

Traditional and Postmodern Perspectives: Samiha Khrais's *The Tree Stump* as a Historical Novel

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Abstract

Objectives: This article aims to analyze *The Tree Stump* (1998; trans. 2019), a modern realist novel by the award-winning Jordanian writer Samiha Khrais, from both a historical-novel and postmodern perspective.

Methods: The analysis is conducted against the backdrop of the viewpoints of key theorists of the historical novel, utilizing critical analysis and comparative analysis methods.

Results: The results show that Khrais's novel deploys as its main strategy of representing its historical events the techniques of the traditional/classic historical novel often associated with Walter Scott and his Waverly novels. Although *The Tree Stump* draws on myth, legend, and local folklore and mixes historical realism and magical realism, its main concern is the historical authenticity and factual accuracy of the events it describes.

Conclusions: *The Tree Stump* contains the main characteristic features of a typical traditional historical novel as defined by the major theorists of historical fiction. It also combines elements of historical realism and magical realism without being impacted by the experimental writings of postmodernism.

Keywords: Samiha Khrais, *The Tree Stump*, historical novel.

بين المنظور التقليدي ومنظور ما بعد الحداثة: رواية سميحة خريس "القرمية" رواية تاريخية

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ملخص

الأهداف: يهدف هذا البحث إلى تحليل رواية (القُرميّة) (1998 ، ترجمة 2019) ، وهي رواية واقعية حديثة للكاتبة الأردنية سميحة خريس الحائزة على جوائز عديدة، من منظور الرواية التاريخية. وبالإضافة إلى ذلك، فإنه يناقش هذه الرواية من وجهة نظر ما بعد الحداثة.

المنهجية: تمت المناقشة بالاستناد إلى وجهات نظر بعض كبار منظري الرواية التاريخية الذين يمثلون الفترتين القديمة والحديثة، وباستخدام المنهج النقدي التحليلي وطريقة التحليل المقارن.

النتائج: تبين النتائج أن رواية الكاتبة سميحة خريس تستخدم في تقديم الوقائع التاريخية تقنيات الرواية التاريخية التقليدية التي تربط عادة بالروائي وولتر سكوت ورواياته (ويفرلي). ومع أن رواية (القرمية) تستخدم الأسطورة والخرافة والفولكلور المحلي، وتمزج بين الواقعية التاريخية والواقعية السحرية إلا أن غرضها الأساسي هو الأصالة التاريخية، والدقة الواقعية للأحداث التاريخية التي تصفها.

الخلاصة: تمثل رواية (القرمية) للخصائص المميزة للرواية التقليدية كما عرّفها كبار منظري الخيال التاريخي، وهي تمزج بين عناصر من الواقعية التاريخية والواقعية السحرية دون أن تتأثر بالكتابة التجريبية لكتابات ما بعد الحداثة. الكلمات الدالة: سميحة خريس ، القرمية ، الرواية التاريخية.

1: Introduction

The Tree Stump (1998/2019; henceforward *Tree Stump*) is the Jordanian novelist Samiha Krai's (1956-) first historical novel which was followed by several others of its kind. The story of this work focuses on the role of the Hashemites, the Jordanian tribes, and some prominent Arab nationalists aided by Britain in liberating Transjordan (now Jordan) and eventually Damascus from the rule of the Ottoman Turks. It covers the events of the Arab Revolt which was a pan-Arab national revolution initiated by Sharif Hussein bin Ali of Mecca on June 10, 1916 and continued until the end of World War I on November 11, 1918. Its avowed aim was the liberation of Arab lands from Turkish oppression and the creation of a unified Arab state in the liberated lands stretching from Arabia to Aleppo. Following the end of WWI, the British went back on their promise to recognize a unified and independent Arab state and, together with the French, partitioned the liberated Arab lands into separate territories.

In addition to its historical subject, the novel develops a fictional story dealing with a romantic relationship between two of its principal fictional characters, 'Qab and Mizna whose story is interwoven into the historical narrative and becomes an integral part of the whole work. Following the literature review below, the discussion focuses on analyzing *Tree Stump* as a historical novel per se, a kind of novel which can be differentiated from other groups of novels by its distinctive features. This objective is achieved through examining the novel against the backdrop of the traditional definitions of historical fiction and in light of the more recent narrative theories and techniques of magical realism and postmodern metafiction.

2. Literature Review

Lukács (1937/1962) sees the historical novel as a genre in its own right and adopts a new approach, making the historical setting and people intrinsic to the themes of historical fiction rather than just an exotic background. Lukács's study has had a great impact on later scholarship regarding the historical novel, though his Marxist definition of the genre has not gone without disagreement and further expansion.

Fleishman (1971) provides a comprehensive discussion of the relationship between history and historical fiction and lays down some of the standard criteria of the historical novel. He envisions the possibility of different types and variations within the general form, thus allowing for a malleable definition of the historical novel.

Shaw (1983) discusses the principal ways that nineteenth-century historical novelists, particularly Scott, used history in their fiction. He maintains that the standard historical novel derives from the mainstream novel and shares the conventions of the realist novel with special emphasis on "historical probability".

De Groot (2010) provides an extensive overview of the historical novel, outlining the history and characteristics of the genre from Scott to the present time. The final section of his book considers the ways in which mainstream historical narratives have been challenged by the new postmodern theorists and writers.

Few English empirical studies have dealt with *Tree Stump*. In her translator's introduction to the novel, Akhtarkhavari (2019: v-xxx) draws parallels between *Tree Stump* and T. E. Lawrence's *Seven Pillars of Wisdom* (1926). She also highlights Krai's interest in historical details and authenticity besides her concern with a fictional story. In her thesis, Oesterreicher (2021) examines *Tree Stump* from a feminist perspective showing how Krai incorporates Bedouin women's voices into her text to present women at the center of their society.

As a historical novel, *Tree Stump* has not received enough critical attention in Arabic research. Obeidat's article (2000) discusses the novel's major themes and principal characters as well as its plot and setting but stops short of treating it as a historical novel conforming to the general conventions of the genre. Al Saleh's book (2005) contains a large collection of critical articles dealing with various aspects of Krai's novels including *Al Qurmiya*, but none of them discusses it as a full-fledged historical novel. Qbilat (2006) briefly analyzes the novel's structure, narrative perspective, and language without examining its historicity. However, Al Majali & Al Nawayseh (2020) address the question of the author's presence within the text of her historical novel, suggesting that this presence can be traced in "the space, characters, and language references" of her work (11).

3. Discussion

The following discussion falls into two parts. The first part examines the views of four eminent theorists/critics of historical fiction and applies them respectively to a critical analysis of *Tree Stump*, ending with a short comparison between *Tree Stump* and Scott's *The Talisman*. The second part attempts a brief analysis of the novel based on the contrast between historical realism and magical realism and between the classic and contemporary concepts of the historical novel.

3.1 Lukács: Arguably the first theorist to investigate the presence of the historical sense in historical novels, Lukács (1937/1962) interchangeably uses several terms such as "historical sense", "sense of history", "historical truth", to refer to the same concept (19-35). He argues that to be a true historical novel, a work of fiction should exhibit "the specifically historical, that is, derivation of the individuality of characters from the historical peculiarity of their age" (19). The historical novel, therefore, should achieve a synthesis of individual and social life in the epoch concerned, an objective which can be realized through representing characters and incidents as historical types that can be judged to be true or false.

According to Lukács, man in society produces society and is a product of the historical process, and so individuals do not exist in isolation from their own society. This interrelationship between the individual and society clears the road to the future in history. Generally, "historical consciousness" can be primarily interpreted as the way by which individuals make sense of history. As Robert (2014: 29) notes, "Historical consciousness can be defined as a concept that deals with interpretations of the past, understanding of the present, and perspectives or anticipations about the future".

By an artistic mingling of fictional and real characters and incidents representing a certain historical period, Kraiss creates a novel that truly reflects the period it describes, and consequently can be considered accurately historical. *Tree Stump* has a genuine historical consciousness wherein it provides a close link between the past, the present, and the future. It appears to have been written with the author's firm belief that the events that took place at that time of the Arab Revolt continue to affect the present politics and destiny of the region. This continuity is virtually manifested in the Arabs' fair cause and their genuine aspirations for unity and freedom that existed in the past and are still extant in the minds and hearts of the Arabs in modern times. The novel's symbolic title "Al Qurmiya" further enhances this sense of historical continuity and antiquity as it means "the part of the plant, especially a tree that remains attached to the root after the trunk is cut" (2), with its suggestive meanings of growth and continuity.

Besides portraying the novel's characters as the natural products of their age, the allusions to a multitude of Jordan's ancient places and historical events highlight the history of the area and remind the present-day readers of the historical roots and origins of the Jordanian tribes that inhabited this geographic region for thousands of years. Reading the following passages, we can see how a clear historical sense is concretized by making simultaneous references to some Jordanian geographical places commingled with some historical incidents: "The past, the present, the future, the body, the soul, al-Jafar, Petra, Ammon, 'Aqaba, Ma'an, al-Sharia, Saint George, John the Baptist, the flags of Ja'far, Mu'tah, Yarmouk... all that passed ..." (94-95). On her visit to Petra, 'Alia recalls the well-known Jordanian historical place founded by the Nabataeans, and provokes memories of past Jordanian/Arab history. The narrator states: "The Nabateans lived here in the past, Arab armies spread over these hills, and nations came and went, and the mountains remained, rosy, standing as a witness of endless time" (38). Such descriptions of Petra and the references to Jordanian geographical and historical places and incidents make the novel not only "historical" but also authentic.

Actually, place plays an important role in historical fiction as it symbolizes the continuity of the past into the present and the future. A generally accepted view is that historical fiction transports the reader to another place which can be either real or imagined and requires striking a balance between meticulous research and great creativity. Emphasizing the role of setting, Lukács argues that history is "not just as a convenient frame in which to stage a contemporary narrative, but rather ... a distinct social and cultural setting (1962: 15-29). Place deals not only with the physical landscape, climate, and weather of the area concerned, but also the social setting of the novel, providing a backdrop for the action. As Abrahm (1999: 194) observes: "The historical novel not only takes its setting and some characters and events from history, but makes the historical events and issues crucial for the central characters and narrative".

In *Tree Stump* the events are set in an authentic historical place, producing a narrative that gives the reader an insight

into the history and the customs of the local people in a manner that brings the receptor closer to the described locations whether spatially, temporarily, or socially. Evidently aware of the significance of place for her historical narrative, Kraiss explores with unmistakable precision the physical features of the area where the events are set. There are vivid descriptions of desert areas, mountainous places as well as arable lands, reflecting the intimate relationship between the people and their land. Additionally, we find minute descriptions of the interaction between the place, the weather, and the dwellers. Describing the reaction of a young man to his environment, the narrator reports: "The steeper the incline was, the warmer the weather became, as if it was a heavenly response to the call of the young man" (129). There are also numerous passages in which the people interact with the place, as expressed in their reaction to the rain, seeing in it a sign of hope: "Rain fell from the summer cloud that accompanied the newborn at the camp and left a bright rainbow behind" (10); "The two women heard the cry of life coming from the newborn, saw a flash of lightning, heard thunder split the heart of the sky, and the rain dropped in torrents (21).

By the same token, the novel abounds in accurate descriptions of local food (*Mansaf*), drink (Arabic coffee), musical instruments (*rababa/rebec*), songs, dances (*al-dahieh*). It is also replete with numerous meticulous delineations of the characters' clothes, costumes, and uniforms. There are references to the Sage's "long goat-hide coat over a black shepherd thaub" (5); to women "wearing their embroidered dresses and traditional colored head covers" (148); and to 'Auda "in his black iqal and red keffiyeh" (76). The costumes of Arab nationals are also described in some detail. Faisal arrives in Jordan wearing "a silk keffiyeh ... that was held in place with a Hijazi iqal decorated with golden and silver threads" (45). Several Arab characters are also described with their local dresses:

They wore urban pants and shirts common in Damascus and Palestine and wrapped their cold bodies with their abayas to stay warm. They were joined by Ahmad al-Balawi, who was wearing Hijazi clothes, Ali al-Najdi in his Bedouin thaub and long black braids, and officer Mawlood Mukhles in his blue military uniform. (47)

Alongside these descriptions, there are minute accounts of Bedouin dialect, traditional Bedouin poetry, Jordanian proverbs, idioms, maxims, beliefs, and popular legends that fill up the characters' dialogues. These are typically Jordanian, reflecting Jordanian culture and an indigenous human experience. Local legends are also recounted throughout the story. Reacting to the legends narrated by the local community, "the sharif entered the castle ignoring the legends; although 'Auda felt a little apprehensive, and Za'al closed his eyes sarcastically pretending that he was waiting for the promised spirits" (103). We are also told that during a social gathering, "some [men] talked about a belief, more like a certitude, that God was fighting on their side, and others went on to swear that they heard the sound of a battle of heavenly angels fighting off the Turkish army one day before their withdrawal (140).

Such descriptions of Jordanian geographical and historical places, lifestyles, dialect, and beliefs as well as Arab clothing and attires depict an authentic image of life during the historical period concerned. They also help connect the past to the present and establish the rootedness of the narrative not only in the period of the Arab Revolt but also in the long history of Jordan.

Lukács (1962, 139) further argues that in addition to possessing a historical sense, a historical novel should depict a "social totality". For Lukács, the main subject of the historical novel is, "man's social life in its ceaseless interaction with surrounding nature, which forms the basis of social activity, and with the different social institutions or customs which mediate the relations between individuals in social life" (139). This totality is "not simply the dead objects through which men's social life manifests itself, but also the various customs, institutions, habits, usages etc. characteristic of a certain phase of human society and of the direction it is taking" (139). However, a novel can never achieve a sense of totality by "reproducing faithfully a mere extract from life"; rather, "by representing a limited section of reality, however richly portrayed, it aims to evoke the totality of the process of social development" (138-130). To achieve this objective, it "must give central place throughout to all that is typical in characters, circumstances, scenes etc." (139).

Lukács's above argument suggests that the historical novel should be concerned with reflecting a true picture of the social life of the community it delineates. A good example illustrating his concept of "social totality" can be seen in the following conversation which takes place between Faisal and 'Auda:

“What about the feuds of the past and the pains the raids have left?”

“These we can handle, but not the wounds inflicted by our cousin”.

At first glance, the above dialogue suggests a sense of social rift or separateness. However, we are told afterwards that when ‘Auda “found out that the tribe of his cousin, al-Jazi, had joined the Revolt he accepted that they would both serve the same cause, and was willing to work under the same banner as long as they did not meet” (55). Here, we witness a typical societal readiness to forego personal problems for the sake of the Revolt and for the political and social unity of the tribes taking part in it.

Lukács further states that a novelist can also achieve a sense of social totality by building his/her novel round a “middling” rather than “heroic” hero and by depicting “typical” rather than “eminent” characters (34-36). This entails that the historical novel should be concerned with “the broad delineation of manners and circumstances attendant upon events”, that is, to grasp the period it deals with and to represent it as embodying large social sections (31, 15-25). Moreover, this social totality can be realized through interweaving the life of the familiar historical figures with that of the people and by making the non-historical characters a true manifestation of the historical movement concerned (42).

Actually, none of the principal characters is portrayed as a hero or aspiring to the status of a traditional heroic figure and neither of them is endowed with legendary strength. Rather, they are depicted as modest figures who embody much of Arab social customs and manners. The same holds true for the principal fictional character ‘Oqab who is represented as an “average” character. In addition, the life of the historical and fictional characters is closely intertwined with that of the common people and the fictional characters and is controlled by a strong code of social customs. A typical Arab hospitality custom appears in Fasil’s treating his companions to his mother’s cookies: “Faisal picked up one of his mother’s cookies, took a small bite, a sign for the men to eat theirs, and took another encouraging them to have as many as they liked” (53). Such behaviour reveals not only the host’s modesty but also a distinctly Arab hospitality and an example of communal life in the society the novel delineates.

Besides, the narrative explores the intricate relations that bring Jordanians together, coming from different parts of Jordan with variegated cultural backgrounds to join the Revolt. Kraiss also introduces people from several Arab countries, assigning them significant parts in the Revolt. She additionally gives an important role to women in their Bedouin community. For instance ‘Alia, endeavours to preserve the values which the tribe holds dear in order to ensure the survival and cohesion of her society: “She recalled how ... when he [‘Auda] was a mere child, put on his goatskin coat ... and sent him out to bring back the tribe’s herds that had been stolen during a raid. She had to do that to save the tribe, prevent a famine, and make him a man” (11). Altogether, these details give a faithful picture of the local society and represent a true manifestation of the social fabric that keeps together the characters and the local population.

3.2. Fleishman: Fleishman’s (1971: 3-4) definition quoted below at great length suggests some specific criteria for the historical genre:

Most novels set in the past – beyond an arbitrary number of years, say 40-60 (two generations) – are liable to be considered historical, while those of the present and preceding generations (of which the reader is more likely to have personal experience) have been called ‘novels of the recent past.’ Regarding substance, there is an unspoken assumption that the plot must include a number of ‘historical’ events, particularly those in the public sphere (war, politics, economic change, etc.), mingled with and affecting the personal fortunes of the characters. One further criterion is to be introduced on *prima facie* grounds. There is an obvious theoretical difficulty in the status of ‘real’ personages in ‘invented’ fictions, but their presence is not a mere matter of taste. It is necessary to include at least one such figure in a novel to qualify as historical. ... The historical novel is distinguished among novels by the presence of a specific link to history: not merely a real building or a real event but a real person amongst the fictitious ones.

Fleishman’s elaborate definition of the historical novel can be summarized in three main points: It should include a remote setting of at least “two generations” removed from the author’s own time; the plot must include a number of historical events; and at least one real personage should be present. Fleishman emphasizes that a historical novel is not one in which only the setting, the customs, habits and dresses are those of the past, but one which makes a specific link to history by

including at least a real person amongst its fictitious characters.

Fleishman's criterion of the distance of two generations, roughly 40-60 years, from the story, echoes Scott who, in his introduction to *Waverley*, states explicitly that his story is narrated with the gap of sixty years from its historical events (Scott, 1893/2022: n.p.). The underlying assumption here is that this distance would form a length of time that might be close enough to understand the period and simultaneously remote enough to surpass the scope of individual human memory. Written in 1998, the story of *Tree Stump* is about eighty years removed from the main historical events it describes, i.e. the period of the Arab Revolt (1916-1918). However, some events in the novel predate the declaration of the Arab Revolt. Part of the events that led to the actual story began with the uprising of some Bedouin tribes in southern Jordan against the oppressive Turkish rule when the Turkish soldiers detained a few of the al-Shobak townsmen and took them away to Istanbul prison (Krais, 2019:3). As the novel's translator clarifies in an endnote, this tribal resistance took place in 1905 (Akhtarkhavari, 2019: 14), about ten years before the official start of the Revolt. Overall, the distance between the writing of the novel and the outbreak of the rebellion roughly corresponds to the minimum two-generation distance envisioned in Fleishman's first criterion for a novel set in the past.

The second criterion of historical fiction suggested by Fleishman, namely the necessity of employing real events in the narrative mingled with and affecting the fictional characters, brings the historical novelist another step closer to the professional historian. The novelist, just like a historian, should discover and retell the historical truths of the past but while concurrently exercising aesthetic control over his/her material. A good historical text, therefore, should show an artistic treatment of plot structure and character presentation emanating from a balanced mingling of factual events and creative plotting.

The story of *Tree Stump* includes several public historical events such the Arab Revolt, WWI, Sykes-Picot, Balfour Declaration and their concomitant political, social, and economic changes. The main plot contains high- and low-culture elements drawn from different types of modern source materials (history books, oral history, popular narratives, etc.). All these sources are used to explore what life was like during the Arab Revolt period and how it developed. Using realistic details as an essential component of its substance, *Tree Stump* attempts to depict the political, social, and cultural milieux in great accuracy, an important defining feature of the historical novel.

However, as an artistic work, Krais's novel is not meant to only transmit historical information, for it includes both factual and fictional narratives in impressive harmony. While its main focus is on actual historical events, *Tree Stump* tries to strike a delicate balance between historical accuracy and fictional creativity. Throughout the text, we see an ongoing oscillation between historical, political, and sociological narratives on the one hand and mythical tales and local folklore on the other. Alongside the historical events and characters of the main plot, there exist a few fictional characters whose fortunes are intertwined with their real social, economic, and political milieux just as the real characters and their actions do. 'Qab, for example, is drawn as a miracle-child (9-3) with a semidivine origin but is brought up in a real social and political setting. Accidentally found and picked up as an infant in a tiercel's nest and carried in the saddle of a purebred and miraculously luminous horse by a caravan from Sinai (6-10), he grows up endowed with some supernatural powers. Eventually, he is brought up as a sociable young man who takes part in the domestic and nationalistic activities of his community. For instance, when Ramla, the wife of Hareth, has difficulty in her child labour, it is the four-year-old 'Qab who eases her childbirth by touching her body with his miraculously blessed hand (20). Later, he marries Mizna and eventually joins the Revolt and becomes one of its principal figures. By this subtle interknitting of fact and legend into her historical work, Krais places her fictional character alongside the real characters in a historically accurate setting.

By the same token, the life of the fictional character Mizna is also integrated into the main historical storyline. Her birth brings in good news for the local community when it rains heavily, giving new life to the dry land (21). Right from the beginning, the life of the fictional Mizna is interwoven into the historical narrative and becomes an integral part of the whole work. Indeed, her life is inseparable from that of the real female characters; she has strong relations with Amsah ('Auda's mother) and 'Alia ('Auda's sister). As these real women are a source of power and inspiration to the real men

(Oesterreicher, 2021: 49-51), so is the fictional Mizna to her fictional lover and husband-to-be. One clear evidence of her integration into her local community and culture is when she accompanies 'Alia on her journey to Petra during which Mizna begins to recall an old story when the Nabateans (an old Jordanian tribe) led by their king Hareth fought Herod king of Judea (41). Mizna's recollection of that particular incident unveils her intimate connection to her historical Jordanian roots. By doing so, she would not only reclaim the past but also contribute to the future of her society through her indefatigable support of the war of liberation. Eventually, Mizna's life, like that of her husband 'Qab, is directly impacted by the raging war and her Bedouin community.

Furthermore, the fictional story of 'Qab and Mizna which involves a happy romance and a successful marriage followed by an active involvement in the war gives rise to a promising future of cultural change and the potential achievement of national and social unity. These two fictional characters that originally had no specific tribal connections set an example of how a good tribal and societal life should be: a desert life free of feudal conflict. As Akhtarkhavari (2019: xvii) observes, "Khrais draws her mythology and fiction from concepts and beliefs embedded in the core of tribal culture".

The interweaving of fictional and real elements is utilized to enhance the historical storyline by producing a realistic and authentic text based on an artistic combination of the life and popular beliefs of the Jordanian people and their sociopolitical aspirations. For instance, the novel opens with the story of a fictional Bedouin sage who sanctions the people's resistance to the Turkish occupation and is eventually drawn into the story of the Revolt. The interplay between the events revolving around some fictional characters and those pertaining to the historical resistance of some tribes in southern Jordan, together with the actions of real-life figures who rose against Ottoman occupation can be seen as an artistic combination of historical realism and creative fiction. This mixture of history and invention embodies an artistic process in which the fictional material is firmly grounded in concrete historical dynamics.

Fleishman's third criterion, that is, the inclusion of at least one real figure amongst the fictitious ones as a means of establishing a specific link to history, signifies a crucial role for character portrayal in historical fiction. Because the historical novel is a fusion of historical and fictional characters, it requires harmony between its historical and fictitious components. When the imaginary characters can coexist in the same world with the historical personages, we can speak of a historical novel. As readers, we expect the fictional and the historical characters to coexist rather than collide within the realistic world of the novel.

Chief among the historical figures included in the tale are Sharif Hussein of Mecca, his son Prince Faisal, the Jordanian Bedouin chief 'Auda Abu Tayeh. The role of such major personages is to provide a means by which social, cultural, and political developments can be understood. Although the story does not contain many details about him, Sharif Hussein is represented as the leader and originator of the Revolt. His main role is to inspire, guide, and give advice to his aides and sons about their plans and actions. For instance, in one of his important messages to Faisal (October 4, 1918), he highlights the importance of Arab nationalism, local traditions, and customs: "Syrians must govern their own land according to their own customs and traditions. ...Common nationalism fosters common understanding and mutual interests" (160).

Faisal is portrayed as the principal historical figure whose main role is to promote a deep feeling of pan-Arab national unity and to foster the Arab dream of freedom amidst the current Arab political and cultural divisions. Already prominent and even admired in previous narratives about the Arab Revolt, he reemerges as an emblem of wisdom, courage, modesty, and generosity, values very much cherished by the Bedouin society. In his endeavour to collaborate with the British in order to achieve his goal of freeing Arab lands from Ottoman occupation, he shows true nationalism by pressing with his endeared and justifiable goal. When the British lieutenant colonel Newcomb raises concerns about "the usefulness of the unorganized loudly speaking [Bedouin] men," Faisal ignores Newcomb's concerns, maintaining that "the Army would not be able to move through the desert without the Bedouins' help" (57). Aware of the difficulty of keeping together supporters and politicians coming from diverse and conflicting backgrounds in the Arab world, he strives to keep these highly divergent groups under control: "Faisal's job was not easy, even his father, the shaikh in Mecca, realized such difficulty in managing such diversity in one Army" (97). Using wise diplomacy, he manages to mitigate the conflict between the Howeitat tribe and the people from al-Karak who attacked them in an act of vengeance, urging them to end their feuds and join the Arab Army (147).

Apart from Faisal, Kraiss brings to center stage another principal character, the Bedouin chief 'Auda Abu Tayeh. Unlike Lawrence who sidesteps the vigorous bond between this powerful tribal chieftain and his native land and people, Kraiss emphasizes the close connection between 'Auda and the Howeitat tribe and his significant contribution to the war effort against the Ottoman garrisons in the Arab region. Through his reputable bravery and nationalistic/patriotic feelings and acts, 'Auda comes up as one of the three major protagonists of the novel who is described by 'Qab as "a fearless general who never lost a raid" (66) and about whom the real-life character Shaikh Diab Al-Oran wonders: "Tell me if anyone ever fought 'Auda and won?" (113). As a chivalric character, he usually adheres to a strong code of fighting ethics that leads him to fight in accordance with the well-established desert rules. Though raiding is depicted as the rule of life for the Bedouins, 'Auda resorts to it only when there is a devastation striking the whole tribe: "If the drought left somewhere green in this wide desert, he would not have sought to raid his cousins" (31). When his son is killed in a tribal feud with his al-Jazi tribal cousins, 'Auda chooses to forgive and relinquish his right of revenge, thus putting an end to the feud with the rival clan (34), a striking instance of tolerance and forgiveness.

Yet another historical figure to reckon with is Lawrence. Originally a British army liaison officer, Lawrence is given a secondary role in *Tree Stump* as he remains an observer rather than a leader or an adviser. Lawrence is portrayed both in realistic and imaginative terms. Besides his real role in the war, he frequently appears as a comic character lurking in the margins or engaged in some humorous situations. His great interest in documentation which involves using cameras and writing compendious notes amounts to an obsession and individual idiosyncrasy (36, 75, 104, 126). He is also shown interested in taking spoils of war and is "astonished at the sight of the colorful, ornately designed carpet that he looted" (92). Like the other historical figures, Lawrence coexists with the fictional characters and is integrated with them and the principal historical figures.

3. 3 Shaw: Shaw (1983) offers a definition of the historical novel based on "fictional probability". He outlines two kinds of probability in a historical novel. First, characters and incidents need to be believable, that is, they actually existed in the world it imitates and that there are no mistakes in representing historical facts. Second, the work should consistently follow its own internal rules and patterns in the sense that its parts should be fit to produce a unified whole (21). It is this historical probability which Shaw takes to distinguish the historical novel from any other novel genre: "Although many kinds of novels may incorporate a sense of history, in historical novels history is "foregrounded" (21). Despite Shaw's respect for historiographic data and the verisimilitude/probability of the actions depicted, his definition does not consider the events and characters that would seem improbable in history as characteristic features of the historical novel.

Tree Stump's historical events occur in a time and place which are described with great details. There are also no cases of anachronism or mistakes in historical facts that can be considered breaches of probability. The novel's characters, events, language, and milieux are historical and real. As the characters and incidents are specific and unique to their age, the socio-cultural milieux also reflect the peculiarity of the historical epoch concerned, depicting its distinctive historical colours.

Shaw (1983:26) also observes that "the probability that distinguishes standard historical novels rests on ... the realization that history is comprised of ages and societies that are significantly different from our own". This definition is clearly realized in Kraiss's novel. For instance, the way Faisal and 'Auda behave and dress and the language they and the other characters use are the natural products of their cultural and social milieux just as the historical events portrayed are intrinsic and inseparable components of the Arab Revolt. As a twentieth-century historical novel, *Tree Stump* differs from a novel set in another century in that it addresses different problems and uses different language and contexts. The setting as well as the character traits and the nature of events in this novel, belong to a specific era from which they cannot be removed to another work without losing their validity.

Moreover, the reader can feel that *Tree Stump* meticulously follows its own intrinsic rules and patterns. The title of the novel "Tree Stump" sets up the keynote to the whole tale, making all the chapters revolve around this central theme of roots or origins. With these meanings, the title points to the revival/resurrection of the past to inform the present and the future and to ensure the Arabs' and Jordanians' rightful place in history. Similarly, all of the novel's narrative elements and devices achieve a great level of structural and thematic cohesion that makes them a unified whole where the historical and fictional

characters move in harmony with their social and cultural backgrounds and the novel's love story runs concomitantly with the historical story till the close of the tale.

Actually, the concern with representing a sense of historical probability is initially signaled in the author's utilization of intertextual sections (quotations, epigraphs, allusions, notes) and paratextual notes and commentaries on the nature, process, and development of her work. To the author's footnotes (about forty) can be added the translator's numerous endnotes which contain many remarks about the historicity of Kraiss's work, all of which are designed to situate the novel's nineteen chapters within their appropriate historical contexts. Attempting to ground her story in authentic historical accounts and to "foreground" the historicity of her narrative, Kraiss explicitly states that, in addition to carefully sifting her historical sources, she depended on "the oral history of that period preserved by the tribes that were involved in the fighting" to double-check the accuracy of her story (Akhtarkhavari, 2019: xii).

Furthermore, Shaw (1983: 20-21) argues that characters and incidents in a novel can be historical and consequently reach "historical probability" in either or both two ways:

When we read historical novels, we take their events, characters, settings, and language to be historical in one or both of two ways. They may represent societies, modes of speech, or events that in very fact existed in the past, in which case their probability points outward from the work to the world it represents; or they may promote some sort of historical effect within the work, such as providing an entry for the reader into the past, in which case the probability points inward, to the design of the work itself.

Tree stump is "historical" in both the outward and the inward ways outlined above. The historical figures' primary function is to further the novel's historical design and move the action outward. Faisal and 'Auda embody the novel's outward outlook to the outside world and to the future, reflecting the Arabs' quest for freedom and their dream of unity which is part of the Arabs' past and their present. Depicting Faisal's joyful feelings after the declaration of the Arab Hashemite Kingdom, the narrator recounts: "The Hashemite stood at the stage slim and calm. The expression on his face told of the dream he carried all these years" (163). Pledging his firm support for the Revolt, 'Auda asserts: "[It] is about a dream that lives in my mind. The prince has no treasures that I desire; it is fate pushing us to march together on a thorny but attainable path" (52).

Similarly, we notice the ability of the historical story to provide an entry into the novel. As readers, we can learn more about local and global issues. There is much information about old cultures and civilizations (Arabic, Islamic, Christian, Greek, Roman, etc.). Besides learning much about the striking political and historical motifs raised in the novel, we can find much information about numerous domestic social and cultural issues. A good case in point is the representation of women's status and their role in the Revolt. This motif appears clearly when the tribal women "stop[ed] providing the [Turkish] soldiers with water" (3). Kraiss's authentic portrayal of these women definitely gives a different image from that conceived by non-Arabic-speaking readers.

3.4 De Groot: Defining the historical novel, de Groot (2010) draws attention to two main characteristic features of the form. The first one is its hybridity and flexibility in mixing different genres: "The intergeneric hybridity and flexibility of historical fiction have long been one of its defining characteristics". The second feature is its tendency to provoke a sense of nationalism: "A historical novel might consider the articulation of nationhood via the past (2010:2).

In accordance with the first characteristic, a historical novel can smoothly take place within numerous fictional types. A careful examination of *Tree Stump* reveals that it contains a variety of literary genres in one way or another: novel, biography, history, fantasy, travelogue, and chronicle, though their occurrence does not affect it as a historical novel *par excellence*. Due to lack of space, however, only brief accounts are here given of this pliable/flexible combination of such genres. The work abounds in biographical elements as can be seen in the general accounts of the life and deeds of various historical personages. It also includes some fantastical elements which, when seen alone, would look impossible or improbable, such as those describing the fictional characters as pointed out in other sections of this paper. As a travelogue, it portrays pictures of several characters' travels such as those of Faisal, 'Auda, 'Qab, and Ramla to or in particular places. Like a chronicle, *Tree Stump* is sometimes concerned with giving factual written details of historical

events pertaining to the principal figures, such as the telegraph from Sharif al-Hussein bin ‘Ali to his son Faisal on 4 October 1918 (160).

Outlining the second characteristic feature of the historical novel, de Groot argues that the genre is distinguished by its connection to national identity. A historical novel can connect the present with a part of a shared national history, evoking stories, customs and traditions long forgotten and, in this way, plays its own part in keeping them alive for future generations. De Groot (2010:148) further argues that “historical novels have often been used to reinsert communities into the past, rescuing them from the marginal positions to which they have consciously been consigned”. Historical fiction thus may engage in political writing and can interrogate, if not undermine, an earlier different version of a certain historical moment.

Tree Stump is a good example of the ability of historical fiction to offer a different interpretation of the past and present of a certain historical era. The author seems to be writing back to *Seven Pillars of Wisdom* (1926/2006). Her primary aim is to signal that her version of the historical events of the Arab Revolt is different from that of her predecessor and offers an alternative narrative to Lawrence’s book. In the new version, Lawrence’s self-proclaimed contributions in his work are reduced while the crucial and patriotic roles of the principal Arab characters in the Revolt and in the Allies’ victory in WWI are highlighted. For instance, in the pivotal Battle of Aqaba, ‘Auda, rather than Lawrence, is presented as the actual planner and leader of the assault (67-79). And in contrast with Lawrence’s narrative, Faisal is drawn as a symbol of pan-Arab nationalism.

Krais’s attempt to reassert a sense of Arab national identity is further manifested in her vigorous critique of Lawrence’s (1926) arguably misrepresented image of both Arab leaders and ordinary people, an image which Krais considers subjective and ideologically motivated. Aiming at correcting what she considers Lawrence’s misrepresentation of Arab image, Krais writes her work with a different focus and viewpoint. In her interview with Akhtarkhavi (2019: xxx), Krais asserts that she embarked on writing her novel when she found out, after doing careful research, that the previous works on the Arab Revolt “did not reflect what she knew well about the Arab tribes, especially in the region, and their lives, values, and practices”. She thus provides a fresh and different perspective by primarily focusing on those parts of the narrative that were not mentioned, concentrated on, played down, or misrepresented in previous narratives. Ultimately, this strategy enabled her to focus her work on the life and national interests of a whole society and nation instead of the fate of one single individual as Lawrence (1926) had done.

Tree Stump’s sense of nationalism is further manifested in its counter-portrayal of Jordanians. Instead of perpetuating the old stereotypes of the Arab region depicted in Lawrence’s narrative as a place of dry deserts and camels, of cruelty and barbarism, of harem and violent marauders, Krais portrays the Bedouins in particular and Jordanians and Arabs in general as mostly law-abiding people whose land had for long been a cradle for old civilizations and ancient cultures and religions. In contrast with the prevalent stereotypical image of a feuds-ridden tribal society, Krais delineates a generally positive picture of Jordan and underscores the close ties that connect the Jordanian tribes, peasants, and city dwellers despite their differences and the occasional “harshness of some of the men who lived in it [desert]” (142). By underscoring Jordanian and Arab nationalism, Krais attempts to revive Arab identity and national unity.

3.5 *Tree Stump* in a comparative context: To further illustrate the main features which characterize *Tree Stump* as a historical novel, a brief comparison is given below between this novel and Scott’s *The Talisman* (1825).

Both novels meet the aforementioned generally accepted definition of the historical novel as a narrative set in the past and focused on reconstructing the depicted epoch’s social and cultural conditions and general atmosphere. Both writers combine the realistic world of history with the fictitious world of imagination, following a strategy of selecting particular historical facts and transforming and supplementing them by the writer’s creative imagination. Justifying what he calls his “violation of the truth of history”, Scott (1984, Introduction: xvii) draws attention to the unavoidable interplay of the fictional with the realistic as an essential feature of historical fiction, stating that “romantic fiction naturally includes the power of ... invention, which is indeed one of the requisites of the art”. Like *The Talisman*, *Tree Stump* combines history and invention as previously illustrated.

As historical fiction, each novel has for its temporal setting a certain period of history with the objective of conveying as accurately as possible the traditions, manners, beliefs, dialect, geography and scenery of that epoch. As *Tree Stump* covers the Arab Revolt period and is set mostly in southern Jordan, *The Talisman* covers the period at the end of the Third Crusade (1189 – 1192) and takes place primarily in the camp of the Crusaders in Palestine, centering on the relation between Richard I of England and Saladin, the Muslim Sultan.

Both works comply with the traditionally accepted period of at least two generations' distance between the historical events described and the date of their dramatization into historical fiction. Accordingly, the two novels show a clear compliance with the principle of temporal distance prescribed by *The Historical Novels Review* journal which defines the genre as "a novel set fifty or more years in the past and the author writes from research rather than personal experience" (Johnson, 2002: n.p).

Each novelist takes creative liberties with his/her literary composition even though they differ in practice. While Scott appears to be using more fictional representation than historical information, Kraiss seems to be employing more historical material than fictional elements. In *The Talisman*, the fictional Scottish knight Sir Kenneth is the principal character in contrast with *Tree Stump* where the major real-life personages Faisal and 'Auda play the leading roles. Whereas Kraiss focuses more on historical incidents, Scott (1894, Introduction, xxi) emphasizes the incidents of his own invention, unequivocally stating: "Most of the incidents introduced in the following tale are fictitious".

Another major area of comparison is the two writers' use of language. Scott employs the language of his own time rather than that used in medieval times even though his narrative revolves around medieval Crusaders and his use of language allows his characters to use a variety of geographic and social dialects. A similar practice exists in *Tree Stump* which also uses vernacular and local dialect to express the dialogue and the conversations of the characters besides the modern Arabic of the main text. In both cases, the ultimate objective is to make the text as authentic as possible, a characteristic feature inherently associated with the historical novel.

In addition, both novelists make use of authorial paratextual comments/notes and epigraphs/quotations derived from a wide array of literary, historical, philosophical, and religious sources intended to suggest the theme of the chapters in which they occur. Lodge (1992:165) tersely points out that "Scott started a vogue for using quotations, old songs and ballads as epigraphs for chapters". The same vogue seems to have continued in Khraiss's narrative which abounds in lots of quotations from Arabic classic and modern poetry, formal and popular idiomatic expressions, folkloric songs, and traditional Bedouin poetry.

Nevertheless, the two novels are sometimes at variance. While *The Talisman* adopts a medieval chivalric viewpoint commensurate with its medieval background, *Tree Stump* follows a more realistic approach consistent with its modern setting. Despite their mixing of the themes of war and love, Scott's work nearly sidesteps the details of the war while Kraiss's novel focuses on the motif of war. Though *The Talisman* begins in *media res*, *Tree Stump* starts from the beginning and invariably follows a predominantly chronological narrative order.

3.6 *Tree Stump* and postmodern historical fiction: Finally, we come to the second part of the discussion. So far, we have been talking about *Tree Stump* as a traditional historical novel and comparing it with another historical novel. However, an important question that can be raised is how far it is related to contemporary postmodern fiction. Since the 1970s, classic realist fiction has been challenged by the anti-realist postmodernist fiction writers using the techniques of magical realism and metafiction in their works and challenging the classic historical fiction's attempts to represent historical truth. These two subjects will be treated in the following two sections.

3.6.1 Magical or magic realism has been used in postmodern critical theory to describe the interrelationship of two ostensibly irreconcilable but virtually closely connected terms/concepts, "magical" and "realist". Bowers (2004: 19) states that in magical realism, "'magic' refers to any extraordinary occurrence and particularly to anything spiritual or unaccountable by rational science". Realism, on the other hand, assumes that the "external world is real, and that our senses give a true report of it" (Ian Watt, 1957; qtd. in Bowers, 2004: 20). She further argues that magical realist fiction include miracles, ghosts, and strange atmospheres (19). What magical realism and historical realism have in common is that both

of them try to paint a realistic view of the world but, in the case of magical realism, it often mixes the improbable and the realist. As realism tries to represent real life in a matter-of-fact manner, magical realism “relies upon the presentation of real, imagined or magical elements as if they were real” (Bowers, 2004: 21). It is this characteristic that has made magical realism pertinent to contemporary discourse on traditional theory of historical fiction, challenging and critiquing its basic assumptions and precepts.

Magical realism has also been defined as “an aesthetic style or a genre of fiction in which magical elements are blended seamlessly with a realistic atmosphere, usually to produce a deeper understanding for reality” (Dar, 2017: 91). The world in magical realism looks much like the real world, with an element of the extraordinary added to it. As Chanady (2019:25) states, the supernatural in magical realism is portrayed “in a matter-of fact manner”. Like magical-realism fiction, a historical novel may incorporate elements of magical realism into its setting and its narrative by blending the magical/supernatural realm with the natural/familiar world.

Tree Stump abounds in mythological tales and other supernatural elements, and uses the term “magical” no less than eight times (e.g. 8, 24, 39). To give a few examples, the ushering in of Faisal and his men into the story is prepared for by introducing a superstitious shepherd who believes in jinn and good/bad omens (42-43). In their trip to Petra to consummate their marriage, ‘Qab and Mizna hear of a legend about a “she-ghoul” that lives in some caves in the area (61). Before this, we were told that “Petra’s beauty and the radiance of the stones carried her to a mysterious and magical world” (39). Additionally, the fantastical birth of ‘Qab and Mizna (9, 15) and the mysterious power that he and a few other fictional characters possess provide instances of magical realism, thus suggesting the coexistence of magical elements in an otherwise prevalently realistic narrative.

“Magical realism,” asserts de Groot (2010: 129) is “a type of metafiction, a self-conscious style which draws attention to itself and, quite consciously, points to the speciousness of realism”. Nonetheless, this definition is not applicable to *Tree Stump*. Despite its amalgamation of history and fantasy, the main concern of the novel is to depict real people, factual events, and fictional characters that coincide in the same world with the historical figures. Hence, the infusing of the narrative with supernatural and mythical elements often associated with magical realism is here deployed not with a view to undermining the mainstream model of historical fiction. Rather, it is used to enrich the predominantly realistic mode of the story by providing a comprehensive totality of the whole narrative.

3.6.2 By the same token, in postmodern historiographic metafiction, the line between history and fiction is blurred as metafiction “consciously and systematically draws attention to its status as an artefact in order to pose questions about the relationship between fiction and reality (Waugh, 1984:2). Consequently, history is here treated as a narrative with possible prejudices or misinterpretations of the past, a sharp contrast to the traditional idea that there is only one true account of history. A clear disavowal of “reality” in traditional historical fiction comes in the work of Hayden White who asserts that “‘History’ is a narrative form itself rather than an account of historical ‘truth’” (qtd. in de Groot, 2010: 111). Both historian and novelist thus use the same narrative style. White’s conceptualization of the fictionality/literariness of the factual past leads to the problematizing postmodern argument that the historical novel is an imitation of history rather than actual history and that it is an interpretation of unsubstantiated factual narratives.

However, *Tree Stump* does not engage in the issues of postmodern historical fiction for it does not show any validated interest in metafiction in the same self-conscious manner that postmodern historical fiction does. Unlike postmodern novelists such as John Fowles and Salman Rushdie who use metanarratives in their novels to discuss certain issues about history to show the indeterminacy and subjectivity of historical interpretations and the unreliability of historical narratives, Kraiss recognizes the traditional understanding of how history is written and constructed and appears to accept multiple and different interpretations of the same historical events. Though she intertwines fact with fiction, Kraiss’s primary concern is not the discussion of history itself or the expression of any anti-realist stand nor the undermining of traditional truth. Like any other traditional historical novel, *Tree Stump* starts and ends with a deliberate attempt to reveal the truth about the past even though this objective can hardly be achieved.

4. Conclusion

The discussion has revealed that Kraiss's *Tree Stump* is a traditional/classic historical novel primarily written in the style originally initiated by Scott's Waverly novels which had laid down the typical form of the historical novel. It embodies the basic features, conventions, and techniques of the traditional historical novel as outlined by the aforementioned four key theorists of the genre, without getting entangled in the issues of postmodern magical realism or historiographic metafiction. Taken together, these include: historical sense, social totality, minimum two generations' distance, mingling real and fictional elements, inclusion of one real-life figure, fictional probability, intergeneric hybridity and flexibility, and provoking a sense of nationalism. The novel's mythical and supernatural elements which are originally characteristic of magical realism are not meant to blur the borderlines between fiction and reality, but are subsumed into the predominantly historical narrative.

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