

Lamis al Nakkash

Cairo University

Fictions of Memory: Life Through the Prism of Death

The paper is a comparative study of three novels from three different cultures analyzed within the context of cultural memory studies. The three texts are analyzed as instances of what Brigit Neumann terms “fictions of memory” a term that denotes not only novels that take memory as their subject matter but also the imaginative and literary representation of the process of memory through mimesis and fiction. (Neumann 2010) Philip Roth’s *The Dying Animal* (2001), Andre Brink’s *Before I Forget* (2004), and Adel Essmat *The Commandments* (in Arabic 2018) are life narratives of three elderly men approaching death who, almost compulsively, narrate their lives, particularly their love lives, to an audience in the second person. The analysis focuses on the ordering and manipulation of time of remembered events, (Genette 1980; Ricoeur 1984) as well as the choice of the narrative consciousness to represent the events (whether the present consciousness of the narrator, or the consciousness of the past experiencing self, or an interplay of both). The three novels use different techniques regarding the manipulation of time and the choice of narrative voice in creating their fictional message. They all share an expressed desire to implicate others in the story as testified by their use of second person method of narration, though for different ends. The three texts also share a tendency to reassess revered values that changed throughout the lives of the narrators, the comparison of which highlights significant cultural specificities. The desire of the narrators to link their individual stories to wider circles of collective and national histories additionally give each narrative its unique cultural meaning and provides