious zeal, transcended immediate political aims and entered the cultural lexicon of the era (Cull et al., 2003, p. 396). Consequently, the resonance of the Crusades as a powerful symbol demands re-evaluation from a contemporary perspective, particularly through the lens of literary explorations of historical memory and ideological conflict.

The recurrent query, "What is history?", echoes across diverse fields, such as politics, poetry, literature, art, and the novel. The intention is not to delineate this question solely within the confines of contemporary literary paradigms. Human interaction with history takes on multiple forms: as a tool for comprehending the present through past events, as a malleable construct susceptible to both construction and deconstruction, as a source of inspiration for groups seeking validation or narrative coherence for a specific purpose, or as an obscure, uncharted territory harboring characters, anecdotes, and historical episodes—many of which literature reanimates in our contemporary milieu. Undoubtedly, historical events addressed by literature in our day and age attract attention. However, their evocation is far from static, exhibiting considerable variation across cultures and objectives. Furthermore, the motivations for employing historical elements in literature diverge substantially from purely political aims, often serving broader ideological functions. This confluence of factors requires an in-depth exploration of the specific theme of Crusade evocations within Arabic and Western literature. Moreover, it is equally important to examine the motives for such evocations, some of their justifications, whether they carry meaning beyond the boundaries of literature, or whether they have implications intended to extend beyond the pages of fiction. Naturally and consequently, these considerations impact present-day discourses and perceptions.

To illustrate the topic of invoking the Crusades in practical terms, this study will address two contemporary literary models that examine the First Crusade (1096-1099) from Eastern and Western viewpoints. This is intended to demonstrate how this distinctive historical event serves different purposes in both cultural spheres, while also shedding light on the motivations behind this invocation. The body of references and studies on the Crusades is vast and cannot easily be summarized. Many are of great importance, whether authored by Western or Arab scholars over the centuries, or, more interestingly, those that examine the events from both perspectives. However, the studies that this research relies on at the theoretical level are mostly those that approach the Crusades from contemporary cultural, historical, and political standpoints. Paul and Yeager (2012) explore the ways in which the memories of the Crusades were negotiated, transmitted, and transformed from the medieval period to the modern era. On the political side, Knobler (2006) identifies the Crusades as an exceptionally effective tool for modern and contemporary elites to assert political power and justify imperial ambitions by manipulating and creating acceptable cultural symbols. Pemberton (2016), on the other hand, suggests that the Crusaders have profoundly influenced contemporary Islamic consciousness and, as history has shown, Islamic memory. Horswell and Philipps (2018) explore the ways in which the Crusades have been utilized over the past two centuries, including the diverse use of Crusader rhetoric and imagery in both the East and the West. Similarly, Horswell and Akil N. Awan (2019) examine perceptions of the Crusades and Crusading, which have become prevalent and widely used in the 21st century through a variety of applications. However, the focus in both this book and the aforementioned studies tends to be on historical, political, and geopolitical themes, rather than on cultural and artistic content. There are certainly studies that focus on the cultural dimension (see, for example, the recent study on Giuseppe Verdi's music and the First Crusade: Wolff, 2024, pp. 723-730). However, studies addressing the resonance of the Crusades in contemporary literature, particularly in the novel genre, remain relatively scarce. It is worth mentioning a recent article by Sokolov (2022), in which the author highlights the significance of invoking the Crusades in modern Arabic poetry and explores the motivations behind this invocation.

This research aims to contribute to the field of comparative literature related to the Crusades by examining how the Crusader-Islamic conflict is represented in both an emerging Egyptian author's Arabic novel (*The Awakening of the Knight* by Mohamed Tarek) and an Italian novelist and historian's Western novel (*Jersusalem* by Frediani). The study will analyze the selected novels in terms of their thematic and symbolic representations of the Crusades, with particular attention to how they reflect different historical perspectives, both ancient and modern, between Eastern and Western cultures. Finally, the research seeks to answer the question: How do two contemporary 21st-century novels depict and reinterpret the Crusades, reflecting the divergent cultural perspectives of the East and West?

II. DISCUSSION

Despite the large body of critical texts and scholarly research directly concerned with the history of the Crusades, there is no denying the scarcity of literary material, particularly the narrative literature, pertaining to Jerusalem during the Crusades in contemporary literary circles. In order to examine the latest literary productions in both Eastern and Western contexts, our choice fell upon the novel *Jerusalem* by the Italian writer Andrea Frediani (2013) and the novel *Sahwat al-Fares [The Awakening of the Knight]* by the Egyptian writer Mohamed Tarek (2022). Through these works, one can explore the function, historical evocation, and conceptualization of a contemporary historical piece that deals primarily with the Crusades.

Prior to delving into the two novels, it is imperative to reiterate that the Arab world continues to experience, culturally and popularly, a state of cultural consciousness imbued with historical, cultural, and religious legacies related to a sort of “conflict” with what some perceive to be Western hegemony, the most visible manifestations of which include the 2003 invasion of Iraq and the ongoing war between Israel and Palestine, along with the ensuing political, economic, cultural, and social repercussions. This makes the question of addressing history - specifically the history of the Crusades - in literature more likely in Arab culture from a functional perspective. Despite this, direct literary engagement with the Crusades in the Arab world since the 20th century has been limited. This is due to several reasons, including the sensitivity of the topic itself, tied to the general popular cultural consciousness that recognizes Arab Christians as part of the social fabric in many Arab countries. Additionally, the crusade wars are associated in the Arab consciousness with a state of weakness and fragmentation, prompting a preference of evocation in popular texts over dense and canonical literary works, as well as other cinematic or artistic expressions. The film *Saladin the Victorious* by the Egyptian director Youssef Chahine may arguably be the sole exception to this rule within the classics of Arab cinema (television series on this subject are plentiful in the Arab world; however, they belong to popular culture). Furthermore, the limited literary engagement with the Crusades in the Arab world can be attributed, in part, to the restricted frameworks within which this topic can be approached. Contemporary discourse tends to portray these wars through a cultural narrative inextricably linked to politics, history, and the selective evocation of historical events for comparative purposes with current Arab social and political realities, often serving as a call for change inspired by these past conflicts. Consequently, literary works dealing with the Crusades are compelled to navigate and incorporate these multifaceted contextual factors. This is the case with the novel *The Awakening of the Knight*, a rare literary work of its kind in the Arab world, recently published and incorporating nearly all the aforementioned considerations, with a focus on historical evocation, conquest, and parallels to contemporary political situations. Although the work did not achieve significant success in the publishing world, it stands as a testament to the ambition and courage of its author in tackling a major historical event such as the First Crusade.

If we begin with the title of the novel, we find that *sahwa* [awakening] is a key term that reveals the preconceived intentions of the Alexandrian author. In its conventional sense, it refers to an ideological, rhetorical, or exhortatory movement rather than an intellectual one (al-Rabba’i, 2015, p. 326). As some researchers argue, it is historically linked to the fall of the Ottoman Caliphate and the entry of the Arab world into a new phase. It is noteworthy that al-Rabba’i links the concept of *sahwa* also to external factors. These include the Iranian Revolution led by Khomeini and the Russian occupation of Afghanistan, which he argues led to a specific reaction in the form of the Islamic awakening (p. 326).

The word *sahwa* may also be related to the concept of *nahḍah*, signifying revival and renewal, based on the historical experience of a heroic knightly uprising that lifts injustice and defeats occupation, given that the novel addresses the era of the First Crusade. Through an artistic and linguistic style that clearly delineates between the Muslim Arab defending his homeland and the Frankish invader depicted as a violent monster, Tarek describes the atmosphere of the city of Jerusalem and the moment of its occupation during the First Crusade (1099). He portrays the Franks as they storm Jerusalem, kill its garrison, and attack people regardless of their religion—Christians, Muslims, and Jews. The ruthlessness of the invaders is also described through the acts of killing men and women, stealing their possessions, showing no mercy to anyone, and shouting: "Victory to the Cross and glory to the Holy War!" (p. 3). This narrative then pivots to a group of Arab Muslim heroes, both male and female, who gradually come to terms with the state of fragmentation they suffer from in the face of the European invaders, initiating preparations to confront them. In this contemporary novel, the past is evoked through modern parallels, such as the author's portrayal of Jerusalem's inhabitants seeking refuge in the Levant during the First Crusade, which mirrors the experiences of Palestinian refugees fleeing to neighboring countries in 1948 and Iraqi refugees after the outbreak of the Iraq War in 2003 (pp. 43, 76). The narrator also informs us that refuge is merely a matter of time until the liberation of Jerusalem as a central Islamic and Arab city, and hence the return to it, reminiscent of contemporary Palestinian narratives passed down through generations from 1948 to the present day. The author, who focuses specifically on the centrality of the city of Jerusalem, depicts the fate of its people as ranging from killing to displacement, using the word *al-shatat* (Diaspora, p. 115) to indicate to the latter. However, this word does not exist with this connotation in the old Arabic dictionaries. Among the most important of these dictionaries is *Lisan al-Arab* by Ibn Manzur (1290). In it, the word *shatta* is mentioned to mean separation and division. As for *Al-Waseet* dictionary, which was published by the Academy of the Arabic Language in Cairo in 1960/1961, the word *shatat* appears with the meaning of dispersion. In its modern usage, the term refers to a political, economic, and social condition frequently employed by writers and journalists to characterize the Palestinian diaspora globally, often in connection with the right of return (Baroud, 2023).

The author not only invokes history and applies it to the present; he also applies contemporary terminology to the past. Take, for instance, the repeated use of the term “bombardment” in the novel (pp. 19, 135, 215), a term associated with modern memory and conveying the use of contemporary warfare technology, which does not align with the armaments of the Crusades era. Moreover, in the novel, there is a continuous advocacy for the education of Muslim youths and their upbringing in the sciences, considering it a fundamental step for mobilization (p. 44). This concept aligns with modern ideals in 19th-century Arab and Islamic nations calling for the *nahda* [revival or renaissance], associating economic, political, or military decline with ignorance and lack of education. One example of a *nahda* pioneer is Rifa'a al-Tahtawi (1801-1873), who visited Paris on a five-year mission. Upon returning to his homeland, Egypt, he initiated a proposal for

an Egyptian and Arab cultural revival project grounded in education (see his book *An Imam in Paris: Account of a Stay in France by an Egyptian Cleric (1826-1831)*, 2004). Such calls do not appear to be present in the literary works of Arab writers during the Crusades era, nor have they at least been addressed by historians of the First Crusade.

The novel closely adheres to a historical chronological structure, as evidenced by the chapter titles, which bear specific and sequential dates, reflecting the author's commitment to the accounts of ancient historians such as Usama ibn Munqidh and Ibn al-Athir. This adherence paves the way for the integration of particular ideas into the narrative, especially those with negative connotations. Among these ideas is the portrayal of the Franks as people who speak a broken and barbaric language, making communication with them impossible, and as inhumane, criminal enemies (pp. 31, 44, 77, 210). This recalls Usama ibn Munqidh's statements about the Frankish language: "On another day, while I was passing through the market, a Frankish woman approached me and addressed me in her barbaric tongue with words I found incomprehensible" (Gabrieli, 2009, pp. 47-48). Such stereotypes about the Franks, prevalent in medieval Arabic literature—whether in poetry or chronicles—have persisted to the present day (Hillenbrand, 2022, p. 245). An illustrative example of the barbarity of Frankish characters in the novel is the figure of Albert, who expresses no remorse for killing Muslims, considering his actions necessary and justified from a religious perspective (p. 77).

The author draws religious, cultural, and political boundaries (within the historical context) in a serious and clear style, precisely defining the limits of right and wrong. He constructs an "Islamic world" (though the term is a contemporary cultural and geopolitical one that does not necessarily align with the historical tone of the text). In fact, some scholars consider it a secular colonial concept that emerged in the late 19th century; see Aydin, 2017) in opposition to a hostile other. This leads to the creation of heroes positioned on opposing sides: the "barbarian" Albert versus the virtuous hero Mu'min. All of this unfolds within a literary framework that lacks elements of fantasy, adventure, and side stories, failing to reconstruct events in an engaging and stylistically varied manner—unlike what we find in Renaissance literature, such as in Torquato Tasso's works, where the unity of action is maintained while highlighting subplots that enhance literary intrigue.

Tarek may see literature as a product of environment and circumstances, intertwined with history and the social necessity for political change and confronting external threats. This perspective may contrast with the broader view expressed by Western historical novelists like Hilary Mantel, who emphasizes the narrative's flexibility in dealing with history. Mantel states,

I aim to make the fiction flexible so that it bends itself around the facts as we have them. Otherwise... I suppose if I have a maxim, it is that there isn't any necessary conflict between good history and good drama. I know that history is not shapely, and I know the truth is often inconvenient and incoherent. It contains all sorts of superfluties. You could cut a much better shape if you were God, but as it is, I think the whole fascination and the skill is in working *with* those incoherencies. (The Review Paris)

In conclusion, we can infer that the historical event may take shape in the novelist's mind as an unclear image, thus requiring completion in some parts and reconfiguration in others. This renders the novel akin to a restoration process, aiming to produce a literary-historical work that celebrates art, beauty, and creativity. *The Awakening of the Knight* falls short in this regard, as it seeks, on one hand, to use history faithfully without developing deeper, clearer, and less direct characters, and on the other hand, to employ the Crusades explicitly for reading the present simply as a repetition of the past.

The Italian novel *Jerusalem* (2013) by writer and historian Andrea Frediani derives its historical significance from its combination of two major historical events: the "Passion of Christ" and the First Crusade. Frediani not only compiles historical data that makes the former event a justification for the latter, but also constructs a narrative structure in which the two events alternate across the novel's four chapters. The plot revolves around a manuscript (non-existent in historical reality, as acknowledged by the author in the preface) left by James the Just in Jerusalem, in which he asserts the Jewishness of Christ and exonerates the Jews from the blood of Christ. After ten centuries, the manuscript resurfaces in the German city of Mainz, specifically in the Jewish quarter, where religious authorities attempt to use it as definitive evidence of the innocence of all Jewish believers from the blood of Christ. However, as news of the manuscript leaks to the highest echelons of the Catholic Church, concerns arise among the Pope and his entourage. Undoubtedly, the contents of the manuscript pose a threat to the future of Christianity and may cause a significant rupture within it if disseminated among the public, which could further reinforce the spirit of sectarian conflict already raging between Western Christians and the Eastern Greek Church.

Among the classified information reaching the Pope was that the manuscript is currently hidden somewhere in the Jewish Quarter of Jerusalem. This revelation prompted the spiritual leader of the Latin Christian Church to make one of the most pivotal decisions in the history of Christianity: the formation a mercenary army and allied forces to seize control of Jerusalem. This development marks the intersection with another significant event related to the Jerusalem narratives: the First Crusade. Recognizing the sensitive nature of these historical events, the novelist-historian found it necessary to elucidate certain points in the prologue and epilogue of the novel, clarifying the distance between historical truth and literary truth. While Frediani acknowledged that narrative grants its author absolute freedom in dealing with history, he defends in the prologue the contents of the manuscript around which the novel revolves, particularly concerning the character of Christ and the truth of James the Just. Therefore, he explicitly refers to his reliance, from a historical

standpoint, on contemporary works that substantiate his thesis, such as the *Inchiesta su Gesù* by Corrado Augias and Mauro Pesce (2006), and *James the Brother of Jesus* by Robert Eisenman (1998), among others.

From a literary perspective, the primary difference between Tarek and Frediani lies in the sources of narrative literature related to the Crusades and historical novels in general. While the Egyptian author relies mainly on historical sources and prose writings (as we mentioned, due to the scarcity of Arab narrative literature related to the Crusades), Frediani's narrative in *Jerusalem* is based on a vast tradition of Italian literary sources dating back to the Renaissance, most notably Torquato Tasso's epic *Jerusalem Delivered*, which mythically magnifies the First Crusade. Starting with the titles of both works, the city of Jerusalem asserts itself as a spatial framework as complex as its temporal dimension; it is not merely a city but a "place" with central religious and historical significance in Italian literature, from Dante to the present day. In her discussion of the history of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, Salvarani (2012) reminds us that Muslims did not destroy the church after retaking Jerusalem, as they were well aware that what mattered to Christians in their military campaigns was not the city and its buildings, but rather the "place" (p. 243). This elucidates that the "place" is an end in itself and a point of arrival. While Tasso's epic recounts the events of the Crusader army's camp in Lebanon and breaches the walls of Jerusalem only at its conclusion, Frediani's novel clearly indicates that the greatest challenge lies first in reaching and then entering Jerusalem. Frediani tells us that this objective extends beyond the Church's pre-Crusade aspirations to encompass the European Jewish community, which views the city as a place of safety and an ideal location to conceal a document that absolves them of Christ's blood. The conquest of the Islamic East and the concealment of this manuscript—which would establish a historical reconciliation between Judaism and Christianity—proceed within a unified historical and narrative reality, tied to both time and place: Jerusalem.

The distinction between Frediani and Tasso lies in the "historical objectivity" regarding the First Crusade. In the prologue, Tasso explicitly states that the events he will narrate do not adhere to historical accuracy. He justifies this ideologically, motivated by his intellectual desire to awaken Europeans to the imminent Islamic threat, embodied by the fall of Constantinople in 1453. The poet dedicates his epic to the Duke of Ferrara—Cardinal Ippolito d'Este—and urges him to mobilize armies for a renewed expedition to Jerusalem, with the goal of reviving the Crusader legacy and reclaiming Christian Europe's control of the Holy City. Therefore, it was only natural for Tasso to consistently attribute chivalric virtues to the fighters in the Christian camp, while never associating such qualities with Muslim warriors, who are portrayed as barbaric and primitive, far from the noble standards of Christian knights. This contrast is further reinforced in his portrayal of female characters, all of whom belong to the Muslim camp. The only path to redemption for these Muslim women, in Tasso's epic, is to fall in love with a Christian knight and convert to Christianity.

Taking a retrospective glance, Ludovico Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso* differs significantly from *Jerusalem Delivered*, particularly in its depiction of chivalry among knights from both sides: Christians and Muslims. Ariosto, amidst the conflict between Charlemagne's Christian paladins and the Saracen army, emphasizes the nobility of chivalry on both sides of the conflict. A notable example is the Christian knight Rinaldo's duel with the Muslim knight Ferrau, where, after a lengthy battle, they mutually decide to shake hands and embark together on a journey in search of the Eastern beauty, Angelica. The narrator (2008) comments on this by saying: "Oh gran bontà de' cavallieri antiqui! / Eran rivali, eran di fé diversi, / e si sentian degli aspri colpi iniqui / per tutta la persona anco dolersi; / e pur per selve oscure e calli obliqui / insieme van senza sospetto aversi" (p. 28) [How generous those knights of ancient days! / Rivals they were, of different faiths those two, / And they could feel their bodies still ablaze / From cruel blows that pained them now anew; / Yet through dark woods they rode, and obscure ways, / And not the least suspicion did ensue].

Undoubtedly, Frediani's narrative style, influenced to some extent by the themes of *Jerusalem Delivered*, occasionally follows the objectivity of *Orlando Furioso*, especially in the early chapters of his Ariosto's *oeuvre*. However, Frediani quickly surpasses the Emilian-born Ferrarese poet by leaps and bounds by deliberately presenting a pure and positive image of Islam and Muslims during their confrontation with the Crusade. The issue here is not limited to avoiding positions in which we might find, following Edward Said (1978), orientalist features (such as those easily found in Tasso's epic. See Cerbo, 2011, pp. 1-21), but it goes beyond that in an attempt to establish a harmonious convergence between historical accuracy and narrative events. An example of this is what Frediani narrates about the nobility of Muslim knights, which intersects with the fact of Muslims standing alongside Jews in their ordeal with the Crusader army. Indeed, the narrative may convey to the reader that Frediani is critical of the Franks due to their aggressive attitude towards those who differ in their beliefs, particularly their "barbaric" treatment (as described by the narrator on numerous occasions) towards Jewish characters in the novel. While the Crusaders raid Jewish homes in Europe before reaching the Islamic East, the governor of Jerusalem, Prince Jamal, inspects the Jewish community in their quarter to reassure them. Tolerance reaches its peak when Prince Jamal falls in love with Sara, a Jewish girl, engaging in a lengthy discussion with her, aimed at presenting a positive image of Islam and its tolerant stance towards other monotheistic religions. Perhaps the most intriguing paradox in Frediani's narrative context lies in the positive image reserved for Muslims alone, contrasting with the Christians and Jews immersed in a dual conflict for which neither the characters nor even the author find a definitive solution.

The romantic entanglements experienced by most characters from different sides (perhaps surpassing the violent conflict between the "enemies") are what distance Frediani's novel from *Jerusalem Delivered*. In Tasso's work, as previously mentioned, all the female characters belong to the Orient, and the crusader knights' longing for them becomes an obstacle that delays their entry into Jerusalem and their celebration of victory. However, the situation appears entirely

different in Frediani's work, as love stories between Christian, Muslim, and Jewish characters serve to not only temper the tense atmosphere within the city of Jerusalem, but also to frame highly important questions about the futility of the Crusades and their religious, ideological, and historical significance. It is no coincidence that these questions arise within dialogue scenes between the knights in love. The decision of the valiant warrior Riccardo to leave for Europe after the fall of Jerusalem into the hands of the Crusaders and to accompany the Jewish woman Rebecca may serve as compelling evidence of the underlying political and economic ideology that had represented the primary motivation for the campaign.

The evidence of the emotional factor's ability to freeze feelings of hostility among individuals of different faiths is presented by the Arab prince Jamal in his words to his Jewish beloved Sara in her home in the Jewish quarter:

Più che parlare di religione, stiamo cercando di stabilire un punto di incontro tra i nostri popoli. E io voglio fortemente che i nostri popoli si incontrino (Frediani, 2013, p. 123). [We are not talking about religion here, but rather trying to build a bridge between our peoples. And I very much hope that our peoples will one day meet].

The reader discerns from Jamal's words a contemporary and progressive discourse grounded in the values of dialogue, justice, equality, and political correctness. It is not coincidental, of course, that we find this statement in a dialogue between an Arab and a Jewish person. Frediani skillfully draws parallels between the present and the past, yet in his narrative they represent and ideally embody the opposite of what Tarek envisions in the *Awakening of the Knight*: peace versus conflict, dialogue versus clash.

III. CONCLUSIONS

The foregoing leads us to the conclusion that many literary works addressing the Crusades historically will find themselves faced with this kind of parallelism, often presenting biased perspectives that make neutrality and objectivity elusive, which in turn widens the gap between historical truth and its literary representations. This echoes the symbolic representation of the city of Jerusalem itself; for Frediani, Jerusalem embodies a world where feelings of affection and rivalry are mixed, unlike the bloody image presented by both Tasso and Tarek, who insist that nobility and the virtues of chivalry are exclusive only to one side. Finally, the Italian novelist, as a contemporary writer of the Palestinian issue and a historian of ancient civilizations, seeks earnestly and thoroughly to instill in his narrative elements of civilizational dialogue among adherents of different beliefs within and beyond the walls of Jerusalem. This is evident within the novel's setting amidst one of history's most profound conflicts, the First Crusade, and within a city considered the greatest spatial and eternal witness to the nations' need for such dialogue. Regardless of their differing literary and historical purposes, what unites Tarek and Frediani is the idealistic endeavor to rectify the present by evoking the past.

In the December 23, 1995 issue of *The Economist*, Jonathan Riley-Smith, one of the world's renowned historians of the Crusades, observed that the resurgence of interest in the Crusades does not necessarily imply that history repeats itself. He warned, however, that,

if renewed aggressiveness among Muslims were to meet a revival of Christian theories of positive force, the outcome could be nasty. One way to avoid it is to study and interpret the crusades - and the conditions that allowed them to flourish. Understanding should help to bring enlightenment. (Riley-Smith, 1995)

It is from the perspective offered by the British historian that this study seeks to enter, by exploring contemporary narrative literature that addresses, from various angles, the profound impact of the Crusades on the human and cultural psyche over the centuries. The use of literature as a tool for understanding this complex historical period opens new avenues for reading and analysis. While we call for further studies and research in this field, we emphasize the importance of expanding the scope of research to include contemporary artistic and literary works that engage with the Crusades from different perspectives. Additionally, we underscore the need to explore both Western and Arab narrative sources more extensively, with the aim of fostering a deeper understanding of the cultural, literary, and human relations that may emerge in the future in a context of cultural exchange.

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