



A Psychological Analysis of the Novel

The Trial by Laylā al-‘Uthmān

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تحليل نفسي لرواية المحاكمة لليلى العثمان

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المخلص

يتناول هذا البحث الكيفية التي توّظف بها ليلى العثمان روايتها المحاكمة (2000) بوصفه فعل شهادة ذاتي التكوّن (Autopoietic Testimonial Act) يحمي حالتها النفسية من اعتداءات الدولة على ذاتها المؤلفة. وقد ألّفت الكاتبة روايتها خلال فترة الأربعين يوماً التي قضتها رهن الاحتجاز قبل تنفيذ الحكم القضائي الصادر بحقها بتهمة الإخلال بالأداب العامة، حيث طوّرت في تلك المدة آليات بقاء لحماية نتاجها الإبداعي. ويعتمد البحث على نظرية الدفاعات في التحليل النفسي الفرويدي، إلى جانب علم النفس التحليلي اليونغي، ونظرية الصدمة عند كاثي كاروث، ونظريات المقاومة لدى فوكو وباتلر، لدراسة الأبعاد النفسية والسياسية للنص (Becker & Sjöström, 2024). ويبين البحث أن الكتابة تؤدي وظيفة تسامية تحوّل الألم الوجداني إلى مادة أدبية، وتسهم في تنمية الفردية في أزمنة الأزمات، كما تعمل قوة معارضة في مواجهة السيطرة المؤسسية. ويخلص البحث إلى ثلاث نتائج نظرية أساسية: توسيع نظرية التسامي بإدخال التهديدات السياسية الخارجية في نموذجها؛ ومفهوم الشهادة المتزامنة الذي يبين كيفية توصيف الأفراد لتجاربهم في لحظة الحدث مقارنة بمعالجتهم اللاحقة للصدمة؛ ومفهوم المقاومة ذاتية التكوّن الذي يوضح كيف يُنتج كل فعل مقاومة ذاتية مقاومة إضافية. كما يُظهر البحث أن الأدب يضطلع بدور جوهري بوصفه وسيلة بقاء تُستخدم لمقاومة السيطرة السلطوية (Djelloul, 2023).

الكلمات المفتاحية: الشهادة ذاتية التكوّن، النقد الأدبي التحليلي النفسي، سرديات الصدمة، كتابة النساء العربيات، الرقابة والمقاومة.

Abstract

The research investigates how Laylā al-‘Uthmān uses her work al-Muḥākama [The Trial] (al-‘Uthmān, 2000) to create an autopoietic testimonial act which protects her psychological state from state attacks on her authorial self. The author composed her novel during her forty-day prison stay before her court-ordered punishment for public morals offenses while she learned survival methods to protect her creative output. The authors use Freudian defense theory alongside Jungian analytical psychology and Caruthian trauma theory and Foucauldian-Butlerian resistance theory to study the psychological and political aspects of the text (Becker & Sjöström, 2024). The research shows that writing serves as a sublimatory process which converts emotional pain into literary content while helping people develop their individuality during times of crisis and serving as an oppositional force against institutional control. The research establishes three fundamental theoretical findings which include extended sublimation theory that adds external political threats to its model and contemporaneous testimony that shows how people describe their experiences at the time of events versus their later processing of trauma and autopoietic resistance which shows how each act of resistance creates additional resistant subjectivity. The research shows that literature functions as an essential survival method which people use to resist authoritarian control (Djelloul, 2023).



Keywords: autopoietic testimony, psychoanalytic literary criticism, trauma narrative, Arabic women's writing, censorship and resistance

1. Introduction

The Kuwaiti author Laylā al-‘Uthmān composed *al-Muḥākama* [*The Trial*] during a forty-day period spanning from her court conviction until the pronouncement of her sentence for violating public morals through her previous literary work (al-‘Uthmān, 2000). The Islamist plaintiffs who prosecuted her for depicting immorality and violations of social customs threatened imprisonment while simultaneously seeking to erase her authorial presence (Djelloul, 2023). The charges brought severe gender-related fears which spread throughout Kuwaitian communities because al-‘Uthmān had written about how women experience sexuality and face domestic violence while being confined to their homes by patriarchal rules. The prosecution used her written work to demonstrate how she threatened social stability through her violation of Islamic principles which triggered Kuwaitian society to discuss artistic liberties in their nation.

The judicial process did not stop her from creating art because she used the legal attack to create new literary work. The author uses metafiction to show a writer who fights against court penalties that stem from her written work while she studies two crucial aspects of state-controlled literature and how authors survive under totalitarian regimes: What defensive role does writing play for mental wellness when someone faces symbolic assaults? What defensive operations enable continued creativity despite overwhelming anxiety? Testimony which appears during traumatic events instead of after they end serves as a survival mechanism. The author maintains observation and narration of her suffering while experiencing persecution. The situation reaches its highest point when authors become criminal defendants because they use their writing to build their personal identity which results in their complete disappearance.

The research proves that al-‘Uthmān uses her novel as an "autopoietic testimonial act" which creates her authorial identity while it battles against legal dangers and safeguards her mental limits from intense emotions and turns her powerlessness into meaningful interpretation and fights against the complete elimination of her authorial presence (Maturana & Varela, 1980). The systems-theoretical term "autopoietic" describes how writing sustains its operational continuity through each writing act which develops capabilities for future writing and each affect-to-narrative transformation which enhances the sublimatory process and each identity threat testimony which supports the identity and each resistance action which creates opportunities for future resistance. The system maintains its existence because it produces psychological and political assets which it uses for survival; the text serves as both a survival story and an operational survival manual (Becker & Sjöström, 2024).

Research has studied how Arab women use their writing skills to create political change (Cooke, 2001; Malti-Douglas, 1991; Djelloul, 2023) but there is a lack of research about how writing helps people survive while facing continuous persecution which also attacks their ability to write. The author al-‘Uthmān demonstrates that writers who experience persecution need to transform the time-oriented aspects of trauma theory because they begin their writing before the traumatic event reaches its end. The testimony she



provided at that time contained both typical and innovative elements which made it different from the trauma models that people use to understand things after the fact. The forty-day waiting period which Visser (2011) describes creates "traumatic anticipation" because it makes people experience disaster-related fear during this time instead of working through their previous traumatic experiences. The person who must face imprisonment remains unaware about what will become of her in the future. The research needs to study written statements as defensive tools which protect against present threats because they stem from a different time than conventional testimonial documents.

The protagonist of her metafictional work watches her own suffering develop as she tells the story of its progression which psychoanalysis explains through the "observing ego's" ability to preserve analytical awareness during severe mental states (Freud, 1937/1964). The author faces persecution while she documents her experience which reveals both her mental state and the political structures and their impact on her creative process. The study defines "meta-testimony" as a multi-layered consciousness which presents its own creation process and unattainable nature to focus on the core issue of testimony production. The dangerous situation in the text allows scientists to investigate how people maintain their complex self-referential mental structure when they face dangerous circumstances.

The research shows writing serves as an essential survival tool according to four theoretical frameworks. The study of Freudian psychoanalysis examines how people use defensive strategies to transform legal attacks into creative work through sublimation which this research applies to conscious external dangers instead of its typical use for unconscious drives. The dream analysis method of Jungian analytical psychology allows researchers to study complex dreams which show how the unconscious mind helps survival through symbolic compensation and fast psychological integration during times of crisis. The framework of trauma theory which Cathy Caruth (1996) developed requires modification to study how victims use testimony as protective measures against continuous persecution. The Resistance theory uses Foucault's (1990, 1995) and Butler's (1990, 1997) work to show how writers use their writing as a form of counter-discourse to fight against disciplinary control through their use of metafictional methods and their practice of ironic text transformations and performative opposition.

The research study generates new information which benefits multiple fields of study. The text shows deliberate psychological analysis instead of automatic emotional responses which enables psychoanalytic literary critics to study written content for its survival value. The research results require new methods for studying time because victims use their testimony as defensive protection during persecution instead of waiting until after the persecution ends; the study identifies two different testimony types which serve different purposes. The research applies psychoanalytic analysis to Arabic literature through cultural sensitivity because Arabic literary studies need more investigation of psychoanalytic methods which produce improved results when integrated with Arab-Islamic intellectual knowledge (Djelloul, 2023). The research investigates through feminist criticism how women authors survive gender discrimination by using particular methods when they exist under patriarchal systems. Research shows that people maintain their creative abilities and authorial control and psychological stability when they face structured attempts to force



them into silence. Research needs to begin right away because authoritarian regimes expanding their power across the world create dangerous circumstances which result in writers and journalists and intellectuals becoming targets for legal persecution that ends in imprisonment and forced migration and physical attacks (El Nossery & Hubbell, 2021).

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1. Psychoanalytic Literary Criticism as Method

The research uses psychoanalytic theory to study the psychological impact of the novel instead of making a diagnosis about the author. The text shows psychoanalytic processes through its structural elements which include repression and return and sublimation and working-through and active meaning creation from passive suffering (Glynn & Latha, 2025). The survival function of writing together with its resistance capabilities receive explanation through four main theoretical frameworks which include Freudian psychoanalysis and Jungian analytical psychology and trauma theory and resistance theory. The defensive operations and affective transformation process of Freudian psychoanalysis serves as one of the four main theoretical frameworks. The second main framework of Jungian analytical psychology examines dream analysis and archetypal symbolic elements. The three remaining frameworks of trauma theory and resistance theory demonstrate how written testimonies contain contradictory elements and show complex time relationships and how writing serves as a political challenge to institutional power structures.

2.2. Freudian Psychoanalysis: Defense, Sublimation, and the Observing Ego

Freudian theory says the ego uses defense mechanisms to deal with hard feelings and outside threats. This idea helps people look at writing as a way to get through tough times (A. Freud, 1936/1966). Sublimation lets people deal with feelings they think are not okay. Sublimation changes these feelings into creative work. The energy from the feelings goes into the creative work. The most important part of the feeling does not change (S. Freud, 1914/1957). Al-'Uthmān says that writing helps her and gives her a safe place. This helps with tough feelings. But her story goes in a different way, because Al-'Uthmān looks at the danger outside, not at what is inside. Sometimes people get in trouble with the law. People talk about these times or make art about these times. People do this to take something hard and make it into something different. These findings support the sublimation theory. Creative transformation helps people deal with political attack. This also helps with conflict in the mind.

Childhood trauma can come back when the stepmother causes stress later in life. Freud called this *Nachträglichkeit*. This means old events can show up again when something new happens. When I feel like I cannot do anything, I often remember things from my childhood that hurt me. These memories sometimes make new problems for me now. When I write about time collapse, I start to feel a little better. Writing helps me take old pain and face it today. I can look at what hurt me before and see it in a new way. Writing helps me heal.

The story shows that the ego can see itself even when feelings get strong. Freud called this the "observing ego." I get anxious when I notice that I am anxious. I turn this anxiety into a story. When I look at a personal experience through my own eyes and then step back



like I am just watching, I find it gives me more room to deal with strong feelings. The strong feelings do not take over. I can use the strong feelings in a way that helps me.

2.3. Jungian Analytical Psychology: Archetypes, Dreams, and Individuation

Freud focused on individual life experiences and instinctual forces but Carl Jung created the theory of a shared unconscious which includes common archetypes which appear in myths and dreams and symbolic images (Jung, 1959/1968a). The psychological development of al-'Uthmān shows how Jung's theory of individuation works (Jung, 1953/1966) because she integrated her unconscious content during her time of crisis to achieve psychological wholeness.

The judicial process contains three fundamental human patterns which include judgment scenes and scapegoating rituals that transfer community fears to one person and the Terrible Mother archetype appearing through the stepmother character (Jung, 1954/1968b; Neumann, 1955). The prosecution establishes a situation which Jung described as "confrontation with the Self" because people need to choose between following social rules and staying true to themselves (Jung, 1951/1959). The author Al-'Uthmān chose to finish her novel while facing persecution which marked the last phase of individuation that leads to self-integration for creating genuine art despite societal rejection.

Jung believed dreams serve as immediate messages from the unconscious mind which offer both corrective knowledge and navigational assistance (Jung, 1960/1974). The research contains complete oneiric content from al-'Uthmān's account which shows nightmares that reveal mental dangers (dreams about giants with iron arms and apocalyptic suns) and dream elements which create optimistic forecasts (dreams about light that appears before court proceedings). Dreams serve as compensatory mechanisms which produce defensive symbols to enable people to manage their unpleasant emotions while they develop skills to identify genuine threats. Al-'Uthmān uses Islamic teachings from Ibn Sīrīn together with her individual comprehension to analyze dreams which Jung would identify as "active imagination" that enables people to unite their unconscious thoughts (Jung, 1957/1960).

2.4. Trauma Theory: Caruth and the Paradoxes of Testimony

Cathy Caruth defines trauma as "unclaimed experience" because people experience overwhelming events which create delayed and uncontrollable repetitive flashbacks and intrusive phenomena (Caruth, 1996). The Freudian concept of *Nachträglichkeit* enables Caruth to demonstrate that people experience trauma in its entirety at the time of its first occurrence because subsequent events trigger the formation of "unclaimed experiences" which people feel but cannot translate into conscious understanding (Becker & Sjöström, 2024).

The Trial contains standard elements of trauma narratives through its use of broken storytelling and time shifts and recurring words and its alternating between historical and current events. The current persecution of the protagonist triggers her past childhood traumas which produce memories that overwhelm her ability to control them. The written statement which al-'Uthmān provided during her experience of trauma contradicts the belatedness theory which Caruth developed. Her testimony appears before the trauma reaches its peak intensity or before the event reaches its end which contradicts standard time-based models. Real-time testimony enables people to witness events as they happen



which prevents events from becoming completely unclaimed. The observing ego continues to function which proves that current witness statements serve two purposes through their expression of thoughts and their instant protective role against mental separation (Visser, 2011).

According to Caruth survivors need testimony to share their experiences yet they face an insurmountable challenge because their trauma surpasses all possible ways to express it. *The Trial* shows this impossibility through multiple statements about language limitations while showing through its own written words that testimony took place even though it seemed impossible. The paradox needs a solution based on metafiction because al-'Uthmān uses unprovable witness testimonies to create a story which examines core issues of trauma theory. The distinction between "acting out" (compulsive repetition without integration) and "working-through" (gradual integration through repeated confrontation) which Dominick LaCapra (2001) defined helps readers understand the recurring patterns in the novel.

2.5. Resistance Theory: Foucault, Butler, and Counter-Discourse

Michel Foucault explained power functions as a system which creates subjects by using institutional structures and discursive systems and operational methods (Foucault, 1977/1995). The system of disciplinary power functions through three mechanisms which include surveillance and normalization and examination to create "docile bodies" through the process of internalizing external control. The legal system uses imprisonment to study al-'Uthmān which creates a risk that people will become more cautious in their speech. People naturally follow social rules which enable modern power systems to function instead of depending on physical force for control.

Foucault demonstrates that power systems generate areas where people can establish resistance according to his work (Foucault, 1978/1990). Power relations produce what Foucault describes as "subjugated knowledges" which consist of excluded discourses that fight against established beliefs (Foucault, 1980). The book by Al-'Uthmān demonstrates how marginalized knowledge systems battle against the established legal framework through multiple ethical frameworks which lead to legal acceptance of her moral worth. The publication shows how Foucault's concept of "reverse discourse" works through the use of regulatory terms to fight against the system which created these terms.

Judith Butler uses Foucault's power system analysis together with psychoanalytic theory to demonstrate how social norms functioning through power systems create subjects (Butler, 1997). Butler demonstrates that subjection establishes an internalized system which people learn to want their own surrender to power while their existence needs power to recognize them. People develop particular mental states because power attempts to control them which results in resistance because these attempts surpass their original purpose to create opposition and subversive repetition (Butler, 1990).

Through judicial processes Al-'Uthmān shows how subjectivation creates suffering by making her experience judicial interpellation which labels her as an "immoral writer" while simultaneously targeting her role as a mother. The author uses performative subversion to establish her own version of the "prosecuted writer" identity which opposes the way power wants to present her by showing her as a brave opponent instead of a criminal. The metafictional structure enables readers to maintain distance from the text which forces them



to study the author-imposed character roles thus creating mental distance for readers to resist (Butler, 1997).

2.6. Synthesis: Toward Integrated Psychoanalytic-Political Reading

The two frameworks appear to be unrelated at first but they must function together because psychological and political elements combine during periods of persecution. The writing process functions as a Freudian defense mechanism while it guides readers toward Jungian self-integration and helps them process trauma through Caruthian methods and enables them to fight against institutional power structures according to Butler. The various systems operate as a single autonomous system which defends personal boundaries through its combination of concealed content and its recognition of traumatic experiences and its resistance against institutional authority. The correct distance between individuals functions as a survival mechanism because it protects their mental defense systems and their political dissent according to Glynne & Latha (2025).

3. Methodology

3.1. Research Design

The research uses qualitative interpretive methods which stem from psychoanalytic literary criticism to serve as its main research approach. The research investigates humanistic elements in al-'Uthmān's written work through its analysis of symbolic methods and psychological processes and thematic elements instead of performing experimental tests to verify hypotheses. The research bases its operations on an interpretive paradigm which explains how literary meaning develops through the combination of text analysis with theoretical frameworks and cultural elements and interpretive approaches (Gadamer, 1975; Ricoeur, 1970).

3.2. Analytical Approach

The research method combines psychoanalytic literary criticism with close reading and thematic analysis through four theoretical frameworks. Through Psychoanalytic concepts readers can understand how texts operate through three defense mechanisms which include sublimation and identification with aggressor and transformation of passive into active. The narrative structure of stories demonstrates how they progress through time according to the mechanism of *Nachträglichkeit*. The dream communication process enables the unconscious mind to transmit its information to conscious awareness. The process of individuation follows universal archetypes which direct human development. People must develop testimonial accounts because their traumatic experiences remain unhealed. The practice of counter-discourse involves using existing regulatory systems to accomplish goals which oppose their original purpose (A. Freud, 1936/1966; Jung, 1960/1974; Caruth, 1996; Foucault, 1980).

The process of close reading analysis requires readers to study all language elements together with structural elements and rhetorical elements according to Brooks (1947). The research employs theoretically grounded close reading which integrates psychoanalytic analysis with full linguistic and formal evidence assessment. The process of sublimation needs proof through complete examination which shows how specific text sections transform emotional elements into artistic creations. The research method of thematic analysis with close reading enables scientists to detect repeated patterns which span the



entire text (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The main thematic sections in the text consist of: Writing functions as a psychological refuge which people use to fight against oppression. The text explores how dreams help people process their unconscious thoughts. The story explores how people experience anxiety about time while they must wait for things to happen. The story presents a situation where female characters face danger to their maternal role. The story shows how past injuries from previous generations affect the present characters. The story contains multiple instances where the author breaks the fourth wall through metafictional techniques. The story shows how the legal system inflicts harm on people through its oppressive nature while simultaneously subjecting them to mental abuse.

3.3. Data Source and Selection

The main source consists of Laylā al-‘Uthmān's Arabic work *al-Muḥākama* [*The Trial*] which contains 41,000 words spread across four sections that describe the forty-day period between conviction and sentencing (al-‘Uthmān, 2000). The original Arabic text allows researchers to study cultural elements together with religious content and linguistic elements which create challenges when translating the text. The Arabic words which describe honor (شرف) and shame (عيب) and modesty (حشمة) carry distinct cultural connotations which stem from Arab-Islamic traditions.

The research analyzed 134 essential passages which spanned across the four parts of the novel through systematic selection criteria. The selection of passages followed three criteria which included (1) psychological importance of dream experiences and emotional responses and childhood abuse and authorial self-referential elements and (2) thematic importance of defense strategies and archetypal symbols and trauma patterns and gender-based oppression and survival techniques and (3) the number of times certain motifs appeared which showed what the author focused on.

The research procedure consisted of six sequential steps starting with uninterrupted immersive reading followed by thematic coding based on research goals and then documentation of repeated motifs which included visual elements and poetic language and conceptual expressions. The researcher applied theoretical frameworks to specific sections of the text during stage 4 which included Freudian defense analysis and Jungian dream interpretation and trauma-theoretical temporal structure examination and resistance-theoretical rhetorical strategy analysis. The researcher demonstrated how different theoretical frameworks support each other through their integration process. The researcher conducted a six-stage analysis which included cross-textual verification and theoretical validation through secondary research and cultural expertise assessment and reflexive examination of researcher positioning.

4. Analysis

The following analysis investigates writing as a survival technique which protects mental stability and political opposition through four sections which include psychoanalytic defense mechanisms and contemporaneous trauma testimony and counter-discursive resistance and metafictional structural integration.

4.1. Writing and the Unconscious: Defense, Sublimation, and Psychic Survival



The novel uses writing as its main psychological defense mechanism which it shows through its metafictional structure. Upon receiving the court summons, the narrator responds:

ألوذ أتحوّر قلقي ثوب أشلح تستجدني مبعثرة أوراقي وأمامي أحوس مشلولة مكتبي إلى جلست ساعتين خلال منقذي هي أليست بالكتابة

[I spent two hours frozen at my desk while my mind became disoriented and my papers scattered in front of me needed assistance. I shed the garment of my anxiety, I transform myself, I take refuge in writing. Is it not my savior?]

The entire defensive transformation process appears in this section. The story starts with a person who experiences total emotional overload which causes them to become frozen and their thinking becomes disordered until they learn to start writing. The sequence demonstrates how the ego executes its "synthetic function" according to Freud by combining outside requirements with fear from the id and motherly values from the superego to generate purposeful behaviors (Freud, 1937/1964).

The complete analysis of the basic metaphor "قلقي ثوب أشلح" (I shed the garment of my anxiety) requires detailed examination. The verb shalaha (to shed, remove) indicates that human involvement occurred during this process because it did not occur by itself. Anxiety is spatialized as an external garment that can be removed through purposeful psychological activity. This affect externalization creates the distance psychoanalysis identifies as necessary for managing overwhelming emotional experience. The desk transforms into a domain where papers start to act independently by seeking assistance which demonstrates prosopopoeia through a process of vital change that makes the author need help with her work so she becomes its guardian. The creative process allows al-'Uthmān to evolve from her defenseless beginning into her position as a protector. The desk serves as Winnicott (1971) described it as "transitional space" which creates a psychological refuge to defend the author's autonomy from legal dangers.

The rhetorical question—"هي منقذي أليست"—performs complex psychological work. The interrogative form reveals doubt about writing ability to save people and it seeks confirmation of its beliefs about this power. The religious term munqidhī (my savior) sacralizes creative activity. Writing serves as the fundamental ability which functions as a life-saving tool that protects people during dangerous situations.

The Freudian view shows how sublimation enables people to convert dangerous emotions into creative output which society accepts as valuable. The situation creates difficulties for psychoanalytic theory because people in this situation are aware of political dangers outside their control instead of dealing with hidden psychological elements. The process of sublimation enables legal harassment to become literary content which converts particular outside threats into individual experiences. The summons produces anxiety which leads me to develop new fictional accounts. The author faces persecution which forces her to create content through the use of enemy tactics which she now uses against them.

The sublimatory operation requires metafictional elements because al-'Uthmān employs writing as her protective area and writing serves her to escape. The recursive pattern allows people to create psychological distance through their self-observation process. People who experience high anxiety levels continue to use their mental abilities for



observation and interpretation and storytelling. The "observing ego" which Freud described allows people to maintain dual consciousness because they stay aware while their emotions completely break down (Freud, 1937/1964). The observing ego establishes a space which allows sublimation to occur thus enabling psychological transformation.

I displayed counterphobic behavior when I decided to complete the novel during the forty-day waiting period because I actively confronted my anxiety instead of avoiding it:

بالحكم النطق قبل أنهيها بالرواية الكتابة أتابع أن أسافر الأقراري اتخذت

[I made my decision not to travel, to continue writing the novel, to complete it before the verdict is announced.]

This decision defies self-preservation logic that would dictate escape. The artist Al-'Uthmān stays close to dangerous situations because she wants to keep feeling the strong emotions which inspire his creative output. She explains that writing functions as her method "خلقني أفضش" (to vent my anxiety) which serves as a way for her to release her emotions. According to Freud and Breuer (1895/1955) abreaction functions as a method of emotional release which she uses through writing.

4.2. Dreams and Unconscious Participation in Survival

The unconscious mind actively works for survival according to the detailed dream content that has been documented. Jungian theory states dreams function as immediate communications which offer both compensatory knowledge and directional advice instead of hiding our desires (Jung, 1960/1974):

تنطبق فرأيتها هربت مسرعة باتجاهي تهوي الشمس رأيت مرة حديد من أذرهم عمالقة فيها لاحقني كثيرة أحلام وتذوب الأرض على

[Many dreams in which giants with arms of iron pursued me. Once I saw the sun hurtling toward me rapidly. I fled and saw it close upon the earth and melt.]

The symbolic density rewards analysis. The "giants with arms of iron" ('amāliqa adhr'uhum min ḥadīd) contain two fundamental archetypes which show a giant as an unstoppable threat and iron as an unyielding metallic material. Jung explained the giant as an archetypal symbol demonstrating how transpersonal forces exceed human control (Jung, 1959/1968a). The iron arms symbolize the state's authoritarian control system which operates through its judicial system to track down the author across space with its unyielding mechanical strength. The second dream image shows the sun moving toward the dreamer while breaking the usual meaning of solar symbols. The sun which usually represents awareness and light becomes a destructive power of the universe which destroys all existence it encounters. The social collapse follows the pattern which Caruth (1996) describes for traumatic events because people experience violent mental images which result from experiences that exceed their ability to process them.

People develop enduring psychological effects after watching disturbing content because they first encountered such disturbing material. The unconscious mind produces threat symbols which help people understand and control their feelings of being persecuted. The dream process transforms unconscious mental information into symbolic dream elements which Freud (1900/1953) described as "dream-work." The transformation process protects people from direct terror through metaphorical and displacement techniques which create symbolic barriers.



Al-‘Uthmān documented a dream which turned out to be her most crucial evidence before her court appearance:

القضية ويرفض عنا إفراجه سيعلم القاضي أن تؤمنني "نور" كلمة يفارقني لا البارحة حلم

[The dream I had last night keeps bothering me because I am convinced the judge will free us through his ability to grant "nūr" (light).]

The dream revealed only the word nūr (light). The Islamic tradition uses light to represent divine guidance because prophetic messages containing authentic truth emerge to reveal guidance which eliminates all forms of darkness. The interpretation of Al-‘Uthmān reveals this sign as a favorable indication which indicates her upcoming court release. The psychological function exceeds predictive accuracy because it creates hope which allows people to keep going while they attend court and build their mental strength. Jung explained that dreams function as a prospective mechanism which helps the psyche discover upcoming possibilities while creating symbolic ways to handle them (Jung, 1960/1974).

The human mind uses compensation according to Jung's theory because it combines nightmares with hopeful dreams. When conscious experience is overwhelmingly negative, the unconscious compensates by generating symbols of hope. The compensation system exists to prevent people from reaching absolute despair while it acknowledges that dangerous situations do exist. People maintain an unstable mental state which alternates between perceiving danger and feeling secure about their ability to survive.

Al-‘Uthmān uses Islamic dream analysis to create her own psychological understanding which results in culturally specific interpretation techniques. She uses Ibn Sīrīn's established Islamic dream interpretation method to demonstrate how to combine Islamic dream analysis with psychoanalytic methods through her own symbolic interpretation. The integration demonstrates that psychoanalytic principles function independently from cultural restrictions yet recognizes how cultures use their indigenous symbolic components and therapeutic approaches (Djelloul, 2023).

The prosecution as a whole creates a crisis which according to individuation theory results in psychological development. Jung explained that individuation demands people to face their concealed shadow elements while they learn to unite their conflicting psychological elements (Jung, 1953/1966). The prosecution calls al-‘Uthmān an "immoral writer" and "corrupter of morals" because these labels stem from the negative views which traditional patriarchal communities held. She needs to merge these projected images into her mental structure but she should stop them from taking over her personality so she can maintain her true authorial identity. The author chose to finish her novel while facing persecution which represented her complete individuation process to become a whole person who could express himself truthfully even when society rejected him.

4.3. Contemporaneous Testimony and Trauma Temporality

The author developed psychological elements in *The Trial* because she wrote the book during her specific time period. The book shows the entire forty-day period between her conviction and sentencing while she faced an unknown future. The current situation has created "traumatic anticipation" according to researchers because people now experience disaster-related anxiety instead of dealing with their previous traumatic experiences (Visser, 2011):



يوماً أربعون [...] يوماً أربعين أسيرته وسأظل الطفل القلق هذا أسيرة أنا

[I am prisoner to this "anxious child" and will remain its prisoner for forty days [...]
Forty days.]

The repeated words serve two purposes by indicating time passage and performing like a magical spell which links to religious scriptures in the Bible and Qur'an (Moses on Sinai, Jesus in the wilderness, the flood). The numerological system converts individual pain into a collective experience which shows how trauma survivors must constantly watch time because their state of high alertness requires this behavior. The author experiences "lived time" (Erlebnis) according to phenomenology because her personal time perception makes forty days seem like a complete lifetime which she experiences with constant worry (Husserl, 1964; Minkowski, 1970).

The delayed experience model of trauma which Caruth developed faces challenges because of the time-freezing effect. The concept of "unclaimed experience" returning as trauma because it exceeded comprehension during initial occurrence requires new methods to study anticipated trauma that has not yet concluded. The present moment of al-'Uthmān faces three possible outcomes which include imprisonment and public humiliation and the loss of her mother's social standing. People lose their ability to experience the present because they fear upcoming disasters which make their current time period seem like it is already ending.

The trauma demonstrates the "absence at the heart of experience" that trauma theory describes—the paradox wherein individuals experience their most intense events yet cannot fully experience them during occurrence (Caruth, 1996):

الكويت أن مرة لأول أشعر أنا. مهددة حريتي أن مرة لأول أشعر أنا. مهدد أسرتي كيان أن أشعر مرة لأول أنا
إمهدة!

[For the first time I feel that my family's existence is threatened. For the first time I feel that my freedom is threatened. For the first time I feel that Kuwait is threatened!]

The anaphoric repetition of "أشعر مرة لأول" ("for the first time I feel") produces an unprecedented feeling of shock which completely destroys all previous expectations. The statement indicates the start of events which people have not yet grasped about what actually transpired. The repeated "I feel" (ash'ur) emphasizes subjective experience. The pattern repeats according to Caruth's description of "the enigma of the survival of trauma" which shows how trauma exists as an ongoing mental process instead of its original occurrence (Caruth, 1996; Freud, 1920/1955).

The testimony which Al-'Uthmān provided during her time of persecution created a new framework which differed from what Caruth had previously established. She documents her persecution through immediate accounts which she bases on her personal experiences. The observing ego maintains its watchful position while it understands and creates stories about pain which it experiences firsthand, thus using writing as a defense against losing itself in the present moment. The research results show that testimony serves as a protective mechanism which maintains ongoing threats while creating important stories when people experience their existence collapse (Becker & Sjöström, 2024).

The story uses trauma psychology to create a disrupted timeline which breaks away from the typical chronological order. The process of moving from present-day pain to



childhood pain demonstrates Nachträglichkeit because our current understanding of past events transforms through new experiences which also influence our upcoming experiences (Freud, 1895/1950):

بعفوية عني صدر فعل لكل استمرت التي محاكماتها عن بعيداً الأبوين مشاحنات عن بعيداً أطلقني لو أتمنى كنت
البريئة الطفولة

[I wished he would set me free far from my parents' quarrels, far from her trials that continued for every act that issued from me with the spontaneity of innocent childhood.]

The term "محاكماتها" (muḥākamātuhā—her trials/judgments) links the novel's title *al-Muḥākama (The Trial)* to the abuse she endured from her stepmother during childhood which now affects her legal situation. The stepmother conducted informal "trials" of the child for spontaneous acts; the state now conducts formal trial of the adult for creative acts. The present-day persecution triggers hidden childhood trauma which penetrates the mental barriers that shield the unprocessed memories from childhood.

The story presents an unorthodox time sequence which LaCapra (2001) describes as "acting out" because it continuously displays traumatic events without achieving any form of integration. The recurring pattern in the story shows "working-through" because each time the characters meet again they gain fresh insights and learn to manage their emotions and develop psychological understanding which they lacked during their first interactions. The story progresses through each subsequent version because the narrator develops her understanding through different perspectives and emotional separation and psychological understanding which becomes visible in his later versions.

4.4. Writing as Resistance: Counter-Discourse and Performative Subversion

The metafictional structure which Foucault (1980) describes produces "subjugated knowledge" which refers to the hidden information that society actively prevents from entering its established beliefs. Through its reflective structure metafiction shows how power systems work to make disciplinary control visible which strips away its appearance of being natural. The narrative approach uses legal documents which prove that people experienced real persecution.

والتقاليد العادات مخالفة الكتابين تأليف من قصدك أن من النيابة بتحقيقات الشاكي قرره فيما قولك ما: س
شاذة جنسية ممارسات ترويج إلى والدعوة الاجتماعية

[Question: What do you say regarding the complainant's statement to the Public Prosecution that your intent in writing the two books was to violate social customs and traditions and to advocate for abnormal sexual practices?]

The duplicated juridical question shows how disciplinary systems function through their operational procedures. The syntactical structure presents an assumed violation which needs evidence of deliberate actions instead of studying the purposeful actions. The assumed syntax shows how power systems establish discourse rules by using the analytical framework which Foucault (1980) created. The legal terms "abnormal sexual practices" (mumārasāt jinsiyya shādhah) show how the legal system used sexual and gender standards to make decisions during court cases. The legal system restricts women from choosing their sexual activities because Foucault identifies this as "bio-power" which operates without needing male supervision (Foucault, 1978/1990). The author al-'Uthmān



includes this question in her novel to let readers study its ideological meaning which demonstrates how male-dominated fears influence legal discussions.

The novel presents its most direct opposition through the satirical dedication which she directs at her court prosecutors.

لولادة حافظاً دعواهم كانت فقد الجزيل الشكر مع إليهم أدبي وأدانوا كتاباتي ضد الدعوى رفعوا الذين الأخوة إلى
الأدبي العمل هذا

[I thank the brothers who filed legal complaints against my written work because their unfavorable comments about my writing enabled me to produce this literary work.]

The organization dedicates itself to multiple activities which work against established systems. The strategy uses reverse discourse to take over the moral correction framework which the accusers use to defend their authority. Second it turns the usual victimization dynamics upside down because al-'Uthmān thanks her oppressors while showing they have not diminished her artistic abilities. The prosecution attempted to silence her but she continued to express her thoughts. Third she applies Butler's (1990) performative subversion theory to develop her "prosecuted writer" persona which battles against current systems of power. The dedication enables juridical interpellation to become literary production which shows that power systems establish limits but fail to anticipate every possible result.

The metafictional element in her work establishes what Butler (1997) calls "critical distance" according to her analysis.

هل كنفسهم الصدئة لسيوفهم وتحنين تراوغي هل ليلى؟ يا ها قدامي يلتمع مسلطاً سيفاً أن أشعر مرة لأول
يشتهون؟ ما لتكتبي الظلماء الدروب إلى منزلة الناصعة دروبك عن تتراجعين

[For the first time I feel that a brandished sword gleams before me. Well, Layla? Will you dodge and bow to their rusty swords, rusty like their souls? You will give up your successful life to create content which matches their expectations.]

People begin to track their personal actions because external observation creates an inner conversation within them. The "brandished sword" functions as visible threat demonstrating the panoptic mechanism that uses visible punishment to control behavior (Foucault, 1977/1995). The interrogative structure functions as an opposing system which prevents fresh information from accessing our existing mental storage. The questions anticipate negative answers: No, I will not comply. No, I will not self-censor. The internal dialogue functions as the "scene of address" which Butler (1997) describes as the area where interpellation encounters the resistance of personal life experiences.

The moral geography between "your bright paths" (*durūbuki al-nāṣi'a*) and "dark paths" (*durūb ḡalāmā'*) presents a view which stands contrary to what typical individuals would expect. Standard patterns in the text show how dark imagery appears with nonconformist actions while light imagery appears with traditional social rules. Al-'Uthmān presents an opposing view which states that authentic creative expression results in the bright path but following others leads to darkness. The situation demonstrates the concept of "reverse discourse" which Foucault (1978/1990) explains in his work.

Continuing to write represents ultimate resistance against the panoptic system monitoring and controlling conduct. The author uses literary work to turn persecution into a theme which serves as a counter-archive that fights against judicial documents and official



stories. The novel demonstrates that disciplinary power failed to achieve complete submission of people to its regulatory system.

4.5. Gender-Based Persecution and Maternal Identity

The persecution needs a look at the parts that depend on gender. The prosecution targets al-'Uthmān for what she writes. The prosecution wants people to question al-'Uthmān as a woman writer. al-'Uthmān writes about honor and shame in societies where men are in charge in the Arab world (El Nossery & Hubbell, 2021). The "corrupting public morals" charges cover more than just her books. These charges show her as a threat to the way things are. The charges make her look different from what most think is normal about sex. They put her at odds with what men try to keep in their hands. Gendered persecution goes after what makes a mother feel like herself. It tries to stop a mother from doing what the culture expects from her.

أقدام تحت الجنة إن قال الله. أم أنني نسي بعضهم الآن. مغلقة عقولهم أن أرى. قاسية أصبحت قلوبهم أن أشعر أنا
طيبة تربية ربيتهم وأنا وبنات، أبناء عندي أنا. الأمهات

[Do they really not feel anything now? Are their hearts so cold that they forget I am a mother? God put Paradise under my feet. I have sons and daughters. I raised my children well.]

This question shows that the legal system can make a mother lose her name. The legal system makes a mother pick between being a mother or being called an immoral writer. In Islam, people often say Paradise is under the feet of mothers. People use this saying to talk about faith when some may feel religion brings blame. A mother has to wait for the person in charge to give approval. Many people think the mother should make the decision. When women write in male-led societies, women often need to show that the writing matches what the society expects from women. Men who write do not need to do this. The passage says that women who live under patriarchy need to hold on to their own sense of art while they do the care work that people expect women to do (Djelloul, 2023).

The research looks at how gender-based trauma changes people as they grow up. The study follows how the trauma shapes people at each age. Al-'Uthmān faced abuse from her stepmother when she was a child. The abuse helped Al-'Uthmān deal with men in power later in life. The stepmother wants to control women when women break the rules. The stepmother makes rules at home and judges children for normal things. The court punishes adults when adults do something new or different. Today, we see that violence against women in big organizations is a lot like the violence women face at home. These systems limit what a woman can choose and who she becomes. The story goes from past violence to what happens now. This tells us that gender-based violence still harms people of every age. Families and people from different generations still feel this pain. Ongoing violence teaches people how to get through tough times. Ongoing violence can help people face problems. But ongoing violence can also bring back old pain and make that pain feel even worse (El Nossery & Hubbell, 2021).

4.6. Synthesis: The Autopoietic Nature of Testimonial Writing

The system of defensive sublimation and unconscious compensation and contemporaneous testimony and counter-discursive resistance functions as an independent testimonial system which runs independently. The term describes how written content



establishes an independent system which operates independently: Each writing activity develops writing abilities while each affect-to-narrative transformation improves sublimatory process and each documented dream enhances belief in unconscious abilities and each metafictional reflection improves the observing ego's ability to analyze distance and each counter-discursive action strengthens resistance confidence. The process is genuinely recursive: writing about persecution provides refuge from persecution, enabling further writing, providing further refuge. The survival manual presents itself as an official written document which demonstrates the author maintains full control while she battles against any effort to erase her authorship.

The self-reproducing quality makes testimonial writing different from standard symptomatic expression. People become able to see their repressed elements when their defensive mechanisms fail to function properly. Al-'Uthmān shows how to defend oneself successfully through three processes which convert anxiety into new forms while using aggressive power to attack outside objects instead of the self and by handling traumatic experiences instead of performing them repeatedly. The story contains a protective system which operates as its metafictional dimension. The statement "writing is my savior" operates as a performative because through writing people can find salvation while using it to defend themselves and perform rescue operations (Austin, 1962).

5. Discussion

The research findings from this textual analysis require assessment to determine how literature functions as a tool for psychological and political purposes when writers write under authoritarian governments. The research shows that writing functions as a system which unites four essential roles which typical academic fields tend to keep distinct: psychological defense and identity formation and trauma processing and political resistance work together as interconnected elements of an autopoietic system (Glynn & Latha, 2025).

The development of sublimation theory to study external political threats brought a major advancement in theoretical knowledge. The process of sublimation in Classical Freudian theory deals with the transformation of unconscious drives yet al-'Uthmān shows how conscious external persecution can lead to creative change. The research findings about this extension help scientists understand how political restrictions affect creative work production during times of oppression.

The current time-based systems which trauma studies use face challenges because of the concept which requires testimony to occur at the same time. Caruth established his theory based on belatedness which describes how trauma manifests through delayed experiences because it cannot be processed during the actual event. The situation with Al-'Uthmān demonstrates how people employ written evidence to maintain their connection with their observing nature when they face persecution while they keep observing through their ongoing narrative activities. The research indicates that trauma theory needs improved time-based classification systems which would separate statements given at the time of events from those provided after the events (Visser, 2011; Becker & Sjöström, 2024).

The autopoietic resistance concept shows how resistance creates its own fundamental environment which enables its survival. The process of writing against persecution creates resistant subjectivity which becomes stronger in its ability to resist future oppression. The



writers maintain their creative output through a recursive system which enables them to keep working under extended periods of danger because their resistance activities create both mental and political strength for survival. The research results demonstrate that authoritarian regimes fail to achieve complete control over their citizens despite their strong position of power.

Research on gendered persecution shows how patriarchal systems use women writers' maternal duties to create an unresolvable conflict between their social duties and their actual creative potential. The situation needs feminist scholars to study how gender-based violence affects different areas of society including family systems and institutional settings and legal systems which share common structural elements that make existing injuries worse (El Nossery & Hubbell, 2021; Djelloul, 2023). Researches can create psychoanalytic criticism through Islamic dream analysis integration with psychoanalytic methods which respects cultural differences by using scientific methods that maintain exactness without requiring Western interpretation. The combination of traditional methods from Ibn Sīrīn which Al-'Uthmān used together with her own symbolic interpretation shows how psychoanalytic and Arab-Islamic intellectual traditions can work together effectively.

6. Conclusion

The research shows that Laylā al-'Uthmān wrote *al-Muḥākama* [*The Trial*] (al-'Uthmān, 2000) as a survival technique which used literary writing to defend mental health and help people build their identities and record their present and fight against government control. The research used systematic text evaluation which combined psychoanalytic and political theoretical methods to discover specific methods which writing serves to maintain mental equilibrium and political influence when faced with political danger. The research found that writing helps people maintain psychological stability and political agency through four main processes which include affect transformation into creative work through sublimation and the observing ego function which allows people to observe their experiences while they happen and unconscious participation through dream compensation and archetypal guidance and metafictional disclosure of disciplinary frameworks and performative acts of identity rejection against external impositions.

The research established its primary inquiry through the creation of new theoretical concepts which enhanced existing theoretical models. The study demonstrates that sublimation theory functions against external political threat in addition to internal drive conflict. The research builds upon Classical Freudian theory which explains how people redirect their unconscious impulses but it demonstrates how writers transform their awareness of persecution into artistic content. The testimonial mode of contemporaneous testimony functions as a protective system which safeguards people during times of persecution through its ability to record instant statements instead of using past trauma models to analyze previous events. The autopoietic resistance system generates permanent patterns which enable testimonial writing to create mental power that helps people continue their resistance work. The practice of gender-based persecution removes maternal identity from society which forces women to decide between their cultural obligations and their actual artistic abilities.



The research has three main restrictions which include analyzing only one text at a time and using psychoanalytic literary criticism methods that create interpretation challenges and needing continuous self-assessment for cultural positionality. Research should focus on studying more contemporary testimonial documents while scientists need to study how different cultures use creative defense strategies and how digital technology affects the process of testifying in real-time during times of persecution.

The research shows that al-'Uthmān's novel allows scholars to study how creative people defend their autonomy when they face obstacles from authoritarian governments. The increasing authoritarian control in the world requires people to write testimonies because these statements serve dual purposes of psychological and political significance. Literature serves as a vital survival tool because it functions as both artistic expression and political declaration which enables endangered people to maintain their mental stability during their fight against total social annihilation. The autopoietic testimonial act shows that writers who face persecution create their own existence through their work which generates itself while protecting itself from extermination.

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