

The Very Short Story and the Genre Classification Problem among Arab Theorists: A Meta-Critical Study

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Abstract:

Nowadays, the issue of the overlap between literary genres throughout history has become one of the most complex and controversial topics that continue to attract the attention of critics and researchers because of significant similarities in their characteristics and structural components. This has opened the door for research aiming at distinguishing literary genres, with each genre defined by its own boundaries and independence—especially since these genres have acquired characteristics of change, transformation, and development. Each literary genre tends to preserve some of its components, while other elements fade away and disappear; at the same time, it acquires new elements that alter its former structure and identity. The very short story is a literary form that possesses its own genealogical features, which make it an independent literary genre. However, it has also been tended to intense disruptions that have hindered its autonomy and rendered it subordinate to other literary genres.

Nevertheless, the stable elements that carries ensure its continuity and survival under a recognized literary and critical term, without becoming confused with other literary forms. Through this designation, agreed upon by a community of theorists, this literary form comes to be classified as a distinct literary genre. Owing to these interrelations, the problem of the overlap of literary genres and the loss of genre purity has emerged.

Keywords: Genre Classification, Genre Overlap, Meta-Criticism (Critique of Criticism), Terminology, Very Short Story.

The very short story is considered to be one of the literary forms that has not yet been fully incorporated into the process of genre classification due to the problem of intergeneric interaction. Some people regard it as a form detached from traditional short narrative genres, while others consider it an extended narrative form derived from the short story. A third group even views it as a form

with no real basis for existence. Because of the intermingling of literary genres, it has become difficult to clearly establish and classify each genre independently in terms of its origins and formal categorization. These issues lead to several questions: What is the relationship between the very short story and ancient narrative arts, and what are the points of convergence and divergence between them according to Arab theorists? How did critic-researchers classify the very short story—do they see it as an artistic phenomenon, a literary form, or an independent literary genre? and what are the aspects of innovation and deviation in this art form?. To answer these questions, critics have put forward a range of positions regarding the issue of classifying this genre which can be elaborated as follows.

The Genre Classification of the Very Short Story according to Souad Meskine.

Souad Meskine devoted attention to all the details of this literary form, both in terms of its components and aesthetic features, as well as its reception within the literary context. All of these scholarly efforts aimed to affirm its existence and defend it as an independent literary project in its own right. She did not stop at this level of analysis; rather, she sought to settle the question of its genre classification and define its specific socio-cultural sphere, while also exploring its structural space in order to clarify its narrative architecture with precision. The researcher addressed the issue

of classifying the very short story in order to distinguish between the concepts of “type” and “genre,” and to determine which designation this literary form belongs to.

She states in this context: “ The very short story is a narrative type, considering that a narrative type is everything that falls under the genre. A type is characterised by features and qualities, and the sum of these define the genre as a general and fixed category. In this sense, the very short story is linked as a narrative type to the genre of the short story through shared characteristics, namely narrativity, irony, density, and unity of event. Thus, the short story is the overarching general genre, under which three narrative types fall: the short story, the very short story.” (Maskine, p. 42). The researcher attempted to address the issue of genre classification by linking the very short story to the original branch of prose namely the short story. Considering it a literary genre with its own narrative components and aesthetic standards, she regards this form as an independent literary type in its own right. Given the characteristics it possesses in terms of the overall structure of the story—namely narrativity, irony, density, and unity of event—this literary form has, in her view, become a narrative model that embodies the specificities of a literary type and draws its foundations from its derivation from the field of the short story. Accordingly, this form has been granted its rightful status by researchers in terms of

naming and genre classification, recognizing it as a literary type that possesses its own narrative specificities, like other narrative forms. Nor can it be considered a literary form detached from and subordinate to the short story; rather, both are seen as sub-narrative models derived from the “mother story,” in which the narrative tradition began. The researcher identified the reason that has prevented the very short story from receiving its rightful place in genre classification which lies in the existence of: “a similarity between type and genre resulting from shared features between them; an overlap among a group of texts belonging to a single narrative type; adjacency resulting from the relationship of a literary type with other forms and transgression, which refers to the transformation of a literary type into a new one. Moreover, the lack of harmony between the designation ‘very short story’ and its form (brevity) is seen as a justification that requires further in-depth examination (Maskine, *The Very Short Story in Morocco-Conceptions and Approaches*, pp. 42-43)".The researcher attempted to identify some of the obstacles that have hindered the genre classification of this literary form. These obstacles lie in the existence of several shared characteristics between “type” and “genre,” since in the natural course of literary development, a literary work is expected to pass through the stage of “type,” which distinguishes it from other literary forms. And after its constitutive

criteria are identified and acknowledged, it moves to the stage of genre classification, becoming an independent genre with its own specificities, distinct from other creative genres. A literary type can not be defined within a purely conceptual and organizational framework in isolation; rather, it must be considered alongside or in relation to other types with which it is placed or juxtaposed for comparison, so that the similarities and differences between them may become evident. That is, “the characteristics of a genre only emerge through their contrast with the characteristics of other genres, and the definition of genre approaches to the definition of the ‘sign’ in Dassaussure, a genre is determined first and foremost by what is not present in other genres.” (Al-Gharafi, 2013, p. 128) Thus, a genre carries a set of constitutive, structural, and essential themes that set it apart and distinguish it from another genre. This differentiation grants each creative genre its own specificities, which it uniquely possesses. From here, the marks of difference between genres emerge based on the distinct composition of each one. With the exposure of this form to the changes of time and the evolution of literature, it becomes an independent entity in itself, fully realized in its specificities and components. “A literary genre consists of pre-existing textual determinants; that is, prior textual structures. A type is formed when a group of texts shares the same elements, which means that the emergence of

the concept of literary type requires a plurality of texts.” (Al-Gharafi, ON The Issue of Literary Genre-A Study of Conceptual procedures and Their Applications in the West and among Arabs, p. 165). In this approach, the concepts of genre and type are defined through the primary material that determines the construction of one literary genre in relation to another. Through comparison among genres, the “type” becomes evident and distinguished by its own specificities, which define its constituent elements. Mikhail Bakhtin states in his general definition of genre that, a genre is defined by the subject of utterance, its aim, and its specific situation.” (Todorov, 1996, p. 159). In other words, a genre carries a particular semantic load that determines its content, as well as the manner of its articulation which is shaped by its own structural conditions and standards. Based on the foregoing, it can be observed that Souad Meskine conflates the concept of “type” with that of “genre” by grouping them within a single semantic field, whereas the correct view is that they are fundamentally different in essence and function. The distinction between them is determined through the process of classifying the literary phenomenon at both the theoretical and applied levels, as well as in terms of function. The separation between “type” and “genre” within genre theory and typology is merely a historical construct through which scholars have attempted to organise literary works and resolve questions of divisions and

subcategories within literary production, as well as to classify literary works across different historical periods. Consequently, the researcher appears to have entered a maze of conceptual and terminological confusion. This overlap has led this new literary form to fall into the problem of definitional ambiguity, which in turn has prevented it from settling on a precise and stable designation. As a result, one group of scholars refers to it as a literary type, another group calls it an artistic phenomenon, while a third group grants it full recognition in terms of genre classification without engaging in debates over whether it should be considered a type or an art form.

The disagreement between “type” and “genre” has led to multiple designations for this artistic phenomenon, such as the “flash story,” the “short short story,” and the “very short story.” The latter term, in particular, has been widely adopted by many researchers due to its prevalence and the plausibility of its naming. The addition of “very” serves as a clear distinguishing line between this form and the short story. However, the researcher did not limit herself to these justifications for this designation; rather, she continued to subject it to a closer scrutiny and evaluation so that her critical project would take on a more coherent and practical form both logically and methodologically. Accordingly, it can be said that the researcher did not deny this literary form its right to belong to the field of literary

type or genre, as it contains narrative criteria that grant it such a right of affiliation, pending a final consensus on its stability and legitimacy. However, she remained hesitant regarding the designation “very short story,” considering it a term that requires a logical justification, one that would give researchers the right to adopt this label over the many other terms that have been used to refer to this literary form. The view that the adjective “very” serves as the decisive element in this designation remains, in the researcher’s opinion an insufficiently justified argument. It requires a more robust terminological strategy in order to justify assigning one name to this literary form over other possible labels.

The researcher conferred legitimacy on the genre classification of this literary form based on its narrative foundation, which in her view, demonstrates the completeness of its boundaries and the clarity of its literary elements and features. Accordingly, there is no objection to describing it either as a literary type or a literary genre. Since “type is broader than genre,” (Harb, p. 22). She anticipated the independence of this new literary form, given that it fundamentally belongs to the overarching field of prose, which encompasses the narrative mode of writing. It also possesses a structural and genealogical framework that confirms its status as a literary type after recognising its literary type, it can be classified within the category of literary genre. “If genre

is defined through the types subsumed under it, then type differs in terms of its constituents, namely its forms and characteristics.” (Maskine, *The Very Short Story in Morocco- Conceptions and Approaches*, p. 78). In other words, a type is distinguished by a set of qualitative features and a range of distinctive themes that set one literary genre apart from another. The researcher was right in the approach she presented regarding the issue of classifying this literary form, particularly in her avoidance of the problem of overlap between “type” and “genre.” She sought to preserve this project by considering it a genre that exists in and of itself, with the legitimate right to enter the broader sphere of other creative genres. The work presented by the researcher is considered valuable and mature, particularly in her emphasis on its independence and separation from any other literary type or genre. She regards it as a completely autonomous literary form unrelated to the short story, despite the existence of shared artistic and structural features between them, given that both belong to the broader narrative or prose category. In her view, such similarity is normal and does not necessarily imply that this form is an extension of the short story. She states in this regard : “The very short story is not a substitute for the short story, because every creative movement will inevitably take its own space of dissemination in order to establish an independent and stable identity for itself, and

time alone is capable of achieving this. The overlap of the very short story with other literary genres is the result of writers themselves, not of the narrative form itself.” (Maskine, *The Very Short Story in Morocco- Conceptions and Approaches*, p. 46) Thus, in the researcher’s view, this artistic phenomenon becomes an independent literary type, separate from any other genre and bearing no direct relation to it, despite the formal proximity and implicit overlap between them. She also sought to preserve the designation “very short story,” while calling for further experimentation, evaluation, and research that would justify the adoption of this term by the majority of scholars and practitioners of this form. At the same time, it could equally be designated as the “flash story,” the “concise story,” or the “bullet story.” Therefore, it is necessary to reconsider this designation more deeply and attempt to move it beyond the hesitation surrounding its naming, in order to recognize its own existence.

Most researchers and critics agreed to add the qualifier “very” to this form so as to distance it from the idea that it is merely an extension of the short story or other literary genres. This point, highlighted by the researcher, preoccupied her significantly; hence she strongly called for the need to reassess the term “very short story,” not out of rejection, but out of a desire to establish it logically and practically. Either by providing a

logical argument that justifies the addition of “very,” or by proposing another carefully considered designation for this literary form. The researcher supported this claim with the words of Haytham Bahnam Barda, who states in this context : “The very short story has a close relationship with the short story, yet there are non-essential differences that distinguish the very short story. They are two parallel forms in terms of structure, meaning, and purpose; it is not a blind subordinate to the short story, nor is its structure absent or diminished in comparison to its counterpart, the short story.” (Harb, *The Very Shot Story in Jordan*, p. 27) The researcher relied on the statement of Haytham Bahnam Barda because she found it to be a sound and logical basis for distinguishing this literary form from the short story. This is because the term used to designate a literary genre must be carefully chosen according to the requirements and conditions inherent to that genre itself, rather than being derived from the features of another literary genre. The researcher moved on to examine the relationship between this artistic phenomenon and other traditional literary forms that resemble it in both form and content. She traced this literary form back to the classical Arabic heritage, based on perceived similarities between those earlier narrative forms and this contemporary narrative type. Among the narrative models in which she identified a degree of correspondence with this form, in terms of

certain shared features, is the “khabar” (report/anecdote). She states : “There are elements of convergence and shared features between them, given the openness that characterises the very short story, not only in terms of its internal structure, but also in its intersections with other genres that it employs or from which it draws certain specific features. This convergence is the result either of intertextuality, the evolution of literary genres, or the need to experiment with new forms of narrative writing. The points of similarity between the khabar (anecdotal report) and the very short story are manifested in brevity and conciseness, as well as a focus on organic unity.” (Maskine S. , p. 18) The researcher grouped the “khabar” (anecdotal report) and the very short story within a single field of similarity, based on the elements shared by the two narrative forms, namely brevity, condensation, and organic unity. However, this similarity that Souad Meskine sought to use in order to situate the very short story within an ancient formative trajectory rooted in the Arabic heritage cannot be definitively established. This is because many ancient and modern narrative forms contain the same thematic features shared by both the khabar and this literary form. Therefore, these features cannot be considered fixed criteria for attributing this form to another literary genre or for necessarily viewing it as a text detached from it, because the interrelations between different literary genres are an inevitable result

of the evolution of prose narrative forms, whereby a new literary genre emerges across successive literary generations. In this process, some of its elements are shed, while it retains aspects of the primary material upon which prose narrative was originally built, and it also acquires new elements that correspond to developments in literary history. Therefore, Souad Meskine cannot consider this criterion as evidence that the very short story is an extension of the ancient narrative tradition. In the past, narratives were often based on instinct, and at times little attention was paid to organic unity; greater emphasis was placed on maqamat and the situational context in which the text was produced. By contrast, the very short story is a carefully crafted narrative discourse, in which the writer focuses in constructing the text on organic unity and condensation more than on the story’s context or its intended purpose. In most very short stories, we can observe a structural space that differs from that of traditional narratives. It appears as though it is a text produced in a contemporary era. However, the fragmentation, the typographical distribution of paragraphs and blank spaces, and the absence of punctuation marks and other indicators of tension all confirm that this art form is new in its features. Its organic unity is achieved through its strange and somewhat fluid structure, in contrast to older very short narrative texts, where punctuation, sequential organization of utterances, as well as the

arrangement of events and ideas, were carefully observed. The very short story, on the other hand, does not rely on such ordering, it is a narrative form that does not depend on the sequence of ideas or events and this fragmentation constitutes the essence of its creativity and the peak of aesthetic pleasure in fragmentary writing.

According to Souad Meskine, the form of the very short story also corresponds to the characteristics of another literary type, namely the joke. She states in this regard: "There are fundamental structural elements in the joke that are present in the very short story, such as implication instead of explicit statement, and gaps (ellipses) that the reader must fill in." (Meskine, p. 19) In this approach, Meskine unifies the structure of the very short story and that of the joke through a set of shared elements, namely implication, concealment, and allusion in the semantic forms of both. The reader is thus the one who interacts with these implicit meanings and attempts to deconstruct them in order to reach the hidden meanings behind these utterances.

It should be noted that all narrative texts contain implicit statements that are not explicitly expressed because literary creativity does not attain aesthetic and rhetorical value unless it includes certain underlying meanings that enhance the text's depth, richness and semantic expansiveness. The skilled writer is one who is able to construct an elusive text that

prompts readers to deconstruct and interpret it in order to reach its deeper layers. Based on the researcher's statement, there is an explicit similarity between the very short story and the joke in certain narrative elements and features. However, this similarity does not make it a narrative form subordinate to the joke or to other traditional narrative forms. This is because, when we refer to the definition of the joke, we find that it is generally an extremely short verbal text based on humor, and most of its themes are intended for entertainment and amusement. However, the very short story deals with more serious themes than humorous ones. This overlap between the two forms does not stem from the writer's reliance on the narrative structure of the joke and his modeling of this genre on it, but rather from the fact that literary genres, in general, tend to converge in certain broad narrative features. At the same time, each genre retains its own distinctive themes and formal structure. The researcher explicitly stated: "The joke and the very short story are similar because they belong to the same family, but they differ in aesthetics and in their handling of language. The joke can serve as a base or raw material for constructing the very short story." (Meskine S. , *The very Short Story in Morocco- Conceptions and Approaches*, p. 20) It appears that the researcher has stripped this literary form of many of its structural specificities by treating it as an artificial text derived from the structure of the joke. This, however, involves a degree

of exaggeration. It is not possible to judge this genre as being subordinate to another in terms of form and structure merely because of certain similarities between them. Each genre has its own construction and distinct form, it can not be forcibly placed within a framework of dependence on another genre, despite the existence of intergeneric relations between the two forms, because they necessarily remain inevitable relations produced by experimental attempts on literary texts in order to bring forth a new literary genre. The researcher also pointed to this issue, despite her acknowledgment of the interaction of the very short story with the khabar (anecdote/report), the joke, and the parable. She states: "The relationship between the very short story and the parable, as well as other traditional narrative forms, can be explained through the justification proposed by Iboultou Nabarou regarding the relationship between the very short story and the fable, where he argues that it is a product of writers, not of the nature of the genre itself." The evidence relied upon by the researcher in justifying her position indicates that the very short story is not a text copied from traditional narrative forms; rather, it is a construct created by writers who sought to produce a new text resembling those forms. This does not mean that the literary genre itself is necessarily predisposed to accept such new criteria when they are borrowed from other narrative structures. In fact, within the nature of any given genre, there may be an inherent

resistance to certain features that can not be forcibly imposed by the writer without disrupting and undermining its structural integrity. In contrast, we find another literary genre that readily accepts those new elements introduced by the writer from a different genre. Consequently, such intergeneric interactions remain, in essence, the product of writers' creative choices. In another context, Souad Meskine brings together this literary form and prose poetry due to the presence of narrative-poetic overlap within this artistic phenomenon. She states: "Language in the very short story acquires its own poetic specificity and approaches poetry through its symbolic expressive atmosphere (images and metaphors), through its intense density (economy), and through its internal harmony (rhythm)." (Maskine S. , *The Very Short Story in Morocco-Conceptions And Approches*, p. 21)

The researcher found between this literary form and poetry clear signs of convergence and similarity, manifested in linguistic concision, its poetic form, and the intense condensation of words, in addition to the rhythmic movement within the text. All of these distinguishing features are shared by both this form and poetry. Consequently, each of them has come to be regarded as a literary genre that interacts with the other in terms of form and structure. This led the researcher to acknowledge the openness of the very short story to various

other creative genres. Based on the researcher's view, we acknowledge the existence of a formal convergence between the very short story and poetry in terms of the elements she has pointed out. However, it can not be asserted that they carry the same semantic load or the same internal dynamic energy. This is because poetry has its own distinctive visual and internal rhythm, whether in terms of meter or typographical form in writing, as well as in the internal tempo of its poetic segments. As for the story, it is governed by its own specific rhythmic system, which differs in its typographical structure and internal construction, relying on the actual energy of sentences. Thus, we find that poetry tends toward an intensification of poetic and rhythmic forms, and this aesthetic dimension remains present regardless of the type of poetry, whether prose poetry or free verse, because its very nature is fundamentally built upon a linguistic system charged with literariness, aesthetic value, economy, density, deviation, and suggestiveness. However, if the very short story exceeds a certain quantitative threshold in these semantic features (poeticity, deviation, and suggestiveness), it shifts from its narrative character into a poetic one, thereby losing its narrative architecture.

Based on the foregoing, it can be said that Souad Meskine sought to preserve this form as an independent literary genre, as it possesses its own creative energies. Its narrative

components, which form the basis of its construction and foundation, can not be bypassed. However, at the same time, she did not grant it full autonomy in its components, as she considered it an open narrative model interacting with various literary genres, due to the interrelations that link these forms at the level of language, theme, expression, and structure. She therefore left her argument in a state of inquiry: can the very short story truly be considered a derivative of the khabar (report), the joke, and poetry? This claim requires further analysis and interpretation in order to reach more solid conclusions that could substantiate her view that this new form is nothing more than an artificial narrative type derived from other narrative forms. However, in another context, she presented evidence that directly contradicts and diverges from her earlier claim regarding this form's extension from ancient literary structures. She indicated that the nature of this form has no connection to traditional texts, and that it is rather writers who have created such similarities between genres as part of narrative experimentation. This second argument introduced by the researcher adds a layer of ambiguity, acknowledging that her views remain hypotheses that may be either valid or mistaken. Ultimately, she does not provide a precise statement on the issue of intergeneric interaction within this form, despite her acknowledgment of its openness to all literary genres. Tzvetan Todorov answered the

question: "Where do genres come from?" by stating: "Quite simply, they come from other literary genres. A new genre is always a transformation of one or several older genres, through inversion, ornamentation, or synthesis." (Maskine S. , The Very Short Story in Morocco- Conceptions and Approaches, p. 58) The researcher stated in this regard that there is continuity between literary genres; whenever a new genre emerges, it adopts certain themes and structural elements from earlier genres, while abandoning some of their features in favor of new ones. Therefore, it is not possible to speak of the full independence of any literary genre, given the textual and metatextual interrelations that connect all genres. Indeed, there is a form of affinity among these genres, since they all derive from the same prose tradition, along with shared elements that allow them to coexist and integrate without conflict or contradiction. Accordingly, it is necessary to establish a narrative framework for this literary form, developed jointly by writers and critics, so that it does not fall into the controversy of whether it should be recognised as an independent literary genre with its own identity, or regarded as a form intertwined with other literary genres. This would also free it from the persistent concern of rejection, justified by the absence of a documented theoretical foundation for its emergence and formation. "If this literary form is a modern narrative genre, still in its early stages of formation and

classification, then it undoubtedly requires care and support from various literary institutions to ensure its continuity and circulation." (Maskine S. , The Very Short Story in Morocco-Conceptions and Approaches, p. 48)

Based on this view, it has become necessary to support this literary form through the efforts of writers, readers, and critical institutions in order to ensure the continuity of its creative project, on the condition that such theoretical work be conducted in a scientific and objective manner.

The very short story's classification genre according to Zakariyat Harb

Akariyat Harb focused on the issue of the terminology of the very short story and the problem of intergeneric interaction between it and other narrative forms. She found that the reason behind this long-debated issue is attributed to... "The multiplicity of terms and concepts previously employed by critics and writers regarding its genre classification. Some associate it with other literary genres such as poetry, the essay, the reflective note, and the joke, relying on the idea of the dissolution of literary genres and on the claims of many who advocate for open forms of writing and texts that are not subject to literary or artistic standards, or even the attribution of such texts to any specific genre—an approach she considers highly problematic" (Harb, The

Very Short Story in Jordan, p. 23) The researcher found that the reason this literary form has not stabilised within a clear system of genre classification is largely attributable to writers and scholars themselves, who have long delayed taking fair decisions regarding its separation from other literary genres. They regarded it as a form detached from those genres, and consequently neglected its classification, under the pretext of freeing it from the constraints of genre categorisation and leaving it unrestricted, without clear criteria indicating that it is an independent literary genre in its own right and not merely a form necessarily detached from a poetic or narrative type belonging to the ancient tradition or earlier concise narrative forms. Accordingly, this significant neglect has resulted in an unsuccessful outcome that prevented this project from overcoming the crisis of terminological multiplicity and the problem of shared structural and architectural features with other literary genres.

The researcher considers this procrastination a serious threat to this emerging art form, whose features were on the verge of becoming clear, yet it remained trapped between rejection and acceptance, oscillating among multiple designations that have hindered its classification and independence. There is another form of neglect pointed out by the researcher, namely the multiplicity of critical positions regarding the

genre classification of this literary form, as well as issues related to its interaction with other literary genres. She states: “Some attribute the very short story to Western origins and deny its Arab roots. The second position acknowledges its influence from the European short story. The third position establishes its existence in Arabic roots such as anecdotes, witty tales, dreams, and brief epistolary signatures. However, we do not consider the third position to be accurate in its claim. The literary forms of the past do not belong to the narrative style in its modern form. Even if we agree that brevity and condensation are features of earlier literary writing—features that are also reflected in the characteristics of the very short story—this does not necessarily mean that its roots should be traced back to ancient Arabic literature. Relationships and connections between literary forms are a natural and expected aspect of literary writing.” (Harb, *The Very Short Story in Jordan*, pp. 24-25) The researcher stated in this passage the independence of this literary form in its specific qualitative features, which distinguish it from other traditional narrative genres. She considered the interactive relations between literary genres and this form to be a natural creative proximity and coexistence, since any writer, when producing a text of whatever genre, will inevitably combine features of poetry, prose poetry, and the *maqama* within this form. Considering these shared elements as appearing spontaneously

during the creative process and coming together within a single text due to the nature of prose, which is capable of accommodating various forms of literary expression. Accordingly, the researcher's argument appears logical and sound, since the writer of this form when aiming to produce a narrative text, will selectively draw from poetry its poetic language from the novel, its experimental forms from the maqama and its rhetorical style, and from the joke its wit, in order to ultimately create an independent very short story with its own subject and identity. In the end, the writer does not deliberately seek to incorporate all those features borrowed from other literary genres. Rather, these are precise narrative standards upon which the writer constructs and evaluates his text; they therefore appear in his work, and may also be present in other literary genres. Through the discussion presented by the researcher, it is evident that she is deeply invested in this project and does not welcome the idea of merging it with other literary genres, even under the pretext of experimentation, renewal, or variation. In her view, a literary genre must be distinguished by its own specific features, which are jointly defined by writers and critics. She also rejects any leniency toward creative practices that have left this form open to overlap and similarity with other literary genres, because such overlap would inevitably prevent it from achieving proper genre classification and full independence as a

literary type or genre. Therefore, there is validity in the researcher's approach, as she aspires to build a very short story project that is distinct from all preceding and subsequent creative works. It does not matter whether there are narrative similarities between this form and other literary genres; what matters most in this study is the establishment of a very short narrative model that originates from itself and exists for its own sake and establishes itself from its own narrative essence, away from all intergeneric interferences that diminish its value as a mature literary genre and remove from it the notion of dependency on an earlier narrative text upon which it relies to build its structure, or on a Western-inspired text. This also frees it from the endless cycle of debate regarding the authenticity of its existence or its nonexistence. As for her view on its relationship with the short story, she states in this regard : "It shares with it the narrative event, condensation, irony, and some language-specific techniques. However, the relationship between them is not one of dependency. Its proximity to other literary forms does not mean that it fails to preserve its distinctiveness. It may, in fact, point to a future rich in creative writing." (Harb, *The Very Short Story in Jordan*, p. 28) The researcher acknowledged the existence of narrative relations between the very short story and other literary genres, particularly the short story, with which it shares elements such as the narrative event, condensation, and irony.

However, it differs from it in its essential specificities and structural formation, and it can not be considered a derivative or detached model of the short story's structure, as it possesses its own uniqueness and distinct composition.

The Very Short Story's classification genre according to Mustapha Ould Youssef

Rather, these are precise narrative standards upon which the writer constructs and evaluates his text; they therefore appear in his work, and may also be present in other literary genres. He says: "With the collapse of the notion of natural selection—which presupposes the inevitable disappearance or extinction of one literary genre in favor of the emergence of another—the concept of genre coexistence emerged as an achievement of modernity and contemporaneity. At the same time, each literary genre seeks to assert its presence by developing its own persuasive and appealing tools in response to the ever-changing tastes of the age." (Youssef, p. 69).

The researcher focused here on the nature of the literary genre that gives rise to another literary genre, ultimately concluding that it is necessary to break down the boundaries between literary genres due to the interactive relationships that connect the prose origins of a single genre with one another—particularly the natural development of subgenres from original genres. This development within the

literary genre points to the existence of shared elements among literary genres, with the transformations that affected the creative arts, some literary genres developed distinctive characteristics of their own and did not permit generic overlap. On the other hand, certain features remained shared among them and evolved into other themes. Accordingly, "generic specificity remains an established characteristic within a creative dynamism that is constantly changing." (Youssef, *On the Poetics of Narrative Compression*, p. 86) Thus, the literary genre evolves into other literary forms and continues to exist according to the conditions and era to which it belongs, without its original form and substance disappearing. The researcher attributed to this art form themes that move it beyond the traditional model, away from standardisation and stereotypical patterns. In this context, he states: "The very short story began to interrogate the unwritten language, distancing itself from outdated language and disrupting familiar linguistic structures through the fragmentation of the lexical reference system. Thus, fragmentation, atomization, multiplicity, genre hybridity and confession became its essential characteristics." (Youssef, *On the Poetics of Narrative Compression*, pp. 66-67)

The researcher found in this art form new characteristics that endowed it with a narrative structure different from the traditional text. These alternative representations shifted the

text from the horizon of auditory reception to that of visual reception, so that the text became a visual narrative piece after having been merely a linear linguistic piece. This transformation occurred through signs and gestures that became the reader's first interpretive threshold—from punctuation markers to line length, font style, and certain drawings. All these elements constitute new devices employed by the storyteller to innovate in literary creativity and move beyond the conventions of traditional language. This awareness of writing stems from socio-cultural and civilizational developments, as well as from the technological shifts that have shaped the artistic and creative world. It is also linked to an interest in the visual world, which encapsulates unspoken issues. Consequently, the storyteller resorted to the realm of symbols, calligraphic images, and typographic forms to convey his message. The writer found in this new mode of writing a diversification of the features of textual composition, combining both the spoken and the silent within those linguistic and metalinguistic signifiers.

In conclusion, it can be said that the very short story is a new literary creation that has not yet been granted a definitive, explicit, and unanimously agreed-upon designation by literary and critical institutions, which has led it into the maze of multiplicity. From this perspective, Souad Meskine, Dhikrayat Harb, and Mustafa Ould Youssef addressed the issue

of naming and classification in an attempt to overcome both the crisis of terminological multiplicity and the problem of dependency between this art form and other literary genres. Their views reveal considerable convergence on these issues with only slight differences among them. One position upon which they all agreed is the necessity of recognising and naming it the “very short story” following profound and logical studies. Nevertheless, they continue to call for reconsidering the designation from both morphological and conceptual perspectives until a stable and officially endorsed name is established for it. Critics also agreed on the obstacles that prevented and hindered the classification of this art form. In their view, these obstacles were represented by the multiplicity of names and terms attributed to it, a diversity that created ambiguity in understanding it and defining its trajectory. As for the issue of its openness to other arts and literary genres, they considered it a problem that entangled it in questions of dependency and extension from those genres, especially in relation to ancient narrative heritage. In addition, this art form became caught in confusion between the notions of “type” and “genre,” which further complicated the issue of determining its structure—whether it should be regarded as an art form, a literary type, or a literary genre.

Within the course of this disagreement, another debate also emerged concerning the

transformation of a literary type into a literary genre over time. Consequently, some writers considered it a form derived from either a traditional heritage text or a modernist text. The three scholars likewise agreed that one of the reasons preventing the proper classification of this art form was the hesitation of critics and researchers to expedite the process of granting this literary creation a definitive designation by officially endorsing the term “very short story” after establishing the conceptual validity that corresponds to its internal structure. As well as the necessity of supporting it both materially and practically through critical and literary institutions, so that it may attain independence in terms of its genre, characteristics, and narrative components. Jamil Hamdaoui also proposed a number of critical criteria that could serve as a basis for distinguishing the very short story from other literary forms, such as the short story. Among these criteria are: “similarity, significance, dominant value, stability, development, horizon of expectation, comparison, resemblance, classification, division, institutionalization, difference, interaction, transformation, change, aesthetics, preference, interpretation, and resistance.” (Hamdaoui, pp. 9-32) We find in the rules established by the researcher a degree of validity and logical coherence, since distinguishing this art form from the short story and other literary genres must rely on such criteria. All of these criteria fall within the field of comparison and evaluation between the two

forms, in order to extract the points of similarity and difference between them and thus identify the specific features and essential elements of each genre. Accordingly, this can be considered a positive attempt to move this art form beyond the dialectic of origin and derivative, and to establish a framework that affirms the independence of its narrative and aesthetic standards from other literary genres, regardless of the shared features that may exist between them.

Critics have found it difficult to clearly define the form of the very short story. Some consider it an artistic phenomenon, others regard it as a literary type, while others see it as an independent genre. This diversity of opinions only leads this art form into further ambiguity, confusion, and lack of recognition. Due to the abundance of these positions and the doubts surrounding it—whether it is a new or an old literary phenomenon, it has become necessary to develop strong critical efforts to classify it within the literary and critical system, and to free it from the maze of unproductive uncertainty. The most appropriate solution in their view is to reach a consensus on its classification, define its designation and actual criteria, and remove it from the pitfalls of ambiguity and dependency, as well as from the debate over terminology, so that it can ensure its continuity and interaction within the reading and creative sphere and secure its place in the literary and cultural

landscape without obstacles or difficulties. There are also other obstacles that faced this project represented by historical and ideological conditions that prevented its completion, due to those individual shifts that turned it into a text “owned by all voices, regardless of their different languages and affiliations.” Thus, “the essential definition of the narrative genre will not be comprehensive, nor closer to precision and objectivity, except by overcoming all national or local isolation, and by betting on a global critical and historical perspective.” (Lacouasin, p. 17) Jack Quaisin acknowledged that the obstacles preventing the classification of the new literary form are due to the abundance of ethnic disputes and historical affiliations, whereby each researcher seeks to attribute this new work to their own country, heritage, and intellectual tradition. Thus, the issue of recognising this art form is not limited merely to questions of its artistic immaturity or the absence of its formal classification; rather, it extends to broader issues rooted in the ideological affiliations of researchers and their differing views on establishing its origins. The multiplicity of positions surrounding it has in turn hindered the processes of its formation and formal categorisation.

This art form cannot be considered a product of traditional texts merely on the basis of similarities or differences, since each literary genre possesses its own structural and aesthetic

themes that reveal its function and purposes. Every genre is born within a specific historical, social, cultural, and human moment. This project also maintains its own language that establishes its identity and distinctive lexicon. However, theorists of this art form have neglected these essential sub-features that distinguish it, which is why it has remained trapped in a crisis of existence as an art form without formal classification. This situation calls for substantial critical efforts to accurately delineate the features of this literary genre and define its fundamental components, in order to bring it out of ambiguity and conceptual obscurity.

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